

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

## THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CALVINISTIC CONGRESS

EDINBURGH, long known as the "city of churches", has in these later days qualified for the title "city of congresses". And what more charming setting could be found for a congress than the craggy heights and classic beauty of the modern Athens! And what more suitable setting for a Calvinistic Congress than the city in which John Knox lived and died, the scene of the signing of the National Covenant, of the labours of the "three mighties" of nineteenth-century Calvinism—Chalmers, Candlish and Cunningham—and of many another stalwart for the faith! As *The Scotsman* remarked, in the course of a sympathetic article on the recent Congress: "Nowhere did the teaching of Calvin take deeper root than in Scotland, and it has left a permanent impression on the national character." A distinguished overseas visitor was further impressed by the appropriateness of New College and the Free Church College as places of meeting, where "in the Rainy and Presbytery Halls great Scottish Calvinists of the past looked down from their portraits upon Dr. Donald Maclean, the Congress President, who is in all respects their authentic successor to-day".

It is too early yet to assess the results of these international gatherings, the fourth of which was held in Edinburgh last July, but there can be no doubt that they bear witness to a revival of interest in historic Christianity both at home and abroad, as well as to a growing spirit of oecumenicity among the sons of the Reformation. The paper by Professor G. T. Thomson may be taken as indicative of the changing outlook in Scottish theology. Dr. V. H. Rutgers, another of the speakers, is a leading layman in Holland who represents his country in the League of Nations, and more significant still was the presence and active interest of Dr. A. Lecerf who holds a Chair of Dogmatics in the Sorbonne, and of his friend and disciple, Jean de Saussure, who now, after so many years, proclaims

Calvin's doctrine in Calvin's pulpit at Geneva. How "our father Calvin" would have rejoiced to see such a day and such a gathering of his spiritual sons!

Previous Congresses had been held in London (1932), Amsterdam (1934) and Geneva (1936). The success of the Edinburgh Congress must be ascribed very largely to the untiring efforts of the President, the Rev. Prof. Donald Maclean, D.D., and of Lt.-Col. W. Rounsfell Brown, B.L., until recently General Treasurer of the Free Church of Scotland, who acted as Honorary Secretary to the Executive Committee. Too high praise cannot be given to the little band of willing helpers who assisted them in the difficult task of organization. Some 150 ministers and students representing churches and universities in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Eire, England, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Lithuania, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, Switzerland, Ulster and the United States of America took part, the proceedings being divided between New College, the theological hall of the University, and the Assembly Hall of the Free Church of Scotland. At the last moment four German delegates were refused permission to travel by the Minister of the Reich, but the Congress included several German citizens who are studying in other countries, some of whom have been expelled from their native land for religious reasons.

The general topic for consideration was "The Reformed Faith and Its Ethical Consequences". At the inaugural reception the chair was occupied by Principal W. A. Curtis (Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Edinburgh University) who remarked that they could not name a modern European whose imprint lay more profoundly or more beneficially upon the world than John Calvin. Returning thanks for the welcome given to the delegates, Professor Maclean observed that scholarship in every land was now on the side of conservatism in theology. If the nations were to recover their moral and spiritual balance, they could only do so by humbly and reverently submitting to the authority of the sacred Scriptures.

On the following day the session was opened in the Martin Hall by the Very Rev. Daniel Lamont (Professor of Practical Theology, Edinburgh University; Honorary President of the Congress Executive), who said God's sovereignty could never be detached from His redeeming love in Christ. That

sovereignty was most plainly and passionately defined at Calvary. Many earnest thinkers were calling the Church back to the great truths which Calvin found in the Bible. These truths had been allowed to grow dim, but they must shine out again if God was to put right what man had put wrong. The Church and theology needed Calvin to restore the doctrine of divine sovereignty to the fundamental place that it occupied in the Word of God. The acknowledgement of that sovereignty was the sole foundation on which moral well-being could be securely built. Its absence must inevitably turn the world into a shambles.

THE REV. ALEXANDER ROSS (Professor of New Testament Exegesis, Free Church College, Edinburgh) delivered a devotional address on "Salvation by Grace", after which DR. J. SEBESTYÉN (Professor of Systematic Theology, Budapest) read a paper on "Calvinism and the Individual". Christian morality, he said, was the sequel to Christian belief. The highest ethical ideals could be traced to the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. Through the centuries in every land the lives of Calvinists had testified to the saving and energizing power of Christ by demonstrating a spiritually sustained steadfastness in duty, combined with inward peace of soul. PROFESSOR W. CHILDS ROBINSON (Columbia Theological Seminary, U.S.A.) took for the title of his paper, "The Touchstone of a Calvinistic Ethic". "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever", he quoted, adding that all other ideas of felicity were illusory and vain. Antinomianism and legalism were equally erroneous, one denying Christ's work in us, the other His work for us. Calvin, following the Saviour, insisted on a life as well as a faith in accordance with the Word of God. He destroyed the antithesis between faith and knowledge by defining faith as "knowledge revealed". In America a recent enquiry into Christian missions had rejected the finality of God's Word, while at the same time it gave dogmatic sanction to the particular type of philosophy taught by its author, namely, empirical idealism. But no man had a right to impose principles on others which rested on no better foundation than his own opinions.

PRINCIPAL J. MACLEOD (Free Church College, Edinburgh) followed with a paper on "Calvinism and the Family". The natural order of social life, he said, is based on the family.

Its quality influences, for good or ill, the community, the State and the world. The Westminster Confession regards the children of believers as among the members of the visible Church. They must be nurtured in the fear of the Lord, taught to know His Word, to reverence His Day and to attend His sanctuary. In the ensuing discussion, the Rev. H. R. A. Philp (Newcastle-on-Tyne) told how, as a result of definite Calvinistic instruction, without any direct appeal, lads had been called by grace. In dealing with modern children the principal difficulty that they had to face was the pagan home.

In the course of a paper on "Calvinism and the Church", DR. G. T. THOMSON (Professor of Christian Dogmatics, Edinburgh University) remarked that the two great handicaps to an effective Protestantism were the Social Gospel and Humanistic Modernism, since these meant that true doctrine was no longer preached or desired, and men were fed instead on topical sermons. One result of this lack of definite instruction in Christian doctrine was a form of universalism which implied that there was no need for salvation or a Saviour. Another result was a universalism which undermined the antithesis of the Church and the world, and made heresy a practical impossibility. A third was the prevalence of a new authoritarianism which put State interests before all other considerations, and which might eventually reject any but pagan religion.

PROFESSOR R. G. M'KNIGHT (Philadelphia) submitted a paper on "Calvinism and Society", in the course of which he remarked that the so-called Social Gospel might be described as a scheme for tinkering with the circumference instead of dealing with the centre. The Gospel of sovereign grace was for "this and that man" (Ps. lxxxvii. 5) as individuals. Men were saved as single units, and the results emerged in all their social relationships. Individuals and communities might rebel against God's law, but they could not frustrate His purposes; in fact, they could not even inconvenience Him. God listened and waited—and then said again: "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." "Make the world safe for democracy", was a dictum requiring inversion. Ethically, a non-Christian demos was no better than a non-Christian dictator. In the perfect society all would know the Lord from the least to the greatest, and the earth would be full of His glory as the waters covered the sea.

"Calvinism and the State" was the title of a paper by PROFESSOR V. H. RUTGERS (Amsterdam) in which he gave an outline of the doctrine of common grace, as distinct from "the grace of God that bringeth salvation" to sinners through our Lord Jesus Christ. Common grace renders civilization possible in a world which was created by God, and which continues to belong to Him and not to Satan. The believer, while not of the world, must serve God in it, and the examples of Obadiah and Daniel prove that he may do so even as the functionary of an impious government.

DR. J. H. S. BURLEIGH (Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Edinburgh University) followed with a paper on "Calvinism and Economics", which showed capitalism to be no post-Reformation phenomenon, but a system that had appeared wherever political security enabled man to pursue his economic interests with a reasonable prospect of success, e.g. in the Roman world. Modern capitalism might be said to have originated in Northern Italy during the late Middle Ages. Our Reformer found himself in a world of developing capitalism, and his synthesis was the last historic attempt on the part of a theologian to bring the entire life of man into subjection to the divine will. In the ensuing discussion, Professor W. R. Forrester (St. Andrews) said they were not ashamed of the contribution Calvinism had made to economics, but Calvinism could no more be held responsible for the defects of modern capitalism than for the phenomenal development of capitalistic methods in countries like Japan. "We cannot blame John Calvin for Japanese imperialism," he added.

The subject of "Calvinism and Art" was considered at a later session, papers being read by DR. LÉON WENCELIUS (Strasbourg) and PASTEUR P. R. MUSCULUS (Pouzanges, Vendée), a descendant of the Reformer of that name. "To Calvin," said the former speaker, "order was beautiful as seen in nature and grace. The Gospel of salvation is the perfection of beauty. There is indeed a common beauty, appealing to all, but only the elect can appreciate the beauty of particular grace, and experience its effects." Professor Wencelius is the author of a masterly treatise, covering the entire subject, entitled *L'esthétique de Calvin*. Pasteur Musculus followed with an interesting review of the place of Calvinists in the history of the arts, with special reference to France.

PASTEUR JEAN DE SAUSSURE (Geneva) addressed the Congress on the subject of "The Interrelation of Theology and (Secular) Knowledge", emphasizing the fact that the Reformed faith was based solely upon the sacred Scriptures, which the Holy Spirit enabled us to recognize as the Word of God. The organ of Christian knowledge was faith, a supernatural product of the Holy Ghost. Christian knowledge consisted in a "certainty that", rather than in a "comprehension how". A great step towards better collaboration between Calvinists would be taken when faith in the Word of God was clearly recognized as the sole criterion of religious knowledge.

The concluding paper of the Congress, by PROFESSOR W. VISCHER (Bâle), who was expelled from Germany four years ago "owing to political events", dealt with "The Significance of the Old Testament in the Christian Life". In 1935 Professor Vischer, who had been lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament Theology at Bethel, Germany, published the first part of a book entitled *Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments*, which immediately aroused widespread attention and is now in its third edition. The modern Marcions have not yet answered his arguments, some of which were reproduced in the Congress paper. The supreme meaning of the Old Testament for us, he said, was that it proclaimed Jesus Christ. Its stories were all part of His story, its biographies part of His biography. All pointed to Him. He gave His life that His people might be saved, and also that the Old Testament might be fulfilled. As long as the Church and the world endure, Christians must be instructed in the ancient Scriptures, "which are able to make them wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus".

At the close of this paper the President announced that the International Commission had received and accepted an invitation from their German brethren to hold the next Congress in the Rhineland in 1940. "But," he added, "should this prove impossible, we hope to hold it at Montpellier in the South of France." The subject will be "The Plan of Salvation" (*Ordo Salutis*).

During the Congress a message was received from Dr. H. Colijn, Prime Minister of the Netherlands, conveying his cordial salutations and best wishes, an appropriate telegram being sent in reply. A pleasing interlude was provided on the

Saturday evening in the shape of a civic reception in the City Chambers, and on Congress Sabbath several of the delegates occupied Edinburgh pulpits. The public meetings held in the Free Church Assembly Hall were well attended, the speakers being Professor A. Lecerf (Paris), Dr. P. J. Kromsigt (The Hague), Dr. J. B. Soucek (Prague), the Rev. S. M. Robinson (Editor of *The Presbyterian*, Philadelphia), Dr. M. P. Ramsay and the Rev. W. M. Hamilton (Edinburgh), and the Rev. D. H. C. Read (Coldstream). A verbatim report of the proceedings, with summaries in two languages, is in course of preparation, and will be published early next month.

*London.*

S. LEIGH HUNT.