

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>

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

CALVIN ON CIVIL GOVERNMENT

Gordon J. Keddie

Wishaw

Introduction

In the twentieth century, the popular mind assumes the radical separation of Church and State. It is almost axiomatic, in the so-called Christian West, that these institutions will be, not only separate, but actually *opposed* to one another, as the “religious” *versus* the “secular”! The State is commonly regarded as the a-religious, neutral agency, which governs a religiously and philosophically pluralistic society, striking a balance between the multiform factions among the citizenry and — not least — steadfastly resisting the ethical teaching of any particular church. The Church, on the other hand, is the aggregation of Christian groups and is simply the religious sector of the broader community. It is, of course, the ever-shrinking minority and therefore the whipping boy of every new wave of anti-establishment reform.

No such concept of Church and State existed in the Europe of the Reformation, far less in the minds of the great Reformers of the Church. John Calvin, the Reformer of Geneva, saw these institutions as God-instituted and, coordinately subject to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Calvin,” writes William Mueller, “. . . thought in terms of the *corpus christianum*. The church and the state are both subject to the sovereign rule of God, the *regnum Dei et Christi*.”¹ Calvin’s treatment of the institution of civil government, therefore, assumes a particular understanding of the Lordship of Christ. Christ’s kingly authority is all-embracing and must encompass the very *raison d’être* of the State. The State is a divine institution subserving the will of God while the world lasts. The officers of the State, therefore, have certain obligations with respect to the revealed Word of God. The State can never be neutral and can never be regarded as existing merely to balance the broad spectrum of interests in society, as if obedience to God’s Word were irrelevant and Christ-denying pluralism the irreducible norm.

It is our purpose, in this study, to examine Calvin’s doctrine of civil government as he sets it forth in his *Institutes*. Three principal concerns of the Reformer will be examined. These are the three principles he enunciates as being essential to a Christian understanding of the State. They are:

1. The divine institution of the civil authority;
2. The centrality of God’s law to the law of the land — necessitating a positive attitude to, law and government on the part of Christians;
3. The principle of obedience to rulers.

Underlying the whole discussion is the conviction that Church and State are separate institutions. Calvin carefully delineates this distinction in *Institutes*, Book IV, chapter 9, and roundly condemns the Papal

usurpation of temporal power. Later, in chapter 11, he explains the doctrine of the “power of the keys”. This power is held by the Church and applies to magistrates and rulers as men under the law of God. Church power, however, is never to bear the sword in the exercise of discipline, for that belongs to the civil power alone. The civil power, on its part, may not interfere with the discipline of the Church.

I. THE DIVINE INSTITUTION

A. *The two governments*

Calvin distinguishes two governments in the world. One is spiritual and “resides in the soul or inner man and pertains to eternal life”, while the other is concerned with “the establishment of civil justice and outward morality”.² This distinction is rooted in an eschatological perspective which informs Calvin’s teaching on the Kingdom of God. Professor T. F. Torrance comments:

The advance of the church between *initium* and *complementum* and the reign of Christ between the two advents, Calvin sees in the historical perspective of the two ages, the old world and the new world to come, but like the New Testament he thinks of them as overlapping.³

Christ’s *spiritual kingdom* and the civil jurisdiction thus co-exist until the Parousia, when, in the words of the Apostle John, “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev. 11:15). These are quite distinct in the view of Calvin; the civil power, while deriving its authority from Christ and representing the morality of the Gospel in the public sector, is not to be understood as the earthly representative of the eternal kingdom, for that is the prerogative of the Church. Civil government is a temporary institution and, remarks Wilhelm Niesel,

is not the same thing as the spiritual reign of Christ, but neither does it function in juxtaposition with it, but it exists for the good of those who in this perishable world belong to Christ and his eternal kingdom.⁴

B. *Civil government is divinely ordained*

The civil power, then, glorifies Christ by ruling according to the mandate given to it by God. In the event that the government denies God’s revealed will and thereby shows itself not to be “founded on Christ”, God will take the glory to himself in the inevitable destruction of that government, for, as Calvin asserts,

He threatens speedy destruction to all kingdoms which obscure Christ’s glory by extending themselves too much.⁵

The civil power is to be seen as ordained of God and its officers are to be regarded as His vice-gerents — but within the limits of their office.⁶

Calvin was quick to reject the separatistic attitude of the Anabaptists. These “fanatics” say that the institution of civil government is a “thing polluted”, with which Christian men can have nothing to do.⁷ This approach, in effect, held that the eternal state of believers had broken through into the present age in such a way as to cancel out the *necessity* of civil government. This, Calvin hotly denies:

spiritual government, indeed, is already initiating in us upon earth certain beginnings of the Heavenly Kingdom, and in this mortal and fleeting life affords a certain forecast of an immortal and incorruptible blessedness. Yet civil government has its appointed end, so long as we live among men, . . . [which] . . . I admit to be superfluous, if God's Kingdom, such as it is now among us, wipes out the present life.*

It is because of the wickedness of men, who would impede the progress of the Gospel and the Lord's people, that God has graciously ordained civil government. Thereby may public evil be restrained and, more significantly still, public righteousness be promoted.

C. *The tasks of civil government*

1. *The tasks outlined.* Civil government, says Calvin, is as necessary to humanity as "bread, water, sun and air" but "its place of honor is far more excellent". Why Calvin thinks this is so is clear from his outline of the basic functions of government. He discerns three fundamental tasks;

(a) "It provides for their living together." It orders the life of society in such a way as to "see to it . . . that men breathe, eat, drink and are kept warm". Government provides for the maintenance of life and limb for its citizenry. The Reformer does not elaborate upon this, but we are surely to assume that this would include the provision of an adequate standard of living for the poor and the indigent. That Calvin would not have had in mind the kind of wealth redistribution taken for granted in modern state socialism is surely indicated by his emphasis, in the same paragraph, on the role of the state as the guarantor of private property — "it provides that each man may keep his property safe and sound". It is, however, fundamental that "humanity be maintained among men".

(b) "Rightly establishing religion." This involves the protection of the position of the Church with respect to (i) the outward worship of God and (ii) what Calvin calls her "sound doctrine of piety".¹⁰ The former refers to the State's role as the guarantor of the Church's freedom to preach the Truth and conduct public worship according to the Word of God. The latter phrase — "sound doctrine of piety" — is more difficult to interpret. One suspects that Calvin here had in mind something similar to that expressed a century later by the Westminster Assembly in Chapter XXIII, 3 of the Westminster Confession. This states that,

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered and observed.¹¹

(c) "Civil righteousness." Two elements are discernible here. Firstly, there is the regulation of societal relationships within the State.

Secondly, there is the promotion of a more "general peace and tranquillity", by which Calvin seems to mean foreign policy. Hence he deals at some length in the *Institutes* (IV, xx, 11-12) with the right of a

government to put the nation in a state of military preparedness and, if necessary, to engage in wars of defence.

2. *Differing interpretations.* There has been considerable debate over the question as to which of the above-mentioned areas is more basic for Calvin. Niesel, for example, says that the establishment of religion is the more important to the Reformer. Calvin, says Niesel,

has left us in no doubt about the fact that the pre-eminent duty of the secular power is to secure the right worship of God. The other duty, which is concerned with peace . . . is clearly subordinate to the former.¹²

On the other hand, Charles Hall takes the diametrically opposite view. According to him, Calvin,

believed that the state exists for the basic purpose of preserving the ordered structure of human society, and thus to further the salvation of the elect.¹³

The resolution of the question would seem to lie in a consideration of Calvin's view as to the content of the law which should be administered by a God-honouring civil authority. Clearly, the nature and content of that law will provide an adequate pointer to the principal purpose of the government enforcing it. This law to be enforced, asserts Calvin, "extends to both Tables of the Law" (of Moses). In addition, even the heathen philosophers admit that stable government is impossible "unless piety is the first concern". It is also clear that Scripture praises holy kings. For these reasons it is the utmost folly for Christian rulers to "neglect the concern for God" and "give attention only to rendering justice among men". With perhaps a tinge of righteous indignation, Calvin concludes,

As if God appointed rulers in his name to decide earthly controversies but overlooked what was of far greater importance — that he himself should be purely worshipped according to the prescription of his law.¹⁴

The conclusion seems inescapable that Calvin regards "rightly establishing religion" as the prime duty of a civil government. "Civil righteousness" is clearly secondary in his thinking, though necessary to the proper accomplishment of the establishment of religion. Basic social order — "living together" — is simply assumed.

It is perhaps worth noting in passing, that the Anabaptists, whose errors Calvin was never slow to counter, most vigorously rejected any civil establishment of religion, although they did expect the State to administer justice. Pilgram Marpeck, in a debate with Martin Bucer in 1531, went as far as to say,

I conclude before my God that earthly power in all its works has no place in the kingdom of Christ . . . and that all who seek to support the kingdom of Christ through (temporal) authority will be punished and destroyed.¹⁵

Calvin's point is just the opposite; civil government *is* kingdom-work and punishment and destruction will follow if it *does not uphold* God's law and the Church of Jesus Christ, His Son.¹⁶

D. *The calling of the magistrate*

Commensurate with this high view of the role of the State is Calvin's estimate of the calling of the magistrate. "Ruling" is a gift of God. Indeed,

... it has not come about by human perversity that the authority over all things on earth is in the hands of kings and other rulers, but by divine providence and holy ordinance.

Civil authority is a calling,

not only lawful before God, but the most sacred and by far the most honourable of all callings in the whole life of mortal man.¹⁷

It is a "holy ministry"¹⁸ and "the highest gift of (God's) beneficence to preserve the safety of men".¹⁹ As "vicars of God" they are to remain faithful to the divine law, for they will render an account of their administration hereafter.²⁰

One might well ask, in view of this strong language, whether Calvin gives to the civil magistrate the place reserved for the minister of the Gospel. When one compares the above with what he says about the pastoral office, one meets with similar language.

God often commended the dignity of the ministry by all possible marks of approval in order that it might be held among us in highest honor and esteem, even as the most excellent of gifts.²¹

What is the solution to this apparent impasse? Perhaps it is in avoiding opposing these statements to one another, but rather looking at them in the respective contexts within which they are set. Thus it will be noticed that when Calvin speaks of the calling of the civil magistrate, he specifically says of it, that it is "the highest gift of (God's) beneficence to preserve the safety of men".²² It is evident that he sees the magistrate as God's vice-gerent in the non-ecclesiastical world, having a "holy ministry" in the realm of civil affairs. He is, as it were, Zerubbabel, standing alongside Joshua — the minister of the Words — but in no way detracting from the latter's position or prerogatives.

II. THE LAW OF THE LAND

A. *Civil law and Biblical law*

If, says Calvin, the magistrate is a "living law", then the law is a "silent magistrate". The laws of the land are the "sinews of the commonwealth", without which any civil authority would sink into oblivion.²³ Calvin will not, however, be drawn into a detailed discussion of the legal system for a model Christian State, and, indeed, would have avoided the subject altogether had it not been for those who denied the legitimacy of governments which ruled according to "the common law of nations", rather than the "political system of Moses".²⁴ Calvin, in other words, rejects Mosaic theocracy as a model for civil government under the New Testament economy.

What law, then, is to be enforced by the civil magistrate? Calvin, following Thomas Aquinas and mediaeval theology in general, distinguishes within the Law of Moses, the *moral* law, which is eternally binding and should, therefore, find expression in all civil law, from the *ceremonial*

and *judicial* laws, which he believes to be abrogated by Christ. As the ceremonial practices under “the church of the Jews” expressed piety, yet are distinguishable from piety itself, so the judicial practices of the Mosaic economy can be distinguished from the “precepts of love” which undergirds them and which remain after the judicial system has passed away.²⁵

Granted that this is true, Calvin sees no objection to a nation making laws that it deems profitable for its own life.

“Yet these must be in conformity to that perpetual rule of love, so that they indeed vary in form but have the same purpose.”²⁶

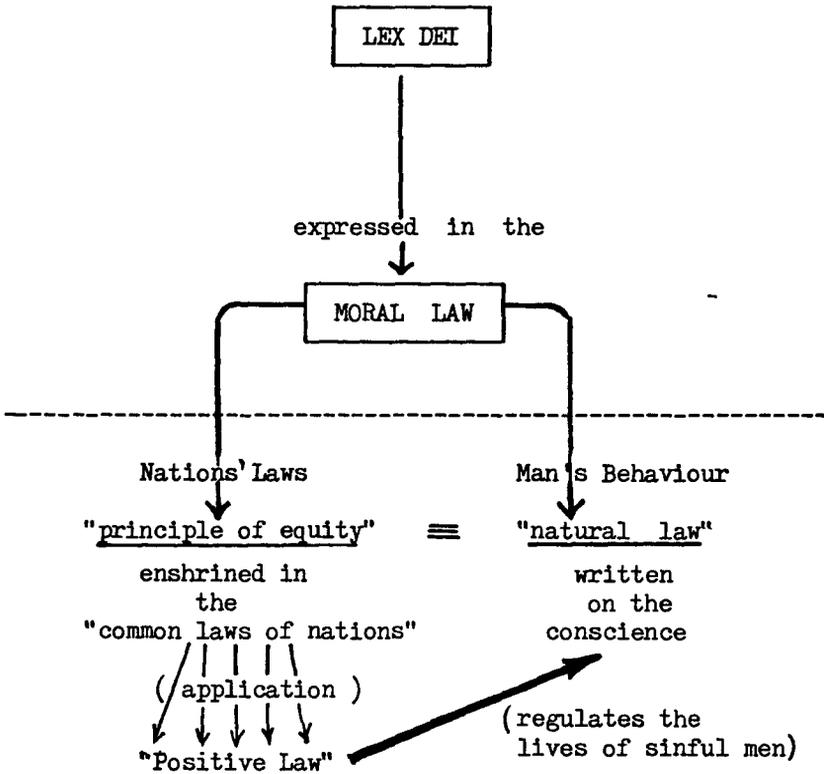


Figure 1. Calvin's scheme of the inter-relationship of God's Law and the Positive Law of nations.

This “perpetual rule of love” — the basis of all civil law outside of the moral law — leads us to consider that other somewhat nebulous category, “the common laws of nations”.

B. *The common laws of nations*

What are the “common laws of nations” in Calvin’s view? Two closely related concepts are introduced to the discussion at this point. These are *equity* and *natural law*. (Figure 1.)

Equity is what Calvin calls that *purpose* encapsulated within the law which transcends the various forms the law may take in different situations. This is the permanent innermost content of the law. It is to be the same for all men everywhere.

Natural law refers to that which is engraved on the consciences of men. For Calvin, equity is equivalent to natural law, because, in his thinking, natural law

is not the sum total of rational principles, as the Stoics conceived it, nor the result of man’s rational thought, as Aristotle described it, nor is it a mere instinctive urge, but rather the law of the living God.²⁷

For Calvin, “the *lex naturae* is rooted in and related to the *lex Dei*.”²⁸

Central to this natural law is the Moral Law of God. That which is expressed in the Decalogue is the *principle of equity* that suffuses natural law — and this is the core around which all civil law ought to be constructed.²⁹ Says Calvin,

“It is a fact that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men. Consequently, the entire scheme of this equity of which we are now speaking has been prescribed in it. Hence this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws.”³⁰

He goes on to give examples to show how the *moral law* — equity and natural law — may find its application in *positive law*, i.e., the law of the land, in different forms adapted to specific situations encountered. According to the extent of the problem, the severity of the law may vary from place to place. Thus,

God’s law forbids stealing. The penalties meted out to thieves in the Jewish state are to be seen in Exodus (Exod. 24:1-4). The very ancient laws of other nations punished theft with double restitution; the laws which followed these distinguished between theft, manifest and not manifest. Some proceeded to banishment, others to flogging, others finally to capital punishment.³¹

C. *The Christian principle of positive political involvement*

Underlying this entire discussion is a principle which Calvin is seeking to establish. It is that Christians must have a positive attitude to the law and to politics.³² This the Anabaptists had rejected. For Calvin, however, civil power is an institution of God for the good of men and, of course, particularly for the Church of Jesus Christ. He therefore concludes that the business of civil government may never be rejected as if it were a device of Satan. Rather it is the work of God within its own divinely appointed sphere.

III. CIVIL OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE

When the civil power operates on a Christian basis — in Calvin’s terms,

when the principle of equity expressed in the moral law of God is faithfully and effectively applied in the positive law of the land — then the problems facing Christians, in their relationship to the State, will be minimal. On the other hand, any non-Christian subjects would have certain difficulties of their own and would doubtless lobby for more “permissive” legislation, notwithstanding any prevailing circumstances of general peace and the maximum availability of Gospel ordinances.

But what if, as is more often the case, the government in power is tyrannical or, on more or less subtle ways, conducts public affairs in a manner inimical to the progress of the Gospel and prejudicial to the welfare of Christians?

A. *Obedience to the “powers that be” is required of all*

Calvin lays a heavy emphasis on the principle of obedience to rulers. The first duty of the Christian is to recognise the nature of the magisterial office as “a jurisdiction bestowed by God”.³³ (Compare I Peter 2:17; Proverbs 24:21) Calvin quotes Romans 13:5 — Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake” — to point out that our obedience is to arise out of a conscientious desire to obey God Himself, rather than from a fear of punishment. To do otherwise and resist the law, is to deny what God has ordained.³⁴

Furthermore, even bad rulers are to be obeyed,³⁵ for when we examine God’s Word, declares the Reformer, we discover that unjust and incompetent rulers have been raised up to punish the wickedness of the people.³⁶ Calvin adduces evidence for this along two lines:

1. The special operation of the providence of God in appointing kings according to His pleasure. He devotes a whole section to the case of Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 27).³⁷

2. The sanctity of the royal person in Scripture (Job 12:18; Proverbs 28:2; Jeremiah 27:6, 17; 29:7). This cannot, however, be taken to imply that Calvin thought that wicked rulers and governments have *carte blanche* to continue as the legitimate authority indefinitely. He cites I Samuel 8:11-17, where the prophet tells the people about the “rights” which the kings they so desire will exercise with respect to them and their property. These “rights” were not sanctioned in the Mosaic Law, but were certainly to be recognised as valid by the people.

It is as if Samuel had said: the willfulness of kings will run to excess, but it will not be your part to restrain it: you will have only this left to you: to obey their commands and hearken to their word.³⁸

B. *Magistrates and constitutional change*

The Reformer is sensitive, however, to the consideration that if subjects have the responsibility before God to obey their rulers, then rulers in their turn are responsible before God to rule their own people well. If the people have genuine grievances against irresponsible government, what can they do to rectify the situation? For example, is there ever a justification for revolution?

1. *Levels of legitimacy of governments.* At this point, Calvin’s intense

conservatism comes to the fore. As hinted in his comment on I Samuel 8:11-17, quoted above, there is, for Calvin, a sense in which the government in power may continue to be legitimate *as far as its subjects are concerned*, long after divine approbation has been removed. As Niesel puts it,

“The legitimacy of a secular government is not a secure and permanent possession. It stems from the relationship in which the rulers stand to the Lord of all lords and depends on how far these rulers remain in obedience to God.”³⁹

There are two levels of legitimacy in view here.

(a) Rulers who deny God’s precepts for civil government are illegitimate *before Him*, however long they may remain in power.

(b) While *any* government remains in power, in the providence of God, it is always to be regarded *by the people* as the legitimate government in the sense that they never have warrant to do anything other than obey its rule. Thus Niesel concludes,

Rulers who . . . attempt to eliminate from the sphere of earthly affairs the living God who has called them to their office, . . . and set themselves up in His place, are in Calvin’s opinion, no longer legitimate. But this certainly does not mean that they are no longer in possession of authority.⁴⁰

The people must obey the *de facto* government: they may not seek by direct action — force of arms — to overthrow it. What then can they do?

2. *The role of the common people.* Calvin maps out what he thinks is the proper course of action for the common people under a bad government. The common people — the Christian commonality — are to have a *politically passive* role. They should engage, however, in the twin exercises of self-examination and prayer.

(a) *Self-examination.* The people ought to turn their attention from the abuses of the government to the way they conduct their own affairs.

Therefore, if we are cruelly tormented by a savage prince, if we are greedily despoiled by one who is avaricious and wanton, if we are neglected by a slothful one, if finally we are vexed for piety’s sake by one who is impious and sacrilegious, let us first be mindful of our own misdeeds, which are without doubt chastised by such whips of the Lord.⁴¹

Humility is thus to restrain impatience and the afflictions of governmental injustice are received as the chastisements of the Lord that work a deeper obedience and godliness in the Christian’s life.

(b) *Prayer.* The people ought also to pray for God’s help in raising up good government — and simply wait upon Him.⁴²

3. *Magistratus populares.* There is a class of persons who can institute a process of constitutional change. These Calvin calls the *Magistratus populares* “appointed to restrain the wilfulness of kings”.⁴¹ These constitutional magistrates have the task of protecting the freedom of the people. They, therefore, may depose a licentious monarch and organise a new government.⁴² Hans Baron has shown that there is a close corres-

pondence between the views of Calvin and those of Martin Bucer.⁴³ The Strassburg theologian refers to the *magistratus inferiores* of the German cities. These constituted the civil authorities of free cities within the realms of territorial princes and electors. As such they were, by their very existence, a check to the absolutist tendencies of the latter. Bucer argues for their retention as a political species on the ground that they will stay the erosion of freedom at the local and urban level — an erosion already well advanced by the rapid development in the late Middle Ages of centralised nations with absolutist monarchies. Calvin's *magistratus populares* — in France represented by the Estates General — fill the same role in a centralised state that Bucer's *magistratus inferiores* do in a German city. The point is simply that legal restrictions must be placed upon the rulers' powers in order to prevent a slide into tyrannical absolutism. To effect this, a class of governmental "watch-dog" is required.⁴⁴

4. *Revolution.* There is always the possibility that God will overthrow a bad government by revolution — using what for Calvin is the illegal "wrath of men". This can never be a legitimate means for law-abiding Christian citizens, but they may well have cause to thank God for the good effects of the lawless activity of others in this matter!

Although they were directed by God's hand whither he pleased, and executed his work unwittingly, yet planned in their minds to do nothing but an evil act.⁴⁵

5. *Civil disobedience.* The final consideration is the question of civil disobedience. However much Calvin emphasises the necessity of obedience to civil authority, he is careful to qualify that with the affirmation that obedience to God supersedes that due to kings. He reminds us of Peter's words, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Civil disobedience is inevitable where there is a conflict between God's clear will and the rule of the civil power. Calvin writes,

I know with what great and present peril this constancy is menaced, because kings bear defiance with the greatest displeasure . . . But since this edict has been declared by the heavenly herald, Peter — "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) — let us comfort ourselves with the thought that we are rendering that obedience which the Lord requires when we suffer anything rather turn aside from piety. And that our courage may not grow faint, Paul pricks us with another goad: That we have been redeemed by Christ at so great a price as our redemption cost him, so that we should not enslave ourselves to the wicked desires of men — much less be subject to their impiety.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

Calvin's concern in his exposition of the Kingship of Christ — a subject beyond the purview of this study — is always to emphasise its essentially *spiritual* nature.⁴⁷ The Kingdom of Christ is not materially qualified. It is not measurable in terms of the possession of wealth or power. Its utility

for the people of God is in their awareness of the glorious rule of Christ ordering all things to their eternal benefit, whether their lot here upon earth be easy or hard.

With respect to the area of civil government the same concern is to be found. Calvin is not interested in devising some Utopian scheme for the ideal Christian state — the institution (civil government) is too temporary and the world fatally flawed by the Fall, for us to be in the position of being able to elaborate a precise structure for such a State. Nevertheless, Calvin does outline carefully, those Biblical principles which serve as guidelines for the Christian community, whether in government or in opposition.

- (1) The State is a divine institution and its officers have a divine calling.
- (2) Civil authority is therefore to be obeyed.
- (3) Should the civil power renege from its God-appointed function, then let the people see the “finger of God” in its tyrannical depredations and repent of their personal sin and pray for deliverance.
- (4) Recognise the grace of God in raising up constitutional magistrates who are able to keep the balance between tyranny and anarchy — if such magistrates there be.
- (5) Let the State fulfil its great purpose, namely, fostering the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ, through the proper establishment of the true religion and the maintenance of peace at home and abroad, in terms of a positive law that enshrines the principle of equity in the moral law of God.

Calvin knows nothing of a modern pluralistic society, where every imaginable heresy receives the protection of the law and the Gospel of Christ is positively rejected in the councils of the nations. This would have been, for him, the evil fruit of the Anabaptist abandonment of the State to the Devil. For Calvin, the Scriptures teach that only the faith of Jesus Christ is to be accorded the positive support of the State. This is the essence of Christian civil government.

NOTES — Principal Scripture passages quoted by Calvin are in parentheses.

1. W. Mueller, *Church and State in Luther and Calvin*, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954, p 127.
2. *Institutes*, IV, xx, 1. (N.B.: The edition referred to is that of Ford Lewis Battles, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960.)
3. T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956, p 118.
4. W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, p 230.
5. J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948, Dedicatory Epistle.
6. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 4. (Exod. 22:8; Ps. 82:1, 6; John 10:35; Romans 12:8; 13:1-4)
7. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 2.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 3.
10. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 2.
11. *The Confession of Faith*, Inverness: Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1970.
12. Niesel, *op. cit.*, p 233.
13. Charles A. M. Hall, *With the Spirit's Sword*, Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1968, p 159.

14. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 9. (Deut. 1:16-17; 16:19; 17:16-19; Psalm 101:4-7; Jer. 22:3)
15. Donald J. Ziegler, "Marpeck *versus* Bucer; a sixteenth century debate over the uses and limits of political authority," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 2 (1971), p 106.
16. See 5. above.
17. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 4.
18. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 7. (Proverbs 8:15; 24:21; I Peter 2:17).
19. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 25.
20. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 6.
21. *Inst.*, IV, iii, 3.
22. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 14.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 15. This need not imply that Calvin is uninterested in the theory of the Christian State, as is suggested by Wilhelm Niesel:
 "When he (Calvin) speaks of the secular government, he is not concerned about the state as such, nor even the Christian state; but about Christ and about the significance which the civil power has for our life in fellowship with this Lord." (Niesel, p.230)
 Niesel appears to set Calvin's first concern — the progress of the Gospel — in opposition to his second — Christian civil government. But surely the two go hand in hand — and in harmony. Calvin would never say that any State should *not* be Christian! His lack of a willingness to weave the fabric of an elaborate programme for a Christian State may well be due to his own practical preoccupation with the work of the Gospel and even to a willingness to entertain a broader conception of the Christian State than some others who developed a structure for the Christian State going beyond the stated views of the Genevan Reformer, e.g. Martin Bucer's *De Regno Christi, 1550*.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Mueller, *op. cit.*, p 158.
27. *Ibid.*, p 157.
28. R. W. Carlyle and A. J. Carlyle, *A History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West*, Vol. VI, Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1962, p 268.
29. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 16. (Exodus 22:1-4; Deut. 19:18-21).
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. J. T. McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," *Church History*, 17 (1949), p 155.
33. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 22. (I Peter 2:17; Prov. 24:21; Romans 13:5).
34. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 23. (Romans 13:1-2; Titus 3:1; I Peter 2:13-14; I Tim. 2:1-2).
35. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 24.
36. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 25. (Job 34:30; Hos. 13:11; Isa. 3:4; 10:5; Deut. 28:29).
37. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 27. (Jer. 27:5-8:17).
38. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 26. (I Samuel 8:11-17).
39. Niesel, *op. cit.*, p 240.
40. *Ibid.*, p 241.
41. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 29. (Dan. 9:7).
42. *Ibid.*, (Prov. 21:1; Psalm 2:10-11; Isa. 10:1-2). Some scholars believe that Calvin has republican sympathies. Baron, for instance, says that he opposed hereditary monarchy on the ground that "heredity of the throne impairs divine selection of the ruler". ("Calvinist Republicanism", p. 39) McNeill takes much the same tack. Calvin does favour a form of government which blends aristocracy and democracy, *Institutes*, IV, xx, 8, but the democratic element is to check the potential excesses of rulers already in office and does not necessitate the view that hereditary monarchy is inimical to the divine selection of a ruler. The point of the *magistratus populares* is that they, or their equivalent, should exist irrespective of the precise form of government. In modern terms, we would say that an independently elected lower tier of government provides a legitimate and necessary check to the totalitarian tendencies of centralised States.
43. H. Baron, "Calvinist Republicanism and its Historical Roots," *Church History*, 8 (1939), p 35.
44. Compare Calvin's role in the Amboise Conspiracy of 1560, when he refused to support Condé even though he was the King's brother. See J. T. McNeill, "John Calvin on Civil Government", *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 42. (1964), p 87. Compare also Calvin's comments on Romans 13:1-5 in the *Commentaries*, where he distinguishes between the

CALVIN ON CIVIL GOVERNMENT

“higher powers” and the supreme. He believes that Paul speaks of *magistratus populares* in these verses.

45. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 30.

46. *Inst.*, IV, xx, 31.

47. *Inst.*, II, xv, 4.