



John Calvin

Calvin Courier

The newsletter of the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies

Fall 2009, Number 44

From the Director

The cooler temperatures have arrived, and our campus is now bustling with student activity once again. Summer at the Meeter Center was very busy, both with events surrounding John Calvin's birthday (a psalm-sing, a Meeter Center open house, and a campus-wide birthday celebration) and with our National Endowment for the Humanities summer institute for high school teachers (see report on p. 3). The institute was very successful, and participants went away invigorated and appreciative of the opportunity. Meanwhile, our visiting scholars came to do their research, and their presentations were well-attended. This fall, we held more special lectures and concerts marking Calvin's 500th birthday, including the annual Stob Lectures, given by Professor David Steinmetz, of Duke Divinity School. Please see our website for more information on upcoming events:

<http://www.calvin.edu/meeter/events/>

We do intend to offer our biennial Genevan Paleography course in 2010, from June 7 through June

18, 2010. Please see our website for more information and an application form. Candidates have to demonstrate a sufficient knowledge of written French before taking the course. Successful applicants will each receive a \$500 bursary towards travel and lodging expenses. The course will once again be taught by Dr. Thomas Lambert, an expert paleographer and key member of the editorial team for the Genevan Consistory records.

Finally, all applicants for Meeter Center fellowships (Student Research Fellowships, Faculty Fellowships, Emo Van Halsema Fellowships for pastors in the Reformed tradition) please note an important change to the conditions of the awards. Beginning in 2010, all successful applicants will have to take up their fellowship anytime between July 1 of the current year through June 30 of the following year, to match the college's financial year. Please contact the Meeter Center with any questions.

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of our work!

Karin Y. Maag

"Was Calvin a Calvinist?"

The issue of John Calvin's relationship with Calvinism is a complex and multi-faced affair, argued Dr. Richard A. Muller in the Meeter Center's 2009 Fall Lecture on October 15, 2009. The complications truly begin to arise when the motivations and assumptions behind the question, "Was Calvin a Calvinist?" are brought into focus. There are at least three fundamental ways to understand the objects of consideration: Calvinism as representative of Calvin's own views; Calvinism as the approach of Calvin's followers; and Calvinism as a term used to represent the Reformed theological tradition.

While integrating a masterful survey of the various usages of the term in the secondary literature, Muller critically parsed the various ways of posing and answering the

question. If Calvinism is understood to refer to Calvin's own position, then there are "a host of problems posed...not least of which is that it (apparently intentionally) leaves Calvin as the only Calvinist." Calvin's theology (or a part thereof) becomes the sole standard of arbitration, the gold standard of determining the level of some contemporaneous or following figure's adherence to Calvinist orthodoxy. Such elevation of Calvin's work mistakenly "assumes that later Reformed theologians either intended to be or should have been precise followers of Calvin



continued on page 2

Richard Muller

Another Productive Summer at the Meeter Center

Once again, for the second time now, I was the recipient of the H. H. Meeter Center for Calvin Studies Student Fellowship which enabled me to leave my comfortable, but always busy surroundings in Heidelberg, Germany, to set apart a 4-week period for concentrated study and research for my dissertation. I am writing on "John Calvin's View of the Human Conscience", especially with respect to the question in how far his teaching on the conscience provides a window into the Reformer's entire theology, both "natural" and "redemptive".



Sebastian Heck

The specific focus of my research was to investigate possible elements of innatism - or the theory of innate ideas - in Calvin's doctrine of the natural knowledge of God and relate them back in time to Melancthon, to some of Calvin's contemporaries, as well as forward in time, so to speak, to some of the Reformed orthodox theologians in order to bring Calvin's own view on the matter into clearer focus. I concluded that Calvin's innatism is nothing of the sort that Locke's critique justifiably applies to. It is utterly non-speculative, but rather a theological doctrine, building on the fact of revelation as both natural and special. In this, Calvin is no creative mind, but stands squarely in the Reformation tradition.

The Meeter Center, once again, proved to be the perfect place to do this, and I was able both to finish a paper as the fruit of my research as well as gather many additional sources to process and integrate into my dissertation once back home. I was able to take advantage of the more than adequate library facilities at the Center as well as the time away from the usual surroundings. The staff of the Meeter Center really made it easy

to work there, being ready to help with whatever question or problem I encountered. I am thankful to the staff of the Meeter Center for the opportunity to once again do research in the pleasant setting provided for me in my office and the library.

"Was Calvin a Calvinist?", *continued*

rather than also followers of Zwingli, Bucer, Oecolampadius, Bullinger, and others, and not merely followers of Calvin in general or Calvin of the tracts, treatises, commentaries, and sermons, nor the Calvin of the 1539, 1543, or 1550 Institutes, but the Calvin of the 1559 Institutes."

Where Calvinism is understood to refer not to the master himself but rather to his disciples, Calvin cannot be understood to be a Calvinist because "no one can be his own follower." And thus, "Whereas the first option leaves Calvin as the only Calvinist, this option either prevents the identification of Calvin as a Calvinist or, falling back on the kind of sentiments fueling the first option, judges the followers on the basis of a rather narrow norm constructed out of Calvin's theology." The third option, simple identification of Calvinism with the Reformed tradition, is no more desirable than the other two. Such an approach is "complicated by the way in which one identifies what is properly Reformed — specifically by the way in which Reformed, used as a synonym of 'Calvinist,' is defined as more or less in agreement with Calvin's theology, whether as understood in its full extent and diversity or as resident in the 1559 Institutes."

The latter half of Muller's lecture explored in more detail the relationship between Calvin's thought and that of his predecessors, contemporaries, and followers, with special attention to claims about the so-called "five points of Calvinism" associated with the Canons of Dort. As Muller said, "It is really quite odd and ahistorical to associate a particular document written in the Netherlands in 1618-19 with the whole of Calvinism and then to reduce its meaning to TULIP." Focusing especially on the "T" (total depravity) and the "L" (limited atonement), Muller corrected many popular and scholarly misconceptions about the teachings and their association with Calvin and Calvinism. To the question, "Was Calvin a Calvinist?" Muller responds, "The answer is certainly a negative. Calvin was not a 'Calvinist' — but then again, neither were the 'Calvinists.' They were all contributors to the Reformed tradition." In a

Lecture Recordings

For our friends who cannot attend, Meeter Center Lectures and Colloquia are recorded, with speakers' permission, and are accessible on the Center's website via podcasts.



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spirited question and answer session after the lecture, Muller recommended that those teaching undergraduates simply refuse to use the historically and theologically problematic term Calvinism and replace it with more historically appropriate, nuanced, and helpful terms, such as Reformed theology or Reformed tradition.

Jordan Ballor; Ph.D student, Calvin Theological Seminary

Recent Acquisitions

Berg., M.A. van den. *Van Noyon tot Genève: tien woonplaatsen van Calvin in beeld*. Bunnik: De Banier, 2009.

Blandenier, Jacques. *Martin Luther & Jean Calvin: contrastes et resemblances*. Charols: Excelsis, 2008.

Boer, Roland. *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Bond, Douglas. *The Betrayal: A Novel on John Calvin*. Phillipsburg: P&R Pub., 2009.

Gordon, Bruce. *Calvin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Hoek, J. *Calvijn spreekt: de actualiteit van een hervormer na 500 jaar*. Heerenveen: Groen, 2009.

continued on page 4

2009 NEH Institute Participants: Row 1: LaNesha DeBardelaben, Sharon Richardson, Brent Springvloed, Bob Schoone-Jongen (co-director).

Row 2: Lisa Samy, Elizabeth Bierling-Powers, Alan Santoni, Susan Cullen, Derek Steinorth

Row 3: Kaelyn Sullivan, Linda Lapp, Jayson Evaniuck, Alexander Kalsbeek, Karin Maag (co-director), Kael Moffat

Row 4: Susan Lindstrom, Mark Vander Werf, Robert Sorensen, Daren Blanck, Matthew Frick

Row 5: Therisa Rogers, Alan James, David Doré, Cathy Borri, Randall Zachman (presenter)

Row 6: Paul Strauss, Eric Gelston, James Goodspeed

2009 NEH Summer Institute

Twenty-four high school teachers from across the country (and one from Hong-Kong!) joined co-directors Karin Maag and Robert Schoone-Jongen, along with eight different expert presenters over the course of three packed weeks for their summer institute, “Making Sense of the Reformation”. Participants bonded through classroom discussions about how to teach the Reformation effectively to their students, over pot-luck breakfasts and dinners, trips to the farmer’s market, and a lively performance of a sixteenth-century play. They gathered primary source texts and images, worked on and presented lesson plans to each other, and deepened their understanding of various facets of Reformation history. As one participant put it, “The quality of scholarship that we experienced in this seminar was astounding. I will value this experience for the rest of my teaching career.”

Recent Acquisitions, continued

Lane, A. N. S. *A Reader's Guide to Calvin's Institutes*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

Link, Christian. *Johannes Calvin: Humanist, Reformer, Lehrer der Kirche*. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009.

MacDonald, Neil B. *Calvin, Barth and Reformed Theology*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2008.

Meehan, Christopher H. *Pursued by God: The Amazing Life and Lasting Influence of John Calvin*. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2009.

Opitz, Peter. *Leben und Werk Johannes Calvins*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009.

Palomino López, Salatiel. *Introducción a la vida y teología de Juan Calvino*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008.

Vial, Marc. *Jean Calvin: introduction à sa pensée théologique*. Geneva: Labor et fides, 2008.

Vollmer, Philip. *John Calvin: Man of the Millennium: Commemorating the 500th Anniversary of the Birth of John Calvin*. San Antonio: Vision Forum, 2008.

Hugh and Eve Meeter Calvinism Awards for High School Seniors

The 2010 research paper topic is:

Assessing John Calvin: Strengths and Challenges

For further details and application instructions visit:

http://www.calvin.edu/meeter/scholarships/highschool_award.htm

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