

Calvin Studies IX



PAPERS PRESENTED — AT THE — NINTH COLLOQUIUM ON CALVIN STUDIES

DAVIDSON COLLEGE & DAVIDSON COLLEGE PREBYTERIAN CHURCH
DAVIDSON, NORTH CAROLINA, JANUARY 30-31, 1998

JOHN H. LEITH AND ROBERT A. JOHNSON, EDITORS

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Preface

John H. Leith

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The Ninth Colloquium on Calvin Studies was held at Davidson College Presbyterian Church and Davidson College on January 30-31, 1998. More than 150 persons attended at least some of the programs. A capacity crowd of 100 attended the dinner on Friday evening. The papers, as can be seen from this collection, were excellent. In addition, those who attended enjoyed conversation and fellowship in a very noticeable way.

The Davidson College Presbyterian Church, with Charles Raynal as minister, contributed significantly to the success of the conference which was held in the Davidson College Church building. The church office of Davidson College Presbyterian Church maintained the financial and registration records. For this we are all very deeply grateful.

The conference is also greatly indebted to Davidson College and to its president, Robert Vagt, who made available to the conference the college guest house for speakers and also made available the college dining room for the dinner on Friday evening. President Vagt was a very gracious host.

Marjorie and Lynn Burris, of the Davidson College Church, were responsible for the management of the conference. They not only made arrangements for rooms and for the dinner, but they also kept good supplies of hors d'oeuvres and drinks available for those who wanted time out for relaxation and discussion. Their contribution to the joy and happiness to the conference cannot be exaggerated. Without their work it would have been a much duller affair. To them we are immensely grateful.

The conference owes much to those who have supported it in financial ways. Among the supporters of the conference are the First Presbyterian Church of Greensboro, North Carolina, Jerold Shetler, minister; Mrs. Ellis Whitehead of Dalton, Georgia; the Georgetown Presbyterian Church, Ben Sloan, pastor; Palma Ceia

Presbyterian Church of Tampa, John DeBevoise, pastor and the Office of Theology and Worship of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Joe Small, coordinator.

The Peachtree Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, Georgia, W. Frank Harrington, pastor, has always supported the colloquium by mailing out the invitations to attend as well as the advertisements of the papers.

The colloquium during the Friday evening dinner presented Marjorie and Lynn Burris a picture of the Davidson College Presbyterian Church that had been placed in a frame made from Davidson oak. The framing had been done by one of their high school mates, Charles Cooke. The colloquium also presented to W. Frank Harrington a framed picture of James Henley Thornwell. The picture had been located by William Harris of the Luce Library in Princeton, and it was likewise framed by Charles Cooke.

Robert Johnson, Associate for Theology, Office of Theology and Worship of the Presbyterian Church (USA), assisted with the arrangements with the conference and also has served as editor of this volume, collecting the papers and preparing them to be printed.

The conference did not arrange for an elaborate book store as we have in the past, but we were glad to have books from Baker Publishing House, from the Droz Press, Geneva and a collection of old Calvin books made available by David Lachman.

Plans are now underway for the tenth colloquium which will be held in January 2000.

Introduction

Robert A. Johnson, Jr.

*Associate for Theology, Office of Theology and Worship
The Presbyterian Church (USA)*

...to study Calvin is not merely to study the past—it is also to gain a deeper understanding of the present.... Although Calvin lies buried in an unmarked grave somewhere in Geneva, his ideas and influence live in the outlooks of the culture he helped to create¹

The modern world (some might say the *postmodern* world) often regards the study of the history of ideas—especially *religious* ideas—as a safe, albeit dull, way for otherwise unemployable antiquarians to pass their time. At best, the turn to history and its figures can seem to be an occasional necessity to retrieve little nuggets of information that we stitch into contemporary narratives so that we might “live better” in the present (or to help us better understand our present misery). However, as Professor McGrath points out above, we do not live in a world of our own making. History, properly studied, provides us with a context for understanding who and what we are and from whence we have come. Certainly in the west, John Calvin stands as a seminal figure in the construction of modern culture, religious practice and civic life.

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.261.

Participants in the Ninth Colloquium on Calvin Studies are not among those who must be convinced of Calvin's continuing relevance. Instead, these individuals believe that the approach to issues of theology, community and personal integrity that Calvin displayed resonates with those living at the end of the twentieth century with remarkable freshness. At the same time, all realize that repristination of Calvin is impossible: whatever Calvin has left in his writings must be contextualized within its own period for it to be understood as intended, to make any ultimate sense, or to be of any final use.

The essays in this volume represent learned appropriations of both Calvin's (and his predecessors) footprint in history and of Calvin's legacy for church, culture and academy. This year brought a prominent—and predominately *international*—group of scholars to speak on a variety of subjects germane to Calvin Scholarship.

Herman Selderhuis presents a study of the *deus absconditus* in "Calvin's Theology of the Psalms." While the hiddenness of God has been a staple of Luther scholarship for years, Selderhuis shows how Calvin develops, in his *Commentary on the Psalms* a tripartite theory of God's hiddenness that acts as both comfort and admonishment to believers. Tony Lane provides a helpful discussion of Calvin's doctrine of free will in "Bondage and Liberation in Calvin's Treatise against Pighius." Tracing Calvin's argument in Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, Lane carefully articulates the subtleties—and ambiguities—of a topic that is as hotly contested today as it was in Calvin's day. Lane concludes that it was his dispute with Pighius (and Bolsec after him) that caused Calvin to formulate a position on free will that was distinct from Luther and more refined than it had been before the dispute.

New College, Edinburgh's David Wright provides some perspective on the growing interest in Calvin's place in a humanistic intellectual world in his article "Was John Calvin a 'Rhetorical Theologian?'" After a helpful summary of literature on the subject, Wright acknowledges that the humanistic conception of rhetoric may have played a role in Calvin's writing and preaching, given his intent to influence and guide. However, Calvin's dedication to the truth and comprehensibility of the Gospel was such that whatever role rhetoric may have played, it was secondary to his primary project of interpreting the Scriptures and describing their importance to his listeners and readers.

Included in this collection are two shorter presentations. The first, by Richard Muller, is his after-dinner address on Friday Evening. In it Muller gives a frank, wide-ranging and informative précis of contemporary Calvin research. Readers will appreciate Muller's inclusion of extensive footnotes on the wealth of materials that he mentioned in the course of his address. Gerhard Sauter, in a brief presentation, gives

an overview of Reformed Theology in Europe. Professor Sauter is an acute observer of the continental theological scene, and provided the colloquium with a helpful guide to that scene for non-Europeans. Especially interesting is a list of characteristics (both positive and negative) of Reformed Theology and Reformed communities with which he concludes his essay.

Yet another European contribution to the ninth colloquium is that of Max Engammare of Librairie Droz of Geneva. His contribution, "Calvin: A Prophet without a Prophecy" investigates whether it is appropriate to call Calvin a "prophet" as he is so often acclaimed. Engammare stresses Calvin believed that the spiritual gift of foretelling the future had passed with the early church. The term "prophet", however, is possessed of several meanings. Understood in one of these alternate definitions, Calvin's position in Geneva, as Bible teacher *par excellence* and civic leader is more than enough to proclaim him "prophet."

Finally, Robert Kingdon supplies more material from his ongoing project in translating and analyzing Geneva's consistory records in "Efforts to Control Hate in Calvin's Geneva." After noting the importance of discipline in the Reformed communion since its earliest days, Kingdon presents evidence of a considered and orderly approach by the consistory to the problem of broken relationships in Calvin's Geneva. The consistory's (not always successful) attempts to stem hatred are a fascinating combination of civil domestic law, covenantal theology, human psychology and authoritarianism.

Unfortunately technical problems have prevented us from including David Puckett's study on Calvin's exegesis of the Old Testament. We apologize to Dr. Puckett and to our readers for this mishap. We hope to include this essay in the papers of a future Calvin Studies Colloquium.

Although we will be on the cusp of a new millennium at the next Calvin Studies Colloquium in January of 2000, we know some things will not have changed. Humanity will still be needy. The world will still know conflict between individuals and nations. We also know that human beings will still be seeking knowledge of self and knowledge of God. Wherever those quests remain, Calvin will still speak to heart and mind.

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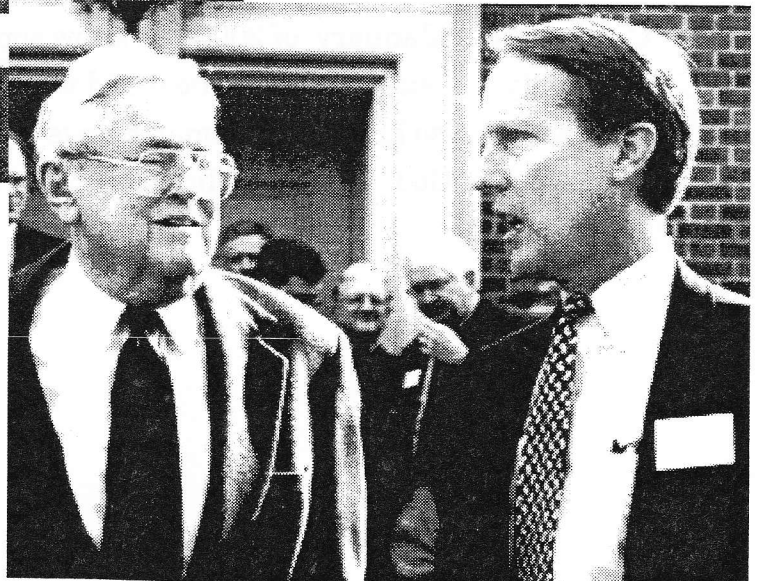
*Charles Cooke visits with
Lynn and Marjorie Burris*



*David Willis catches a
bite during a conversation
with Ben Farley*



*James Goodloe speaking
with John Leith*



Pictures From

*Brian Armstrong holds forth
at the Davidson College
Presbyterian Church "stoa"*



*Cater Ligon, 92 years old, standing at
attention with the same awe and diligence
he would employ if standing at the tomb of
his much-admired commander,
Gen. George S. Patton*



*Speaker Max Engammare and
participant Galen Johnson*

*Stacy Johnson makes
his point to Phil Butin*

