

CALVIN'S TORMENTORS

UNDERSTANDING THE CONFLICTS
THAT SHAPED THE REFORMER

GARY W. JENKINS


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For Professors William J. Tighe and Gary R. Hafer,
in gratitude for decades of friendship.

“Vos autem hortor ut ita virtutem locetis, sine qua
amicitia esse non potest, ut ea excepta nihil amicitia
praestabilius putetis.” —Cicero, *Laelius de Amicitia*

“Par ce que c'estoit luy; par ce que c'estoit moy. . . . Nous nous
cherchions avant que de nous estre veus.” —Montaigne, “De l'amitié”

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John Calvin

Preface

I owe a debt to John Calvin. Having been reared in the austere rigorism of Methodism, I found myself, my first semester in college, reading Calvin on the threefold office of Christ. Pretty heady stuff for a young Methodist. More reading followed—the *Institutes*, the commentaries (especially Galatians)—and by the time I was a junior I had started attending a Presbyterian church, much to the chagrin of my parents. (Ironically, my mother, who greeted my Calvinian ways with a distinct horror, came from a line of French Huguenots, whose ancestor, Marin Duval, born in Nantes, came to Maryland in 1650.) Some months back over lunch a colleague asked me, in light of my childhood, “So how did you get here? How is it you aren’t a fundamentalist any longer?” When I gave him the quick bio, he responded, “Calvin probably saved you from modern American enthusiasm.” His words got me thinking. My debt to Calvin is not just that he kept me from snake handlers, but rather that he started me down the trail of questions that in one sense has never ended. And while I am sure the Genevan Reformer would not be amused by where the trail has led me (he would probably think me more an idolater than Sadoleto and the Sorbonnists), how is it that I think as I do (I am an Orthodox Christian)? And have I betrayed some secret covenant or pact that should have kept me happily Presbyterian forever? I began this book as a sequel to another author’s efforts on Calvin’s friends, but it quickly turned into something else—namely, a study on how controversy shaped Calvin. The young French émigré who sat shaking before the thunderous anathemas of Farel in 1536 became the de facto force in the life of Geneva in 1555, facing down the native-born opposition while seeking to implement his vision of a church truly reformed; ultimately he would emerge as the tacit leader, even if in exile, of the French Reformed church, a position reflected in many of the

controversies here discussed. Along the way he would employ his excellent intellect not just to prepare a learned ministry for France but also to take on numerous interlocutors whom he believed threatened what God had clearly called him to do. Thus, one of the questions that arises concerns how Calvin's notion of his vocation shaped his approach to the controversies that beset him.

Each of these chapters presents individuals who in one way or another opposed Calvin's agenda, and for Calvin, who certainly believed himself a participant in the words of Christ, "He who rejects you, rejects me," these contradictions were an assault on the very work of God. He was God's man, God's ambassador, God's prophet: not a prophet in the sense that he had come to herald the dawn or broach some new understanding, but a prophet to call a wayward people besotted by superstition, ignorance, and idolatry back to the pure faith, both in doctrine and morals. This calling was the source of his ministry. Every conflict seemingly brought greater assurance to Calvin of his calling, steeling him in his purpose for the next one that emerged.

That Geneva became the fulcrum of so much controversy arises from its geographical and historical place in Europe. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Geneva was part of Savoy; just before Calvin's arrival, it became a protectorate of Berne. Lastly, it became part of the Swiss Confederation, a denouement that came about partly because of the affinity of religion among the cities of Geneva, Berne, Basle, and Zurich, one that Calvin helped effect. More than this, Geneva also lay along one of the key routes between Italy and the Low Countries, and thus became the frequent stop of Italians heading north, and Flemings, Rhinelanders, and others heading south. Consequently, radicalism from Italy flowed through Geneva. But controversy was not primarily an accident of geography, for Calvin's notoriety seemed to invite disputes; it was with Calvin that Servetus, for instance, began a correspondence, not with Bullinger, or Haller, or Musculus.

Controversy, as now so then, invites invective. The sixteenth century was long suited in the art of insult, and the characters in this book were no different. Calvin, given both his zealous personality and his sharp intellect, became an easy target for abuse. And while he was the object of tremendous opprobrium—among other things he would be called a brothel keeper—he could give as good as he got; Calvin labeled the author of this insult a shape-shifting werewolf (meaning one who could never seem to get his theological confession right). This type of writing certainly spiced up the polemical literature, whether theological or political, and makes for interesting reading. The late Robert K. Webb once told me that to be a historian was to be bored out of your mind. I think the highest compliment I can give a student applying for graduate school is that she can be bored to tears and still keep reading.

Happily, I was not often bored in this endeavor, but there were lots of trails that need not have been followed and that made the journey longer than it should have been. All the same, this book only scratches the surface of what were doubtless aggravating, exasperating, and infuriating episodes in the lives of all involved.

The commonplaces of sixteenth-century polemics aside, the amount of material is daunting, not just from Calvin's *Opera*, which would take years to comprehend were one to read it all in the original Latin and French (I have been years at this and certainly have not accomplished it yet), but also the even more ponderous *Opera* of his tormentors, almost all of whom were productive scholars in their own right. Thankfully, as the footnotes will show, most of them have not lacked later scholars to investigate their lives, whose acumen has been no end of help in writing this book. I owe them more than footnotes, and they are the giants on whose shoulders I have stood. I hope I have seen, through their scholarship, if not more, at least clearly. Of the writing of books on Calvin there is no end, and I hope this one will open up some new avenues of inquiry. There is no list of abbreviations, for while some authors' or editors' works could have used them—for example, Herminjard—the only one that was necessary was for the *Calvini Opera* (CO), and its publication details can be found in a corresponding footnote. Unless otherwise noted or conveyed in the citation, all translations are my own.

March 30, 2017, Feast of St. John Climacus

Acknowledgments

So often after I have given a paper proposal for a conference, with the paper still needing to be written over the summer, I have ended up with a completely different paper from what I had planned. This truth I know is not lost on many of my colleagues in the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference who frequently start their papers with “I’ve changed my title.” While I started this book with the working title *Enemies of Calvin*, a title in some respects still usable, the title I have ended up with, suggested to me by the novelist G. W. Hawkes (who, in chorus with the rest of the Faculty Irregulars, has been cheering me on for the past few years), turned my thoughts ever so slightly but enough to take me down a very different path from the way I had first conceived this book. Frequently people asked me how I winnowed down my choices, for there are certainly some who could have been added. But finally time and space constrain everything; the opponents I have chosen best fit the purpose of the book, which is how controversy shaped Calvin’s life and, to a large degree, his thought. In this trek down many trails, I have picked up many debts. The foremost of them is to my wife, Carol, who has been more than patient with me as I have buried myself in my office or in libraries trying to get this done. The same can be said of my daughter, Kristen, who has missed our weekly movie dates on many occasions so Dad could sit and read. They are two of the foundational pieces of my life without whom I could not have done this. I thank also the faithful of St. Paul’s Orthodox Church, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, and Father Andrew Stephen Damick, as they have been persistent in their encouragement.

I owe a true debt to Emmalee Moffitt of the History Department at Eastern University. Emmie formatted the chapters per Baker Publishing Group’s request, pointed out lots of errors on my part, and excellently performed

every demand I placed on her. I also owe thanks to the estate of Charles van Gorden, which has endowed the chair I hold at Eastern University, and by whose munificence I am able to travel for research. I am also the beneficiary of a grant from the Agora Institute for Civic Virtue and the Common Good, which allowed me to spend two months at the University of Oxford in 2015 for research. I am thus indebted to the librarians of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, for all their courtesies, both in the Duke Humfrey reading room and in the Weston reading room. The same obtains of the Taylor Institute and especially of Christine Ferdinand and the staff of Magdalen College Library for sitting with me several raw days in the old library as I pored over books there. All of this would have been much more difficult without the grand hospitality of the Oxford Study Abroad program and its director (a scholar in his own right), Robert L. Schuettinger, and with him his staff, in particular Adam Brown and Tim Moore, who looked after me in Oxford, put me up in grand digs on numerous occasions, and were always magnificent company on Friday evenings: you gentlemen have no idea how grateful I am for all your kindnesses. I need also thank the librarians of Warner Memorial Library, Eastern University, and Trexler Library, Muhlenberg College.

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This same holds true for Professors Fred Putnam, R. J. Snell, Steve McGuire, Michael Dondzila, and Dean Jonathan Yonan of the Templeton Honors College, scholars each in the mold of what the Renaissance desired. Last I wish to thank Professor William J. Tighe of Muhlenberg, who has never stopped encouraging me in my efforts, told me I needed to do a chapter on Joachim Westphal (and I am glad he did), read every chapter (and a few more than once), has been tireless in conversation, and could certainly have written this book so much better than I have.

1

Louis du Tillet and Calvin the Nicodemite

The Fitful Separation from the Whore of Babylon's Church

Calvin had not always been a candidate for the caricature he later obtained, not always the proper prophet or icon of the virulent, violent, capricious, and wrathful God so often conjured when his name is mentioned, nor the definitive traducer of the false religion of Rome. The course of Calvin's theology, like the course of his life, followed its undulant age. Although Calvin was clearly a child of his times, not every child of that age was a Calvin, and indeed, as this chapter will show, not even Calvin began as a Calvin; and in all justice, the frail French émigré who died in Geneva, far from home in what the French then still considered Germany, bears only a resemblance to the shade so often conjured from the nethermost polemical hell.

Treatment, therefore, of Louis du Tillet as the first of Calvin's tormentors proves apt, for it shows Calvin at a crucial period in his spiritual and intellectual formation, long before the great and bold tracts against Servetus, Castellio, Westphal, and Baudouin, inter alios, and his confrontations with the Enfants de Genève (the Genevan patriots). We have in this early period a Calvin who is more the Erasmian, more a Reformer, more a *moyenneur* (a word he coined for those who stood in the middle, neither fully embracing Protestantism, nor at all repudiating Catholicism). This is not to claim that Calvin was an Erasmian, not at least in any formal way, though materially, for a time, he was. Beginning this study with Louis du Tillet and his family also shows a young Calvin whose hopes for the future of reform could be stated with milder assertions and less invective, when lines had not yet been so

precisely drawn, and when there were still those in both camps who thought something could be salvaged of a united Christendom. All this changed on all sides by the early 1540s, but by then Calvin and du Tillet, at first close and dear friends, had already parted company.

While this chapter focuses on Louis du Tillet, it does so in the context of the wider du Tillet family. Louis was the fourth son of Elie du Tillet, who had been ennobled by Charles VIII in 1484 and held an estate in l'Angoumois, below Poitiers and to the west of Limoges. Elie had succeeded handsomely as an accountant, first in the province, but then as vice president of the *Chambre des Comptes* in Paris. Consequently Louis's older brothers were each already men of notable accomplishment when in 1533 he met Calvin. Jean, the second son, who is often known as the *Greffier*, was the clerk of the Parlement of Paris, where he recorded laws, certified that the laws as published were correct in their wording, and represented the Parlement to the king; he also functioned as a royal archivist and historian whose contributions to the discipline of history are immense. The *Greffier* was joined in his historical endeavors by the third brother, also named Jean, who immersed himself as well in antiquarian and humanist studies of the past.¹ The second Jean, bishop first of Saint-Bieuc (1553), and then of Meaux (1562), had received from Francis I full access to the vast royal archives, which he put to great use in uncovering the past.² It was he who first published the *Liber Carolini*, Charles the Great's (Charlemagne) response to the seventh ecumenical council, and the very edition that Calvin would use when brandishing the work against the Catholic use of images, statuary, and icons. The oldest brother, Séraphim, had also been the clerk of the Parlement of Paris before being replaced (apparently by legal proceedings) by his brother.³

At some point in Calvin's time as a student at Paris he had befriended Louis du Tillet. In late 1533, owing to the reaction of the university against Nicholas Cop's convocation sermon—a homily animated by Lutheran ideas and linked by the authorities to the young Calvin—Calvin took refuge at the du Tillet estate.⁴ The du Tillet home bestowed on Calvin more benefits than mere asylum, for Louis, the priest of Claix, a village outside Angoulême, and also a canon of the cathedral of Angoulême, enjoyed the large library of his two brothers,

1. Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 215–38.

2. Alexandre Crottet, *Chronique protestante de France, ou documents historiques sur les églises réformées de ce royaume* (Paris: n.p., 1846), 95.

3. Elizabeth A. R. Brown, ed., *Jean du Tillet and the French Wars of Religion: Five Tracts, 1562–1569*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 108 (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1994).

4. Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 76.

a library that numbered several thousand volumes on history and theology, along with a great many manuscripts. Here Calvin spent hour upon hour in study, producing his first theological treatise, a tract against the Anabaptist doctrine of soul sleep, titled *Psychopannychia*. Calvin also used the library as he began work on the first edition of his *Institutes*. He saw his time there as fulfilling a duty, with his studies as repayment for du Tillet's hospitality: "The humanity of my patron is so great that I understand it to be bestowed for the benefit of learning, not me."⁵ But his studies were not Calvin's only activity in l'Angoumois, for he also taught Louis Greek, and so adept did Louis become that he was given the title "the Greek of Claix." Calvin also took two trips, the first to Nérac in the southwest, where he sought out Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, the great humanist and leader of reform in Paris, who had taken refuge with Marguerite of Navarre. Marguerite, the sister of King Francis I, patronized both humanism and a group of humanist and evangelical Reformers known as the circle of Meaux. Francis I himself had a deep interest in humanism and could easily turn a blind eye to the Reformers' dalliances in evangelicalism, though this is not to say he countenanced Lutheranism, albeit there was some of that within the circle as well. The circle came under scrutiny, and the University of Paris was none too happy with their activities. Lefèvre, while no Lutheran, certainly appeared to the conservatives of the university to skirt orthodoxy, and thus he sought refuge out of the reach of the Sorbonne. His reputation drew Calvin. The other trip was to Noyon in April and May of 1534 to resign his benefices, cures, and livings.⁶ While in Angoumois, Calvin and du Tillet met with notable clergy from the area, doubtless to discuss theology, humanism, and the state of the church. Participants included Anthony Chaillou, the prior of Bouteville (later called the pope of the Lutherans); the abbot of Bassac; and also two brothers, the *Sieur* of Torsac and the young Pierre de la Place, who would later be a historian of the Reformed church but was only fourteen or fifteen at this point.⁷ Otherwise, Calvin was tireless in his scholarly endeavors: Florimond de Raemond remarks that Calvin threw himself into his studies, neither stopping to eat during the day nor going to bed at night.⁸

5. Quoted in Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 83–84.

6. Crottet, *Chronique*, 99.

7. Florimond de Raemond, *L'Histoire de la Naissance, Progrez, et Decadence de l'Herésie de Ce Siecle* (Paris, 1610), 884. Most of what we know about Calvin and his time at Claix/Angoumois is from Florimond, one of the great antiquarians and historians of his day, and an ardent Catholic apologist. Cf. Barbara Sher Tinsley, *History and Polemics in the French Reformation: Florimond de Raemond, Defender of the Church* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1992).

8. De Raemond, *L'Histoire*, 884.

But the halcyon days, no doubt an ideal that always remained with Calvin, formally ended on October 17, 1534, finished off by the Affair of the Placards. On that night, broadsheets denouncing the Mass as an abominable abuse, written by Antoine Marcourt and printed in Neûchatel, were posted throughout France, and particularly in Paris, Orleans, and Blois. One even found its way to the royal bedchamber in Amboise.⁹ Francis I, who had until that time showed some restraint in dealing with the “evangelicals,” now turned on them with a fury. Calvin and du Tillet, on du Tillet’s franc, thought it best to leave France. Traveling under pseudonyms, du Tillet as Haulmont (a village on his family’s estate) and Calvin as d’Espeville (one of his first benefices near Noyon), the pair made for Strasbourg, where they met the city’s Protestant leaders, Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito. From there they traveled to Basle, arriving in January of 1535, where Calvin further worked on his *Psychopannychia* and continued work on the *Institutes*, finding a publisher for the work, which came out in 1536. In Basle Calvin also may possibly have met the thundering Reformer Guillaume Farel.¹⁰ Though a meeting in Basle seems improbable, Farel certainly somehow had the measure of Calvin before their confrontation in Geneva in August 1536. Farel had been part of the circle of Meaux, but like a number of others of the group, he decided to quit France instead of conforming. Indeed, Farel had been an easy target, for though a gifted speaker, he was not a clerk, and in 1525 was forbidden to preach. Farel, never forgiving the members of the circle of Meaux who had acquiesced in the demands of the hard line taken in Paris, headed to the French-speaking regions of western Switzerland, first to Basle, where his antihumanism and insults directed at Erasmus soon had him drummed out of the city. Then he went to the Pays de Vaud, where he operated as an ecclesiastical agent of Berne, a city that had converted to Protestantism in 1528.¹¹ Pierre Caroli, another member of the circle and a doctor of theology from Paris, whom we shall meet in a subsequent chapter, also left France. Farel was a man of little flexibility, who saw clearly what other people ought to do. He certainly had little time for those who took less than a clear stand on the questions of the day and thought that most of his former colleagues who had stayed behind

9. See Frans Pieter van Stam, “The Group of Meaux as First Target of Farel and Calvin’s Anti-Nicodemism,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 68 (2006): 253–75, who, following Atance (cf. note 38 in van Stam), sees the rhetoric of the placards arising from the Sorbonne to push the group of Meaux into a corner.

10. T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin* (Hunts, UK: Lion, 1975), 75.

11. Van Stam, “Group of Meaux,” 260. Jason Zuidema and Theodore Van Raalte also give 1525 as the date of Farel’s expulsion but give 1524 as the date for his activities in Basle; Zuidema and Van Raalte, *Early French Reform: The Theology and Spirituality of Guillaume Farel* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 9–11.

and outwardly conformed, even if they thought Rome in desperate need of reform and sought to bring this reform about, were endangering not only their own souls but also the souls of those who looked to them. Farel saw in their lives no real awareness that being in communion with idolaters posed a real danger not only to their own souls but also to the souls of their spiritual wards. Such clerics would be termed Nicodemites (the term first appears in 1544), those whose error was believing in evangelical doctrines (i.e., Protestantism) but attending Mass for conformity's or safety's sake (so named for Nicodemus in John's Gospel, who sought out Jesus under the cover of darkness for fear of the Jews).

Calvin and du Tillet remained in Basle about a year, with Calvin seeing the *Institutes* through the presses. But in spring of 1536, the first edition of the *Institutes* having come out in March, Calvin and du Tillet set off again, this time to Ferrara, where the duchess of the city, Renée of France, the daughter of Louis XII and sister-in-law to Francis I (who was married to Renée's sister, Claude), had married Ercole di Este, Duke of Ferrara. Much like her sister-in-law, Marguerite of Navarre, Renée sympathized with French humanists and Reformers and harbored many of them at her court (French subjects constituted her personal retinue). Almost nothing is known about Calvin's time there. He did meet the duchess, with whom he subsequently carried on a lasting, though erratic, correspondence. He also made the acquaintance of Johannes Sinapius, the duchess's physician, whom Calvin would recommend to one Françoise de Boussiron de Grand-Ry for marriage (Françoise also served at Renée's court).¹² Perhaps while in Ferrara, but perhaps during his time at Basle, Calvin sent two letters back to France. The letters are lost, though Calvin kept copies that he subsequently published as a single tract in the spring of 1537, his *Epistolae duae*. The letters were aimed at an erstwhile friend from school and a fellow traveler of the Meaux circle—namely, Nicholas Duchemin and Gerard Roussel, respectively.¹³ Calvin had been at Orléans with Duchemin, having lived in one of his houses, though Duchemin had since decamped to work at the episcopal court of Orléans. Roussel had actually become the bishop of Oloron, in the very southwest of France toward Navarre. What the original content of each letter was can only be surmised, as clearly later events and reappraisals are reflected in Calvin's published versions, most notably the disputation in Lausanne in

12. Erik Alexander de Boer and Frans Pieter van Stam, eds., *Ioannis Calvinii Epistolae Scriptae Didactica et Polemica*, vol. 4, *Epistolae Duae (1537), Deux Discours (Oc. 1536)* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2009), xvi–xviii.

13. De Boer and van Stam, *Epistolae Duae*, xx–xxvi. For a broader framework, see van Stam, "Group of Meaux," 253–75; and Cottret, *Calvin*, 101–4.

October 1536, as Calvin incorporated much of what was said there by Farel into his treatises. Clearly the letters covered the question of Nicodemism, though how virulent they were and whether they rose to the level of his 1537 *Epistolae duae* must be questioned; the reason why will be held off until the conclusion of this chapter.

Calvin and du Tillet's time in Ferrara came to an abrupt end when all the evangelical French at Renée's court had been compromised to the unforgiving duke. One of their company, Leon Jehanent, during the veneration of the cross on Good Friday, had left church without performing the expected devotion; brought under suspicion, he was arrested and questioned, then others were questioned, and apparently Calvin and du Tillet, having stayed there probably no more than six weeks, left.¹⁴ Calvin went back to France to put his affairs in order, and du Tillet ended up in Geneva with Farel. Calvin's father had died in 1531, and although Calvin had renounced his own benefices and livings in April of 1534,¹⁵ he still needed to make arrangements for the affairs of his family. Once that had been done he took his brother, Antoine, and sister, Marie, and intended to go to Basle via Strasbourg.

Here Calvin's story takes its fateful turn. French and imperial armies were between Paris and Strasbourg, and so Calvin decided to take a circuitous route to Strasbourg via Geneva. Perhaps a desire to see his friend du Tillet produced the detour, though Calvin, oddly, planned to stay only one night. Upon learning that his friend had arrived, du Tillet went to Farel to tell him that Calvin was in Geneva. Farel immediately went to the inn where Calvin was and demanded, in no uncertain terms, that he stay in Geneva and help him with the reformation of the city. Calvin protested that he was a scholar seeking the quiet of study and contemplation. Farel, imperious and menacing, invoked divine imprecations on Calvin were he to pursue a life of study and thus abandon God's work in Geneva. Calvin stayed. What would prove a momentous event the Genevan authorities met by innocent indifference, Calvin being registered in the city records simply as "ille Gallus."¹⁶

For the next eighteen months, Calvin, Farel, and du Tillet sought the reform of Geneva. The peculiarities of Calvin's relationship with Geneva will be treated specifically in the chapter on Calvin and the Genevan patriots, but a few points are called for here. Geneva had thrown off its temporal and spiritual lords in 1535—namely, the Duke of Savoy and his governor of the

14. De Boer and van Stam, *Epistolae Duae*, xiii–xiv.

15. Ganoczy, *Young Calvin*, 86.

16. William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 53.

city, its bishop. In order to do this, the leadership of Geneva had to obtain the aid of Berne, and this assistance came with the understanding that Geneva would adopt Protestantism. The ministers that Geneva thus acquired, chiefly now Farel and Calvin, had no room for half measures and insisted that the city reform its ecclesiastical life completely in line with their ardent vision of the church. Part of this reform was that Communion should be observed weekly at every church in the city and its environs (though this was an ideal rather than an adamant demand) and that the company of pastors were to guard the table—that is, exercise the power of excommunication on those deemed unfit to receive the sacrament.¹⁷ The government of the city completely opposed this arrangement, for having thrown off their bishop they were not about to turn such power over to a group of foreigners. Recognizing the link between frequent eucharistic celebrations and the power of church discipline, the magistrates allowed Communion only quarterly, and the struggle thus centered on the book of church order.¹⁸

Matters came to a head on April 19, 1538—Easter Sunday. Although the Reformers had never obtained from the government the ability to celebrate Communion every week, it was to be celebrated that Easter. At this point Farel and Calvin decided to raise the pressure on the town council and make a statement regarding what they perceived to be their prerogatives as ministers. They simply did not have Communion at all anywhere in the city, effectively for that Easter excommunicating the whole city. Enraged, the council dismissed Calvin and Farel. But even before this happened, earlier in 1538 or in late 1537, du Tillet had already departed from Geneva, leaving but a note that he was returning home.¹⁹ He went via Strasbourg.

Calvin took up a correspondence with du Tillet that spanned the rest of 1538.²⁰ The letters present a number of insights into Calvin's early thought. Unlike most of Calvin's letters, these were written in French and were of such a seemingly private nature that they lay untouched in Paris till the 1840s and were only formally published in 1850.²¹ Thus the letters themselves give us an entirely private side of Calvin, unlike the very public squabbles that dominated

17. John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 139.

18. Cottret, *Calvin*, 128–29.

19. Ganoczy, *Young Calvin*, 119.

20. Martin Bucer also corresponded with du Tillet over the latter half of 1538 and at the beginning of 1539. See Jacques V. Pollet, *Martin Bucer*, vol. 2, *Etudes sur la correspondance avec de nombreux textes inédits* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), 528–33.

21. Alexandre Cottret, *Correspondance Française de Calvin avec Louis du Tillet, chanoine d'Angoulême et curé de Claix sur les questions de l'Église et du ministère évangélique* (Genève: Cherbuliez, 1850).

so much of his life.²² What is more, they offer us an insight into a formative turn in his life, a turn that prompted du Tillet's actions. No firm date stands out for du Tillet's departure. Alexandre Crottet in his introduction to the correspondence gives no date; Bruce Gordon gives early 1538;²³ and Machiel A. van den Berg in *Friends of Calvin* gives August 1537, but with no explanation, though clearly such an early date would give room for another letter other than the short note that du Tillet would have left, for Calvin implies he has two letters from different quarters.²⁴ The first letter from du Tillet to Calvin in Geneva, the one somewhat explaining his actions, can be pieced together from Calvin's response, sent in January 1538 from Geneva.²⁵ Du Tillet had been preparing to leave for some months, and perhaps the break was thought out as early as spring of 1537 with the publication of Calvin's *Epistolae duae*, since Calvin's anti-Nicodemism seems the basis of du Tillet's misgivings. Du Tillet still attended all the debates and meetings, showing little sign of his growing unrest. It seems most likely that du Tillet left at the beginning of 1538, leaving only a note, prompting Calvin to ask whether he had been rude or a bore, and that perhaps such behavior on his part was what had alienated du Tillet, for he could not bring himself to believe that Louis had left for the reasons given.

Calvin, in grief, claimed that joy had left his life and wondered whether an offending imprudence on his part had brought about this unhappy state.²⁶ But more than this, he was baffled, for he asserted that he was as he had always been; we can only suppose that du Tillet, as will be seen, had asserted that Calvin had changed. Bewilderment also arose, Calvin wrote, because du Tillet's resolve and steadfastness, his constancy and strength, characteristics that could only show an unshakeable commitment to reform, had always elicited great admiration from him.²⁷ Indeed, it seems Calvin thought that du Tillet was only going home, and not returning to the communion of Rome, at least formally. Obviously du Tillet had met with Bucer and Capito (Calvin

22. The letters are treated briefly in both Cottret, *Calvin*, 138–39; and Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 92–94; a good read on the correspondence is Olivia Carpi-Mailly, “Jean Calvin et Louis du Tillet: entre foi et amitié, un échange révélateur,” in *Calvin et ses contemporains: Actes du colloque de Paris 1995*, ed. Olivier Millet, Cahiers d'Humanisme et Renaissance 53 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998), 7–19. See also George H. Tavard, “Calvin and the Nicodemites,” in *Calvin and Roman Catholicism: Critique and Engagement, Then and Now*, ed. Randall C. Zachman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 62–72.

23. Gordon, *Calvin*, 92.

24. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 24; Machiel A. van den Berg, *Friends of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

25. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 24–28.

26. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 24–25.

27. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 24–25.

mentions du Tillet's advisers in Strasbourg), who had a very different view on Nicodemism, not that they counseled it, but they still took a softer line than either Calvin or Farel.²⁸

And this comes to the main point for Calvin: he did not question du Tillet's faith as to its substance, but he worried to no end about du Tillet's association with Rome and even his seeming softening on Rome's decadence. For Calvin, Rome was worse than Israel in the days of Jeroboam and was more like Israel under Ahab, having obtained a long tradition of corruption. Rome cannot be the church, for the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (something that du Tillet must have referenced in the first letter), and since Rome obviously lacks the truth, how can they be the church? Du Tillet had asserted in the first letter that since the name of God was still among the Catholics, the blessing of God should not be thought so quickly lost. To this, Calvin maintained that ignorance so dominated them that they were incapable of doing God's will.²⁹ Calvin ended his letter by praying for du Tillet's health and for God to save him from his scruples. This was the longest of Calvin's letters.³⁰

Du Tillet's response, sent from Paris in March 1538, fleshed out what had been implicit in his first letter. While he lamented Calvin's ennui, his own conscience had been suffering worse. For two years he had watched Calvin (thus going back at least to their time together in Ferrara), and he never believed that Calvin had a calling from God to do what he was doing. To du Tillet, his time with Calvin had brought him to the place where in order to follow Christ, to take up the cross, to embrace the bitterness (*amertume*) that results in sweetness (*douceur*), he had but one option.³¹ He had come to the conviction that a false persuasion had dominated his life to such a degree that he did not want to ask questions. But enormous questions raged all around him: for instance, the just do not live by faith alone, and over this issue two sides had emerged. Who has the disposition of fear and humility to admit that one could be wrong? Should we not live in fear that we might be believing things not taught to us by God?³² This fear should plague every individual, for what single person has seen at all times and in all places that which ought rightly to be held, especially since the angel of Satan can transform himself into an angel of light? This is not, du Tillet maintained, a pardon for those who do not want to listen to Christ, for those who have no desire to reform their lives. Du Tillet assured Calvin that he had no love of abuses, but rather

28. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 25.

29. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 26–27.

30. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 28.

31. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 30.

32. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 32–33.

wished to aid those seeking to fix them. In the end, it was not his scruples that were the problem, but Calvin's, for du Tillet stood astonished that Calvin would condemn those seeking to reform the church (e.g., the Meaux circle). Ironically, du Tillet wrote, "What good I find in you I find in them as well, but do you praise them for it? You do not." Du Tillet then gave a cutting retort: "Am I not able to give them this title 'the churches of God' because I don't hold you for a schismatic, certainly I don't want to dissimulate."³³ Du Tillet did not think Calvin ungifted, but these same gifts he saw also in others and asked whether they were not from God as well.

Further, du Tillet rejected the claim that the Catholics were worse than the ancient Jews, or at least in the same condition as the Jews in the days of Jeroboam, let alone in the days of Ahab. He then came to what was the heart of the matter for him: neither Calvin nor he had ever had baptism except at the hands of the ministers of God, and that was where he was now going in answer to the scruples made above, to where he knew the ministers of God were. "Because where there is a true ministry of God, there necessarily also is the true Church of God."³⁴ It should be noted that to this point du Tillet had persistently used the plural, churches (*Eglises*), but here he now used the singular, the definitive. Again, he admitted that abuses existed, even idolatry, but at the same time the Word was preached and sacraments administered. It would be a great error, du Tillet continued, if he did not see that the Spirit indeed was at work there. In a rejoinder to Calvin, du Tillet noted that in Rome many heard the Shepherd's voice, even though many did not, just as there are wise and foolish virgins called to the last feast.³⁵

As for the pillar and ground of the truth, what, asked du Tillet, does Calvin do with all those called "church" by Christ in the Apocalypse? What of the Galatians or the Corinthians? Did not the first churches arise out of the synagogues, so that God made the synagogues his very churches? How could Rome be worse than the Jews at the time of Christ who actually rejected and murdered him? Yet Christ observed the scruples of Judaism in the face of such hypocrisy and immorality.³⁶ Rome has a ministry especially appointed by Christ, whom the Jews rejected. Du Tillet cited Calvin at least tacitly for Donatism. What Ahab and Jeroboam did was so utterly against anything that God had commanded that it was bad in and of itself, for it sought to supplant true religion and manifestly contradicted the Word of God. But many of those things in the church that Calvin now thought of as abuses God had used to

33. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 33–34.

34. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 35.

35. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 37.

36. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 39–40.

call people to repentance, for what constituted a good might be abused, but an abuse does not destroy the use.³⁷

Calvin finished his second letter, the shortest of the exchange, dated July 1538, only when he had arrived in Strasbourg. In brief, Calvin told du Tillet that he was no longer in Geneva, and while the letter did not explain why, it seems that Calvin assumed du Tillet knew. Calvin simply asserted that he had retired from Geneva and was waiting on the Lord's will for direction. He did give some news about the Swiss churches, and commented on his own trouble discerning what God wanted of him.³⁸ Du Tillet focused on this bewilderment in his reply of September 1538. He began by writing that Calvin seemed to suffer from people who care more for earthly things than for things of God. Obviously du Tillet, who as the letter made clear was formally going back to Rome, had at the same time no desire to treat Calvin as if he were a pestilence, for he wrote that all of Calvin's troubles would eventuate in his knowing what God's calling for him entailed.³⁹ Saying this, he revisited the question of knowledge brought up in the first letter, that all too often people think they know God's will and quickly convince themselves of it. He focused on Calvin's situation, pointing out that he had been called to his life as a Protestant only five years ago, and yet he acted in an imperious manner, condemning people even if they also condemned the things that Calvin himself censured.⁴⁰ Du Tillet pointed out that he was writing this not to impugn Calvin or to enter into controversy but to give him an occasion for self-examination. For du Tillet, the Lord often throws people into a thousand perplexities in order for them to rectify their lives, and, in his view, Calvin needed to rectify his self-assured attitude about his calling to be a minister of God.⁴¹ In du Tillet's mind, how had Calvin not assumed the status of an oracle? To this du Tillet reasserted something already noted in his first letter, that the Lord does not bestow all his gifts on one person but spreads them among all. Further, only with fear and moderation can we hear God, for prejudices weigh everyone down, and without fear and humility no one will ever be rid of them.⁴² Du Tillet closed by telling Calvin that he had put some money aside for him, perhaps hoping that Calvin would return to Paris.

In Calvin's last letter, dated October 1538, he admitted the constant need to examine oneself but maintained that ultimately the problems at Geneva said

37. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 42–43.

38. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 49–51.

39. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 52.

40. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 53.

41. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 53–54.

42. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 55.

more about the Genevans than about him, for he was faultless in the matter, nor would he hold the calamity as chastisement.⁴³ Further, he had given du Tillet's interrogation of his calling some thought and took his friend to task for questioning it. He had talked to some people whom they both knew, probably meaning Capito and Bucer, though possibly also Farel, inquiring about their thoughts on his vocation. The note this sounds at first seems an answer to du Tillet's criticism that Calvin had not been called by the church, but in the end, it turned into something else. Even if du Tillet did not accept their mutual acquaintances as confirmation of Calvin's call to the ministry, it was immaterial, for he, like Jonah before him, had a prophetic calling to take the gospel to the nations and thus had little need of external confirmation for his office.⁴⁴ Calvin's claim of a charisma directly from God may well have been taken from Farel, who was never ordained, and whose lack of ordination was completely known by both Berne and Johannes Oecolampadius, Farel's first Protestant sponsor, when the Bernese sent him out to preach.⁴⁵ Further, Calvin wrote that du Tillet obscured matters by calling darkness light (Geneva's motto, once having thrown off the prince bishop, was *post tenebras lux* [after the darkness, light]) and ascribing the abuses of Rome to the work of God, for those things were never goods.⁴⁶ He closed, thanking him for the offer of money, but stating that others were taking care of his needs.

Du Tillet in his third letter, sent from Paris in December 1538, denied attacking Calvin, but rather, du Tillet asserted, he had written out of concern for Calvin's soul. He wrote because he doubted Calvin's calling to the ministry, for what minister would condemn that which is not condemnable, even if in need of reform?⁴⁷ Further, du Tillet maintained that he wrote because Calvin had fallen, and this gave du Tillet an occasion to help him, since he also wrote to warn him that great-hearted people are beset by great problems and distractions, and that Calvin should examine himself in God's sight with fear and trembling.⁴⁸ And this forms the basis for the largest part of the last letter of this exchange. Du Tillet noted that Calvin had asserted his calling by God based on his own say-so, his own opinions. But how had God in the person of his Son established the ministry of the church but by calling and

43. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 59.

44. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 60.

45. Zuidema and Van Raalte, *Early French Reform*, 26; and see 47n68. For a discussion of this topic and its very wide implications, see Jon Balsarak, *John Calvin as Sixteenth-Century Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Professor Balsarak notes Calvin's letter to du Tillet, 95.

46. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 60.

47. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 62.

48. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 63.

setting apart the apostles and then Paul, who then confirmed this calling through the laying on of hands? This calling was done with signs and outward forms, and du Tillet cited Paul about the ministry given to Timothy by the laying on of the hands of his fellow priests, and then by the imposition of Paul's own hands.⁴⁹ Du Tillet closed, again reprimanding Calvin for his lack of humility and for having asserted that the incident in Geneva had nothing to teach him and that he had been justified in his actions since the Genevans were such recalcitrant people.⁵⁰

Louis du Tillet faded from Calvin's life, though years later, in his preface to the Psalms, Calvin recalled him as someone who had turned back to Rome. And in the church of Rome Louis du Tillet remained, living the remainder of his life in the shadow of his brothers, both of whom, Jean the *Greffier* and Jean the bishop, played such important roles in the great affairs of France. Both became completely devoted to the cause of Catholic France, and their services were duly rewarded. But the incident of younger brother Louis with Calvin seems to have left some impact. Jean the *Greffier* had actually come to worry about his brother in 1538 and went looking for him to bring him home. He apparently came to Geneva just as Calvin was being expelled, saw the Reformer again briefly in Basle, and then once more in Strasbourg.⁵¹ That Louis had "come to his senses" on his own perhaps made things easier for Jean.

Eventually Jean would distinguish himself in the service of France, and particularly during the Wars of Religion. His original duties were unremarkable, however important, but at the beginning of the 1560s he came to the attention of the powerful family of Guise, chiefly Charles of Guise, the cardinal bishop of Lorraine, and brother of Henry of Guise, the duke. That his work in the royal archives had vast importance for how to think about the power of the monarchy and the role of history in governance was not lost on the cardinal, and he summoned the *Greffier*.⁵² The Guise family was interested because, with the death of Henry II in 1559, their niece Mary, the daughter of their sister Mary of Scotland, had come to the throne as Francis II's queen, and they saw in the *Greffier* a powerful polemicist with the resources of his studies at their disposal. The Guise's time at court was short-lived, but their influence in France was not, and both the *Greffier* and the bishop became loyal supporters not only of the Guises but also of their ardent devotion to

49. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 67–69.

50. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 77–78.

51. Crottet, *Correspondance*, 49.

52. For the significance of Jean du Tillet on the discipline of history, see Kelley, *Foundations*, 215–38.

the Catholic faith.⁵³ Ironically, as the two of them rose in prominence outside the royal house proper, Louis's second brief time in prominence came to a close. From 1552 to 1560, Louis, perhaps at the instigation of one or both brothers, served as one of many chaplains to Catherine de Medici, Henry II's widow, then dowager-queen of France.⁵⁴

Had Calvin been a Nicodemite? The obvious answer is yes, for he could not have lived almost a year at the estate of du Tillet, his host the curè of Claix, without attending Mass. We cannot explain his audience with Lefèvre either, nor his attendance at the court of Renée of France in Ferrara, without assuming that he went to Mass, since coincident with the time of his arrival the whole of Renée's French retinue was under scrutiny. But it seems that from their time together in Ferrara du Tillet had noticed a change beginning in Calvin that must have reached its denouement sometime in late 1536 (the Lausanne Disputation) or 1537 (the publication of the *Epistolae*, which used material from the Disputation to bolster the content of the earlier letters), which prompted du Tillet to the conclusion that he and Calvin had fundamentally different views of faith and the church. The correspondence reveals du Tillet's essential understanding of the church as an objective reality existing irrespective of its adherents' faith, and he thus placed a great deal of weight on its externals as those things that guaranteed its indefectibility. This stands in stark contrast to Calvin's appeal to his charismatic calling. As Alexander Ganoczy notes, "Du Tillet in fact remained committed to the idea of apostolic succession and the hierarchical constitution of the church, and he could not understand how his friend had received this extraordinary vocation to a prophetic mission."⁵⁵ Calvin, to the contrary, had come to profess that the church is found among the faithful—those professing the right faith—and inextricably within the context of the purely preached Word, right administration of the sacraments, and due direction of church discipline.

Calvin's letters to Roussel and Duchemin seem the beginning of Calvin's more precise attitudes, for were the letters sent from Ferrara, this would have been the two years marked by du Tillet's March 1538 letter, though sentiments reached their peak in his strident publication in 1537 of the *Epistolae duae*. Doubtless the catalyst of this change was the year spent with Farel, from

53. During the Wars of Religion, Jean du Tillet the *Greffier* wrote multiple tracts against the Huguenots and in favor of the Guises and their particular view of the French royal position. See Brown, *Jean du Tillet and the Wars of Religion*.

54. Hector de la Ferrière et al., eds., *Lettres de Catherine de Médici* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1880–1943), 10:530, lists Loys du Tillet, frère de Jean du Tillet, évêque de Briec et Meaux, as one of Catherine's chaplains from 1552 till 1560.

55. Ganoczy, *Young Calvin*, 119.

whose austere gaze Calvin had hid du Tillet's first letter. The *Epistolae duae* is replete with lines and thoughts drawn directly from Farel's anti-Nicodemite harangue at the October 1536 disputation in Lausanne, and little more is needed to see that it was Farel who weighed most heavily in Calvin's formulation of his stricter stance. Calvin's correspondence with du Tillet does show that at least for friendship's sake Calvin was willing to admit that faith might be found in Rome, but this opinion was more testimony of the embers of friendship, embers that had died by the time Calvin coldly referred to du Tillet in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms as that "someone who now disgracefully defected back to the Papists."⁵⁶

56. *Ioannis Calvini, Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* (hereafter CO), 31:25, in *Corpus Reformatorum* (Saale, 1834-): "Unus homo, qui nunc turpi defectione iterum ad papistas rediit, statim fecit ut innotescerem." Calvin uses "vilenement" for "turpi" in the French, 26.