

CALVIN'S SERMONS: SUSPECTED, UNIQUE, AND PRIZED

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After long neglect, Calvin's sermons began to receive renewed attention in the twentieth century. As is well known, Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* has been his one text continually read (and mis-read). The reformer's treatises and his commentaries have had some currency in particular contexts, or at least they have not completely dropped out of circulation. However, the story of Calvin's sermons can be most strikingly illustrated by the fate of the manuscript volumes in the Geneva library, which were disposed of in 1806 as old paper. While that did shock some later contemporaries (apparently the first outcry came in 1826), this true tale gives point to the observation that Calvin's sermons have indeed been extremely neglected.¹

There is now, however, a growing literature on the subject of these sermons. The writings of Erwin Mühlhaupt have been fundamental for the German renaissance of Calvin's sermons; the two books of T. H. L. Parker have been the key influences on the English-speaking world; and Richard Stauffer has been a leader among the French Reformed.² These and other members of the international group of editors of the *Supplementa Calviniana* have made significant contributions in various books, articles, and

¹ See Bernard Gagnebin, "L'histoire des manuscrits des sermons de Calvin," *Sermons sur le Livre d'Esaië*, pub. by G.A. Barrois (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), pp. xiv-xxviii; here pp. xx-xxi.

² See T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (London and Redhill, 1947); idem, *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1992). Erwin Mühlhaupt, *Die Predigt Calvins, ihre Geschichte, ihre Form und ihre religiösen Grundgedanken* (Berlin, 1931); idem, ed./ trans, *Johannes Calvin. Diener am Wort Gottes* (Göttingen, 1934). Richard Stauffer, "Les sermons inédits de Calvin sur le livre de la Genèse," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 98:1 (1965), pp. 26-36; Stauffer, *Dieu, la création et la providence dans la prédication de Calvin* (Bern/ Frankfurt/ Las Vegas, 1978).

presentations.³ For the purposes of this paper, though, it is the wonderful *Bibliotheca Calviniana* that takes center stage, with deep gratitude to Professors Rudolphe Peter and Jean-François Gilmont for their heroic labors.⁴

The present essay is the first part of a larger project intended to explore the sermons from several perspectives. The focus here is shaped by three questions: As nearly as it can now be determined, what was the original extent of Calvin's preaching? Of the sermons which were preserved, how did some come to be published and in what form? What was Calvin's own role in this and how much was the publication effort supported by him? Part one investigates the extent of Calvin's preaching, part two surveys the historical context of his sermons and what makes them virtually unique, and finally there is a summary of the arguments for and against the publication of these sermons, including the reformer's own role.

I.

The usual place to begin when determining the extent of Calvin's preaching is with the catalogue of sermons taken down verbatim by Denis Raguénier, the first and most important stenographer paid by the Bourse Française.⁵ The chronological sequence of the books in Raguénier's list, divided into Old Testament and New, is provided in the first appendix. The Biblical sequence for the Old Testament is Genesis, Deuteronomy, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah; for the New Testament it is the Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels, Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus. This list of preached sermons includes the later part of Joel, Nahum, and the first four chapters of Daniel which were never actually transcribed because Raguénier was ill the weeks when Calvin was treating those texts.

³ The original editorial committee of the *Supplementa Calviniana* was gathered by James I. McCord, with Erwin Mühlhaupt as main editor, and Georges A. Barrois, Jean Daniel Benoît, Willem Frederik Dankbaar, Bernard Gagnebin, Henri Meylan, Barnabas Nagy, Thomas H. L. Parker, Hanns Rückert, and Richard Stauffer as members. Later, as it became evident that the task was more time-consuming than anticipated, other editors were added: Willem Balke, Erik de Boer, Max Engammare, Olivier Fatio, Francis M. Higman, Elsie Anne McKee, Wilhelmus H. Th. Moehn, Rodolphe Peter, and Lewis Thorpe. Rückert (SC 1: 2 Samuel, 1936-61). Barrois (SC 2: Isaiah, chap. 13-29, 1961). Benoît (SC 5: Micah, 1964). Peter (SC 6: Jeremiah & Lamentations, 1971). Mühlhaupt (SC 7: Psalms, Passion/ Easter/ Pentecost, 1981). Balke & Moehn (SC 8: Acts, 1994). Higman, Parker, & Thorpe (SC 3: Isaiah, chap. 30-41, 1995). Engammare (SC 11: Genesis, 2000). Yet to come are Ezekiel (de Boer and Engammare) and 1 Corinthians, chap. 1-9 (McKee). *Supplementa Calviniana* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1953/61-); hereafter SC.

⁴ Rodolphe Peter & Jean-François Gilmont, *Bibliotheca Calviniana. Les oeuvres de Jean Calvin publiées au xvi.e siècle*. I. *Ecrits théologiques, littéraires et juridiques, 1532-1554* (Genève: Droz, 1991). II. *Ecrits théologiques, littéraires et juridiques, 1555-1564* (Genève: Droz, 1994). III. *Ecrits théologiques, littéraires et juridiques, 1556-1600*. (Genève: Droz, 2000).

⁵ The list is reprinted in several volumes of the *Supplementa Calviniana*; in vol. 2 it forms part of Gagnebin, "L'histoire des manuscrits des sermons de Calvin," pp. xv-xvii.

Raguenier's successor did not make a catalogue, but his work and some information about sermons which were preached but not transcribed can be filled in from other sources. However, much of this information must be interpreted. The biographical account under the name of Nicolas Colladon refers to Calvin's preaching on Isaiah in 1546, Hebrews in 1549, Judges in 1561, and 1 Kings at the time of his death. The bibliography provided by Theodore Beza adds some precision; his list includes sermons "on some chapters of the end of the epistle to the Hebrews," which indicates that these were written down though it does not provide any dates. Beza also says that the sermons on 1 Kings covered "about the first eighteen chapters." Nicolas Des Gallars refers to the sermons on Isaiah preached in 1546 as part of his source material for the 1550-51 version of Calvin's commentary for which he was responsible.⁶ Occasionally there are some other more elusive notes about Biblical books that Calvin expounded. For example, his own letter of 28 July 1542 to Farel mentions some kind of treatment of Genesis, though it is not clear whether this refers to sermons or lectures.⁷

Some of these "sermons" were probably not, however, preached in the parish church but were *congrégations*, the public "lessons" on scripture that was held once a week. Like the sermons, these *congrégations* were Biblical expositions in French preached by different ministers in turn. Unlike the sermons, the *congrégations* did not focus on application; they were in most ways a vernacular equivalent of the Biblical lectures Calvin gave to his Latin-educated audience. According to Eric de Boer, who is making a detailed study of the *congrégations*, the Hebrews "sermons" of 1549 mentioned by Colladon (and Beza) were *congrégations*.⁸ It is not clear whether the Isaiah sermons of 1546 were given in the parish or the *congrégation*; De Boer's efforts to reconstruct a list do not include any such reference, but his list also has lacunae for the 1540s.⁹ However, since Des Gallars used these sermons for the commentary (which means Calvin was responsible for all of them and not just part, as was usually the case with *congrégations*), it is probable that these were preached in the parish.

Before going further, there are several interesting points to observe about Calvin's practice of preaching. First, some Biblical books appear more than once; for example, he preached on Isaiah in 1546 and then again in 1556-59, when the texts were recorded by Raguenier. This second time through Isaiah Calvin was seriously ill for some months, and during that time Pierre Viret preached on the same prophet. Although it is not possible to be sure, it is probable that this interim work by Viret did not serve as a "substitute" for Calvin's own exposition on those passages, and it appears that when he returned to the pulpit he

⁶ For Isaiah, see OC 21:68; Hebrews, OC 21:71 and 21:48; Judges, OC 21:91; 1 Kings, OC 21:48. Des Gallars is cited in *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, p. 405.

⁷ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, p. 521, citing Louis-Aimé Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les pays de langue française* (Geneva & Paris, 1866), tome 8, pp. 80-81.

⁸ See Eric de Boer, "The Congrégation: An In-Service Theological Training Center for the Preachers to the People of Geneva," *Calvin and the Company of Pastors: Papers Presented at the 14th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Product Services, 2004), pp. 57-87; see pp. 74, 76.

⁹ This information provided by the author from his on-going project to prepare the *congrégation* texts for the new critical edition of Calvin's works, the *Calvini opera omnia denuo recognita*; a summary is found in De Boer, "The Congrégation," p. 74.

picked up where he had left off before he became sick.¹⁰ Apparently, not only did Calvin repeat some books, but he did not skip even when someone else had preached on the same text in his absence.

As is well known, Calvin usually followed the *lectio continua* method, but there is one Biblical book that he did not expound strictly in that fashion: it was Psalms. Colladon explains that Calvin was treating “only those which had not previously been translated into rhyme (because he had already preached on the others).”¹¹ This suggests that the reformer thought he needed to expound a Psalm text when its use was introduced, in order for the people to understand what they were singing. Thus the Psalms which were first available in meter — some of them the ones most essential to the liturgy — were expounded early in his ministry before his sermons were being recorded.

Besides the regular series of *lectio continua* sermons straight through whole books, there were some other partial expositions. Most often these were the regular Holy Week sermons on the passion narratives, but others were preached on individual “feast days,” i.e., Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, which included the main Lord’s Supper celebrations.¹² Two sets of sermons for Matthew 26-27 (28) (which stood for the synoptics as a harmony) have been preserved but none of the Johannine passion sermons. The Matthew sermons published in Calvin’s lifetime were preached in 1558 and appeared that same year in a collection of sermons on feast days. The other extant set of Holy Week sermons comes from 1562, while there are two sermons on the Easter passage Matt. 28:1-10 from 1559 and 1560; all of these were printed in the twentieth century.¹³ The Johannine

¹⁰ See Pierre Viret, *Quatre sermons français sur Esaïe 65 (mars 1559)*, ed. H. Meylan (Lausanne: Payot, 1961). Meylan comments that one might imagine that Viret picked up where Calvin left off; he adds “cette hypothèse séduisante se heurte à de très réelles difficultés” (p. 7), without explaining what those might be. These sermons were transcribed by Raguénier, but it is not known why there are no more after these four which were preached on 5, 8, 12, and 15 March 1559 (p. 7) on Isa. 65:8-11. Raguénier’s catalogue describes the sixth volume: “le 6. et dernier volume sus le Prophete Esaïe contenant 43 sermons, aussi suivans et consequutifz l’ung à l’autre...” (Gagnebin, “L’histoire des manuscrits des sermons de Calvin,” p. xvii.) This volume of sermons is missing, but logic says it probably contained at least four or five chapters, therefore starting before chapter 65 which was Viret’s text. (The calculations are based on the three known volumes of Isaiah sermons; #2: chapters 15-29 in 66 sermons, #3: chapters 30-41 in 67 sermons, and #4: chapters 42-52 in 57 sermons; leaving chapters 53-66 for two final volumes of 44 and 43 sermons respectively.) Also Raguénier is clear that he did not miss any of Calvin’s sermons (he does not use the “suivans et consequutifz” without cause). Thus it is very improbable that Viret’s sermons were seen as a substitute for Calvin’s and so it is most likely that when he returned to the pulpit Calvin continued his exposition where he had left off.

¹¹ “Au sermon du soir les Dimanches il preschoit les Pseaumes, prenant seulement ceux qui n’estoyent pas encore traduits en rythme (car desja auparavant il avoit presché les autres).” OC 21:71.

¹² See *Plusieurs sermons touchant la divinité, humanité et nativité de N.S. Jesus Christ* [Geneva] Conrad Badius, 1558.

¹³ These are edited by Mühlhaupt in SC 7.

passion is recorded as having been preached in the week of March 31-April 6, 1550; a second single sermon on Wednesday, March 25, 1551, treated the passion from John 18-19. It is virtually certain that Calvin preached on the passion story more often than the four or five specific instances on record, but there is no evidence to determine exactly when he followed which gospel. In addition to the above named sermons specifically on Matthew and John, there were some others which Raguénier simply entitled "*passion et resurrection*," in a volume composed of feast day sermons from 1549-1555 which is no longer extant. According to its surviving table of contents, this volume included eight sermons preached in Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost 1549 taken down by Maître André de la Chesnaye, and others on Christmas, "*passion et resurrection*," and Pentecost recorded by Raguénier.¹⁴ So much, then, for the extent of Calvin's preaching as far as explicit evidence goes.

What is missing? It does not seem that this question has exercised the scholarly imagination, but it is worth some educated guesswork. What leaps to the eye first is the total absence of any known reference to sustained preaching in the parish on the epistle to Romans or the gospel of John or the epistle to the Hebrews. The list of Biblical books treated at the congrégation does include Hebrews in 1549-50 and the Gospel of John from 1550 to 1553, as well as some hints that Romans may have been the topic in 1542.¹⁵ However, these references seem late and limited. Surely Romans was one of the key New Testament texts for all the Reformation, and John was Calvin's own favorite among the gospels for teaching doctrine. As early as 1539 in the *Reply to Sadoleto* Calvin affirmed: "I hesitated not to dwell at greater length on topics on which the salvation of my hearers depended," and Gary Hansen has pointed out that the Pauline epistles, John, and Hebrews were keys in Calvin's theology because of his "explicit practice...of commenting first on the books that have the greatest clarity on the most important subjects."¹⁶ Thus it is virtually inconceivable that Calvin never gave concentrated homiletical attention to John or Romans or Hebrews in the parish context, especially if he could preach through Isaiah twice. The centrality of Romans and John makes these texts the key focus of attention here.

The only logical time to situate parish sermons on Romans or John would be in the early years of Calvin's reform work. (After Raguénier began work in 1549 the known sermons fill all the reformer's time.) The years prior to 1549 are effectively blank so far as any record of Calvin's preaching goes (apart from some sermons on Psalms), and the books of Romans and John would be natural choices for initial sermon series. As is well known, the reformer's first commentary was on Romans, and this was completed soon after he settled in Strasbourg. There is some evidence that Calvin was lecturing on Paul in Geneva before his exile, and the editors of the *Bibliotheca Calvinina* speculate that "the epistle to Romans was

¹⁴ See the "table of contents" published by Mühlhaupt, SC 7, pp. xlvii-xlviii, which gives the topics of 34 sermons by Calvin.

¹⁵ See De Boer, "The Congrégation," pp. 74, 76, esp. n.73.

¹⁶ See *John Calvin & Jacopo Sadoleto: A Reformation Debate*, edited by John Olin (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1976), p. 84 (OC 5:409). Gary Neal Hansen, *John Calvin and the Non-Literal Interpretation of Scripture* (Princeton Theological Seminary Ph.D. dissertation, 1998), p. 16; pp. 16-21 examines the vital role of Paul, John, and Hebrews in the development of Calvin's theology.

probably the subject of his first lectures.”¹⁷ That being so, it seems likely that he treated this book from the pulpit as well as in class. Especially since he had begun as a teacher and was definitely hesitant about preaching, it would make sense for Farel’s new assistant to concentrate on one book and explain the same text in two forms. One can only speculate, but there is good circumstantial reason to hypothesize that Calvin was preaching on Romans during his first Genevan sojourn, as he helped his more experienced colleague to instruct these new followers of the gospel in the key teachings of their new confession — especially justification by faith-grace alone and Christ as the sole Redeemer!

Furthermore, in 1542 Calvin published a short expository piece on the epistle of James. This is the only “commentary” to appear first in French and the only one to have been written directly in that language, not translated from Latin, and Rodolphe Peter has identified its character as sermonic.¹⁸ Although Gilmont maintains the classification of commentary, it is significant that this particular book, with its distinctive view of faith, should be made public in French so early in Calvin’s ministry. It is tempting to hypothesize that a sermon series on James might have formed a sequel to one on Romans, and that the fruit of this preaching was issued as a kind of homiletical commentary. This would help explain the anomaly of a French commentary appearing before the Latin was written, especially since the content of this early work on James was noticeably different from the later Latin commentary.

As for the Gospel of John, there are several factual hints about its place in Calvin’s early Genevan ministry. The *Registres du Consistoire* provide a few fleeting references to Calvin’s preaching. Although these do not supply much definitive information, what turns up in the comments of Genevans brought before the Consistory is suggestive. In 1542 (the session on April 4), Pierre, *le barbier du Molard*, says that “he was at church on Sunday morning and thinks that it was Calvin and that he preached on St. John, and the afternoon sermon he does not know who it was except that he preached on John.”¹⁹ It is not clear whether Pierre *le barbier* meant sermons on a Biblical person named John or John the Biblical book.

¹⁷ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, p. 76. The printer Oporin wrote to Calvin on 25 March 1537 that he heard Calvin was commenting on Paul, and he asks Calvin to put those lectures into commentary form. “L’Epître aux Romains a probablement fait l’objet de ses premières leçons.”

¹⁸ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, p. 110: “De plus cet ouvrage est rédigé directement en français contrairement aux autres travaux d’exégèse. Dans une note inédite, R. Peter range cette exposition parmi les sermons de Calvin: ‘bien qu’elle n’ait pas la forme d’une prédication, elle nous en donne la substance’. Il remarque que le commentaire de la même Epître publié ultérieurement propose une exégèse plus serrée et un texte plus dense.”

¹⁹ See *Registres du Consistoire de Genève au temps de Calvin. Tome I (1542.1544)*, pub. T. A. Lambert & I. M. Watt with R. M. Kingdon (Genève: Droz, 1996). April 4, 1542, p. 28: “Az respondu qu’il vaz aux sermons et ce fust dymenche a matin et cuyde que ce fust Calvin et qu’on prescha de Saintz Jehan; et apres dyné ne scet le quel, sinon qu’il prescha de Jehan.”

However, considering the way he refers to “St. Jehan” or “Jehan,” it is at least worth speculating that he heard Calvin preaching on the book of John.²⁰

The gospel of John almost certainly played a special role in the communion services in Geneva. According to records in the *Registres du Conseil* and the *Registres du Consistoire*, it was the practice to read aloud from the passion narratives during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is recorded at least as early as December 1538, after Farel and Calvin were exiled. However, the 1542 *La forme des prieres* provides a rubric for this reading, and it appears from Consistory minutes in April 1542 that the practice continued. Before the Supper readers are assigned for the various churches (April 6), and afterwards, two weeks later (April 20), several former Roman clerics from country villages are called upon to explain why they had not done the reading as requested. The specific passion story is not named in the early years, but later a visitor to Geneva identified what he heard as the Gospel of John, beginning at chapter thirteen.²¹

Since Calvin did not write a commentary on the gospel of John until considerably later, the circumstantial evidence for sermons on John is somewhat different from that for Romans, where the first commentary appears shortly after the point when sermons on Romans might logically have fitted. However, here another factor is to be taken into account. De Boer maintains that often the *congrégations* were the preparatory ground for Calvin's commentaries, but there were apparently exceptions.²² Most notable was Romans, since it seems that the *congrégations* treated this book after the publication of the commentary. In at least one other instance (significantly, again a Pauline text), i.e., the *congrégations* on Galatians (1562-63), the commentary (1548) preceded the *congrégations* by many years. Although Calvin's commentary on John (1553) was no doubt related to the *congrégations*, the reformer might very well have preached on the book from the pulpit considerably earlier. In fact, he almost had to have done so! The sermons on the synoptic gospels (1559-64) appear at a very late date; it would be extremely surprising if, before 1559, Calvin had not preached to his regular parish congregation straight through any one of the four gospels! And so, even if it is still clearly speculation, it seems quite natural to imagine Calvin preaching through John some time in the early years in Geneva after his return in 1541.

Beyond these two significant New Testament omissions from Calvin's homiletical works, Romans and John, there are others that may surprise the observer. There are no parish

²⁰ Pierre refers to morning and afternoon sermons as if their substance were a single subject matter or a series, but on the other hand, if he recognized Calvin in the morning he ought to have done so in the afternoon. This raises the question whether it was a series by Calvin, or two pastors preaching on John, but it is also possible that Pierre was not paying very close attention to who was in the pulpit.

²¹ For *La forme des prieres*, see OS 2, p. 49. For Dec. 1538, see OC 21:240. See *Registres du Consistoire de Genève au temps de Calvin*: April 6, 1542, pp. 34-35; April 20, 1542, p. 40 “Monsieur George Poutex, de La Verchiere et Mychiel Morand, Religiuelx de Satignin” were canons of the priory of Satigny. For visitor, see Antoine Catalan, *Passevent Parisien Respondant à Pasquin Roman* (Paris: Isidore Liseux, 1875), p. 74. Calvin's own fondness for John, plus the fact that so much of this gospel is focused on doctrine, probably made this passion story particularly edifying for reading at the Supper.

²² See De Boer, “The Congrégation,” p. 80.

sermons on Philippians or Colossians or Philemon, or Hebrews, or Peter or John or Jude or James (unless the early French commentary may be taken as evidence that this book was also expounded from the pulpit). There are none on the Apocalypse, either, but that lacuna is not surprising since this book was not one of Calvin's favorites. Even if skipping Philemon, Jude, and the Apocalypse is natural, the complete silence on several important Pauline epistles as well as Hebrews and all the Petrine and Johannine letters seems suspicious. Calvin later would preach not only on all four of the major prophets but also on eight of the twelve minor ones.²³ If he could work through most of these relatively less important books, it is highly improbable that he failed completely to preach on Hebrews or significant Pauline texts like Philippians or virtually any of the catholic epistles. It is likely, therefore, that some of these New Testament epistles, which all the lists of sermons pass over in silence, were the subject of Calvin's preaching before his words from the pulpit made it into formal records.

By way of historical context, Calvin's work may be compared with that of Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575). During his lifetime Bullinger preached through most of the Old Testament, including several times through the prophets. He also preached through all of the New Testament, most of it several times; in fact, he preached on Hebrews four times.²⁴ While it is obvious that Calvin could not have preached as many sermons simply because his life was so much shorter than that of Bullinger, it is also plain that it would have been extremely strange if he had not preached on all the New Testament (except Bullinger's favorite, the Apocalypse, on which Calvin did not even lecture).

Before proceeding to the question of the publication of his sermons, it is helpful to return to the list of Calvin's known preaching, in Biblical order: Genesis, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah; the Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels, Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus. The books missing from the Old Testament list are Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Joshua, Ruth, 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Habbakuk, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Some of these, such as Joshua, were treated in the *congrégations*, and the omission of others, like Chronicles, is not too surprising, though the lack of the remaining minor prophets is worth noting. More remarkable is the list of New Testament books missing: the Gospel of John, the letters to Romans, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 & 2 & 3 John, Jude, and the Apocalypse — and possibly James. When considering Calvin's regular parish preaching, it is salutary to bear in mind what Biblical books are unaccounted for in the records.

II.

The preservation and publication of Calvin's sermons were not as self-evident as some modern students might think. This brief summary is intended to set the context for the

²³ See lists of sermons, appendix.

²⁴ See Walter Hollweg, *Heinrich Bullingers Hausbuch: Eine Untersuchung über die Anfänge der reformierten Predigtliteratur* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers, 1956). [Summary in E. A. McKee, "Heinrich Bullinger," *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. W.H. Willimon & R. Lischer (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1995), pp. 48-50.]

arguments about making Calvin's sermons public; Prof. Hughes O. Old's magnum opus must be consulted for a full history of preaching — as I am sure I need not remind this company!

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The existence of the sermons themselves was conditioned by a number of factors that can be summarized under the heading of “sermon culture.” The first and most obvious practical condition for having written sermons was the “simple” issue of recording what the preacher said. For many centuries after the western Christian empire passed into medieval Christendom, however, it was very uncommon for sermons to be taken down verbatim, and this was virtually never done for vernacular sermons. Partly this might be attributed to the sheer difficulty of the process: relatively few people were literate and the number who could write was even smaller, so the chances of any given sermon being recorded as spoken were very limited. Those who were literate were almost always trained to write in Latin, although by the later middle ages written texts in the vernaculars were becoming common. More importantly, there were a number of constraints and conventions governing sermon publication which reduced the likelihood of a complete written record of a preached vernacular sermon nearly to zero.

The language of sermons was one of the key factors in determining what “ordinary” preaching found its way onto paper.²⁶ Here it is important to distinguish between the sermon literature that has survived and the actual sermons which ordinary people heard. Serious theology or Biblical exposition was virtually never written in the vernacular except by “heretics” like the Lollards (as examples from English manuscript handbooks demonstrates). In general, in the Middle Ages and early modern Europe, sermons preached to the laity, at least the common people, were always in the vernacular. Those more abundantly preserved sermons addressed to the clergy (except nuns, who were usually less fluent in Latin than monks or priests) were normally in Latin. The upper ranks of the nobility might also be able to follow a sermon in Latin, and with the spread of urban society and education, more laity, especially humanist-trained men, also found Latin accessible.

However, whatever the language of the spoken sermon, the language of its publication was normally Latin, at least for sermons by the friars who provided most of the educated preachers. In the case of a vernacular sermon that was recorded in Latin, the vocabulary (if not the sense) was changed. More commonly, however, the direction of sermon transmission was from Latin to the vernacular, because many of the texts published to aid clergy in preaching were prepared in Latin, which then must be rendered (or rendered again) into the speech of the particular people. Some clerics did prepare handbooks of the kind of vernacular sermons which were popular in rural parish churches; these were usually more

²⁵ See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998-).

²⁶ Sources for this summary include: See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*. Volume 3 *The Medieval Church* (1999), pp. 453 for Tauler's sermons written out by Dominican nuns. G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England. An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the period c.1350-1450* (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), chap. III, esp. pp. 223-233. Larissa Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ. Preaching in Late Medieval and Reformation France* (NY/ Oxford: OUP, 1992), esp. chap. 4. Larissa Taylor, ed., *Preachers and People in the Reformation and Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), esp. chap. 1, Thomas Worcester, SJ, “Catholic Sermons.”

fanciful — or “heretical” — than the texts which appeared in Latin.²⁷ (Exposition of Biblical texts in vernacular publications by educated clergy became common only in the early modern period.²⁸) Some preaching handbooks, whether in Latin or the vernacular, were collections of sermons, written out in full; others were sermon outlines or books of exempla (illustrative anecdotes classified by topic) to allow semi-literate priests to construct their own moral exhortations based on a lively story. The point is that, no matter what the language of the manuscript (and most of these were in Latin), practically none of the recorded sermons are verbatim accounts of what was actually said in an ordinary parish church.

Besides the question of the language, essentially all of the sermons which were “published,” in manuscript form or after the introduction of the printing press, were written for that public purpose and thus were usually polished for, if not actually re-written before publication. At the least, what got down on paper was almost never precisely the same as what was heard in the pulpit, except in the case of learned Latin orations which were written to be read or recitations of prepared texts (like rhyming sermon-songs). The pre-publication editing of most homiletical material might range from a preacher giving fuller form to his own notes, through transcription by educated clerical listeners, to the formal writing out of a sermon which had never been preached in that specific fashion. For sermons preached in the vernacular, the clerical transcription process often produced a macaronic text, a mixture of the spoken language and Latin, because clergy were ordinarily trained to write in Latin but not the vernacular. They were also accustomed to thinking theologically in Latin, so that theological vocabulary in Latin would come more readily than common speech.²⁹

A third factor of sermon culture was the status and subject matter of preaching. In the Middle Ages regular preaching was not expected of parish priests; friars were the source of most sermons ordinary people heard. Parish clergy who did preach usually used materials prepared by others, which concentrated on moral and catechetical education: the basic prayers, stories of Biblical characters and popular saints and liturgical feast days, instruction on the appropriate behavior for each rank (wives, merchants, children, rulers, *et al.*), the laws of the church, etc. If these prepared texts reached the parish clergy in the vernacular they might well include as many marvels as miracles, since the theological standard for vernacular texts was much less strict than that for Latin. Educated clergy wrote and delivered Latin sermons, prepared according to various scholarly models. The older “homily” form, a kind

²⁷ Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, pp. 223ff describes the variety of texts, notes examples of vernacular sermons recorded in Latin and then transposed back into the vernacular, the clear distinction between the learned mendicants and other clergy, the vernacular collections for either “Lollard” or common parish audiences, including rhyming verse admonitions. Old’s *The Reading and Preaching of Scriptures in the Worship of the Church* gives a fine picture of the educated preacher; Owst provides many examples from the manuscripts which did not become standard teaching so his book, though older, gives a good idea of the rural parish pulpit in England, which was probably not too different from the continent.

²⁸ See Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church. Volume 3: The Medieval Church* (1999), pp. 538-39 for “Strasbourg Plenarium” as kind of late medieval postilla circa 1500 with exposition of gospels and epistles; e.g., Geiler von Kaysersberg’s Plenarium, the *Evangelia mit Auslegung*, published in 1517.

²⁹ See Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, pp. 228ff, reasons for Latin; macaronic texts, pp. 231ff.

of Biblical exposition with a relatively simple structure, was occasionally still used but it was rare. The usual university sermon was a thematic development of a verse, idea, doctrine, etc., with many divisions and subheadings to unfold the theme. With the coming of humanism, newer styles of preaching became common in elite circles, but these were still Latin sermons usually written for and read to clergy or court.³⁰

When Protestants made expository Biblical sermons central to the liturgy, they modified the substance, status, and language of parish preaching. Now preaching was no longer optional but necessary for Sunday worship (if not also for daily services); now the basis must be scriptural exegesis and doctrine; and now the vernacular was considered appropriate for serious theology as defined by the Bible. The old model sermons and handbooks were both rejected and useless; something new must be done to provide proper Biblical preaching for ordinary parishes. There were several ways to approach this major homiletical challenge, some more radical than others. It was possible to provide new handbooks, a pattern followed by Martin Luther and Thomas Cranmer. Naturally these model sermons had the Bible and classical creeds as their sole subject matter. Besides that innovation in content, the key novelty was that essentially all of these Protestant preaching books were printed in the vernacular and they could even be read by literate laity. Cranmer's Homilies (misnamed because they were not Biblical exposition) were thematic sermons, though not complex in form like their medieval predecessors, and they were explicitly ordained to be read.³¹ Luther's Postilla were written homilies published to provide poor preachers — or devout householders — with texts to read or at least to follow.

Most regularly preached sermons were still not recorded, but Luther was an exception to that rule as to many others. A few of his printed sermons were texts which he wrote for publication. Some of the postilla were edited by Luther himself, but many were prepared by his colleagues from his spoken words. It appears that Stephen Roth was the most faithful to what Luther actually said, but the reformer “was dissatisfied with Roth's work and commissioned Caspar Cruciger to replace it” with a more literary edition of his words. In fact, Luther remarked appreciatively “that after Cruciger had finished editing a sermon for his postil, it was far better than anything that Luther himself had said.”³² Clearly, the goal of publication was not to reproduce the exact words of the preacher, and the more elegant the form of the sermon that appeared in print, the better. Some of Luther's sermons also survive in the notes of colleagues like Georg Röser, notes that may give a better sense of Luther's actual pulpit work but rarely capture the exact words because, while Luther spoke in

³⁰ See Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, pp. 226f for differences between friars [learned and attached to Latin] and other preachers [experimenting with vernacular]. See Worcester, “Catholic Sermons,” pp. 3ff for thematic sermons and developing humanism.

³¹ Ronald Bond, ed. *Certain Sermons or Homilies (1547) and A Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570)* (Toronto/ Buffalo/ London: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1986).

³² See summary of the character of Luther's sermons in Lowell Green, “Justification in Luther's Preaching on Luke 18:9-14,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (1973), pp. 733-734; quotations from p. 733 n.3 and p. 734 (citing WA Tischreden, vol., 3, No. 2869b). See Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*. Volume 4 *The Age of the Reformation* (2002), p. 5 refers to Luther's “stenographers”; pp. 8-9 n.11 refers to sermon writer who was not a trained stenographer.

German, Rörer (like his medieval predecessors) recorded in a mix of German and the more familiar Latin.

Luther's Postilla were normally expositions of the traditional selected lectionary (although he also preached through Old Testament books which had not been part of the lectionary), and Cranmer's homilies followed a kind of catechetical model, but if one abandoned those two traditional formats, the preparation of handbooks became more difficult. As is well known, the Reformed tradition rejected the old lectionary and substituted *lectio continua*, a modified form of the patristic homily pattern; and they applied this to the whole Bible, not just the Old Testament. Following *lectio continua* meant at the least that a much larger store of model sermons would be needed, an impossible number, if the uneducated preacher were to have a full Bible's worth of homilies to read.

However, this difference in the way that Lutherans and Reformed chose scripture readings did not, in itself, significantly change the relationship between spoken and printed sermons, for several reasons. One is simply that most preaching still did not find a printed form, and when it did, it was revised for the public. Secondly, most often the kind of sermon which early Reformed ministers published was aimed at teaching the clergy, and again, it was written down for publication. Ulrich Zwingli revised the few of his sermons that were published in his life-time; of these the thematic *Der Hirt* is probably the best known. (His colleague Leo Jud made notes when Zwingli preached through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the gospels, but these notes from the *lectio continua* sermons were not printed until modern times.) Heinrich Bullinger published a number of sermons, mostly in Latin, including two famous sets, the *Decades* and one hundred sermons on the Apocalypse. The *Decades* were "sermons to clergy," although unlike their medieval antecedents these were printed in the vernacular as well as Latin so that everyone could have access to them. Bullinger's sermons on the Apocalypse are a kind of *lectio continua*, and in addition he published series on Jeremiah, Daniel, and Isaiah, plus some sermons on Christological feast days. However, these were all in Latin, essentially an extension of his commentary writing and not vernacular sermons. There are some occasional pieces that appeared in German, e.g., the sermon on Matthew 14 which he preached in 1552 during the struggle between Charles V and the Protestants. But again, all of these were prepared for print by the author. Like Luther, Bullinger made manuscript notes for some of his sermons and many of these notes are extant, but they give only the key points.³³ For most of the other reformers, few sermons are preserved, and practically none of those published in their own day were taken down verbatim; all were prepared for the public.

In sum, then, there is very little verbatim homiletical material extant before Calvin. (Indeed, the traditional sermon culture probably helps to explain why there is so little evidence for what Calvin was preaching in the early years, since recording sermons was the exception rather than the rule.) Even after the innovation of Calvin's sermons, most such texts that reached the wider public continued to be polished or even written for publication.

³³ See Meylan, p.5. Zwingli, "Der Hirt" (1524), *Huldreich Zwingli's Werke*, ed. M. Schuler & J. Schulthess (Zürich, 1828). Vol. 1, pp. 631-668. For one of Bullinger's rare German sermons see, "Von rechter Hülfe und Errettung in Nöthen," on Matt. 14, Zürich 12 July 1552, in Carl Pestalozzi, *Heinrich Bullinger. Leben und ausgewählte Schriften* (Elberfeld, 1858), "appendix D," pp. 560-579. Full information in Hollweg, *Heinrich Bullingers Hausbuch*. [Summary in McKee, "Heinrich Bullinger," p. 49.]

The huge majority of Protestant sermons before the seventeenth century and even afterwards were never recorded in any fashion, and those which did see the light of print were almost always edited or even re-written for that purpose. None of this should be a surprise. Sixteenth-century Protestants changed much about preaching — narrowing the subject to scriptural exegesis and Biblical catechesis, elevating the status from desirable to essential, and consistently using the vernacular for serious pulpit theology. However, they did not change the methods of recording and publishing sermons. This last point seems minor, but it has a particular relevance for appreciating the innovation that Calvin's sermons presented.

It was amazing to his contemporaries — and ought to amaze his heirs — that Calvin's sermons were taken down by a trained stenographer as he preached. At first one of the traditional ways for recording a master's preaching was followed: that is, several of Calvin's colleagues wrote down a few of their eminent friend's sermons for their own use. The traditional editing was also common; when Nicolas Des Gallars used homiletical material from Calvin's 1546 Isaiah sermons to prepare the 1550-51 commentary, he states that he used both French and Latin in making his notes (the common macaronic form) and also revised and polished what he recorded to make a smoother text.³⁴ But something very novel happened in 1549. From that year until his death around the end of 1560, the French refugee Denis Raguenier, who was the early modern equivalent of a stenographer, took down Calvin's sermons in shorthand and dictated them to scribes to make fair copies. After Raguenier's death there was a hiatus but then Paris Prostat continued the work. Practically speaking, therefore, the great majority of Calvin's sermons were recorded in a way both complete and rare. The first condition for having the sermons, that is, getting them down on paper, was met in a unique and rich and virtually unprecedented fashion.

III.

The second condition for the publication of Calvin's sermons was ascertaining a market and getting Calvin's permission. Apparently the former was much easier than the latter, but to some extent both were dependent on accepting a new idea of what printed sermons were. That is, vernacular extempore sermons copied down verbatim did not fit any of the traditional categories of publication: they were not revised or polished for the public, they were not intended by their preacher as model sermons or a handbook. Thus, Calvin himself first had to be convinced.

The opening wedge was provided by two Psalm texts that Calvin had specifically chosen for special Day of Prayer services, on Nov. 4 and 11, 1545. One auditor, Pasteur Jean Cousin, wrote these out for his own comfort, and then pled with the preacher to allow him to print them because so many people were asking Cousin for copies. (One might speculate that because Calvin had almost certainly interrupted his *lectio continua* series for these sermons, they had received more conscious premeditation than he usually had time to devote to his daily preaching and thus may have been closer to his own standards.) In any

³⁴ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, p. 405 (citing Des Gallars' preface to Calvin's 1550-51 Isaiah commentary).

event, according to Cousin, Calvin very reluctantly agreed, and the texts appeared in 1546.³⁵ (In fact, the preacher's hesitations did not apply only to the sermons; the teacher was also similarly self-critical, and made analogous objections to printing the Biblical lectures that he had not had a chance to revise.³⁶ There would have been no commentaries on Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, or the minor prophets if Calvin's friends had not pressured him.) Calvin's objections to the publication of his verbatim sermons are repeated in virtually every preface except two, as the reformer's friends nagged at him to allow them to publish and distribute his sermons. (The one key exception was an editor who did not know the reformer and published without the permission of the *Bourse Française*, which owned the sermons. This opportunist apparently felt that his case would be strengthened by claiming the approval of Calvin — now safely dead — for his work.³⁷) Cousin's two Psalm transcriptions were just a foretaste of what was to come, but before examining the rest of Calvin's published sermons it is important to look at the ones he himself chose to print, and then consider how his colleagues argued for the publication of others.³⁸

Calvin's Role in Publishing His Sermons

The only publication sponsored by Calvin himself was a set of four sermons, first printed in 1552, which were conceived as another form of his argument against Nicodemism. The *Quatre Sermons fort utiles pour nostre temps avec exposition du Pseaume 87* was composed of four texts Calvin had revised in his study, plus a short commentary on Psalm 87. The titles of the sermons give the gist of their subject matter.

A sermon in which all Christians are exhorted to flee external idolatry, on Ps. 16 verse 3. The second sermon, containing exhortation to suffer persecution to follow Jesus Christ and His Gospel; on the passage which is in Heb. 13 [13]. The third sermon, showing how the faithful ought to prize being in the Church of God where they may have liberty to worship Him purely; on the theme of Ps.

³⁵ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, p. 219. Full treatment of the day of prayer will appear in my future book, *The Pastoral Ministry in Calvin's Geneva*, the larger project of which this essay is also part.

³⁶ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 2, pp. 622-24.

³⁷ The *Sermons on Daniel*, 1565; this point will be developed in the larger work when it is complete.

³⁸ Badius' preface to the *Sermons sur les dix commandemens* explains: "Mesmes [Calvin] jamais n'a este d'avis, et n'a voulu permettre qu'on en imprimast aucuns, fors quatre pour le soulagement des povres fideles qui cherchent la liberté Évangelique, et cependant trouvent tant d'empeschemens qu'ils ne s'en peuvent desvelopper: ce qu'il feit aussi en partie pour s'acquitter d'une promesse qu'il avoit faite, de mettre quelque jour quelques Homelies en lumiere. Les autres qui ont este depuis adjoints à ces quatre, ç'a plus este d'une permission contrainte et forcee ou plustost importunité, que de franche volonté et consentement. Ce qu'il faut aussi que je confesse de ceux-ci: car jamais ne m'eust permis de les imprimer, en ayant desja este requis d'autres fois, sinon que je l'eusse pressé, et souvent importuné," OC 25:597-598.

27. The fourth sermon, showing how one should strive to achieve the freedom to serve God purely in the Christian Church; on the theme of Ps. 27.³⁹

Calvin explains his reason for publishing.

Although I have previously written two treatises sufficiently extensive to show that it is not allowed for a Christian who lives under the papacy and who knows the pure doctrine of the Gospel to do anything which appears to be a consent or adherence to the abuses, superstitions, and idolatries which reign there; Nevertheless every day there are people who ask me afresh for counsel, as if I had never spoken. I understand that there are others who do not cease to make their retorts and offer subterfuges against what I have written about this. So, in order to cut short those who ask about what ought to be known and notorious, and those who think to cover themselves with a wet sack against the judgment of God [excuse themselves], I have thought it expedient to revise and put in order a sermon which I preached on this subject, of which a summary was taken down.⁴⁰

As Calvin notes, someone had transcribed the gist of this sermon and probably of the other three as well (which may have been recorded by Raguenier), and he worked them over to make a publishable text. Obviously his chief purpose in this book was theological, and he viewed these sermons as an auxiliary means to draw readers away from Nicodemism. Perhaps he thought that the homiletical format, the exposition of specific Biblical texts, would reach those who ignored or seemed impervious to treatises.

The issue of Nicodemism was important enough that Calvin immediately commissioned a Latin translation of the *Quatre Sermons*. First he asked Theodore Beza to do it, and (when the latter was too busy), he passed on the job to the noted classics scholar Claude Baduel, who later became a minister in Geneva.⁴¹ Besides the Latin, published in 1553, there were two other translations that same year, in Italian and English. Like the French, the Latin and Italian included all four sermons, but the English only the first two in a version based on the Latin text. However, later all four sermons were published in English (1561), and then in 1579 they were again translated into English, this time from the French original.⁴² All the rest of Calvin's sermons that appeared in print were published at the insistence of others, rather against the preacher's own wishes. It is important to observe why Calvin objected and how his friends argued for the publication.

Arguing For and Against Publishing Verbatim Texts

The reformer himself had several quite logical reasons to resist the printing of his sermons. Perhaps most often expressed was the concern that these extempore presentations were not polished. Among the fullest descriptions of Calvin's reluctance is that provided by Conrad Badius in the preface to the *Sermons sur les dix commandemens* in 1557. First Badius

³⁹ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, p. 464.

⁴⁰ OC 8:373-374.

⁴¹ On Latin, see *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, pp. 478-79.

⁴² See list from *Bibliotheca Calviniana* in appendix.

explains the way the sermons were written down, as if to defend Calvin's modesty and honor.

[These sermons] (like all the others which he preaches) were taken down by the regular stenographer (*l'escricain ordinaire*) and he did not touch them again or revise them in any way. I say that because one might suppose that he had worked over them and polished them at home, entirely at his leisure, to make a good showing, but I can assure you that they are just the way God gave to him to speak publicly, without a word added or taken away.⁴³

(With regard to the last point it may be said that although some publishers were not averse to making minor cosmetic changes, in general the printed sermons faithfully reflected what Calvin said and Raguenier wrote down.) More significantly, Badius appears to be responding to some criticisms; evidently the sermons were good enough that some people might think they were in fact the product of the careful work of a leisured man, like other published sermons. Calvin the preacher would certainly object to the idea that he was showing off, but Calvin the humanist was also probably very embarrassed that people might believe he could not have done better than the way these sermons presented him. After insisting that the preacher's objections were not owed to ill nature, Badius defends Calvin's character and his ability.

His whole intention is that whatever works he publishes should come out with the appropriate elegance, and it upsets him that what he preached in a bare and simple fashion accommodated to the ignorance of the people, without fit apparel or lovely arrangement, should be immediately brought to light — as if he presumed that everything he said should be immediately spread everywhere and the world filled with his writings. That is why he has always refused to have his lessons or his sermons printed.⁴⁴

Given the medieval tradition of publishing only written or at least polished texts, which was continued by Calvin's contemporaries, it is natural that the reformer who was such a gifted stylist should dislike having the exact words he spoke in free form given a wide circulation, particularly when he was in the process of providing the same theology in properly revised or written commentaries.

Sometimes Calvin's argument as cited by his publishers in fact alludes to the tradition of the books of model homilies. Both Conrad Badius in 1561 and Jacques Ruffy (Roux) in 1562 speak of "Homilies ... fait à loisir" as something foreign to Calvin's preaching.

If you do not find such an arrangement as could be required in some premeditated or carefully ordered writing, do not blame the author, who simply spoke as God's Spirit gave him utterance, without special attention [to style] but giving total attention to the meaning and true interpretation of the scripture and accommodating himself to the ignorance of his flock and to the capacity of the weak. Also he did not preach with the intention that these would be brought to light, and in fact I dare say that it is not his will that that happen; he is not so

⁴³ OC 25:597-598.

⁴⁴ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 2, p. 956.

lacking in graceful speech that he could not have enriched them with the arrangement appropriate to such homilies as are written at leisure.⁴⁵

Besides Calvin's own feelings — whether of modesty or embarrassment — there are two things evident in these several quotations. One is that the Genevan reformer did not want to write model sermons to be read, and the other is that he did not consider these verbatim homilies to be appropriate for others to read in place of making their own. Probably the medieval sermon handbooks are in view here, but it is possible that Calvin also was expressing a certain reserve with regard to the Lutheran *Postilla*, or at least refusing to be perceived as copying that pattern.

The Genevan pastor also voiced a second, more pastoral objection to having his extempore sermons broadcast. These sermons were preached to and for a specific congregation, people he knew and saw before him, with whose situation he was intimately acquainted. They should not be handed over to people in other places and circumstances to whom the applications were not addressed. The first sermons, on Psalms 115 and 124, were brought out by Pastor Jean Cousin at the petition of the same people who had heard Calvin preach, so the specific audience was not an issue. In time, though, both voices in Geneva and those further away begged to have the fruit of Calvin's pulpit shared with those beyond the reach of his voice, and then audience became a significant consideration. According to several of his editors, Calvin had made a promise to write some sermons for publication,⁴⁶ but by 1554 at least part of his wider readership was tired of waiting. When Jean Girard printed the first set of Raguenier's verbatim sermons to be published, *Vingt deux sermons sur Ps. 119*, in 1554, he explained that he was responding to requests of the faithful to have something in hand immediately, while waiting for the ones which Calvin had promised to write.

I begged him, at the insistence also of several good faithful people, that he would allow his sermons — just as they had been taken down as he spoke — to be published so that the profit of them might extend further. He objected, preferring to print some short commentary when the occasion lent itself to that, rather than fill paper with such long matter as one unfolds in the pulpit: nevertheless, since he cannot hope to do that for a good while, given the small amount of leisure which he has, and meanwhile the world would be denied the great usefulness which reading these sermons — just as they are — could provide, I thought it was better to publish them. If God pleases to allow the author to make a work more polished and perfect, nothing will be lost if the

⁴⁵ Badius' preface to *Pastoral Epistles*, OC 49, p. xvii. See also OC 35:543-544, the preface by Jacques Roux: "[J]e te presente [Hezekiah's song] avec sa vraye exposition, fidelement recueillie des sermons de Jehan Calvin loyal ministre de Jesus Christ, selon qu'il l'a preschee publiquement, sans qu'on y ait depuis rien adjousté ne diminué. Cependant toutesfois il faut que je confesse que je n'ay obtenu de luy sans grande difficulté qu'elle fust mise en lumiere, comme aussi se persuaderont facilement tous ceux qui le cognoissent priveement, d'autant qu'ils scavent bien qu'il a seulement voulu servir au troupeau que Dieu luy a commis, en l'enseignant familierement, et non faire des Homilies à son loisir pour estre mises devant les yeux de tout le monde."

⁴⁶ See Badius, *Sermons sur les dix commandemens*, 1558, OC 25:597-598.

children of God have been edified by the holy teaching which they will find here.⁴⁷

By this time, 1554, Calvin's French language commentaries on most of the New Testament were in circulation (a number of them were printed in small, individual booklets so that a vernacular audience would be encouraged to read them)⁴⁸, but evidently the desire for scriptural application was not satisfied by these more formal expositions.

The urgency which Girard mentioned was a matter of time, the desire for immediate publication, but there were many who thought of immediacy in terms of genre, an appreciation for texts which seemed more informal. In fact, that had been one of the arguments used by Cousin in presenting the first sermon texts. After explaining that these were taken down as Calvin spoke and thus the roughness must be excused, Cousin points to an advantage of the sermons' origin in the pulpit: "that the theme so treated is more efficacious, as it ought to be when the readers think that they are present at the preaching."⁴⁹ Unpolished Calvin's verbatim sermons might be, but in the eyes of some that lack of polish was balanced by the benefit of a sense of being present with the preacher. The anonymous preface to the sermons on Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, published in 1561, emphasizes both the importance of the context given by preaching (the circumstances of the story in Genesis) and the vividness of the presentation to move the hearer.

But in order to understand better what Abraham's trial was, one must unfold the significant circumstances of the story which Moses tells in Genesis. These have been so ably expanded and creatively represented as if alive, by our faithful minister M. Jean Calvin when he treated this passage in his daily sermons, that I thought it was good to communicate to you those which have been gathered, so that you might have a taste such as they had who were touched and moved by his living voice. And besides, these sermons can teach you to persevere steadily when you are subjected to trials.⁵⁰

In Badius' preface for the Pastoral Epistles there is an even more explicit awareness of the role of the living voice and gestures of the preacher to impress the scripture on the hearers.

The faithful in France judged that the publication of these sermons would be of great use to you because it has not yet been given to you to be fully fed with the living voice in which a majesty full of efficaciousness is seen to shine.⁵¹

The verbatim accounts must be supplemented with an awareness of the contribution that the act of preaching makes to the meaning as well as the vividness of the sermon.

⁴⁷ *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, p. 540.

⁴⁸ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 2, pp. 384-95 = 51/2-51/4.

⁴⁹ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 1, p. 219.

⁵⁰ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 2, p. 864.

⁵¹ OC 49, p. xvi.

Seeing this [the fact that the sermons were extempore] if you find some sentences short and some thoughts cut, reflect that the gestures made when speaking help a great deal in understanding the thoughts, which when read often do not have the grace they did when spoken. Also, when one is accustomed to a pastor's style and way of teaching, one understands with half a word (so to speak) what he means. Therefore do not pay so much attention to the external arrangement as to the purity of teaching.⁵²

This reference to the effect of gestures in preaching is not to say that Calvin was a dramatic preacher in the theatrical sense. Badius' preface to the sermons on the Gospel Harmony spends some time defending the preacher against criticisms and mockery by those hearers who compared him unfavorably with actors and complained about the faults of his delivery. Exasperated, Badius sharply says that the detractors, who could not do nearly as well themselves, pay no attention to the doctrine which is the primary concern.⁵³ The point is that Calvin's editors recognized that the sermons lost some of their vividness and perhaps some clarity when they were printed, but these editors maintained that the extempore origins in fact served a purpose in making the exposition more dynamic and immediate than if Calvin's words had been polished at leisure.

Yet if Calvin the humanist was embarrassed by the unpolished sermons, Calvin the pastor could be importuned to release them for purposes which he accepted as right. There were several reasons which appear to have convinced the Genevan reformer to accede to his nagging friends. One was Calvin's conviction that what he taught was different from what earlier preachers had produced, and that the spreading of this Word of God was essential. The preface which Badius wrote in 1558 for a collection of sermons on feast days makes this point very clearly by contrasting Calvin's teaching in his sermons with that of his medieval predecessors. Badius begins by comparing the "Sorbonistes et tous les criars des Moines" with Pharisees and then offers a very negative view of their style and content.

The Sorbonnists only tell useless and foolish fables, or amuse themselves with questions that are strange and full of sophistry, and with a thousand subtleties which serve no edifying purpose at all. Others [monks], instead of preaching the word of God, preach the constitutions and ordinances which they themselves have made to establish the tyranny of the pope, the true antichrist and enemy of truth. Others froth at the mouth in the pulpit and disgorge arrogant speech against the children of God, ... instead of nourishing their poor famished sheep with the true pasture of the word of God, sheep who take in such poison under the guise of spiritual nourishment for their souls.⁵⁴

Badius then goes on to give a very rich picture of Calvin's style and content. He begins with a sharp critique of the sermon handbook style which assumed "one size fits all" and squeezed every text into the same mold.

⁵² OC 49, pp. xvii-xviii.

⁵³ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 2, p. 956.

⁵⁴ OC 35:586-587; see OC 35:595-596 on Decalogue (1557).

[Calvin's sermons] are not ready made, or bought by the dozen, but are duly premeditated and well fitted to the capacity of his sheep, keeping the benefits of the Lord Jesus Christ always before the eyes [of the hearers] so as to engrave them vividly in their souls. They are not "common places" already digested, nor sermons which he has up his sleeve to make them serve for all passages of scripture like a shoemaker's model "one size fits all."⁵⁵

Badius then turns to a positive description of Calvin's homiletical exegesis.

[But his sermons are] true, pure expositions, bare [of clutter] and suited to the text he has to explain. He does not fill them with extraneous exhortations or invective born of ambition. For, even though we greatly need to have the Word of God daily fight against superstitions of the papacy to efface them from our hearts, like a strong odor which we have drunk in from our youth, yet if the passage is not formally (intentionally) against such abuses, he [Calvin] does not go out of his way in the interpretation to speak out against that abuse the way the papists, on every occasion and without cause, bark like mastiffs against the Gospel which has been renewed in the world in recent days. But his [Calvin's] custom is to follow a thread [of thought] and tenor [of the text] which tends toward edification, omitting nothing which makes for the honor of God and instruction of his hearers.⁵⁶

Contrary to what his critics both accuse him of, and yet do themselves, Calvin sticks to his text. He expounds the Word of God and does not include polemic unless the text leads him to it.

Another preface, published in 1560 with a collection of sermons from Genesis and Luke, also contrasts Calvin with his opponents. Probably the exegesis of both medieval and contemporary Roman clergy is implicitly being criticized when Protestant preachers are described as ordained by God "rightly to cut the bread of doctrine for all the faithful, just as a father, who distributes bread to his children, cuts it in pieces for each according to what he sees each needs."⁵⁷ The anonymous preface then explains what this feeding of the flock means.

For instead of tangling it [this scriptural bread] up in complete confusion in the spirits of his hearers, [these Gospel pastors] explain it in familiar fashion in detail and with a marvelous order. Instead of trimming it, tearing it in pieces, twisting it to another meaning, and stopping at the crust rather than penetrating to the interior, [these pastors] offer it [scriptural bread] in its entirety, in its perfection and truth, in full reverence without disfiguring it, and they nourish our souls with its marrow.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ OC 35:585-586, from *Plusieurs sermons* 1558.

⁵⁶ OC 35:585-586, from *Plusieurs sermons*, 1558.

⁵⁷ OC 23:635-636.

⁵⁸ OC 23:635-636.

As seen above, some of the editorial comments on Roman preaching (like those about the Sorbonnists and monks) focus on the subject matter in particular, pointing out that what such priests say is not based on scripture. Calvin's editors recognized that some Roman clergy also based their preaching on the Bible, but to their Protestant eyes the traditional form of treating scripture fell far short by comparison with the new "Gospel" exegesis.

Calvin may or may not have been reassured by the remarks about the appropriateness of his style but he could not argue effectively against the main reason put forward for publishing his sermons. His friends thought that these texts would be of great profit to the church, and since he would not want to deprive God's people of that nourishment he should agree to their publication. In fact, as time passed, the appeal of the sermons seems to have grown, at least among lay people. Calvin might object that his preaching had applications directed to one particular people in one particular place, but this very pastoral attention to application contributed to the popularity of his sermons among other audiences. The preface to the sermons on Job (1563) gives a sense of this.

For the rest, although other learned people have worked to provide an easier understanding of this book in their writings; nevertheless, besides the fact that his [Calvin's] sermons are in the common French language, the way he treats doctrine in these sermons is so simple and suited to the level of the most rude (as they say), yet without leaving out necessary matters [which learned people can use]. Moreover, they are applied now here, now there, for the service of the present time, such that certainly all who will judge rightly and fairly will find here a good help and will have sufficient to be satisfied.⁵⁹

Reading something like this, one wonders if ordinary people may have found the reformer's sermons more edifying — or at least more readable — than his commentaries. Certainly even though Calvin's French commentaries were available, many French-speaking Protestants thought that the reformer's sermons were well worth sharing with those "under the cross."

I beg you to consider the contribution to the progress of the Church of God which has resulted from the sermons of our good Master Jean Calvin which have been published to date. Although he did not have the leisure to revise these sermons and we were obliged to bring them to light just as they were taken down, nevertheless they have served as mute teachers to those who, deprived of the freedom to hear the living voice, have enjoyed reading these sermons, and have been brought to a knowledge of the truth by that means.⁶⁰

This argument for offering his sermons to a wider audience was certainly of a kind to persuade the French exile: there is evidence that the Gospel benefited by earlier printings of Calvin's sermons and thus more should be done. Badius' words in 1562 confirm the importance attributed to the circulation of Calvin's sermons in France.

⁵⁹ OC 33:7-8.

⁶⁰ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 2, p. 957, preface to Gospel Harmony by Badius, 1562 (missing from OC).

And because you do not yet have such a freedom in the preaching of the gospel as we do, and because God has only begun to gather some little flocks here and there in France — flocks which are daily in fear of the wolves — and because the pastors to whom they have been entrusted do not yet minister the pasture of life to them except in secret, surreptitiously [as if they were stealing], the faithful there have thought that the publication of these sermons would be extremely useful.⁶¹

Even if it was taken for granted that the living voice of the preacher was to be preferred to print, having something in print was a great deal better than no gospel preaching at all. The anonymous preface to the *Sermons sur Ephesiens* goes so far as to compare Calvin's oral preaching and written sermons to Paul's oral preaching and epistle writing!

There is no need to make a long story of praise for the teaching that is contained here, nor for the author's way of teaching: simple, familiar, and yet nevertheless full of authority and efficaciousness. For we are assured that those, who in reading these sermons seek the honor of God and their own salvation, will recognize that the author has no other aim than these two things: the honor of God and their salvation. Those of ill will themselves will be convinced, in spite of themselves. In conclusion, therefore, dear brothers who encounter this book, we beg you once again to listen to our God and His Son our Master declaring by one of His servants and excellent ministers of His Church, what once the holy apostle, after having preached with living voice, himself put down in writing in a brief summary for us and for those who come after us until the end of the world.⁶²

One wonders what Calvin thought of this extravagant comparison between himself and the apostle, between his sermons and Paul's epistles!

Another factor that Calvin perhaps recognized was that the homiletical form might have some particular strengths. At least that seems one conclusion to be drawn from his publication of the *Quatre sermons*, and it is explicit in the kinds of things his friends wrote in the prefaces to their publications. The audiences for the sermons included people who might not read theological treatises but could be attracted to something more devotional or simpler, that is, something with personal application. At least one preface notes the importance of having a written form of the sermons for reading and meditation at home.

To help them [in keeping their baptismal promises], besides the living voice of true ministers, and other books containing faithful exposition of scripture, we here present to them the sermons of M. Jean Calvin on the apostle St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in which sermons we hope they will have matter for their profit, so that they may better understand what they will thereafter hear preached, or indeed what they will individually read.⁶³

⁶¹ OC 49, pp. xvi-xvii.

⁶² Anonymous preface to *Sermons sur Ephesiens*, OC 49, pp. xii-xiii.

⁶³ Anonymous preface to *Sermons sur Ephesiens*, OC 49, p. xii.

Some editors believed that the sermons would serve believers who needed instruction in a simpler style than the usual treatise. Badius makes this clear in his preface to the sermons on 1 Cor. 10-11. Acknowledging that Calvin's teaching was well known, this learned publisher nevertheless thought the sermons were needed because of their "more familiar" style — which is like that of Paul.

We thought it would be very suitable to bring to light the sermons of our faithful pastor Jean Calvin on the tenth and eleventh chapters of the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, where among other matters the Supper is treated in a familiar (accessible) way. It is true that in his *Christian Institutes*, and in a treatise which he wrote expressly on the *Lord's Supper*, and similarly in the *Accord on the sacraments, their nature and right usage, agreed upon between the doctors and pastors of the Church of Zurich and those of this city of Geneva*, one may well see that he [Calvin] does not detract in the least from the pure and true ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that he faithfully declares what we ought to know about this sacrament. Nevertheless, because he is more familiar in his sermons, we thought it good to publish these, so that it might be clear to everyone that we bear as much honor and reverence for the Supper of the Lord as anyone alive, and that we seek what Jesus Christ presents to us there, that is, His body and His blood as food for our souls, but not in a carnal way but a spiritual one.⁶⁴

The publication of the extempore sermons could serve as another means, besides the various kinds of texts Calvin had already himself written and printed, to convey — in the midst of the Supper Strife — that most important thing, a right understanding and honor of the Lord's Supper.

It was not the people in the pew alone who found the reformer's preaching instructive. Several other prefaces note that Calvin's sermons could also be used to help preachers who were less trained or able to do their own exegesis. Two of these prefaces were written by Badius, and the second (1562) is a very personal testimony to hear from the printer who left Geneva shortly thereafter to serve as a minister in France until his death.

[These sermons may serve also] as a format for some who in these times of tribulation have been called to the ministry of the Gospel; those ministers, having conformed to this way of teaching: pure, simple, and far from all ostentation and affectation of human eloquence, are today fishing for souls in great heaps, to dedicate and consecrate them to their Lord and Shepherd.⁶⁵

It may well be that Badius was considered qualified for the vocation of pastor in part because of his profound acquaintance with Calvin's sermons, or at least it was obvious from his words where he would find help for his own preaching.

Pastors and lay believers continued to use Calvin's sermons as preaching aids after his death, but many hoped that the teaching found in the sermons would be effective among several other less obvious audiences. These included Roman opponents or other detractors,

⁶⁴ OC 49, pp. xiv-xv.

⁶⁵ See *Bibliotheca Calviniana* 2, p. 957, preface to Gospel Harmony by Badius, 1562 (missing from OC). Plus OC 49:xvi-xviii (on pastoral epistles...)

who should be forced to acknowledge that their calumnies were not true; and unawakened sinners who needed to be convicted of their state before God and given a catalyst for their conversion to the Gospel.⁶⁶ Thus, in a way, the story of Calvin's sermons comes full circle, back to his own publication of the *Quatre sermons* — but only after encompassing a much wider and richer terrain.

IV.

The appreciation for Calvin's sermons gains a new depth in the context of seeing not only the amazing volume of his works but also their rare character and the surprising gift of their preservation. This essay has pointed out some puzzling lacunae in the long list of Calvin's sermons, lacunae that become visible when his high regard for such books as the Epistle to the Romans or the Gospel of John is juxtaposed to the strange silence of the sources about sermons on these and other Biblical books. After a reminder that sixteenth-century Protestants (like earlier "heretics") changed the status and textual source of preaching as well as the tradition of treating serious theology only in Latin, this essay has also brought to the fore the real uniqueness of Calvin's sermons. That is their character as verbatim records of his extempore preaching, something which does not exist in the same way for any of his contemporaries or predecessors, and for relatively few of his successors before the age of technology.

Finally, the essay makes clear that it was Calvin's friends, not Calvin himself, who made this very surprising break with tradition, and persuaded the reformer to publish his extempore sermons, unedited, just as they had been spoken. His friends did this in part because Calvin was slow to write sermons, but also because they found the immediacy of the preached text, with all its roughness, to be powerful for the purpose of spreading the gospel. Since so many of Calvin's sermons disappeared in 1806, and those which were published in the sixteenth century make up a large portion of what remains, students of Calvin owe his first disciples a great debt of gratitude!

⁶⁶ See Badius' preface to *Sermons sur les dix commandemens*: awakening worldly, prompting ignorant to seek out the law of God: OC 25:599-600; preface to *Plusieurs sermons*, defending Calvin vs. detractors, OC 35:587-588; in his preface to *Sermons sur 1 Cor. 10-11*, defending Reformed vs. accusations as "Sacramentarians," OC 49, p. xv. Also anonymous preface to *Sermons sur Ephesiens*, to those who have not yet come to God, exhorting them to remember the promises they made in baptism [and convert] to keep them, OC 49, p. xii. Additional note to 1558 edition of *sermons sur les dix commandemens* when two more sermons attacking idolatry were added says these will be useful for the obstinate to convict them of error, OC 25:593-594.

PREACHED SERMONS

KNOWN (BUT NO TRANSCRIPTIONS)

- 1546-? Isaiah
 1552 Joel (completed); Nahum; Daniel chap. 1-4
 1560-64 Harmony of Gospels, continuation after Raguénier's death.
 [Almost completed when preached last time 2 Feb. 1564; some of these were transcribed, according to Beza's catalogue: OC 21: 48 "Quelques sermons encores sur l'Harmonie des trois Evangelistes" in addition to 65 published]
 1561 Judges, beginning 3 Feb. 1561 (OC 21:91)

TRANSCRIBED

Weekdays

- 1545 Two sermons on Ps. 115:1-3, Ps. 124, preached 4 and 11 Nov. 1545 (Wed. Day of Prayer), transcribed by Jean Cousin.
 1549-50 Jeremiah (not consecutive), beginning 12 Nov. 1550, 91 sermons
 1550 Lamentations, beginning 6 Sept. 1550, 25 sermons
 1550-51 Micah, beginning 12 Nov. 1550, 28 sermons
 1551 Zephaniah, beginning 6 Feb. 1551, 17 sermons
 1551 Hosea, beginning 2 April 1551, 65 sermons
 1551 Joel, beginning 5 Sept. 1551, 17 sermons
 1551-52 Amos, beginning 28 Oct. 1551, 43 sermons
 1552 Obadiah, beginning 5 Feb. 1552, 5 sermons
 1552 Jonah, beginning 28 March 1552, first 6 sermons

Gap because Raguénier ill

- 1552 Daniel, chap. 5-12, beginning 18 July 1552, 47 sermons
 1552-54 Ezekiel, beginning 21 Nov. 1552, three volumes, 174 sermons
 1554-55 Job, beginning 26 Feb. 1554, three volumes, 159 sermons
 1555-56 Deuteronomy, beginning 20 March 1555, three volumes, 200 sermons
 1556-59 Isaiah, beginning 16 July 1556, total 343 sermons in 6 volumes
 1559-60 Genesis, beginning 4 Sept. 1559, 61 sermons; beginning 21 Feb. 1559, 62 sermons

Gap after Raguénier's death

- 1561-62 1 Samuel, beginning 8 Aug. 1561 [Colladon, OC 21:91]
 1562-63 2 Samuel, 23 May 1562-3 Feb. 1563, 87 sermons [SC 2]
 1563-64 1 Kings, last sermon on 2 Feb. 1564 [Colladon, OC 21:96; Beza's catalogue, OC 21:48 "In prioris regum 18 capita circiter."]

Sundays

- 1549-54 Acts series (with some omissions in first part), beginning first part on 29 Aug. 1549, 95 sermons; beginning second part on 27 Nov. 1552 (a.m.), 94 sermons;
- 1549-52? Psalms (not consecutive), beginning 17 Nov. 1549 (p.m.), 72 sermons
- 1553 Ps. 119 (Sunday afternoons 8 Jan.- 2 July 1553), 22 sermons
- 1554 Thessalonians, beginning 26 March 1554 (p.m.), 46 sermons
- 1554-55 1 Timothy, beginning 16 Sept. 1554 (a.m.), 55 sermons
- 1555 2 Timothy, beginning 21 April 1555 (a.m.), 31 sermons
- 1555 Titus, 17 sermons
- 1555-57 1 Corinthians, beginning 30 Oct. 1555 (a.m.), 110 sermons
- 1557 2 Corinthians, beginning 28 Feb. 1557, 66 sermons
- 1557-58 Galatians, beginning 14 Nov. 1557 (p.m.), 43 sermons
- 1558-59 Ephesians, beginning 15 May 1558 (p.m.), 48 sermons [Calvin ill for some months,
- late 1558-early 1559]
- 1559-60 Harmony of Gospels, July 1559-17 Nov. 1560, 65 sermons
GAP after Raguénier's death [though some more transcribed]

HYPOTHETICAL

- 1536-38/ 41 Epistle to Romans
- 1541-42? Genesis
- 1541-42? Epistle of James
- 1542-44(?) Gospel of John
- 1544(?)-- Hebrews, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Peter, 1-3 John?