

Book Reviews

Derek W. H. Thomas and John W. Tweeddale, eds. *John Calvin: For a New Reformation*. With an afterword by R. C. Sproul. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019.

It was somewhat quiet after the Calvin jubilee in 2009. The five-hundredth anniversary of John Calvin had resulted in a flood of events including a huge number of publications. But then silence fell over Calvin, as happens so often after jubilees. It is therefore praiseworthy that Crossway has taken the initiative to publish the book under review. It contains twenty good-sized chapters, of which the first seven (part 1) are more historical and biographical and the other thirteen (part 2) more theological. Several of the chapters have been published before elsewhere, and it is a good thing that they are included and form a unity with the other parts of the book.

Chapters 1 (Michael A. G. Haykin) and 2 (Stephen J. Nichols) sketch the contours of Calvin's biography. Chapters 3 (David B. Calhoun) and 4 (Douglas F. Kelly) deal with Calvin as pastor. In chapter 5 (W. Robert Godfrey), many of Calvin's theological friends are introduced, including the influence they had on the Reformer. Chapter 6 (Steven J. Lawson) gives a clear overview of Calvin's homiletical work, and chapter 7 (Derek W. H. Thomas) describes the various stages Calvin's *Institutes* went through from 1536 to 1559. As said, part 2 focuses on Calvin's theology, the basis being mainly the *Institutes*, but included are his sermons, commentaries, and letters. The subsequent chapters cover Calvin's thinking and teaching on Scripture (K. Scott Oliphint); creation and humanity (J.V. Fesko), including such themes as government, natural law, science, art, and music; providence (Burk Parsons); the law (Guy Prentiss Waters); the person and work of Christ (Paul Wells); the Holy Spirit, meditation, and prayer (Joel R. Beeke);

the Christian life (Edward Donnelly); knowing God through suffering (Derek W. H. Thomas); and predestination (Paul Helm). These are followed by a chapter on Calvin's ecclesiology (John W. Tweeddale), and a chapter on the sacraments (Keith A. Mathison). The last two chapters focus on Calvin's thoughts on the perseverance of the saints (Robert A. Peterson) and on his eschatology (Cornelis P. Venema).

A review is not the place for me to go into each of these chapters, but the list of topics shows a coherent and inclusive representation of the life and thought of the Reformer. A strong point is not only that many quotations from Calvin are given, but that all authors describe Calvin in the context of his time and indicate how he made use of what other Reformers (like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and Philip Melancthon) and church fathers (especially Augustine) had written before him.

In the preface, the editors inform the reader that the authors of the various chapters "reflect on the significance of the ministry and teaching of John Calvin for the church today" (9). So the aim of the book is not purely academic; it also has a focus on the practical life of the church. I can say that each author succeeded in accomplishing this aim. This, however, does not turn the book into "just" a popular work—there is nothing wrong with popular books on theology and church history, by the way—as the multitude of footnotes referring to a wealth of primary and secondary sources make clear. Indeed, it is evident that the authors are, so to speak, Calvin enthusiasts, and critical distance to his personality, attitudes, and exegetical and theological work is absent. This sort of one-sidedness is a healthy counterweight to the equally biased and unfounded critiques found in many other publications on Calvin. It must at the same time be said that the authors do supply the proofs for what they state by referring consistently to Calvin's books, catechetical work, sermons, and letters. In addition to this value, the authors also show that they are familiar with the present state of Calvin research, of which they have made good use, as the references indicate.

This all means that the book is a fine example of how academic research can be made accessible for a wider audience and especially for those with an active role in the church or those who just want to know more about Calvin and Reformed theology. I would add that the book can also be used as a textbook as it presents a fine overview of Calvin's life and theology in chapters that can also be studied separately. This book demonstrates that we do not need jubilees to get good books published.

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