



# Calvin Courier

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

Spring 1998, Number 21

## From the Director

It is now seven months since I became director of the Meeter Center, and this period has been a highly fruitful one in a range of areas. We will be welcoming seven research fellows to the Center in 1998, and we are pleased with both the caliber and the number of successful applicants. Our publication projects are proceeding apace, as Baker Book House has formally agreed to publish an edited volume of contributions on the Reformer Philip Melancthon (based in part on our successful conference at the Meeter Center in October 1997). We are also starting to work on a planned volume on the Psalms as used in Reformed worship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

At the same time, we are putting together a research guide, detailing the abundant resources available to scholars in the Meeter Center. We will send this guide to all interested scholars, graduate schools, doctoral supervisors, and graduate students.

Furthermore, together with the Institute of Christian Worship at Calvin the Center will undertake a project on liturgy and worship in the sixteenth century and its medieval inheritance. This project has received a seed grant of \$5,000 from the Calvin Center for Christian

Scholarship, indicating something of the level of support for the Meeter Center and its research.

We are also delighted to be receiving strong support from the Friends of the Meeter Center. Their contributions make a big difference to our work, and we are deeply grateful to all who have become Friends or renewed their support during the last few months. The money received has enabled us to offer an extra fellowship this year to Gert den Hartogh, a doctoral student from The Netherlands who will come to the Center for six weeks to pursue his research. Those wishing to contribute will find a form on the back page of this newsletter.

The Meeter Center has also continued to reach out to the community at large through two very successful exhibitions, one on Reformation Bibles and the other on early editions of Calvin's *Institutes*. Special lectures accompanied both exhibitions. Classes from the religion and history departments at Calvin have also come to hear special presentations on our rare book collections and on the history of early printing.

If you are in Grand Rapids this summer, please drop in for research or simply to visit. We'd be delighted to see you.

Karin Y. Maag

## Faculty Colloquium

"*Sursum Corda*": this gentle imperative, a favorite of John Calvin's, was the touchstone for Dr. John Witvliet's lecture on images and themes in Calvin's theology of worship at a colloquium sponsored by the Meeter Center on April 23. The investigation presumed that Calvin *has* a comprehensive theology of worship, however much that may have been overlooked in subsequent studies – studies that have leaned heavily on the *Institutes* to the neglect of Calvin's commentaries and sermons. Traditionally, Calvin studies have probably focused on what Calvin deplored in worship. Dr. Witvliet indeed began his

exposition by naming four liturgical sins that Calvin refers to repeatedly: disobedience, hypocrisy, superstition, and idolatry. Calvin's liturgical theology can be approached through more than via negativa, however. A gallery of images is contained within Calvin's writings. Spatial, sensory, and

*continued on page 3*





## New Acquisitions

### Books

Gilmont, Jean-François. *Jean Calvin et le livre imprimé*. Genève: Librairie Droz, 1997.

Hesselink, I. John. *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997.

Neuser, Wilhelm H. and Brian G. Armstrong, eds. *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*. Vol. 36 of *Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies*. Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1997.

Neuser, Wilhelm H., Herman J. Selderhuis, and Willem van't Spijker, eds. *Calvin's Books: Festschrift for Peter De Klerk*. Leeuwarden: J. J. Groen en Zoon, 1997.

### Rare Books

Calvin, Jean. *Institutio christianae religionis*. Strasbourg: Wendelin Rihel, 1545.

Calvin, Jean. *Vivere apud Christum non dormire animis sanctos, qui in fide Christi decedunt, assertio*. Strasbourg: Wendelin Rihel, 1542.

## Book Review

*Registres du consistoire de Genève au temps de Calvin*, vol. 1. Edited by T. A. Lambert, I. M. Watt, and J. R. Watt under the direction of R. M. Kingdon (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1996).

The issue of the distinctive marks of the true church was crucial to the nascent Protestant churches in sixteenth-century Europe. Against the fifteen *notae* of the true church argued by the Catholic Church, Lutheran churches in the era of the Reformation insisted on two distinctive marks, the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Although the young Reformed churches under the influence of Calvin shared Lutheran's preoccupations for orthodoxy and recognized the primacy of preaching of the gospel and the administration of the

sacraments, they asserted the equal value of discipline as a distinctive mark of the true church. According to Calvin, the church is not only the place where true doctrine is preached but also the place where true doctrine is lived. And correct practice is possible only through the exercise of church discipline.

Thus, students of church history miss an important element of sixteenth-century Reformation theology when they overlook the practical side of the theology of the Reformers. Kingdon's book *Registres du consistoire de Genève au temps de Calvin* provides scholars with much-needed first-hand information on the historical and social contexts in which Reformed orthodoxy was practiced and lived.

Kingdon's book constitutes the first volume of a series transcribing the twenty-one folio volumes of the original manuscripts of the Consistory of Geneva during the period of Calvin's ministry (1542–1564). Upon his return to the city of Geneva (1541), Calvin initiated the creation of the Consistory. The Consistory was a religious court in which true religion could be enforced through admonitions and excommunication. The Consistory of Geneva dealt mostly with moral and civic issues related to the practice of true religion. It strongly condemned cases of fornication and adultery, validated civil marriages, and enforced true doctrine by admonishing or excommunicating blasphemers, heretics, and those who lived promiscuous lives.

The *Registres du consistoire* provides invaluable information on the development of the new Reformed faith and its struggles with the remnants of traditional Catholicism in the city of Geneva. Through different cases recorded in the registers one gains important information on the piety of the people of Geneva and on the social background of the Reformers' doctrines, something which is often difficult to understand from theological works.

Volume I opens with an interesting case. Pernet Du Puys accused Clauda Du Bouloz before the Consistory, claiming that she did not keep her engagement promises made two years before when they went for a picnic outside Geneva. Clauda Du Bouloz denied that promises made while drinking with friends were about marriage engagements since she did not consult her parents. This case brings us to the heart of the interaction between faith and civic responsibilities in sixteenth-century Geneva. And the book provides one with hundreds of cases where true religion is put to the test in the lives of Genevans in the sixteenth century.

Students of Reformation Europe can only rejoice that the publication of the *Registres du consistoire* sheds more light on our knowledge of the practical side of the Reformation in Geneva. One hopes that an English translation will be available soon so that the work will be accessible to English-speaking scholarship.

Paul Mbunga Mpindi, Ph.D. student  
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## Colloquia and Conferences

### 1998 Colloquia

January 22, 1998: Dr. Richard Muller, professor of historical theology at Calvin Seminary, spoke on "Calvin's *Institutes*: Its History and Development." The Meeter Center invited attendees to view an exhibition of various early editions of Calvin's *Institutes* from its collection.



Meeter Center display of Calvin's Institutes

April 23, 1998: Dr. John D. Witvliet, director of the Institute for Christian Worship, lectured on the topic, "*Sursum Corda*: Images and Themes in John Calvin's Theology of Worship."

October 3, 1998: An Evening of Psalms service will involve the participation of campus choirs and church choirs from the area. The audience will also participate.

### Fellowships Awarded in 1998

**Faculty Research Fellowship.** Dr. Kyung-Yeun Burchill-Limb, professor at Protestant Theology in Strasbourg, France, will do research this summer on Calvin and the good life.

**Emo F. J. Van Halsema Fellowship.** Rev. Galen Johnson, pastor of the Victory Baptist Church in Thomasville, North Carolina, plans to do work on the development of Calvin's doctrine of baptism. Rev. Andrew-Joseph Kiss, a librarian at the Calvinist College at Sarospatak in Hungary, will work on the historical sources for the century of the Reformation in Eastern Europe.

**Student Research Fellowship.** Ms. Nicole Kuroпка, a Ph.D. candidate at Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal in Germany, plans to research Philip Melancthon's reinterpretation and application of rhetoric. Ms. May Tan, Ph.D. candidate at The University of Edinburgh in Scotland will study Calvin's Christian discipline and his pastoral ministry in Geneva (1541-1555).

**Friends of the Meeter Center Fellowship.** Dr. Gerrit den Hartogh, a Ph.D. candidate from the Universiteit Utrecht in The Netherlands, plans to study Ursinus's concept of the doctrine of providence.

**Special Fellowship.** Professor Robert Benedetto, an associate librarian and associate professor of bibliography from Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, plans to research the spirituality of the Reformed tradition.

**Fellowship Applications** for 1999 may be obtained from the Meeter Center upon request and should be returned by January 1, 1999. Application forms are also available on our Web site.

### Faculty Colloquium *(continued from page 1)*

biblical thematic themes abound. These culminate in a conviction that worship is not even primarily the act of humans but is one of divine agency and is rooted in a Trinitarian vision where each divine person has his role in worship. God is fully present and active in public worship. God is the subject in Calvin's reflections; "we humans do nothing." Witvliet reacted to and commented on the historical, theological, and practical repercussions of Calvin's rich liturgical theology. Among other things, he noted that one ought not to consider Calvin's themes and images as singularly unique. In many ways he was re-articulating patristic motifs. The presentation closed with several compelling questions to further challenge Reformed liturgical reflection.

Dr. John Witvliet, director of the newly established Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, integrated his liturgical scholarship with numerous Calvin citations—particularly from his commentaries—to present listeners with a rewarding and challenging lecture. His talk generated questions and comments that indicated an eagerness to investigate Calvin's liturgical theology in more depth. For example, what did Calvin exactly mean by *Sursum Corda*? It became clear that, as Dr. Witvliet had argued, an answer to this will require research into all the theological loci present in and issues associated with Calvin's original writings.

Dave Vroege, M. Div. student  
Calvin Theological Seminary

### Hugh and Eve Meeter Calvinism Awards for High School Seniors

Fifteen papers were submitted on the topic "John Calvin's View of the Creation and the Relevance of That View to Current Environmental Issues." Sarah Den Boer from Abbotsford, British Columbia won the first-place award of \$2,500, and second-place winner Nathan Bierma from Grand Rapids, Michigan, won \$1,250. Contact the Meeter Center to receive an informative brochure about next year's contest. Papers should be received by January 15, 1999.



## Friends of the Meeter Center Enrollment

### Annual membership fees

Student rate	\$20	Associate	\$100
Supporter	\$40	Partner	\$200
Donor	\$75	Benefactor	\$500

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