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## The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin (Book Review)

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**The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin**

Donald K. McKim, editor

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xvii + 352 p.

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This new volume on the well-known Protestant reformer John Calvin has a clear focus: it is an introduction for serious students with little or no background in Calvin studies. In only four years celebrations of his 500th anniversary will begin, and the study of his works and influence has continued to draw interest. Indeed, this is a very comprehensive presentation of many aspects of Calvin studies, and there are both general chapters as well as quite in-depth studies of specific areas of Calvin's theology. Donald McKim's long editorial experience has given this volume balance and good scholarship. Divided into several major sections, including Calvin's Life & Context, Calvin's Work, After Calvin, and Calvin Today, a group of nineteen scholars represent many aspects of Calvin studies.

John Calvin is, without question, one of the most important contributors of Protestant theology. Andrew Pettegree on the spread of Calvin's thought and R. Ward Holder on Calvin's heritage demonstrate his great influence on a host of denominations, well beyond Reformed and Presbyterian circles. David Wright summarizes Calvin's greatest contributions as "a massive body of biblical theology, and a firmly ordered pattern of church polity" (286). However important Calvin's work was, it is misleading to see him in isolation from a larger group of reformers, each contributing different elements to a renewed Christianity. Carl R. Trueman reminds the reader that current scholarship finds the category of "Reformed" far more helpful in defining the movement centring around Calvin, rather than the older designation of Calvinism. While some chapters in this volume are very specific to particular doctrines, the interest of this reviewer is to select some areas of wider concern about the place of Calvin in the 21st century, especially in ecumenical dialogues, and to show that some of the older popularizations of Calvin need to be refined. With less and less interest in doctrines and theology, theologians have attempted to contextualize the older classics for today. A good example is the recent book by Richard J. Mouw, *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport: Making Connections in Today's World* (Zondervan, 2004).

It may come as a surprise that Calvin viewed the Pope as *primus inter pares* (first among equals), if and when the church was truly reformed (Ganoczy, 13). Calvin's primary goal was to reform the church, not leave it. The self-designation "reformed" was meant to show his intent, but he soon realized that the social forces unleashed in the 16th century would make it impossible to seek unity within polemical dialogues and battles. Calvin must be seen in the context of a humanist-scholarly environment and an emerging world of independent, merchant communities that created a world much different than the middle ages. While opponents of Calvin's work in Geneva have often characterized this free city as a theocracy, several authors show that he had long battles with other prominent Genevois, he never received full citizenship until the end of his life, and his view of civil order was "dramatically distinct from that of the church" (Stevenson, 175). In order to reform the church, Calvin's central role was as a biblical scholar. Using the new humanist method *ad fontes*, the *Institutes* demonstrate that he not only relied on the study of the biblical texts in their original languages, but he carefully read the church fathers, medieval theologians, and contemporary scholars, with an aim to communicate to his audience with a "lucid brevity" (Thompson,

60). *Sola scriptura* for Calvin should not be understood as a rationalist biblicism of the text alone. The goal of understanding God and ourselves for Calvin was knowledge of the Word of God. "The Word comes to believers, Calvin argues, primarily through preaching, but also through the evangelical sacraments, which function as 'appendages' to the Word. In both preached Word and sacraments, the Holy Spirit works through outward means to create faith, to justify, and to sanctify those who receive the means of grace" (DeVries, 108). The result of his theology is a piety that was fostered in obedience to the Word of God; this is reflected in his goal *solī Deo gloria*, and in his response to God's Word, 'I offer thee my heart, Lord, promptly and sincerely.' In turn "piety is rooted in the believer's mystical union (*unio mystica*) with Christ" (Beeke, 128), and this belief carries through to the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper/Eucharist. B.A. Gerrish states that genuine theology, in contrast to the "sophistry" of the late medieval schoolmen, is eminently practical: its aim is piety or, as Bucer said, 'a godlike life'" (300). In addition, Calvin understood that theology must develop, and the later work of Schleiermacher and Barth demonstrates the path of Calvin's initial work. Finally, Jane Dempsey Douglass offers some thoughtful reflections on Calvin's foundations for ecumenism. During his life time Calvin lived among immigrant communities in "multinational and multicultural Geneva" where he lived as the prophets of old in a "biblical vision of the reign of God as a reign of love, peace, and justice" (309, 311). Today the World Alliance of Reformed Churches hosts some 218 member churches in 107 countries, and they have entered into fruitful dialogue with other Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church (Princeton University, 1996).

*John B. Roney*

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### **The Deities Are Many: A Polytheistic Theology**

Jordan Paper

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. xiv + 155 p.

Jordan Paper is Professor Emeritus of Humanities (Religious Studies, East Asian Studies) at York University. In this book, his goal is to make fellow Westerners realize that "polytheism fits the human mind and experience so comfortably that there is no need for confessional theology per se in polytheistic traditions, especially before they were relatively recently challenged by the Christian West. Of course, there have been many thousands of polytheistic cultures, so it is possible that polytheistic theologies have long been around, and we are simply unaware of them. Or perhaps it requires someone coming from a monotheistic background, interested in comparatively analyzing religion, and slowly imbued with polytheistic understandings and practices, to conceive of doing such a theology" (4). The author (= A.) suggests that all these conditions are met by him perfectly, so that he "may be one of the very few scholars who can write a general rather than culturally specific confessional polytheistic theology" (xi). For him, "there is no need of it [theology] in polytheistic cultures, but there is a great misunderstanding of these cultures in monotheistic ones" (4); such a "misunderstanding" is referred to very often in the book (e.g. 2, 39, 44, 45, 49, 52, 56, 57, 64, 66, 74, 75, 86, 90, 101, 104, 107, 111, 112, 118, 123, 125, 128, 130, 131, 139).

Dadosky performs many operations of this sort, and with more precision and expertise than can be illustrated in this brief review. When he does focus on the contribution that Eliade can make to Lonergan studies, he points out that Lonergan's philosophy of God does not draw adequately upon a consideration of religious experience. This point, admittedly a serious one, functions more as a concluding irony than as a fully developed dimension of the study.

Dadosky draws upon a good range of primary and secondary sources for each author. I was surprised, however, to find no mention of Vernon Gregson's *Lonergan, Spirituality, and the Meeting of Religions*.

Eliade, because of the way his brilliant insights transcend systematization, might have balked at Dadosky's attempts to corral him. Those unfamiliar with Lonergan should find this to be a good introduction. The book successfully demonstrates the power of Lonergan's thought to analyze, explain and arrange various worlds of experience and thought related to the extraordinarily complex realm of religious experience.

Dadosky, reaching up to the mind of Lonergan, offers some important insights on the respective roles of religious studies and theology in addressing the convergence of world religions, a question of great significance for our times.

*Dennis M. Doyle*

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### **Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards**

William Dyrness

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. vii + 339 p.

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While contemporary art lovers shudder at the thought of Europe's most wonderful stained-glass windows or statues being smashed by unforgiving 16th-century peasants, William Dyrness has attempted to search for the *raison d'être* behind these apparently anti-aesthetic acts. Iconoclasm has been a problem in the Christian tradition since its inception, however, beginning with the Jewish fear of idolatry and the early church's controversy over the use of icons. But, like anticlericalism, there are deep religious motives that search for a new freedom of expression once it appears that other paths have become restricted by the official institution. Dyrness offers a fresh approach to this long-debated subject through the use of recent theoretical evaluations in art history, theology and the social sciences. With a clear and well-documented style, this book should be of interest to scholars and students alike.

Dyrness has reconceptualized the iconoclastic phenomenon by probing into the human imagination and showing how it leads to a visual, aesthetic expression. The reformers could agree with their medieval predecessors that any direct appropriation of God was impossible and therefore external images have a place in making the divine present to the limited human capacity. The great difference, however, centres in the direction of this labyrinth pathway. If the medieval perspective had privileged the visual over the aural, then the reformers attempted to reverse the process. They feared that without a guardian framework of biblical revelation the image may fall into idolatry; pure imagination may lead to fancy. Rather, through the Word of God

revealed in scripture, an inner appropriation of truth gave a framework to external vision. But, Dyrness argues, it was not a simple reversal of aural over visual. Indeed, the medieval *lectio* suggested that reading be both aural and internally meditative. And the reformers, beginning with the word, relied on the illumination of the spirit to visualize first internally an image of God; this, in turn, encouraged the limited development of external visual images. An active participation in Psalm singing, for example, a tradition which was actively carried on by the reformers, seemed to incorporate the Word, aural repetition, and the meditative reflection as well. With an internal appropriation of God's revelation, the external imaging could be best visualized in several ways.

Martin Bucer articulated his belief in God's activity as "the goodness of God [that] shineth in all his creatures" (92), and because of this the portrait took on an increased importance. Rather than the depiction of saints or angelic beings, images of ordinary people, one's neighbor, were meant to show the *imago dei* as manifest here on earth. Paintings of architecture also demonstrate human creativity, reflecting the divine impulse; ordinary houses, marketplaces, harbours and churches inhabited by ordinary people at work or play or worship became a way to demonstrate God on earth. Dyrness points out: "For followers of Calvin it is not in the contemplation of an image, nor in an Ignatian meditation on the events of Christ's life, that spiritual nurture and godliness are to be found. These spiritual benefits are sought as believers live out—reenact—this life-giving cross in their everyday life" (83). This cultivation of creation demonstrated the work of God's redemptive plan carried out by human hands. Paintings depicting a "delectable garden," a pastoral scene, or civic society pictured God's order on earth. Dyrness summarizes the use of visual expression in this way: "Art here serves religion, but not at all in the medieval sense. It now serves what is to these architects the higher calling of religion, that program of making right a distorted created order. Walking in a "delectable garden," strolling in a well-ordered space, one does not necessarily think of God. But these are spaces that can, to these builders, 'picture' God nevertheless" (112).

In the later chapters Dyrness demonstrates how the Reformed imagination found expression in the new world among the Puritans. If iconoclasm characterized the Reformation, the limited use of visual images with plainness and economy characterized New England Puritan art. Despite their lack of public paintings they valued portraiture, and the Puritans envisioned their entire settlement as a visual demonstration of God's order in a Christian commonwealth, and in their minds a resurrection of the biblical paradigm. This was a direct expression of God's activity on earth. If anything, Puritan society, Dyrness reminds the reader, was a sermon culture and the preaching of God's word allowed a lively imagination to flourish, if one could pay attention to the many hours of preaching. One result of this aural culture was the new hymnody and poetry that set itself free from the "elaborate metaphoric strictures" that traditionally accompanied it. Dyrness uses the example of the verse by George Herbert: "Is it no verse, except enchanted groves / And sudden arbours shadow coarse-spunne lines? / ... / [rather] Shepherds are honest people / let them sing; / ... / Who plainly say, 'My God, my King'" (133). The great Puritan divine William Ames addressed the place of visual images: "while Christ was still to appear, all things were more outward and carnal, afterwards more inward and spiritual" (159). Therefore, the Reformed visual culture was based on the concept of a new covenant, and with the aid of the Spirit of God the Christian would not need external aids to believe, but

through a quickened imagination or rational reflection would eventually give some visual expression to an internal reality.

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### **Dialogues avec un musulman**

Pierre Grelot

Parole présente

Paris, Cerf, 2004. 218 p.

Pierre Grelot, professeur d'Écriture sainte, qui enseigne à l'Institut catholique de Paris, entame ici un dialogue avec un jeune étudiant musulman marocain. D'emblée on constate le très grand déséquilibre de ce dialogue. Il s'agit, en effet, d'un entretien entre un père catholique, qui détient un doctorat et une connaissance approfondie de sa foi, et un jeune étudiant musulman, qui a une connaissance élémentaire et pratique de sa religion. C'est donc un livre dans lequel on trouve davantage le point de vue chrétien que le point de vue de l'islam.

D'après le Qur'ân, les gens n'ont ni tué, ni crucifié Jésus, mais ce dernier a été élevé vers Dieu. Grelot à ce propos explique « que le Qur'ân fait écho, en cet endroit, à une légende qui a couru, au II<sup>e</sup> siècle, chez des hérétiques qui voyaient dans le corps de Jésus une simple apparence. Je puis te citer ici des textes de cette époque. Un évêque d'Antioche, Ignace, écrivait aux chrétiens de la ville de Smyrne pour les combattre : "C'est réellement que le Christ a souffert, comme c'est réellement qu'il s'est ressuscité lui-même, et sa passion n'a pas été une simple apparence, comme le prétendent certains incrédules [ ... ]" (*Lettre aux Smyrniotes*, II). Je pourrais citer d'autres textes venus du II<sup>e</sup> siècle. Il est dommage que le Qur'ân fasse écho à cette tradition inexacte » (22). Dans notre monde moderne actuel, il est inacceptable de cataloguer certains groupes minoritaires comme étant « hérétiques ». Un musulman qui croit à l'authenticité absolue du Qur'ân interprétera, justement, que son Livre sacré corrobore la vérité véhiculée par ce groupe minoritaire.

Les deux commandements des Évangiles « d'aimer Dieu de tout son cœur » et « d'aimer son prochain comme soi-même » n'entrent pas en contradiction avec les principes de la foi musulmane. Le Qur'ân n'a pas été révélé pour répéter uniquement tout le contenu des révélations antérieures (Torah, Évangiles), comme les Évangiles ne sont pas des répétitions de l'Ancien Testament. Les enseignements de la Torah et des Évangiles qui ne contredisent pas la vérité qur'ânique doivent, en principe, être acceptés par les musulmans. Le Qur'ân distingue entre deux niveaux de foi : le niveau spirituel du simple musulman (*muslim*) qui se soumet à la volonté divine et celui du croyant (*mu'min*) qui a la foi. Ce dernier a implicitement développé une relation personnelle d'amour avec Dieu. C'est pourquoi la notion d'amour est centrale chez les shî'ites et les sûfis. Si Allâh est le Clément et le Miséricordieux, c'est aussi parce qu'Il est Amour (68).

Le Qur'ân confirme que Jésus est le Verbe d'Allâh (*Kalimat Allâh*), mais les chrétiens considèrent que Jésus est aussi une manifestation divine (69). Cette dernière idée rejoint un concept développé chez les shî'ites, pour qui l'Imâm (Guide spirituel), Successeur du Prophète Muhammad, est le lieu d'apparition d'Allâh (*mazhar-i Allâh*).

de volonté et d'inclinaison au néant; le Décret du concile de Trente sur le péché originel, qui développe la doctrine en termes de justice, de mort, de servitude et de concupiscence. Quant au souci particulièrement développé de définir le mode de transmission du péché originel non pas en termes moraux, d'imitation, mais anthropologiques de génération et de propagation, l'auteur y voit une formulation qui concerne l'inscription de l'origine en chaque sujet humain. Il passe ensuite à l'examen des deux textes bibliques fondateurs. Du récit de Gn 2-3 se dégage une «règle de soustraction», instituant dans le sujet un écart entre «la fascination de la plénitude» impossible et l'accueil d'une parole comme marque d'altérité qui ouvre à l'existence. Dans Rm 5, 12-21, Panier voit la mort de Jésus-Christ comme «s'adossant» (p. 130) à la «loi» fondamentale que le péché tente précisément de contourner: la venue au monde d'un sujet singulier implique le don d'une grâce venue d'un signifiant que ce sujet ne peut jamais posséder, comme le marque sa condition mortelle.

Force est de reconnaître dans le résultat une lecture originale et rigoureuse. La contribution propre de l'ouvrage doit cependant être bien comprise: il s'agit de considérer les textes dans leurs structures d'ensemble plutôt qu'en chacune des notions ou figures narratives qui s'y rencontrent. Dans cette perspective, cet essai rigoureux et porteur d'une perspective originale mérite une place significative dans les essais contemporains d'histoire des doctrines et d'anthropologie théologique.

*Jean-François Roussel*

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**The Essential Carlstadt: Fifteen Tracts by Andreas Bodenstein (Carlstadt) from Karlstadt**

Edward J. Furcha, translator and editor  
Classics of the Radical Reformation, 8  
Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1995. 449 p.

E. J. Furcha (late Professor of Church History at McGill University) has done an admirable job of translating and editing 15 selected tracts from the early 16th-century reformer Andreas Bodenstein from Karlstadt, commonly known as Carlstadt. Furcha has captured the essence of Carlstadt's theology, his struggle to find support and protection and his fervent spirit of reform. Furcha's translations have also preserved the earthy language of the 16th century, reminiscent of Luther's *Table Talks*.

Carlstadt has been placed with the "radical reformers" (Anabaptists), a category that George H. Williams made popular. Yet Carlstadt had some affinity with the magisterial reformers, and he is often included on the fringes of the larger "Reformed" movement and, as Calvin Pater has demonstrated, his theology makes him the "father" of the Baptists. Many of these tracts show both similar roots of other reformers—from Augustine to Renaissance humanism—and great disagreements about the application of religion to the current political struggles of the 16th century.

Carlstadt eventually had problems with Luther, although he had started out as Luther's Dean of Theology at the University of Wittenberg. Early in Luther's first struggles he and Carlstadt had stood side by side defending their new interpretations, such as during the famous Leipzig debates. Then Carlstadt and others pushed the reform too far for Luther. Tract Four demonstrates his call for iconoclasm which angered Luther. Many of these tracts are addressed to Carlstadt's many protectors, some well-known, like Albrecht Dürer, most of them obscure and without any real power. When Carlstadt faced off with Luther on the question of the eucharist (Tracts 11, 13, 14) it was hard, therefore, to compete with Luther's better resources from powerful princes and publishing houses. Carlstadt could no longer accept the scholastic understandings of transubstantiation, yet he struggled with how the divine mysteries were present in material objects. He avoided a pure memorial approach, however: "I know, then, without wavering that consecrated bread is body of Christ—and as such Christ, as he said—i.e., the total and living Christ, and that consecrated wine is blood of Christ" (p. 45). Carlstadt's defence rests on his better knowledge of Scripture, and he even claimed that "I also understand Paul more thoroughly than Dr. Luther" (p. 344)—an implicit statement that Luther had not fully rejected scholastic notions and practices.

One of Carlstadt's greatest contributions, perhaps, is the unique blend in his work of contemporary humanism and mysticism with early Christian practice—in a way he was a Protestant desert father. Via the devotional literature of the day, such as the *Theologia Germanica* and the *imitatio Christi*, and older asceticism, he developed the key concept of *Gelassenheit*. This describes a position of "yieldedness" whereby one becomes a "detached person." Tract One (from 1520) and Tract Six (from 1523) are devoted to the explanation of how God becomes united to the human soul that has completely surrendered the ego (*Ichheit*). This is a life-long journey, Carlstadt reminds his reader, and the path of "renunciation" (*renunciare*) is "carrying the cross" daily: "Anyone who loves God aright seeks nothing other than God's honour in suffering and works, in sweetness and bitterness" (p. 37). What follows is a psychological understanding of the self, and all its deceptions, before one can understand God or Scripture. With the Protestant reformers in general he condemned the papacy for its dominant authority and clung to the free examination of Scripture, God's word. *Gelassenheit* has very practical manifestations in good works. Referring to Deut. 15 ("there ought to be no beggars among you") or Lev. 23 (allow gleaning), Carlstadt warned Christians to help anyone in need, and drew a distinction between the poor who will always be in the community yet can readily seek assistance from Christians and the beggar who is no one's responsibility. Carlstadt eventually went to Switzerland and found greater affinity with Anabaptists and Reformed, and from 1534 until his death in 1541 he worked at the University in Basel.

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