

Calvin's Theological Approach and Its Significance in Shaping the Foundations of Reformed Christianity

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Abstract

This paper explores essential facets of John Calvin's (1509-1564) theological concepts like predestination, divine sovereignty, and the doctrine of Scripture in his foundational work, *Institutio Religionis Christianae* (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*). It examines Calvin's contribution and the establishment of Reformed Christianity as a unique theological tradition by examining the historical context of the Protestant Reformation. The study of Calvin's theological methodology involves examining the Scripture's function, highlighting the text's authority within Calvin's theological framework and the exegetical approaches. It examines how Calvin's theories were received and how they shaped Reformed confessions, impacting other theologians and denominations. The paper explores the influence of Calvinism on modern religious thought. It highlights criticisms of his theological methodology and offers objective rebuttals and responses.

Keywords: John Calvin, Institutes, Theological Method, Predestination, Reformed Christianity

I. Introduction

The Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century saw influential figures redefine Christian doctrine. One of the most influential Reformed theologians was John Calvin. Born in Noyon, France, in 1509, Calvin influenced the Reformation movement with his intellect and theology.¹ His renowned work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, published in several versions between 1536 and 1559, provided a thorough theological framework outlining his

¹ Muller, Richard A. "Calvin on Predestination: A Developmental and Bibliographical Essay." *Hapshin Theological Review* 8 (2020): 81-107.



views on doctrine and practice. Calvin was a preacher, reformer, and systematic thinker whose importance in the Protestant Reformation goes beyond his work as a theologian. His theological contributions impacted the development of Reformed Christianity as a unique tradition, going beyond the theological discussions of his day.² Originally meant to be an introductory text, the *Institutes* became a foundational work that expressed Calvin's theological beliefs on the depravity of humanity, the sovereignty of God, and the importance of Scripture.

Calvinism has been mistakenly criticized as being too narrow, being theological determinists, having a "rigid predestinarianism," and having a fixed set of doctrines in the TULIP acronym.³ Nevertheless, Calvin's theological formulations have significantly impacted Reformed Christianity.⁴ The investigation of Calvin's biography, his contribution to the Reformation, and his subsequent influence on the development of Reformed theology will be instructive. Calvin's influence can be seen in Reformation traditions' continued theological articulations and ecclesiastical frameworks.

II. The Protestant Reformation's Historical Context

Europe had significant social and theological changes during the 16th century. The Roman Catholic Church, which had hitherto dominated politics and religion, came under increased pressure to reform because of alleged corruption, doctrinal affirmations and practices that were contrary to the Scriptures.⁵ These calls became louder because of the new printing technology that enabled the quick spread of ideas and promoted communication, giving dissident voices more direct access to the people.

The Protestant Reformation, which Martin Luther sparked in 1517 when he daringly nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church, was a reference to this revolutionary period.⁶ Luther's ideas sparked widespread discussion and criticism of several Catholic Church doctrines and practices, most notably the indulgence trade and papal

² Chia, Philip Suciadi, and Juanda Juanda. "The Background of Calvin's Thoughts." *Journal Didaskalia* 4, no. 2 (2021): 19-28.

³ Oliver Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 210.

⁴ Crisp, 8.

⁵ Avis, Paul. "John Calvin-Ecclesialogist." *Ecclesiology* 19, no. 1 (2023): 3-6.

⁶ Ozment, Steven, and John Witte. "Martin Luther." In *John Witte, Jr. and Gary S. Hauk, eds., Christianity and Family Law: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) (2017): 195-210.



authority.⁷ He articulated justification by grace and the authority and sufficiency of Scriptures in the church. Rapidly spreading throughout Europe, these ideas and doctrinal differences led to a flurry of religious reform movements that attempted to reform doctrine and practice.

a) Calvin and his Emphasis on Biblical Authority

John Calvin, a contemporary of Martin Luther, was instrumental to the Reformation. Born in France in 1509, he wanted to study law but changed his focus to theology.⁸ He became famous as a reformer and theologian with *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, published in 1536. Calvin's methodical thought and organizational skills profoundly articulated the Reformation's doctrine. In Geneva, he established a theocratic system of government, proving his commitment to putting reformed ideas into practice in the real world of church life, administration, and theological matters.⁹ On the social reform front, he constituted a Consistory, an institution of elders and pastors for enforcing discipline and moral laws for his vision of a society shaped by the Word of God in every aspect of life.¹⁰

Calvin believed in the authority of the Scriptures, which is not conferred by the church or human reason. He interpreted and preached scriptures, lectured, and wrote commentaries.¹¹ Systematic preaching of the Scriptures was employed because it was believed to be inspired by God, inerrant, clear and sufficient. Calvin wrote, "But while no daily revelations are given from heaven anymore, the Scriptures alone remain, wherein it pleased the Lord to consecrate his truth to everlasting remembrance; it must also be noticed how they will justly receive authority among believers and be heard as the living voices of God himself."¹² According to Calvin, the church's authority is to be located in the Word, through the Spirit's guidance.¹³ Apart from its centrality in the pulpit ministry, Scripture was also at the center of worship; the reading of Scriptures characterized the entire Protestant worship service. According to Calvin, it is in the Word that God meets his people, and his people meet him; "Wherever the faithful, who worship him purely and in due form, according to the appointment of his word, are

⁷ Carl R. Trueman and Eunjin Kim. "The Reformers and Their Reformations." In *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, Matthew Barrett and Michael Scott Horton, eds., (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 105-108.

⁸ Yahya, Yuangga Kurnia, and Mohammad Rafdi Ilahi. "The Doctrine of Predestination According To The Old Testament." *Journal of Comparative Study of Religions (JCSR)* 1, no. 2 (2021).

⁹ Witte, John. "Martin Luther's Influence on Legal Reforms and Civil Law." (2017).

¹⁰ Trueman and Kim, 119.

¹¹ Ibid, 121.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1539), 1.21, CR 29:293.

¹³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), 4.8.13, CR 30:855.



assembled together to engage in the solemn acts of religious worship, he is graciously present, and presides in the midst of them."¹⁴ As a result, Sola Scriptura was the foundational tenet of the Reformation period.

b) The Formation of the Reformed Christian Tradition

Different theological traditions, each with its doctrinal formulations and particular focus, started to merge as the Reformation progressed. Often associated with Calvinism, Reformed Christianity arose as a separate branch of Protestantism. Reformed theology was notable for its dedication to a solid conception of God's sovereignty.

Calvin distinguished the Reformed tradition from other Protestant denominations with his beliefs on predestination, which holds that God, in his gracious choice, has predetermined each person's salvation or damnation.¹⁵ His views on this doctrine were based on Scripture and the Augustinian heritage. He believed predestination is beyond God's foreknowledge of what will happen in history or who will respond to the gospel message, "We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted within himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death."¹⁶ According to Calvin, God's decision to save some is based entirely on his "freely given mercy," whereas his decision not to save others is based on his "just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment."¹⁷

The knowledge of the nature and organization of the church, or ecclesiology, was another essential component of Reformed Christianity. Calvin's emphasis on the local church's autonomy—which pastors and elected elders exercise—opposed the Roman Catholic Church's hierarchical structure. The focus on church governance came to be associated with Reformed churches.¹⁸ In addition, the creation of Reformed catechisms and confessions, like the Westminster Confession of Faith, highlighted a dedication to precisely stating doctrinal

¹⁴ John Calvin. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 141.

¹⁵ Witte Jr, John. "Luther the Lawyer: The Lutheran Reformation of Law, Politics, and Society." *Law & Just.-Christian L. Rev.* 178 (2017): 6.

¹⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), 3.21.5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.21.7.

¹⁸ Hillis, Bryan. "The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries." *Journal of church and state* 48, no. 4 (2006): 878-880.



viewpoints. For Reformed communities, these confessions functioned as identifiers and doctrinal pronouncements. A dynamic narrative is constructed by the historical background of the Protestant Reformation, Calvin's unique influence on its course, and the subsequent establishment of Reformed Christianity as a distinct theological tradition.¹⁹ The subsection below explores Calvin's methodological approach and its enduring influence on the development of Reformed theology.

III. Calvin's Impact on the Reformation of Christianity

John Calvin had a significant and long-lasting impact on the growth of Reformed Christianity. His theological views, outlined in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, profoundly influenced succeeding generations and shaped his day.²⁰ Calvin's views subsequently shaped theological discussions and church denominations.

A. Dissemination of Calvin's Ideas

Calvin's views gained traction quickly and through a variety of means. A significant factor in the widespread distribution of his writings, especially the *Institutes*, was the invention of the printing press. Multiple language translations of Calvin's writings made them more accessible to laypeople and theologians, encouraging a wide readership throughout Europe.²¹ As his ideas gained popularity, Calvinist communities began to form in different parts of the world, which helped his theological framework spread. Calvin's involvement in scholarly and ecclesiastical circles also helped his views proliferate. During his time in Geneva, which became a haven for exiled Protestants, theological discourse and the spread of Reformed ideas flourished. Many nationalities sent students to study under Calvin in Geneva, who then brought his concepts back to their own countries.²² The international network of students and advocates was pivotal in disseminating Calvinist theology across the European continent.

Through his correspondence, Calvin maintained ties with many theologians, pastors, and political figures, which helped spread his beliefs.²³ In his letters, he answered theological

¹⁹ Stanglin, Keith D. "Calvin's Theological Legacy from the Seventeenth through the Nineteenth Centuries." *John Calvin in Context* (2020): 418-26.

²⁰ Lee, Seung-Goo. "The Relationship between Heinrich Bullinger and John Calvin." *Hapshin Theological Review* 8 (2020): 109-148.

²¹ Robbins, Joel. "World Christianity and the Reorganization of Disciplines: On the Emerging Dialogue between Anthropology and Theology." *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies* (2020): 15.

²² Pak, G. Sujin. "John Calvin." In *Protestants and Mysticism in Reformation Europe*, pp. 179-199. Brill, 2019.

²³ Addai-Mensah, Peter. "A Discussion on Augustine's Notion of Predestination and its Later Interpretation in Salvation History." *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 3, no. 1 (2020): 21-27.



questions, offered pastoral counsel, and formed coalitions with other reformers who shared his views. This network of epistolaries served as a forum for scholarly discussion, promoting unity within Calvinist circles and guaranteeing the widespread distribution of his theological ideas.²⁴ Calvin's theories were also greatly aided by the foundation of Geneva as a hub for theological publishing and education. Calvin taught at the Academy of Geneva, which developed into a seminary for aspiring theologians and pastors.²⁵ These alumni expanded the influence of Reformed theology around the world by bringing Calvin's ideas to their local communities. A mix of print culture, social networks, and academic institutions helped Calvin's views gain traction. The widespread adoption of his theological framework set the stage for the growth of distinctly Reformed communities throughout Europe and beyond.

B. The Evolution of Reformation Creeds and Confessions

Calvin's theological contributions were crucial in forming Reformed Christianity's foundational frameworks. It was especially true during the formulation of Reformed confessions and creeds, which functioned as cornerstone texts for establishing doctrinal distinctiveness and directing the activities of Reformed communities.²⁶ Calvin's influence can be seen in early works such as the *Genevan Confession of Faith* (1536) and the *Gallic Confession* (1559).²⁷ The sovereignty of God, the infallibility of Scripture, and the nature of the sacraments were outlined in these confessions, giving Reformed congregations a doctrinal foundation.

Nonetheless, the Westminster Standards represent Reformed theology's most significant and long-lasting manifestation. Composed in the middle of the 17th century, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, and *Westminster Larger Catechism* thoroughly codified Reformed theological ideas.²⁸ Even though Calvin had passed away several decades previously, his impact could still be seen in these records. The Westminster Assembly, entrusted with writing them, comprised theologians strongly inspired by Calvinistic ideas. The resulting standards became foundational papers for Reformed

²⁴ Sampe, Naomi, Novita Toding, and Hasrath Dewi Ranteallo. "Luther and Calvin, and the Christian Work Ethics." *Melo: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 1, no. 2 (2021): 122-137.

²⁵ Pitkin, Barbara. "John Calvin's Vision." *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism* (2021): 105.

²⁶ Thompson, John L. "Confessions, Conscience, and Coercion in the Early Calvin." In *Calvin and the Early Reformation*, pp. 155-179. Brill, 2019.

²⁷ Pitkin, Barbara. "Calvin on the Early Reformation." In *Calvin and the Early Reformation*, pp. 200-224. Brill, 2019.

²⁸ Brewer, Brian C., and David M. Whitford, eds. *Calvin and the early Reformation*. Vol. 219. Brill, 2019.



communities worldwide and for English-speaking Reformed churches.²⁹ The Westminster Standards echo Calvin's theology in various respects. Calvinists emphasize Scripture's authority, God's sovereignty, predestination, and the sacraments.³⁰ Calvin's views on Christ's redemptive work, the covenant, and God's decrees are prominent in the Confession.

Moreover, Calvin's views on ecclesiology, worship, and the state's role in religious concerns impacted the practical elements of these confessional agreements. Calvin's stress on the authority of Scripture in matters of faith and practice is consistent with the regulative principle of worship, which holds that only acts expressly mandated or justified in Scripture are acceptable in public worship.³¹ Reformed confessions and creeds were formulated with Calvin's theological legacy in mind, which provided a theoretical foundation that influenced the identity and practices of Reformed Christianity.³² These confessional writings served as pillars of support for Reformed congregations, directing their religious practices and adherence to doctrine.

C. Impact of Calvin's Thoughts on Subsequent Theologians and Denominations

Long after his passing, Calvin's ideas continued to influence Christian theology significantly. His impact on later theologians and denominational changes was long-lasting, extending beyond the immediate Reformation environment.

Theological Continuity

Theologians who adopted and developed Calvin's views produced works that carried on his theological legacy. Calvin's successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza, was instrumental in establishing and promoting Calvinistic theology.³³ Writings by Beza, such as *Confession de Foi du Chrétien* (*Confession of the Christian Faith*), helped to clarify and support Reformed theology.

Furthermore, the Puritans in England developed and implemented Calvin's views within the framework of theological contemplation and ecclesiastical reform, having been

²⁹ Whitford, David M. "Calvin and the Early Reformation." In *Calvin and the Early Reformation*, pp. 1-10. Brill, 2019.

³⁰ Hazlett, William. "Reformed Theology in Confessions and Catechisms to c. 1620." (2019): 189-209.

³¹ Kidder, Annemarie S. "Confession in the Reformed Tradition." *Liturgy* 34, no. 1 (2019): 12-20.

³² Bender, Kimlyn J. "The Reformers as Fathers of the Church: Luther and Calvin in the Thought of Karl Barth." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 72, no. 4 (2019): 414-431.

³³ Spater, Jeremy, and Isak Tranvik. "The Protestant Ethic Reexamined: Calvinism and Industrialization." *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 13-14 (2019): 1963-1994.



greatly influenced by Calvinistic theology.³⁴ Prominent authors, including Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Goodwin, and John Owen's writings, show how Calvinistic ideas continued to influence theological discourse.

Denominational Formations

Several denominations emerged under the Reformed tradition. The Presbyterian tradition took Calvinistic theology and became incredibly dominant in Scotland and the United States.³⁵ Calvin's ecclesiological ideas were reflected in the Presbyterian polity, which focused on eldership and representative administration.

The Synod of Dort (1618–1619) in the Netherlands resolved theological disputes and established Reformed beliefs, which included a strong support of the Calvinistic theory of predestination.³⁶ The synod's Canons of Dort offered a doctrinal foundation that impacted later Reformed groups. Calvin's doctrines significantly influenced the Huguenots in France, who were instrumental in the growth of Reformed Christianity there.³⁷ The persecution did not change the Huguenots' distinctive Reformed identity, which added to the rich fabric of global Calvinism.

Global Expansion

Calvinism spread beyond its European roots to become ingrained in various cultural contexts.³⁸ Reformed theology was applied worldwide through missionary work and the global expansion of European colonial powers. For instance, Calvinistic philosophy guided Puritan settlers in North America and the subsequent growth of Reformed denominations. The theological underpinnings of numerous Protestant churches, including Congregationalists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, were greatly influenced by the Calvinistic legacy, which further added to the doctrinal diversity of American Christianity.

³⁴ Bem, Kazimierz. *Calvinism in the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth 1548–1648: The Churches and the Faithful*. Brill, 2020.

³⁵ Wilson, Anne V. "Clouded Motives and Pharmacological Calvinism: How Recreational Use of a Drug Affects Moral Judgments of Its Medical Use." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 41, no. 4 (2022): 304–318.

³⁶ Finnegan, Diarmid A. "Science, metaphysics and Calvinism: the God of James Croll." *Earth and Environmental Science Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* 112, no. 3–4 (2021): 221–229.

³⁷ Flipse, Abraham C. "Shared Principles, Diverging Paths: Neo-Calvinism, neo-Thomism and the Natural Sciences, 1880–1960." In *Neo-Calvinism and Roman Catholicism*, pp. 67–92. Brill, 2023.

³⁸ Nuban Timo, Ebenhaizer I., Agus Santoso, and Bobby Kurnia Putrawan. "Protestant Church of Maluku Ecclesiology: From Calvinism to Fuse to Become Pancasilaism." *Toronto Journal of Theology* 37, no. 2 (2021): 188–197.



Calvinistic theology helped to shape the Dutch Reformed Church, which rose to prominence as a religious organization in South Africa. Calvinism's influence can also be seen in other regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where Reformed customs were established and thrived.

Theological Adaptations and Challenges

Although Calvin remained influential, later theologians engaged with and occasionally questioned certain aspects of Calvinistic thinking. Calvin's theology of predestination was called into question theologically by Arminius and the emergence of Arminianism in the early 17th century.³⁹ Following discussions, the Five Points of Calvinism were developed in reaction to Arminian viewpoints, most notably at the Synod of Dort.

The variety of Presbyterian and Reformed denominations today reflects the persistence of Calvinistic theology and the flexibility of Reformed ideas in various theological and cultural situations.⁴⁰ While some Reformed Christian denominations have adopted more diverse theologies, others continue to take a more confessional and Calvinistic approach. In summary, Calvin has had a significant and diverse impact on later theologians and denominational advancements. His theories were carried forth in the writings of theologians who came after him and significantly contributed to developing several denominational traditions worldwide. The enduring influence of Calvinistic ideas in various cultural settings is proof of the flexibility and durability of his theological legacy based on the Scriptures.

IV. Criticisms of Calvin's Theological Method

Though profound and robust, John Calvin's theological approach has not been without a challenge. These criticisms frequently centre on particular theological stances and more general facets of Calvin's philosophy. Analyzing these objections sheds light on the difficulties Calvin's theology faces.

- 1) **Predestination and Determinism:** The idea of predestination, which holds that God has unquestionably selected certain people for salvation and others for damnation

³⁹ Bruening, Michael W. *Refusing to Kiss the Slipper: Opposition to Calvinism in the Francophone Reformation*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2021.

⁴⁰ Intan, Benjamin Fleming. "Calvin and Neo-Calvinism on Public Theology." In *Calvin's and Neo-Calvinist Legal Theory in Indonesian Context*, pp. 3-20. Brill Schöningh, 2023.



from eternity, is one of the most divisive parts of Calvin's theology. Critics contend that this deterministic interpretation of God's sovereign election compromises human free choice and moral responsibility.⁴¹ There have been accusations of divine arbitrariness and a lack of proper human agency due to the apparent harshness of predestination.

- 2) **Limited Atonement:** Calvin's limited atonement theory, which holds that Christ's atonement is only efficacious for the elect, has drawn criticism for what some see as a bit of understanding of God's redeeming activity.⁴² Limiting the extent of Christ's atonement, according to critics, calls into doubt God's omnipotent love and his gift of redemption to all people.
- 3) **Authoritarian Ecclesiology:** Calvin's ecclesiology has drawn criticism for having the ability to encourage authoritarianism. It has a strong emphasis on church discipline and the authority of elders.⁴³ Some contend the church's hierarchical structure could impede personal freedom and encourage power abuses.
- 4) **Theological Determinism and Human Freedom:** About the predestination debate, some argue that Calvin's theological determinism erodes individual freedoms and casts doubt on moral obligations.⁴⁴ Whether or not people can be held accountable for their actions is called into doubt by the notion that God is the author of everything, including human decisions.
- 5) **Harsh Theological Stance:** Calvin's theological writings have come under fire for what is seen to be a harsh tone, particularly his controversial efforts against theological opponents.⁴⁵ Some contend that Calvin's unyielding attitude toward dissidents, like Servetus, demonstrates an intolerance incompatible with the unity and charity that characterize Christianity.

⁴¹ Macabasco, Jesse Paulo Valencia. "Calvin's Institutes And The Problem Of Evil." (2020).

⁴² Chan, Suk Yu. *Heavenly Providence: A Historical Exploration of the Development of Calvin's Biblical Doctrine of Divine Providence*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022.

⁴³ Antombikums, Aku Stephen. "Is Divine Providence Risky? A Dialogue Between John Calvin and John Sanders." *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 33, no. 1 (2022): 58-73.

⁴⁴ Sanchez, Michelle Chaplin. "Calvin, Difficult Arguments, and Affective Responses: Providence as a Case Study in Method." *The Journal of Religion* 99, no. 4 (2019): 467-491.

⁴⁵ Holmes, Christopher RJ. "What Does Calvin's Engagement with Acts Teach Us about God's Providence?." *Journal of Reformed Theology* 15, no. 3 (2021): 208-224.



Responses for Calvin's Theological Positions

1. Divine Sovereignty and Human Accountability

Calvinists highlight the harmony between divine sovereignty and human accountability in response to predestination critics. They contend that Calvin's theology emphasizes God's all-encompassing plan, which incorporates human decisions rather than undermining human agency.⁴⁶ Calvin humbly addressed these fundamental theological realities, acknowledging the mystery surrounding human free will and divine power.

2. God's Universal Offer of Grace and Limited Atonement: Proponents of limited atonement argue that Calvin's perspective emphasizes the effectiveness and purpose of Christ's atoning work for the chosen. They contend that limited atonement emphasizes the unique redemptive purpose for individuals whom God has selected rather than lessening the universality of God's offer of grace.⁴⁷ Calvinists do not frame limited atonement as a limitation on divine love; instead, they emphasize the fullness and profundity of God's love for the elect.

3. Ecclesial Authority and Spiritual Oversight: Calvin is credited with defending the biblical paradigm of ecclesial authority and discipline to preserve moral integrity and doctrinal purity within the church.⁴⁸ Advocates contend that when administered with humility and love, eldership and church discipline improve the community's spiritual well-being. They argue that Calvin's ecclesiology is intended to shield the church against moral slackness and doctrinal departure.

4. Theological Determinism and Human Responsibility: Calvinists argue that although God is sovereign, true human responsibility is not eliminated in response to criticisms of theological determinism.⁴⁹ They contend that human choices are a part of the ordered process by which God brings about events and controls how those events transpire. Calvinists maintain that God's sovereignty and human responsibility are complementary elements of the divine-human relationship rather than mutually exclusive.

⁴⁶ Potgieter, Pieter C. "John Calvin on Social Challenges." *Acta Theologica* 39 (2019): 72-87.

⁴⁷ Earnshaw, Rebekah. *Creator and Creation according to Calvin on Genesis*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020.

⁴⁸ Hartog, Paul A. *Calvin on the Death of Christ*. BoD—Books on Demand, 2023.

⁴⁹ Santoso, Audy. *Union with God: An Assessment of Deification (theosis) in the Theologies of Robert Jenson and John Calvin*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021.



5. Setting Calvin's Polemics in Context: Calvin's supporters recognize that parts of his writings are controversial, but they also highlight the historical setting and theological discussions of the day.⁵⁰ Like many other Reformation-era theologians, they contend that Calvin participated in heated arguments to defend and elucidate critical doctrinal points. Despite acknowledging the forceful language, supporters argue that Calvin intended to preserve traditional Christian teaching and against heresy that he believed threatened the nascent Protestant movement.

Handling Reactions and Rebuttals

Understanding the intricacy of the theological questions is necessary to navigate both justifications and objections against Calvin's theological method. It is critical to understand that Calvin's theology is subject to criticism just like any other theological system.⁵¹ Defenders counter that some critiques are lessened by a sophisticated knowledge of Calvin's views based on a careful reading of his writings and an awareness of the theological and historical background.

Furthermore, appreciating Calvin's pastoral component is necessary to engage with his theology fully. Calvin was a systematic theologian and a pastor who cared passionately for his followers' spiritual health. Within the framework of the newly formed Reformed communities, the practical applications of his theology focused primarily on encouraging a robust Christian life and a faithful expression of the Christian faith.⁵² Considering the difficulties and controversies of his day, it is essential to approach Calvin's theology in modern conversations with historical and theological empathy. Critics draw attention to possible theological conflicts, but supporters contend that reading Calvin's comments in light of his theological framework offers a more compassionate and nuanced viewpoint. In the end, debates concerning Calvin's theological approach necessitate a close examination of the subtleties in his writings and an appreciation of the continuous discourse within the larger

⁵⁰ Asomaning Marfo, Clifford. "John Calvin's Understanding of the Lord's Supper: A Histro-analytical Study." PhD diss., Adventist University of Africa, Theological Seminary, 2021.

⁵¹ Visk, Matthew David. "A Taxonomy of Contemporary Versions of Penal Substitutionary Atonement." PhD diss., Middlesex University/London School of Theology, 2020.

⁵² Riccardi, Michael. *To Save Sinners: A Critical Evaluation of the Multiple Intentions View of the Atonement*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2023.



Christian tradition.⁵³ Taking up the criticisms and rebuttals provides a chance to explore the intricacies of theological conversation and advances our knowledge of Calvin's lasting influence on Reformed Christianity.

V. Contemporary Relevance of Calvinism

A. Calvinism in the Contemporary World

The theological movement known as Calvinism, which is based on the ideas of John Calvin, is still solid and essential in modern Christianity. Although theological views have changed, Calvinism has had a lasting influence on its historical foundations and current iterations.

1. **Global Presence:** Reformed and Calvinist churches can be found on almost every continent, demonstrating the global reach of Calvinism.⁵⁴ In Europe, the Reformed tradition is still widely practised in nations including Scotland, the Netherlands, and portions of Switzerland. Puritan Calvinism has also shaped England's religious history.

The Calvinist movement has grown in North America, especially in the US and Canada. Presbyterians and Reformed Baptists are two of several Reformed denominations that enrich American Christianity.⁵⁵ Calvinistic doctrine has resonated in South Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and Reformed churches have become established and influential.

2. **Doctrinal Identity:** Many Reformed churches are still shaped by the theological characteristics of Calvinism, which are commonly summed up by the acronym TULIP (Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints).⁵⁶ These ideas offer a thorough framework for comprehending redemption, divine sovereignty, and the essence of humanity. They were developed in reaction to theological disputes of the 16th and 17th centuries. Calvinistic theology has endured, as seen by the tenacity of confessions and creeds like the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Canons of Dort. These texts serve as contemporary declarations of faith that direct the activities and beliefs of Reformed communities in addition to being historical documents.

⁵³ Billings, Todd. "John Calvin." *Christian Theologies of Salvation: A Comparative Introduction* (2020): 208-224.

⁵⁴ Avis, Paul. "John Calvin–Ecclesiologist." *Ecclesiology* 19, no. 1 (2023): 3-6.

⁵⁵ Doornbos, Gayle E. "Clear Eyes, Full Hearts: A Review of Calvinism for a Secular Age." (2022).

⁵⁶ Jones, Andrew M. "Kevin DeYoung, The Religious Formation of John Witherspoon: Calvinism, Evangelicalism, and the Scottish Enlightenment." (2021): 68-70.



3. Cultural Impact: Calvinism profoundly affects society outside of churches and in places of higher learning. Communities have been shaped by the emphasis placed on duty, hard effort, and a worldview shaped by a Calvinistic notion of vocation.⁵⁷ In his well-known theory on the Protestant work ethic, Max Weber emphasizes the connection between Calvinism and capitalism's rise and the impact these ideals had in promoting economic productivity.

4. Academic Institutions: Many esteemed academic establishments, both past and present, possess Calvinistic origins or connections. Calvinist ideas are frequently cited as the foundation for the dedication to academic rigour and a comprehensive view of education.⁵⁸ Calvinism's commitment to integrating faith and learning into educational institutions is seen in its influence, which cultivates a worldview that unites the holy and the secular.

5. Social Justice and Ethics: Calvinism has not only engaged with doctrinal formulations within contemporary Christianity but has also delved into social justice issues. Social responsibility and moral behaviour are valued in many Calvinist traditions. The Reformed perspective, which emphasizes God's sovereignty and Christ's dominion over all spheres of existence, has spurred discussion on human rights, justice, and poverty.⁵⁹ Diverse Calvinistic traditions emphasize social justice; some emphasize the significance of personal accountability, while others push for systemic change. However, the theological groundwork established by Calvinism has prompted careful consideration of the moral implications of Christianity in the contemporary world.

In conclusion, the global reach, doctrinal formulations, cultural influence, influence on education, and involvement in social issues all demonstrate the importance of Calvinism in the modern era. Calvinistic theology has left a lasting legacy that influences people worldwide and shapes Reformed groups' contributions, practices, and beliefs in the contemporary age.

⁵⁷ Allen, Michael. "Calvinism: A Very Short Introduction, by Jon Balserak." *Journal of Reformed Theology* 13, no. 2 (2019): 169-170.

⁵⁸ Maghenzani, Simone. "Global Calvinism and Protestant Empires." *Storica* 29, no. 85 (2023).

⁵⁹ Ong, Andrew David. "Toward a Chinese American evangelical theology: the promise of neo-Calvinism." (2020).



B. The Persistent Impact of Calvin's Theological Approach

1. **Exegesis and Biblical Authority:** Calvin's assiduous exegetical process and his unwavering adherence to the authority of Scripture remain relevant in contemporary Christian thought. The emphasis has impacted reformed traditions and more comprehensive evangelical hermeneutics on meticulous interpretation, historical context, and the application of reason to biblical texts.⁶⁰ Calvin's expository method continues to impact modern Christian study, as seen by the significance of reading the biblical text in its original languages and historical context. Calvin's insistence on the priority of Scripture is mainly responsible for accepting the Bible as the infallible Word of God, essential to Christian belief and practice.

2. **Systematic Theology and Doctrinal Clarity:** Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, an example of his systematic approach to theology, continues to influence how Christians comprehend and express their religion. Systematic theology has been defined by how theological concepts are arranged, how theories are coherent, and how important ideas are explained in detail.⁶¹ Modern theologians use Calvin's systematic theological approach, including those who do not follow the Reformed tradition. A cross-denominational Calvinistic legacy permeates theological discourse, as evidenced by the quest for coherence and clarity in theological formulations and an understanding of the interdependence of concepts.

3. **Theological Framework and Doctrinal Accuracy:** Calvin's theological framework, distinguished by his devotion to doctrinal accuracy and meticulous attention to detail, has a lasting influence on contemporary Christian theology. Calvin's lucid handling of theological matters has established a benchmark for theological contemplation.⁶² Calvin's influence inspires Christians to precisely state their convictions and participate in meaningful theological discourse in a time of religious variety and dispute. With their emphasis on comprehending the ramifications of doctrinal stances, Calvin's writings continue contributing to discussions of theology in the modern era.

⁶¹ Tel, Martin. "North American Metrical Psalters." *Hymns and Hymnody: Historical and Theological Introductions, Volume 3* (2020): 190.

⁶² Billings, Todd. "John Calvin,." *Christian Theologies of Salvation: A Comparative Introduction* (2020): 208-224.



4. Engagement with the Philosophical and Cultural Context: Calvin's theological approach included interacting with his day's philosophical and cultural milieu. In the same Spirit, modern Christian theologians address the issues and problems brought forth by their day's intellectual and artistic currents. Calvin offers a paradigm for careful and pertinent theological thinking because of his strategy of interacting with culture while staying firmly grounded in biblical truth.⁶³ Calvin's theological method is still relevant today, as seen by the efforts of theologians to handle postmodernity, pluralism, and secularism. A Calvinistic dedication to interacting with the world without sacrificing the core tenets of the Christian faith is seen in the fusion of biblical wisdom with knowledge of the current cultural milieu.

5. Pastoral Emphasis and Ethical Application: Calvin's theological approach was pastoral, seeking to support Christians' spiritual life rather than just being academic. Theological scholars and pastors are being prompted to think about the practical applications of theological doctrines for the lives of believers and the church due to this pastoral emphasis that still permeates contemporary Christian thought.⁶⁴ Calvin's method is popular among modern Christian leaders who want to apply theological principles to real-world problems. Christians attempting to make sense of the complex modern world find resonance in the ethical implications of Calvinistic theology, which is based on a dedication to holiness and ethical conduct. Hence, Calvin's theological methodology continues to influence contemporary Christian thought. Its exegesis-based methodology distinguishes it and its dedication to systematic theology, doctrinal accuracy, engagement with cultural context, and pastoral orientation.

VI. Conclusion

The paper examined John Calvin's theological legacy, including his life, contributions, and long-lasting influence beyond Reformed Christianity. It emphasized how vital Scripture was to his theology, how much he valued explanation, and how much his beliefs about predestination, divine sovereignty, and the infallibility of Scripture influenced his views. It also examined Calvin's impact on Reformed Christianity, including how his ideas spread, how Reformed confessions and creeds evolved, and how his ideas affected later theologians

⁶³ Snyder, Andrew. "John Calvin and the Holy Spirit." *The Holy Spirit and the Reformation Legacy* (2020): 129.

⁶⁴ McCray, Alden C. "Defending 'Avertive' Religion: Calvin on the 'Visio Dei' and Moral Theology." *The Reformed Theological Review* 82, no. 1 (2023): 25-47.



and denominations. This investigation demonstrated Calvinism's worldwide influence, theological distinctions, cultural impact, and ongoing significance in various circumstances. The paper also addressed criticisms of Calvin's theological approach, including issues with ecclesiastical authority, limited atonement, predestination, and the apparent harshness of his theological position. The paper offered arguments in response to these criticisms, emphasizing the harmony between divine sovereignty and human accountability, the interpretation of limited atonement, the pastoral goal of episcopal power, and the contextualization of Calvin's polemics. Finally, the paper focused on the global reach of Calvinism, its theological distinctiveness, cultural influence, impact on education, and involvement in social justice problems. It examined how Calvin's theological approach continues to affect contemporary Christian thought, focusing on exegesis, systematic theology, interaction with cultural context, and pastoral orientation.

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