

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN CALVIN

**A Church History Term Paper
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During the Academic Year 1950-1951
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The value of Calvin's Letters in Forming our Understanding of the Reformer

The literature on Calvin and the Reformation in French Switzerland is extensive. Men have varied in their attitude towards the Reformer and his movement as widely as they could. No one has been so much loved and hated, admired and abhorred, praised and blamed as John Calvin was. Yet the verdict of history is increasingly in his favor, the more people get to know him, the more they come to a better understanding of his person, his teachings, and the role he played in the Reformation.

One of the main motives for the severe attacks on Calvin is religious and sectarian prejudice; but another and worse one is the blindness caused by an ignorance of the reformer coupled with the so-called "enlightenment" that comes from modern science. They have succeeded so far in forming totally wrong opinions of all the reformers, who were used by God to liberate Christianity from the bondage of man-made religion. A quotation from a recent book published by a Swiss Christian psychologist reveals the extent to which one may wander from the truth. In his book "**Christianity and Fear**," he locates the cause of evil and suffering in fear, rather than in sin. He speaks of Calvin, in words unrivalled even by Servetus: "*Calvin, in particular, was exceedingly cruel to those unfortunates (referring to certain witches.) He excelled his contemporaries in his desire to exterminate them and was delighted with the efforts of those who had maimed one poor man by torture, urging them to proceed further.*"

This eminent citizen of the country Calvin gave his whole life to reform, must have forgotten the golden rule applied in passing judgments, and in the study of history; viz. **impartiality**. So we do better look for the truth in first-hand and original sources.

We begin by examining the documents left by the Reformer for the benefit of the coming generations. As already mentioned the materials concerning Calvin are abundant and have not yet been fully examined. He is best known by his **Institutes**, his **Commentaries**, and the various booklets and pamphlets that flowed from his pen.

Of particular importance are the letters of Calvin; for through them we have access to Calvin, not just as a reformer and theologian, legislator and disciplinarian, but to the man who lived in those troubled days of the 16th Century; who suffered, loved and rejoiced like any other man. Calvin's correspondence reveals his true character; and when examined continuously, many treasures will unfold from their perusal. In the New Testament we see a striking reality. Luke's **Gospel** and his **Book of Acts** were written as letters to Theophilus. The foundations of Christian theology are laid in the letters of Paul

and the other apostles. The prophetic book of the New Testament, **Revelation**, was sent in a form of a letter to the churches in Asia Minor.

A History of the Compilation of Calvin's Letters

Calvin's correspondence was enormous and fills ten volumes (X-XX) in the last edition of his works. The Strasbourg editors give in all 4,271 letters written by Calvin or written to Calvin. During a quarter of a century he kept up a continuous correspondence with people from all walks of life. It began in his youth and is only closed at his deathbed (1528-1565). It thus embraces, with few intervals, all the phases of his life, from an obscure scholar at Bourges and Paris to the triumphant reformer, who was able at dying to contemplate his work as accomplished. Nothing can exceed the importance of this correspondence, in which an epoch and a life of the most absorbing interest are reflected in a series of documents equally varied and genuine. The familiar effusions of friendship are mingled with the more serious questions of theology and with heroic breathing of faith.

Lying on his deathbed, Calvin asked Beza to make a selection from his letters, and to present them to the Reformed Churches, in token of the interest and affection of their founder. In the troubled days of the 16th Century, this request received an imperfect fulfillment. The plague, the great disasters, public and private; the outbreak of the Civil war in France, all contributed to make this publication almost impossible. Still it should never be thought that the friends of Calvin shrank from the performance of their duty. By their care, the originals or the copies of a vast number of letters addressed to France, England, Germany and Switzerland, were collected at Geneva, and kept at the archives of the city. A disciple of Calvin, Charles de Jouvillers, contributed more than any one of his contemporaries to the formation of the magnificent epistolary collection that now adorns the Library of Geneva. He undertook distant journeys to insure the fulfillment of this project, seeking everywhere for those precious documents in which were preserved the thoughts of the venerated master he had lost. He transcribed a vast number of letters with his own hand. This labor, pursued for twenty years under the superintendence of Beza, was the origin of the collection of Calvin's Latin Correspondence published in 1575.

Nearly three centuries had passed without adding anything to the work of Charles de Jouvillers and Beza, leaving numerous unpublished documents preserved in the Library of Geneva, or collected in the libraries of Zurich, Gotha and Paris. Dr. Paul Henry, of the French Reformed Church in Berlin, enriched his "**Life of Calvin**" with a number of letters from the libraries of France and Switzerland. Many other distinguished Protestant authors followed him by publishing several unknown letters that aroused the interest of the public in the second half of the 19th Century.

The English collection was published first in 1855, by Thomas Constable & Co., Edinburgh, and Little Brown & Co., Boston, Mass. It was the outcome of the translation of a collection which resulted from five years of study and research among the archives of Switzerland, France, Germany and England. The great historian of the Reformation, Dr. Merle d'Aubigne, took charge of compiling them from the original manuscripts. He,

also edited the important historical notes, found nearly on every page, without which many letters would never be perfectly understood.

The Literary Importance of Calvin's Letters: the Style, Languages, "Posting" Conditions in the Reformer's Time.

Calvin writes Latin as a contemporary of Cicero and Seneca, reproducing without any effort their graceful and concise style. He writes in French as one of the creators of that language, which is indebted to him for some of its finest characteristics. He thus ranks with Francois Rabelais in his influence on the French language yet he reflects the opposite extremes of the French character. Rabelais, the author of **Pantagruel**, gave birth to the secular style, which aims to entertain and to please; but Calvin gave the style which suits a discussion aimed at instruction and conviction. Bossuet, the famous Roman Catholic divine of the 17th Century says in his "**Histoire Des Variations**," "*Nothing ever flattered Calvin more than the glory to write well. His pen was more correct, especially in Latin, than that of Luther...both excelled one another in speaking the language of their country*". Pierre Larousse, the Noah Webster of France, calls Calvin, "*the founder of the Reformation in France, and one of the fathers of our tongue.*"

The language of his letters does not differ from that of his other writings, for the same passion, eloquence and majesty of style pervades throughout his correspondence. At first we might not like his long sentences, which require more concentration than our modern way of writing, but the time comes when we would forget ourselves, following his pen with utmost fidelity. In our age, which has lost a good deal of the manners of passing generations, we might get "tired" of the compliments that commence many of his letters. Calvin is driven sometimes to have a very long preface to his letters, so that forgetting the main subject; he has to add detailed postscripts. He uses very few Greek words, and that is done only to elucidate his ideas; he calls Paris, the **Acropolis**. His handwriting is very difficult to read, and compilers of his original letters must have had a hard time in deciphering them. His signature was **Ioyan Calvin**; yet many of his letters ended with the pseudonym, **Charles D'Espenville**, (i.e. Charles of Espentown).

As to the manner of mailing his letters we might pass over the subject without due consideration. We do need to be reminded that not only Calvin lacked the modern facilities of transportation, but that many factors were standing as a great handicap to an organized mailing system. The troubled days of the 16th century, the total absence of our modern Post Offices and International Postal agreements, the importance of the carried messages, need all to pass under thoughtful attention. The place of Geneva in the heart of Western Europe, at the crossroads of East and West, and North and South, tended to compensate for many of the aforementioned disadvantages. How patiently did Calvin wait for many important answers, is expressed in the desire of flying, when they were too late in coming!

Character of Calvin, as Seen Through his Letters

There is a prevailing but erroneous conception of the character of Calvin. He is presented by many of his adversaries as a stony-hearted tyrant, the relentless persecutor, the gloomy theologian, a cold and unsympathetic man. As to his admirers, J. Bonnet might be quoted, from his sketch of *Idelette De Bure*, as representing the true picture of the reformer. *“Calvin was great without ceasing to be good, he unites the qualities of heart to the gifts of genius. He felt and inspired the most pure friendships’ he knew, at last, the felicity of home life in a most short union, whose mystery, half-revealed by his correspondence, spreads a melancholic and a sweet day to his life”*.

Having the preceding quotation in mind, let us come to the letters of Calvin, freeing ourselves from all prejudice, and attempting to see his whole life, with its joys and sorrows, likes and dislikes, obscure beginning and glorious end.

In one of his earliest letters, (1528), Calvin reveals himself as a punctual, sensitive and attentive youth. He cannot tolerate his fidelity to be questioned, and with the finest eloquence he explains to one of his friends how the illness of his father kept him very busy. A year later, (i.e. four years before his conversion), he writes an interesting letter to Francis Daniel, whose sister was to enter the convent in Paris. He stands as a liberal, and quite at ease in speaking with the prospective nun. He wrote:

“I sounded the inclination of your sister, whether she would take the yoke patiently...I admonished her not to rely too much on her own resolutions, but rather that she would rest upon the strength of God for all needed help... in Whom we live and have our being.”

Later in his life, when he had assumed the hard and perilous responsibility in Geneva, he expressed in a letter his love for truth and his complete consecration for the cause of Christ.

“I at the same time, however, announced my resolution of unbarring the truth, even though it should be at the cost o my own life.”

We cannot but admire such courage shown by a man who has never enjoyed the blessings of good health, throwing himself into the midst of the populace to appease their fury.

“I immediately ran up to the place. The appearance of matters was terrible. I cast myself into the thickest of the crowds...I called God and men to witness that I had come for the purpose of presenting my body to their swords. I exhorted them if they designed to shed blood, to begin with me.”

Calvin’s stand for the freedom of speech, and of the Church and State, can be clearly seen from his letters. At the same time he depicts his hatred for falsehood, immorality and dissension among Christians. The most striking part of his character which is revealed in his correspondence, is a complete trust in God, in the framework of Romans

8:28. In 1549, Calvin wrote a letter to Farel, a few days after the death of his wife, thus revealing a deep fountain of tenderness and affection.

“In full possession of her mind, she both heard the prayer, and attended to it. Before eight she expired, so calmly, that those present could scarcely distinguish between her life and her death.”

To Viret, he wrote:

“Although the death of my wife has been exceedingly painful to me, yet I subdue my grief as well as I can...And truly mine is no common source of grief. I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life, of one who, had it been so ordered, would not only have been the willing sharer of my exile and poverty, but even of my death. During her life, she was the helpful helper of my ministry.”

At the loss of his only son who died in infancy (1542) he wrote to Viret:

“The Lord has dealt us a severe blow in taking from us our infant son; but it is our Father who knows what is best for his children...God has given me a little son, and taken him away; but I have myriads of children in the whole Christian world.”

We have a most striking testimony in a private letter, to his extraordinary fidelity as a pastor. While he was in attendance at Ratisbonne, the pestilence carried away Louis de Richebourg, who was at Strasbourg, under the tutorship of Claude Ferary, Calvin’s beloved assistant. On hearing the sad news, he wrote to his father, who was still in France:

“When I first received the intelligence of the death of Charles and your son Louis, I was so utterly unpowered that for many days, I was unfit for nothing but to weep; and although I was somehow upheld before the Lord by those aids wherewith He sustains our souls in affliction, yet among men I was almost a nonentity.....I appeared to myself as if I were half-dead.....The son whom the Lord had lent you for a season, He has taken away. There is no ground, therefore, for those silly and wicked complaints of foolish men: O blind death! O hard fate! O implacable daughters of destiny!....But what advantage you will say, is it to me to have had a son of so much promise, since he has been torn away from me in the first flower of his youth? As if, forsooth, Christ had not merited, by His death the supreme dominion over the living and the dead!....Nor can you consider yourself to have lost him, whom you will recover in the blessed resurrection in the kingdom of God....Neither do I insist upon your laying aside all grief. Nor, in the school of Christ, do we learn any such philosophy as requires us to put off that common humanity with which God has endowed us, that, being men, we should be turned into stones.”

The Letters Analyzed: The People Calvin Corresponded with; the Subject of these Letters and their Importance

Coming to the letters themselves, we may ask ourselves how much Calvin influenced people by his letters. Are we able to settle certain questions concerning the history of the Reformation by the examination of his correspondence? There might be an endless number of questions regarding this subject, so a discussion of the most important ones will suffice for the moment.

Calvin was never reluctant about letter-writing. That was his “trait” from his early years until his last days. He liked to spend his time in the study, but he was forced to incessant labor. Under the title of “**Calvin’s Catholicity of Spirit,**” Schaff says:

“Calvin was a Frenchman by birth and education, a Swiss by adoption and life-work, a cosmopolitan in spirit and aim. The Church of God was his home, and that Church knows no boundaries and language. To heal the divisions of Protestantism, he was willing to cross the oceans...No theologian has left behind him a correspondence equal in extent, ability and interest.”

He had the burden of the Church of Christ on his shoulders, and he accepted his yoke with entire thankfulness. His active part in the religious and civil activities of Geneva, did not hinder him from engaging in an enormous net of correspondence. Those that received his letters, ranged from rulers and kings, to ordinary people seeking his precious advice. Starting from Geneva or Strasbourg messengers went as far as England, France, Germany and Italy. With certain people, mainly those laboring in the churches of Switzerland, he kept a continuous correspondence. Among them, the names of Henry Bullinger, the successor Zwingli at Zurich, Viret and Farel come first. His contact with Melancthon, began in 1538, and was affirmed when they both met later at Frankfort, Worms and Regensburg. Other important personalities were the Queen of Navarre, Falais, the Protector Somerset, King Edward VI, Archbishop Cranmer, Knox, the Duchess of Ferrara, the King of Poland, the King of Sweden, the Elector of the Palatinate, Duke of Württemberg.

Often times, a group of people or responsible leaders wrote to Calvin seeking his wise judgements. In reply we notice such addresses as: *“To the Pastors of the church at Berne; To the Ministers of Nouchatel; To the Five prisoners of Lyons; To His dearly beloved the pastor of the Church of Frankfort; To the Pastors of Schaffhausen; and To the Seigneury of Geneva, etc...”*

A close analysis of some of these letters is necessary to form our opinion and estimate of certain important subjects. In a letter to Francis Daniel (1534), the Reformer expressed a complete faith in God in the midst of persecution and exile.

“I shall conclude that I have been very favourably dealt by...But the Lord, by whose Providence all is foreseen, will look to these things. I have learned from experience that we cannot see very far before us. When I promised myself an easy tranquil life, then

what I least expected was at hand; and on the contrary, when it appeared to me that my situation might not be an agreeable one, a quiet nest was built for me...this is the doing of the Lord, whom, when we commit ourselves, Himself will have a care of us."

Could we ever find more powerful words than these, a better testimony to the love of God to all His children!

Aroused by the outbreak of persecution in France, Calvin exhorted the ministers of the church at Basle, to help their unfortunate brethren. The same letter sheds also some light on the persecution itself.

"Two persons have been burnt...many have been thrown into prison, who are in jeopardy of their lives; unless timely opposition is made to the fury of those who, already drunk with the blood of these two victims, are not otherwise at all likely to set any bounds to their persecution."

When forced to leave Geneva, Calvin came to Strasbourg, where he, for three years, took charge of the Reformed church in the city. An interesting extract from a letter to Farel, is most helpful to Christian people who are really concerned with the welfare of their churches.

"We may indeed acknowledge before God and his people that it is in some measure, owing to our unskilfulness, indolence, negligence and error that the Church committed to our care had fallen into such a sad state of collapse."

These words from the mouth of Calvin, who had never known rest for a second, because of his burning zeal to the cause of Christ, are a precious reminder to all that are laboring for the Kingdom of God. *"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do."* Luke 17:10

His opinion of the "ideal" wife is found in one of his letters to Farel.

"But always keep in mind what I seek to find in her...This only is the beauty which allures me, if she is chaste, if not too nice or fastidious, if economical, if patient, if there is hope that she will be interested about my health."

As soon as he received letters from the persecuted Huguenots, he answered them quickly, exhorting them to leave their country in order to have the freedom of worship. His letters to Mr. and Mme. De Falais are very interesting. The Reformed leader first counseled them to leave France and seek freedom in Strasbourg. He also wrote to his friends that they might take the necessary steps to find a house for the exiles. The mere reading of these letters would give us a true picture of the difficulties that attended the coming of French refugees to Switzerland, their domestic lives; a fascinating historical novel may be reconstructed on the basis of these letters.

Some very important reflections of Calvin which might have never been recorded in his official works are found in his letters to some important personalities of the 16th Century. Thus in one of these letters, Calvin makes a very practical contrast between Philosophy and Religion.

“Philosophy is the noble gift of God, and those learned men who have striven hard after it in all ages have been initiated by God Himself, that they might enlighten the world in the Knowledge of truth. But there is a wide difference between the writings of these men, and those truths which God, of His own pleasure, delivers to guilty men for their sanctification. In the former you may fall in with a small particle of truth...but in the latter...the Spirit of God, like a most brilliant torch, or rather like the sun itself, shines in full splendour, not only to guide the course of your life, even to its final goal, but also to conduct you to a blessed immortality. Draw then from this source, wherever you may wander...”

We may also come to know what position Calvin took in regard to the ancient philosophers of Greece and Rome, and one of the finest tributes to the Word of God may be borrowed too.

In April 1552, five young Frenchmen instructed in Theology at Lausanne, spent a few days at Geneva, where they met Calvin, and then proceeded further to their country. At Lyons, they were arrested, and declared guilty of heresy. Their story is a typical one of the fate that thousands of Huguenots met in the prisons of their homeland. After one year of so-called trials, in the various courts of France, they were condemned to be burnt at the stake. During the long year, they kept a continual correspondence with the Reformer, who, after the Word of God and His quickening Spirit, helped them to endure the fiercest treatments. One may not finish reading these letters without feeling the presence of the spirits of these martyrs, whose blood served as the seed of the whole Reformed Churches.

Here is a letter from one of those unfortunates, who were waiting for their end.

“Sir and Brother...I cannot express to you the great comfort I have received from the letter which you have sent to my brother Dennis Peloquin, who found means to deliver it to one of the brethren who was in a vaulted cell above me, and read it to me aloud, as I could not read it myself, being unable to see anything in my dungeon. I entreat you, therefore, to persevere in helping us with similar consolation, for it invites us to weep, and to pray.”

Coming to a final point, one may be eager to know whether the correspondence of Calvin sheds a light on such subjects as, Servetus, the relation between the German Reformer and the French, the influence of Calvin on the Church of England.

In the 19th Century, many historians and theologians took interest in the “Servetus” case, lead by their study of the life of Calvin. But most have overdone the subject, and put some of their own ideas into the brain of Servetus, who, like Calvin, must be studied and judged in the light of the 16th Century, and not of the 19th Century. With the growth of

Rationalism in the Protestant Churches of the Continent, the invention of “modern christo-centric theology,” the entire emphasis on the love of God, forgetting His holiness as well as His justice; we should not be amazed in seeing more attacks on Calvin, and more eulogies of Servetus, the “*prophetic forerunner of modern theology!*” The higher critics of Deutschland, did not begin their attack directly on the Son of God, but rather began by discrediting Paul and charging him of having invented a different religion from that founded by Christ. The way was paved for doubting the Gospel of John....to the end of the devilish attack on the true Gospel of Salvation. It is first easier to charge Calvin with the great sin of “intolerance,” then condemn him and his whole theology.

But if we consider Calvin’s course in the light of the 16th Century and the documents that are in our reach, we must come to the conclusion that he acted his part from a strict sense of duty, and in harmony with the public law, which justified the death penalty for heresy and blasphemy. Letters were sent to all the Churches of Switzerland, asking them for their opinion in the matter. They were all united in condemning the heresy of Servetus, and justified the proceedings of the trial.

Melanchthon, the mildest and gentlest among the Reformers, fully and repeatedly justified the course of Calvin, and the Council of Geneva, and even held them to be models for imitation. One year after the burning of Servetus he wrote to Calvin:

“I have read your book, in which you have clearly refuted the horrid blasphemies of Servetus; and I give thanks to the Son of God, who was the..... (awarder of your crown of victory) in this your combat. To you also the Church owes gratitude at the present moment, and will owe it to the latest posterity. I perfectly assent to your opinion. I affirm also that your magistrates did right in punishing, after a regular trial, this blasphemous man.”

While engaged in the writing of his last work at Vienne, Servetus opened a correspondence with Calvin. He sent him a copy of his book, and told him that he would find in it “*stupendous things never heard before.*” He proposed to him three questions:

- 1. Is the man Jesus Christ the Son of God, and how?***
- 2. Is the kingdom of God in man, when does man enter into, and when is he born again?***
- 3. Must Christian baptism presupposes faith, like the Lord’s Supper, and to what end are both sacraments instituted in the New Testament?***

Calvin courteously answered the questions, in brief, referring to his books for details, but was ready to give further explanation if desired.

Servetus, not satisfied with the answer, wrote back alleging that Calvin made two or three Sons of God, that the Wisdom of God, spoken of by Solomon, was allegorical and impersonal.

To these objections Calvin sent another and more lengthy answer. Servetus continued to press Calvin with letters, and returned the copy of the **Institutes** with copious critical objections. “*There is hardly a page,*” says Calvin, “*that is not defiled by his vomit.*”

Calvin sent a final answer to the questions of Servetus, together with a French letter to Frellon, a learned publisher at Lyons, and a personal friend of both.

*“Since he has written to me in so proud a spirit, I have been lead to write to him more sharply, than is my wont, being minded to take him down a little in his presumption (**Je lui ai bien voulu rabattre un petit do son orgueil, parlant a lui plus durement que ma coutume me ports.**) If he persists however, in the style he has hitherto seen fit to use, you will only lose your time in solíciting me further in his behalf...I shall make it a matter of conscience not to busy myself further, not doubting that he is a Satan who would divert me from more profitable studies.”*

However, it is difficult to reconcile Calvin’s conduct with the principles of humanity. Seven years before the death of Servetus, he had expressed his determination not to spare his life, if he should come to Geneva. In February, 1546, Calvin wrote to Farel:

“Servetus lately wrote to me, and coupled with his letters long volumes of his delirious fancies, with the Thrasonic boast, that I should see something astonishing and unheard of...But I am unwilling to pledge my word for his safety; for if he does come and my authority is of any avail, I shall never suffer him to depart alive.”

This matter may well be closed with a quotation of “**La Reforme de Luther and Shakespeare,**” by Marc-Monnier:

“.....Those that do not see in Calvin but the murderer of Servetus do not know him. He was a conviction, an intelligence, one of the most astonishing forces of his great century. In order that we might weigh him to his own merit, we have to throw in the scale other things than our tenderness and pity...not living but to work, and not working but for the establishment of the Kingdom of God...Calvin destroyed Geneva in order to remake it after his image and in spite of all the revolutions, this improvised reconstruction still endures: there exists at the doors of France a city of conservative beliefs, good studies and good customs: a ‘city of Calvin.’”

The Value of the Correspondence between Calvin-Melanchthon

Living at a time when many large factions of the Protestant Churches are trying to get closer together, by sacrificing many essential and valuable doctrines, a question might come to us about the causes that led to the divisions of Protestantism from the beginnings of the Reformation

It cannot be denied that there was a continual contact between the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches in their earlier days, yet the unity of these two branches never took place owing to several reasons. The quick spread of the doctrines of the Anabaptists,

caused Luther to be suspicious of every movement that did not conform to his teachings. Thus we notice his unfriendly attitude toward Zwingli, and the Evangelical Churches of Switzerland; and later on, his unfriendly position toward Calvin.

To charge Calvin with intolerance would mean a complete ignorance of the facts relating to the friendship of the Reformer with Melanchthon. Indeed, Calvin was never indifferent. He was sure of the call of God, Who used him as an instrument to bring back the Christians to the pure teachings of the Scriptures; and he would have betrayed the cause of Christ, if he ever thought of compromising with the messengers of the Evil One.

Calvin and Melanchthon were first acquainted by correspondence through Bucer in the fall of 1538, and their intimate friendship continued to their last days. Melanchthon was twelve years older than Calvin, as Luther was thirteen years older than Melanchthon. Calvin sought the friendship of his German brother, and he always treated him with reverential affection. He dedicated to him his **Commentary on Daniel**, describing him as, *“a man who, on account of his incomparable skill in the most excellent branches of knowledge, his piety, and other virtues, is worthy of the admiration of all the ages.”*

Melanchthon, in sincere humility, acknowledged the superiority of his younger friend as a theologian and disciplinarian, and called him emphatically *“the theologian.”* They both had many points of contact. They devoted all their learning to the reformation of the Church; they were equally conscientious and unselfish; agreed in all essential doctrines; and deplored the divisions in the Protestant ranks.

They differed also on minor points of doctrine, and discipline that sprang from the peculiar constitution of each one’s mind. Their sincere and lasting friendship is a most remarkable testimony that a deep spiritual union and harmony may co-exist with theological differences on non essential points.

In their first personal interview at Frankfort, in February 1539, they at once became intimate, and freely discussed the questions of the day relating to doctrine, worship and discipline. After the **Colloquy at Regensburg**, they did not see each other any more, but continued to correspond as much as their time and duties would permit.

A few extracts from certain of their letters will speak for themselves of one of the noblest Christian friendships. In February 1543, Calvin gave a lengthy answer to a message from Melanchthon:

“...but although it has reached me somewhat late, I set a great value upon the acquisition...Would, indeed, as you observe that we could oftener converse together were it only by letters. To you that would be no advantage; but to me, nothing in this world could be more desirable than to take solace in the mild and gentle spirit of your correspondence...While we live on the earth we may cheer each other with that blessed hope to which your letter calls us that in heaven above we shall dwell forever where we shall rejoice in love and in continuance of our friendship.”

Thanking Calvin for the dedication of the **Commentary on Daniel**, Melanchthon wrote:

“I am much affected by your kindness, and I thank you that you have been pleased to give evidence of your love for me to all the world, by placing my name at the beginning of your remarkable book, where all the world will see it...as regards to the question of predestination, I had in Tübingen a learned friend, Franciscus Stadianus, who used to say, ‘I hold both to be true that all things happen according to divine foreordination, and yet according to their own laws.’ Although he could not harmonize the two, I maintain the proposition that God is not the author of sin, and therefore cannot will it...I only suggest that this mode of expression is better adapted for practical use.”

Calvin, notwithstanding his difference with Melanchthon, published a French translation of the improved edition of Melanchthon’s **Theological Commonplaces**. Later, the revival of the unfortunate **Eucharistic Controversy** by Luther, tried the friendship of the Reformers to the uttermost. **Calvin expressed his regret at the indecision and want of courage displayed by Melanchthon from fear of Luther and love of peace.** Calvin wrote a letter to Luther via Melanchthon, who never dared to show the aged Reformer the message of Calvin. Then Calvin wrote this letter:

“Would that the fellow-feeling which enables me to condole with you, and to sympathize in your heaviness, might also impart the power in some degree at least to lighten your sorrow. Your “Pericles” allows himself to be carried beyond all bounds with his love of thunder, especially seeing that his own cause is by no means the better of the two...We all acknowledge that we are much indebted to him. But in the Church, we always must be on our guard, lest we pay too great a deference to men...It is all over with her, when a single individual has more authority than all the rest...In the meantime, let us run the race set before us with deliberate courage...I do not cease to offer my chief thanks to God, who had vouchsafed to us that agreement in opinion upon the whole of that question (on the real presence); for although there is a slight difference in certain particulars, we are very well agreed upon the general question itself.”

At the defeat of the Protestants in the **Smalkaldian War**, Melanchthon accepted the **Leipzig Interim**, with the condition of conformity to the Roman ritual. Calvin sided with the Lutherans non-conformists who under the leadership of Mathias Flacius, resisted the **Interim**, and were put under the ban of the empire. Calvin wrote a very touching letter of remonstrance to Melanchthon who caused *“the enemies of Christ”* to rejoice, *“over the contest (of Melanchthon) with the theologians of Magdeburg.”* He ended this letter by saying:

“I had rather die with you a hundred times than see you survive the doctrines surrendered by you...Pardon me for loading your breast with these miserable, though ineffectual, groans. Adieu, most illustrious sir, and ever worthy of my hearty regard...”

After a brief interruption, Melanchthon reopened the correspondence in the old friendly spirit. In 1557, Calvin expressed satisfaction, in a letter to his German friend, that he still entertained the same affection, and closed with the wish that he may be permitted to

“enjoy on earth a most delightful interview with you and feel some alleviation of my grief by deploring along with you the evils which we cannot remedy.”

On the 19th of April, 1560, Melanchthon passed away to his eternal reward, leaving Calvin, who had to fight the battle of faith four years longer... Calvin had not his wish fulfilled, *“Would that I could die in this bosom!”*, but his friendship with Melanchthon which was stronger than death, can challenge anyone who dares to charge him with want of heart and tender affection.

Calvin’s influence upon Great Britain

In a letter to Farel, dated March 15, 1539, Calvin gave this judgement of Henry VIII’

“The King is only half wise. He prohibits...the priests and bishops who enter upon matrimony; he retains the daily masses; he wishes the seven sacraments to remain as they are...does not suffer the Scripture to circulate in the language of the common people...he lately burned a worthy and learned man (John Lambert) for denying the carnal presence of Christ in the Bread...”

As soon as King Edward VI acceded to the throne, Calvin began to exercise a direct influence upon the Reformation in the Anglican Church. He kept writing to the Protector Somerset, advising him to introduce preaching and strict discipline among the clergy and drew up a summary of articles of faith, and a catechism for children. He also wrote to the King and dedicated to him his **Commentary on Isaiah**. He corresponded with the Archbishop (Cranmer) who once invited him with Melanchthon and Bullinger, to a meeting at **Lambeth Palace**, for the purpose of drawing up a consensus creed for the Reformed churches. Calvin, showing his zeal to do all he could for the peace of the Church, said, in his answer: *“As to myself, if I should be thought of any use, I would not if need be, object to cross ten seas for such a purpose...I only wish that I had the power, as I have the inclination, to serve the cause.”*

During the reign of Queen Mary, many important church leaders flocked to Geneva where they found the best asylum. Then, they returned to occupy high positions in the Church of England, under Queen Elizabeth. Calvin’s theological influence became supreme, and he commanded his position as a great commentator among the scholars of the Anglican Church. His letters to the English leaders tended to strengthen the common cause against papacy, and the friendship between the Churches of the Reformation.

In our troubled age, when there are so many voices crying with many different ideas concerning the teachings of Christ, His person and His mission, it is time to go back to the great Reformer of Geneva, sit under him, and learn the true sense of the Word of God. Do we want to get acquainted with him? Let us read him, his **Institutes**, his inspiring **Commentaries**, his useful **tracts**, and furthermore, let us read his **letters**. Then we can say: *“we know Calvin.”* We do not need anyone to testify with or against him. Thanks to his correspondence, we have come to think with him, feel ourselves among the

Reformers, and have developed immunity against the slanders that have circulated against him.

Starting with a vague knowledge of the Reformer, when I once asked my father “*Do we follow Luther or Calvin?*” then struggling for seven years in a French Catholic College, against the bigotry of the “***Brothers of the Christian Schools,***” who looked at us Protestants as heretics, I came at last to a firm knowledge of Calvin. I had a difficult time to brush away such stories that were told at the Catholic school, about Luther who on his death bed supposedly told his wife, “*heaven is a good place, but alas, it is not ours!*” and the charge that Calvin was just, “*un mystique froid,*” a cold mystic, I came to the conviction that the blindness that still covers France because of its rejection of the Gospel, is due to its rejection of the voice of God through his servant Calvin. But thanks be to our God, that many others have received and welcomed the message of the Reformer, with joy and gratitude. My deepest tribute goes to all those who have helped me to get acquainted with John Calvin. It has been indeed a great privilege to have had the opportunity, through reading some of Calvin’s letters, to “listen” to the wise words of the chief founder and consolidator of the Reformed Churches.