

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH ACCORDING TO CALVIN IN THE INSTITUTES 1539, 1543, AND 1559.

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Abstract

Pandangan Yohanes Calvin tentang keesaan gereja tertuang dalam karya utamanya yakni *Institutio*. Buku *Institutio* atau *Pengajaran Agama Kristen* terbit dalam empat edisi, masing-masing edisi 1536, 1539, 1543, dan 1559. Tulisan ini akan memusatkan perhatian khusus pada pandangan Calvin tentang keesaan gereja dalam ketiga edisi terakhir. Maksudnya adalah untuk melihat bagaimana Calvin, secara konsisten, mengembangkan eklesiologinya yang sudah dia letakkan dalam edisi pertama. Ternyata eklesiologinya mengalami perkembangan, perluasan dan pendalaman dari satu edisi ke edisi berikutnya. Pengembangan gagasan eklesiologinya yang menekankan keesaan gereja itu ditentukan oleh interaksinya dengan konteks yang menantang yakni gereja Katolik Roma dan gerakan Anabaptis radikal. Karena keesaan gereja begitu kuat ditekankannya, maka ia sangat anti perpecahan gereja (*schism*). Baginya perpecahan gereja adalah perbuatan setan. Karena itu setiap warga gereja bertanggung jawab memelihara kesatuan gereja.

Keywords: *Institutio*, ecclesiology, unity, gereja yang kelihatan, gereja yang tidak kelihatan.

Since *The Institutes* have had various alterations and expansion, it is interesting if we follow such improvements from one edition to the others. The intention of this is to see the way of thinking of the writer which developed from time to time and at the same time showed its interactions with Rome on the one hand and with the Anabaptist Radicals on the other hand. From several published editions, we will only use the Latin editions of 1536, 1539, 1543 and 1559. These four editions were selected taking into account that the above-mentioned expansion and enrichment were clearly apparent in these editions.¹ But because of Calvin's view on

1 In this case we followed the line put by Battles and Balke in their books. See especially F.L.

the unity of the church in the first edition (1536) have been written in the previous edition of this journal,² here I will only focus on the edition of 1539, 1543 and 1559.

1. The Unity of the Church in *the Institutes* 1539³

As already mentioned, Calvin tried to be consistent in his opinion and thought. Such consistency was always maintained from one edition to another. In his teaching on the church, we can always see such consistency. If there are new things and issues which we did not find in the previous edition, it did not mean a change of reflection or thought but simply appears as a clarification. This is in fact what we find in *The Institutes* 1539 edition. From the structural aspect, there were quite significant changes. If the first edition of *The Institutes* only consisted of six articles, then the second edition consisted of seventeen articles. From the aspect of content, most parts were expanded and divided into particular discussions, while several subjects were newly discussed, for example the Old and New Testaments and the relation of both, about predestination and providence and about Christian life. The subjects which were most expanded especially concerned the church, particularly the visible church and its office, about trinity, about baptism particularly infant baptism, about the covenant and its relation with predestination, about oath, sanctification and the millennium.⁴ Its feature as a catechism book was less evident in the 1539 edition. It has changed to become a biblical handbook in a new order of instruction.⁵

The appearance of new subjects and the expansion of particular subjects with the affirmation, as we have seen, were caused by intensive contacts between Calvin and the Anabaptists during his stay in Strasbourg. The discussion between them has opened his sight to enrich and expand the earlier thoughts which were in the 1536 edition of *The Institutes*.

Battles, *An Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980, 15.

- 2 See Agustinus M.L. Batlajery, "Keesaan Gereja Menurut Calvin dalam Institutio 1536," *Studia Philosophica et Theologica*, Vol.11, No. 1, Maret 2011, 128-143.
- 3 The version of the Institutes which is used here is *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J.T. McNeill, transl. F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: MCMLX). Since this Institutes already consisted of four books, so the quotations will be taken by referring to this book. It is further abbreviated with *Inst.I. II. III. IV*, followed by chapter, point and code. The codes are: 'b' for 1539 edition; 'c' for 1543 edition. This version of McNeill will also be used in the following explanations since 1543 edition, etc. have been summarized in this version.
- 4 W. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973, 97; cf. F.L. Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, 156.
- 5 W. Balke, *op.cit.*, 97.

Calvin's opinion about the church and its unity were explained in an article of faith, as in the first edition. The objective of his attacks was still the same; on the one hand directed to Rome with the concept of their *ecclesia deformata*, on the other hand directed to the Anabaptists who dreamt of an *ecclesia perfecta* and so tended to separate from the church.

To survey this edition, then, we will note several highlights where Calvin asserted the unity of the church:

- 1.1. While in the first edition, we find his opinion about the church is more as *the mystical body of Christ*, in the second edition he prominently discussed *the visible church*, i.e., the visible dimension of the church. It was the first time for Calvin to use the terminology *ecclesia visibilis*. According to him, the church had two dimensions: the invisible and visible dimensions. The invisible church must be manifested within the visible church. So the unity he has discussed would be applied to the visible church. It meant that the unity should be apparent on the visible church. The visible church should manifest the unity of the church. We can not interpret this as a clear shift in Calvin's ecclesiology. But this new stress on the visible church was caused by the danger of spiritualism of the Anabaptists. It is an addition and enrichment of his view.
- 1.2. The visible church was also called catholic and universal. This church consisted of God's elect, headed by Christ, were called not only to inherit the eternal life but also *to participate in one God and Christ*.⁶
- 1.3. Indeed, the church which was catholic and universal was the gathering of the elect who came from all kinds of nations and separate places. But they did agree on one true teaching and mutual bond by the same belief. It was the mutual truth and confidence which joined them. The unity of the church, as such, was established in the matter of mutual possessions and the agreement concerning one true teaching. In other words, the unity is in the fundamental belief. The following statement described it:

But that we may clearly grasp the sum of this matter, we must proceed by the following steps: the church universal is a multitude gathered from all nations; it is divided and dispersed in separate places, but agrees on the one truth of divine doctrine and is bound by the bond of the same religion. Under it are thus included individual churches, disposed in towns and villages according to human need, so that each rightly has the name and authority of the church. Individual men, who, by their profession of religion, are reckoned within such churches, even though they may actually be stranger to the church, still in a sense belong to it until they have been rejected by public judgment.⁷

⁶ *Inst.* IV. i. 2 (b).

⁷ *Inst.* IV. i. 9 (b).

- 1.4. In accordance with Cyprian, Calvin justified the opinion that only through the church, could salvation be achieved. There is no salvation outside the church, he borrowed Cyprian's words and applied them to the visible church. Calvin's intention by this quotation is that he wanted to emphasize that separation from the church actually meant to leave the salvation which was blessed by God. Therefore, it is necessary to unite our selves and remain in Church. So, by quoting Cyprian and applied it to the visible church, he would like to affirm the necessity to maintain the unity of the church. "Calvin heavily underscores the necessity of maintaining the unity of the church. He takes over Cyprian's adage 'there is no salvation outside the church' and applies this statement to the visible church" according to Balke.⁸
- 1.5. The intention as mentioned above was obvious in the description he used to describe the visible church which was the "mother of the believers". As mother who conceives, gives birth, raises and takes care, it was not decent to extricate our selves from her, since she is the one who gives salvation.

But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title "mother", how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Matt. 22:30). Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation, as Isaiah (Isa. 37: 37) and Joel (Joel 2: 32) testify.⁹

- 1.6. The affirmation of the importance of maintaining the unity of the church will be explained further with the following statements:

The basis on which we believe the church is that we are fully convinced we are members of it. In this way our salvation rests upon sure and firm supports, so that, even if the whole fabric of the world were overthrown, the church could neither totter nor fall. First, it stands by God's election, and cannot waver or fail any more than his eternal providence can. Secondly, it has in a way been joined to the steadfastness of Christ, who will no more allow his believers to be estranged from him than that his members be rent and torn asunder. Besides, we are certain that, while we remain within the bosom of the Church, the truth will always abide with us. Finally, we feel that these promises apply to us: "there will be salvation in Zion" (Joel 2:32; Obad. 17, cf. Vg.).¹⁰

⁸ W. Balke, *op.cit.*, 112.

⁹ *Inst.* IV. i. 4 (b).

¹⁰ *Inst.* IV. i. 3 (b).

By this, he intended once again, to assert the importance for anybody to become a member of the church and not become estranged. According to him, the church is the mother of believers, mother of all of us and Christ's bride.

- 1.7. In accordance with this, by quoting Augustine, he clarified that there was a difference between *I believe in the Church* and *I believe the church*. Since, the church was not the subject of our faith, but only the object, so the correct expression was *I believe the church*.¹¹ Church is the way of salvation which always places itself under God's authority. The subject of our faith is God. Therefore, to God we should say *I believe in God*, not *in the church*. To believe the church means to be convinced that we are members and that our salvation is firm; it relates to Christ's firmness which does not allow the believers to be taken away from Him, torn apart. He is convinced that the truth will stand firm for us as long as we stay in church's womb. To believe the church means to partake in it. Consequently, church and its unity must be consistently maintained.¹²

- 1.8. Calvin said:

How we are to judge the church visible, which falls within our knowledge, is, I believe, already evident from the above discussion.... Wherever we see the word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administrated according to Christ's institutions, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists (cf. Eph. 2:20).¹³

Just as in the first edition, in the second edition Calvin consistently considered the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution to be the signs which could identify and unite the church at the same time. Therefore, he further mentioned: "In this way we preserve for the universal church its unity, which devilish spirits have always tried to sunder".¹⁴

- 1.9. Since Calvin was remarkably serious and consistent with reference to the unity of the church, so all tendency to separatism is rejected. Because for him:

For the Lord esteems the communion of his church so highly that he counts as a traitor and apostate from Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of Word and sacraments.¹⁵

11 *Inst.* IV. i. 2 (b).

12 *Inst.* IV. i. 3 (b).

13 *Inst.* IV. i. 7 (b); *Inst.* IV. i. 9 (b).

14 *Inst.* IV. i. 9 (b).

15 *Inst.* IV. i. 10 (b).

Separatism, according to him, is a satanic work. "For there is nothing that Satan plots more than to remove and do away with one or both of these. Sometimes he tries by heaping contempt upon them to drag us away from the church in open rebellion,"¹⁶ according to Calvin. Therefore, when the party of Guellermin in Geneva intended to separate from the Reformed church in Geneva after the exile of Calvin and Farel, Calvin's reaction was:

The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it as long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults.¹⁷

For him, any kind of misconduct could possibly happen, but as long as the basic principles, which are the ministry of the Word and sacraments, are still evidently pure, then such unity is the true church. As such, it is not decent to reject it or to separate from it.

The guilty people receive discipline, like excommunication. But excommunication was not the expression of hatred and curse. Discipline could not be executed with violence since violence could end up with sectarianism. Violence could also cause people to be arrogant, people who tend to take over God's position and hide the real truth. Therefore, for Calvin, we should be bent under the conviction that whenever Christ is proclaimed there the Holy Spirit works in the heart of every believer.¹⁸

We note that the unity of the church he prominently highlighted in the 1536 edition was spiritual unity, but he still brought up this unity in the 1539 edition. But the unity should be apparent in the visible church. Its implementation is obedience to Christ as the Head, together to keep the right teaching, to perform the ministry of Word and sacrament, to remain in the church which is the mother of the believers. By referring to the importance of the unity of the church, he rejected any tendency of sectarianism which existed in the Anabaptist movement. The denial of the sectarian tendency was also triggered by the accusation by the Anabaptists that the evangelicals were also anti-Christ.¹⁹ Accordingly, the struggle against the opinion of the Anabaptists has dominantly colored this 1539 edition.

16 *Inst.* IV. i. 11 (b).

17 *Inst.* IV. i. 12 (b).

18 W. Balke, *op.cit.*, 115.

19 *Idem*, p. 116, Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes*, 15.

2. The Unity of the Church in *The Institutes* 1543

The structure of this edition has been expanded from seventeen articles to twenty-one. Additionally, the order of the articles has also changed.²⁰ From the aspect of content, there was also a kind of expansion as the result of continuous interaction with the Anabaptists. The articles relating to the Anabaptists were re-written by concentrating on the practical issues so that it is more apparent that the material was further expanded. The issue of ecclesiology, which has been improved in the 1539 edition, has also been elaborated. The subjects like the nature of church, office, church order and discipline were also intensively and deeply discussed.

The most prominent was the more spacious place for the discussion about the visible church. It was obvious in the following words: that baptism was understood as *an insertion into the body of Christ* and as *a sign of initiation*, which was the real sign of acceptance into the visible church;²¹ these things he never touched on before.

The other issue which is also prominent in this edition is the expansive study about ecclesiastical office. Here he gave a deeper theological basis for such subjects. This basis he did not change any further in the last edition in 1559. In the ecclesiastical matter, the significant difference between Calvin and the Anabaptists was their opinions about the visible church. The Anabaptists demanded that the visible church should become a church purely according to the pattern of the New Testament church. This idealism had emerged as an ambition to establish a perfectionist church, which is holy and clean.²²

To these matters, Calvin affirmed that the pure and perfect church could not be found in the testimony of the New Testament. To demand the establishment of a pure and perfect church means to disregard the facts that the New Testament witnessed the church which consisted of sinners. What the Bible has witnessed was much different. Therefore, we need to hear the testimony of the Bible so that we can judge the visible church properly. He said:

For we have said, the Holy Scripture speaks of the church in two ways. Some times by the term "church" it means that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit... Often, however, the name "church" designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ... In this

20 See the diagram in Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, 156.

21 W. Balke, *op.cit.*, 155.

22 Idem, 156.

church are mingled many hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance. There are very many ambitious, greedy, envious persons, evil speakers, and some of quite unclean life. Such are tolerated for a time either because they cannot be convicted by a competent tribunal or because a vigorous discipline does not always flourish as it ought.²³

The above quotation reflects that for Calvin sanctification of the church was only by the work of God through the Holy Spirit. The church does not consist of saints. God's elect, are mingled with sinners, hypocrites, greedy, ambitious and envious people. Also the elect are sinners in themselves, but they were sanctified by God through the work of the Holy Spirit. It can be seen here that the Holy Spirit received a place in his ecclesiology.

This church is one church. Since although they were gathered from any place on earth, they are those:

... who profess to worship one God and Christ. By baptism we are initiated into faith in him; by partaking in the Lord's Supper we attest our unity in true doctrine and love; in the word of the Lord we have agreement, and for the preaching of the Word the ministry instituted by Christ is preserved.²⁴

We note that to have faith in Christ, to accept the right teaching, to love and to confess the righteousness of God's Word are the important unifying forces. These forces are in action where the Word is truly preached and the sacraments are purely administered.

Calvin moreover asserted that Christ as the Head is the absolute condition for unity. He calls upon Cyprian who in his famous book "On the Unity of the Catholic Church" said the famous words, "He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the church for his mother". For Cyprian there is one God and Christ is one, and there is one church and one chair (episcopate) founded upon the rock by the word of the Lord. Calvin with his sharp view saw that for Cyprian the source of concord of the entire church was Christ's episcopate alone. Calvin is totally in agreement with Cyprian's illustration to explain the unity of the church which based in Christ:

The church is one, which is spread abroad far and wide into a multitude by an increase of fruitfulness. As there are many rays of the sun but one light, and many branches of a tree but one strong trunk grounded in its tenacious root, and since from one spring flow many streams, although a goodly number seem outpoured from their bounty and superabundance, still, at the source unity abides. Take a ray from the body of the sun; its unity undergoes no

23 *Inst.* IV. i. 7 (c).

24 *Inst.* IV. i. 7 (c).

25 *Inst.* IV. ii. 6 (c).

division. Break a branch from a tree; the severed branch cannot sprout. Cut off a stream from its source; cut off, it dries up. So also the church, bathed in the light of the Lord, extends over the whole earth; yet there is one light diffused everywhere.²⁵

Consequently, we cannot separate our selves from the visible church. To keep the communion with the visible church is a command. It was asserted by Calvin with the following words:

Just as we must believe, therefore, that the former church, invisible to us, is visible to the eyes of God alone, so we are commended to reserve and keep communion with the latter, which is called 'church' in respect to men.²⁶

For Calvin, the invisible church is the church before the eyes of God, while the visible church is before the eyes of man. These churches are one and equal. We cannot estrange ourselves from one and bring our self closer to other. We are the members of both. By referring to Augustine, he was of a certain opinion that separatism is the incredibly largest violence. To guide the church toward unity is a command to those who perform the ministry of the Word. "Let them ponder how much more important both the ministry of the Word and participation in the sacred mysteries are for gathering of the church",²⁷ according to Calvin. The unity of the church should be persistently kept in spite of depravity which poisoned the church.

Indeed, for the sake of the church and its unity, Calvin denied all kind of separatism. To respond to the accusation leveled by Rome that the reformers spread abroad schism and sects Calvin said:

Those who, by making dissension, break the communion of the church are called heretics and schismatic. Now this communion is held together by two bonds, agreement in sound of doctrine and brotherly love. ...Let us therefore remember that whenever church unity is commended to us, this is required: that while our minds agree in Christ, our wills should also be joined with mutual benevolence in Christ. Paul, therefore, while urging us to it, takes it as his foundation that 'there is ... one God, one faith, and one baptism (Eph. 4:5)'. ... He means that apart from the Lord's Word there is not an agreement of believers but a faction of wicked men.²⁸

We may properly see that the expressions agreement in sound of doctrine and brotherly love and agree in Christ were used by Calvin to point to the church as the communion, and also as the criteria in determining whether a group or church was schismatic or not. Such expressions bound and joined the people in the church, or among one church and the others. In other words, they were bound by such criteria.

26 *Inst.* IV. i. 7 (c).

27 *Inst.* IV. i. 16 (c).

28 *Inst.* IV. ii. 5 (c).

We saw already that Calvin intended to give in the 1543 edition a further development of his doctrine of the offices in the church. Although he stated with Cyprian that Christ alone is the highest office in the church, he now, following Paul in Ephesians 4, gave full attention to the functions of the offices in the church as gifts of the exalted Christ after his resurrection and session in heaven. Strongly guided by his exegesis of the Pauline Epistles he gave a deeper understanding of the theology of the offices in the church. In this he predominantly referred to Bucer during the process of developing of his teaching. There were three parties, Rome, the Anabaptist and Spiritualist. Confrontation with these three groups has colored his teaching about the office in the church.²⁹

It is interesting to observe that Calvin related the office with the service of reconciliation. Christ entrusted his service to the apostles and intended them to pass it on to the believers. To the presbyters and the bishops, He entrusted the ecclesiastical office. In this relation, Calvin affirmed three points:

First, however great the holiness in which God's children excel, they still – so long as they dwell in mortal bodies – remain unable to stand before God without forgiveness of sins. Secondly, this benefit so belongs to the church that we cannot enjoy it unless we abide in communion with the church. Thirdly, it is dispensed to us through the ministers and pastors of the church, either by the preaching of the gospel or by the administration of the sacraments,...³⁰

When opposing the separatism of the Anabaptists, he advised them to seek forgiveness where the Lord has placed it. "Accordingly, let each one of us count it his own duty to seek forgiveness of sins only where the Lord has placed it".³¹ Furthermore, Calvin said:

... For if anyone were sufficient to himself and needed no one else's help (such is the pride of human nature), each man would despise the rest and be despised by them. The Lord has therefore bound his church together with a knot that he foresaw would be the strongest means of keeping unity, while he entrusted to men the teaching of salvation and everlasting life in order that through their hands it might be communicated to the rest.³²

It means that the teaching of salvation and eternal life are entrusted by God to men. Accordingly, such teaching could reach other people. The ultimate intention was to have a bond which keep the unity of the church. The bond was the teaching of salvation itself, or more precisely God's Word. So according to Calvin, the church's officials were those

29 W. Balke, *op.cit.*, p. 60; W. van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996, 16-38.

30 *Inst.* IV. i. 22 (c).

31 *Inst.* IV. i. 22 (c).

32 *Inst.* IV. iii. 1 (c).

who held particular office in the church, and who took an important role to keep the unity of the church as the body of Christ for they were obliged to proclaim the Gospel as the binding and unifying forces. That was the reason for him to say:

And he gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the full adulthood; so that we may no longer be children Carried about by every wind of doctrine, ... But seeking truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the Head, into Christ, in whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Eph. 4:8,10-16).³³

Since ecclesiastical office held an important role as mentioned above it could not be abolished. To abolish the office means to disperse the church. Calvin affirmed this as follows:

Whoever, therefore, either is trying to abolish this order of which we speak and this kind of government, or discounts it as not necessary, it is striving for the undoing or rather the ruin and destruction of the church.³⁴

It was not just the office that had an important role in the unification process. Ecclesiastical discipline was not less important. It was considered as the healthy support, basis or structure, and the binding of the unity of the church. Consequently, as he already described in the previous editions, it was necessary to apply the discipline in the church. In this edition, Calvin related the discipline to doctrine, by saying that discipline supported doctrine and caused the doctrine to be expressed in human deed. When discipline is decreased, then the unity of the church will be absolutely disturbed. The church would be torn apart when there was no discipline in it. The following quotation indicated this:

Discipline is like a spur to arouse those of little inclination; and also sometimes like a father's rod to chastise mildly and with the gentleness of Christ's spirit those who have more seriously lapsed.³⁵

However, once again the application of ecclesiastical discipline could not be with violence. By applying discipline, someone could be brought to realize his mistake and get to know himself:

For such great severity is not to be used in lighter sins, but verbal chastisement is enough – and that mild and fatherly – which should not harden or confuse

33 *Inst.* IV. iii. 1 (c).

34 *Inst.* IV. iii. 1 (c).

35 *Inst.* IV. xii. 1 (c).

the sinner but bring them back to himself, that he may rejoice rather than be sad that he has been corrected.³⁶

In accordance with Augustine, Calvin regarded schism as a punishable sin:

All pious method and measure of ecclesiastical discipline ought ever to look to the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3), which the apostle orders us to keep by forbearing one another (Eph. 4:2), and when it is not kept, the medicine of punishment begins to be not only superfluous but also harmful, and so ceases to be medicine.³⁷

All the above citations indicate that Calvin applied the unity of the church in various aspects of the visible church. Therefore, in his description concerning ecclesiastical office: the administration of the Word and sacrament and discipline, he related it to the unity of the church. It is also evident that for the sake of the unity of the church, all schismatic tendencies should be rejected.

3. The Unity of the Church in *The Institutes* 1559³⁸

From the material aspect, the last edition of *The Institutes* has had an expansion. There are new articles with new content as well. Structurally, there was an increment in the number of the articles from twenty-one in the 1543 edition to eighty articles. The prominent change of order in this edition is when Calvin classified some articles into one book, which made it then consist of four books. Calvin completed this last edition while in a weak physical condition because of his illness.

The subjects which have been extended are for instance about the church, about the human fall into sin and the loss of free will, and also civil governance. Intensive discussions between Calvin and his opponents, like Westphal, Osiander, Servetus, Socinus, and Menno Simons, has also colored the extension of this edition. This extension signifies an enrichment. Basically, the continuity and homogeneity of Calvin's thoughts was consistently maintained.

The discussion of the church and its unity could be found in book four, particularly chapters one and two. Quite differently from the 1536 edition where the basis of this unity was placed within the explanation of the fourth section of the Apostle's Creed, here Calvin gave a different

³⁶ *Inst.* IV. xii. 6 (c).

³⁷ *Inst.* IV. xii. 11. (c).

³⁸ This edition has summarized all editions so in our description we can not avoid some repetition of what has been described before. Calvin's last editions constitute an expanded synthesis of all his earlier editions.

title to the first article of book IV from that which can be read in the first edition.

The title given to the first article of book IV was: *Concerning the true church, with which we must maintain unity because it is the mother of all the faithful*.³⁹ This title has assertively reflected that Calvin held the unity of the church in the highest esteem. At the same time he indicates the danger that where the church has no true preaching of the Word and pure administration of the sacraments there the church assumes the appearance of the false church. Calvin said in his reply to Sadoletto:

You very well know Sadoletto ... that we are not only much more consistent with antiquity than you are, but also that we tried nothing other than that the ancient face of the church should be restored, which at first is distorted and soiled by unlearned and not the best man, and afterwards ominously is lacerated and almost devastated by the roman pontiff and his faction.⁴⁰

In his final discussion in the 1559 edition, Calvin started with the ecclesiastical offices. What is God's plan with the church? His intention is to make an instrument which could strengthen our faith so we could get to the final destination, sanctification. He said:

Since, however, in our ignorance and sloth (to which I add fickleness of disposition) we need outward helps to beget and increase faith within us, and advance it to its goal, God has also added these aids that he may provide for our weakness. And in order that the preaching of the gospel might flourish, he deposited this treasure in the church. He institutes "pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11) through whose lips he might teach his own; he furnished them with authority; finally, he omitted nothing that might make for holy agreement of faith and for right order. First of all he instituted sacraments, which we who have experienced them feel to be highly useful aids to foster and strengthen our faith.⁴¹

Here we see how important the role and function of the officers in the church are for Calvin. The purpose of the church is for Calvin, to be an instrument to our vocation and to come to the aid of our sanctification. The preaching of the Gospel and the institution of the teaching ministry are intended to awaken the faith and promote the collective sanctification of the members of the ecclesiastical community by establishing between them what Calvin calls "the consensus of faith"; that is a unanimous agreement in faith and in outward order. As for the statements, their principal function is to maintain the faith of believers and thus contribute to their individual sanctification. The above purpose was further

39 See the *Institutes* ed. McNeill, 1011.

40 Joannis Calvini, *Calvini Opera Selecta*, Vol.I, 1926 (disingkat OS I), 466, *Responsio ad Sadoleti epistolam*.

41 *Inst.* IV. i. 1.

described by using the figure of the church as a mother. A mother gathers her children, raises them up and the most important aspect is that she guides them to the maturity of faith.⁴² Here Calvin started to touch the issue of the unity of the church. We note several points as follows:

3.1. The Church as Mother

By taking the thought of Cyprian who described church as Mother of the believers and taught that the church is the one and only way to salvation,⁴³ Calvin actually has started to put forward the affirmation that the church is one. The opinion of Jean Cadier justified this matter:

At the beginning of this chapter, taking up Cyprian's word (On Christian Unity, Ch. VI), he declares: "it is not lawful to separate these two things which God has joined together; namely that the church should be the mother of all those of whom he is the Father" (IV.i.1). We must understand a unity of the church of such a kind that we are persuaded of being truly grafted into it; for if we are not bound to all the other members under the common head, who is Jesus Christ, we can have no hope of the inheritance to come. This is why the church is called catholic or universal, since there could not be two or three churches without tearing Christ asunder, which cannot be (IV.i.2). Outside the bosom of this church there is no hope of remission of sins, nor of any salvation (IV.i.4) It is a dangerous and deadly things to withdraw or separate from the church (IV.i.4).⁴⁴

3.2. The Catholicity of the Church

Just as in the first edition, in this last edition Calvin also emphasized the catholicity and universality of the church. The interesting thing is that the issue of the catholicity and universality of the church was related to the impossibility to tear the church asunder, for Christ is one and cannot be divided, which did not appear in the first edition. It was evident when he said:

The church is called catholic or universal because there could not be two or three churches unless Christ be torn asunder (cf. 1 Cor. 1:13) which cannot happen.⁴⁵

In this way the catholicity and universality of the church which were emphasized in the first edition was still maintained. The church is only one which is catholic and universal. The church cannot be torn asunder into two or three since Christ is one and also cannot be torn asunder. Therefore, the unity of the church which is emphasized here was based

42 Inst. IV. i.1.

43 F. Wendel, *Calvin, the Origin and the Development of His Religious Thought*, London: Collin, 292.

44 J. Cadier, "Calvin and the Union of the Churches", in Willem Nijenhuis, *Calvijn en de Einheid der Kerk in het Licht van Zijn Briefwisseling*, Den Haag: Nijhof, 1958, 120.

on the universality and non-divisibility of the Christ.

Observing that kind of Calvin's thoughts Nijenhuis commented:

From the very beginning, Calvin devoted considerable attention to the catholicity and the unity of the Church. The number of the elect is general (universus); the Church is "the one fellowship" and the one people of God, if Christ our Lord is the leader and head. Its Catholicity and universality signify that there cannot exist two or three churches but only one, in which God's elect are gathered and united in Christ, that, just as they are dependent on one head, so they grow together as they if were into one body, by God's Spirit: one in faith, hope and peace.⁴⁶

The same opinion was also conveyed by Stauffer. He added that the unity of the church according to Calvin was not the unity of the invisible church. When he mentioned catholicity, at the same time he was referring to the visible church. According to Stauffer:

This concern for unity, this need for catholicity, is manifested by Calvin in the clearest fashion in numerous texts. When he treats, in *The Institutes* of the Christian Religion, for example, the article of the Creed relative to the "holy catholic church", he not only sees in her the invisible Church, but indeed the visible church. This visible church is the multitude spread over the world who worship God and Christ, who witness to their faith by baptizing, who affirm its unity in the celebration of the Eucharist, who are faithful to the bible and defend the ministry of preaching.⁴⁷

3.3. The Marks of the Church

The authority of the church was determined in such a manner that we could find the ministry of Gospel and Sacrament. He called this the *notae ecclesiae*.

Where the preaching of the Gospel is reverently heard and the sacrament are not neglected, there for the time being no deceitful or ambiguous form of the church is seen; and no one is permitted to spurn its authority, flout its warnings; resist its counsels, or make light of its chastisements – much less to desert it and break its unity.⁴⁸

It means that to admit and to accept each other became the essential factor in the church's unity. We could say that the unity of the church

45 *Inst.* IV. i.2.: see that the words "unless Christ be torn asunder (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 13) which cannot happen", was the special sign of this edition which was not apparent in the first edition.

46 W. Nijenhuis, "Church Unity in Luther and Calvin", in *Ecclesia Reformata, Studies on the Reformation*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994, 24.

47 R. Stauffer, *The Quest for Unity from John Calvin to Isaac d'Huisseau*, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publication, 1986, 22.

48 *Inst.* IV. i. 10.

could be implemented when there is a mutual admission and acceptance among the churches in every place, since it has the ministry of Word and the sacraments in it. In accordance with this de Jonge and Aritonang in their description of reformation ecclesiology, said the following:

It is notable here that for Calvin, the unity of the visible church is not necessarily implemented in the unity of organization. The ecclesiastical organization could be different from city to city and country to country, but as long as churches and congregations could admit each other as the church who has the Words and Sacrament, then the unity of the church could be implemented.⁴⁹

The unity of the church is not uniformity of organization and involving in a certain way also church order. However Calvin gave freedom to each church to determine its own form. In this matter, there is a freedom to choose their own order. The most important thing is that both *notae ecclesiae* should be absolutely apparent in such form. Those two *notae ecclesiae* in a certain time in future will unite the variety of church orders.

3.4. Imperfection Is No Reason For Separation From the Church.

It is interesting to note here what Calvin wrote in the book IV.i.14:

Among the Corinthians no slight number had gone astray; in fact, almost the whole body was infected. There was not one kind of sin only, but very many; and they were no light errors but frightful misdeeds; there was corruption not only of morals but also of doctrine. What does the holy apostle – the instrument of the Heavenly Spirit, by whose testimony the church stands or falls – do about this? Does he seek to separate himself from such? Does he cast them out of Christ's Kingdom? Does he fell them with the ultimate thunderbolt of anathema? He not only does nothing of the sort; he even recognizes and proclaims them to be the church of Christ and the communion of saints (1 Cor. 1:2). Among the Corinthians quarrels, divisions, and jealousies flare (1 Cor. 1:11; 3:3; 5:1; 6:7; 9:1 ff); disputes and altercations burgeon together with greed; an evil deed is openly approved which even pagans would detest (1 Cor. 5:1); the name of Paul (whom they ought to have honored as a father) is insolently defamed; some mock the resurrection of the dead, to the destruction of the whole gospel as well (1 Cor. 15: 12); God's free gifts serve ambitions, not love (cf. 1 Cor 13:5), and many things are done without decency or order. Yet the church abides among them because the ministry of Word and Sacraments remains unrepudiated there. Who, then would dare snatch the title 'church' from these who cannot be charged with even a tenth part of such misdeeds.⁵⁰

The above sentences reflected that Calvin supported what Paul said to the Corinthians; that misdeeds could happen in the church, and many

49 Jan S. Aritonang & Christiaan de Jonge, *Apa dan Bagaimana Gereja*, Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1989, 34.

50 *Inst.* IV. i. 14.

immoral persons could stay in the church. The other possibility is that there could be many differences during the implementation of the main teaching as the mutual basis of truth. However, in this matter, we could not estrange ourselves from the church, since however it may be, the Apostle Paul persistently called them the church of Christ and the communion of the saints. The church will remain a church as long as the Word and the sacrament are firmly affirmed. It means that God and Christ will always be in the church. Thus, to estrange oneself from the church means to deny God and Christ.

3.5. Fundamental Criteria For the Unity of the Church.

Eventually, Calvin again reaffirmed the unconditional admission of the fundamental beliefs as the implementation of the unity of the church. The particular fundamental beliefs, for Calvin, were the foundation and at the same time, also, the undeniable truth. In this case, every party should be in accordance with it. Even though in reality, there were also particular fundamental teachings which became the causal factor of dispute in the church, it should not invite division. Calvin said:

What is more, some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments, but this ought not to estrange us from communion with the church. For not all the articles of true doctrine are of the same sort. Some are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the proper principles of religion. Such are: God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; our salvation rests in God's mercy; and the like. Among the churches there are other articles of doctrine disputed which still do not break the unity of faith. Suppose that one church believes-short of unbridled contention and opinionated stubbornness-that souls upon leaving bodies fly to heaven; while another, not daring to define the place, is convinced nevertheless that they live to the Lord. What churches would disagree on this one point? Here are the apostle's words. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be of the same mind; and if you be differently minded in anything, God shall reveal this also to you (Phil.3:1).⁵¹

This means that for Calvin the most important thing is mutual agreement in certain principles as the absolute truth. Those principles became the basic factors which characterized Christianity. It does not matter when there is a particular difference of unessential things. So Calvin was tolerant of other churches as long as the differences concerned the unessential principles of the Christian faith. It was the basic things which unite the church, the great things, not the small or unessential things. This is what Hesselink called the criteria for unity according to Calvin. According to him:

51 *Inst.* IV. i. 12.

In fact, Calvin's list of essential or fundamental doctrines is surprisingly slim. Although he is speaking illustratively, it still may surprise many to learn that the doctrines which 'are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the proper principles of religion' are only these: God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; our salvation rests in God's mercy; and the like (*et similia*).⁵²

This will definitely raise the question about what Calvin meant with "and the like" in the above quotation. The answer was not found in *The Institutes*, but in a treatise which he wrote as the answer to Joachim Westphal. There Calvin described it as follows:

In regard to the one God and his true and legitimate worship, the corruption of human nature, free salvation, the mode of obtaining justification, the office and power of Christ, repentance and its exercise, faith which, relying on promises of the gospel, gives us assurance of salvation, prayer to God, and other leading articles, the same doctrines are preached by both. We call on one God the Father, trusting to the same Mediator; the same Spirit of adoption is the earnest of our future inheritance. Christ has reconciled us all by the same sacrifice. In that righteousness which he has purchased for us, our minds are at peace, and we glory in the same head. It is strange if Christ, whom we preached as our peace, and who, removing the ground of disagreement, appeared to us our Father in heaven, do not also cause us mutually to cultivate brotherly peace on earth.⁵³

Contextuality and Development in Calvin's Ecclesiology

Before summarizing our description of Calvin's concept of the unity of the church in *The Institutes*, it is necessary for us to examine *The Institutes* to find his interaction with the contexts, Rome and the Anabaptists.

Already in the 1536 edition we find Calvin's reaction toward the Anabaptists, in several subjects of teaching. They related to the law, ecclesiology, judgment of love, discipline, baptism, holy communion, office in the state, oath, liturgy, attitude to the government, pacifism, tax and jurisdiction and legal resistance to oppose tyranny.⁵⁴ Not all these subjects will be discussed. Instead, we will take two subjects in order to prove the purpose of this part. The subjects concerned will be about ecclesiology and church discipline.

52 I.J. Hesselink, "Calvinus Oecumenicus: Calvin's Vision of the Unity and Catholicity of the Church", *Reformed Review*, Vol. 44, No.2, 1990, 110; cf. I.J. Hesselink, *On Being Reformed Distinctive Characteristics and Common Misunderstandings*, New York: Reformed Church Press, 1988, 82-85.

53 H. Beveridge, *Tracts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church by John Calvin*, Vol. II, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958, 251.

54 W. Balke, *op.cit.*, 48-70.

a. **About the Church**

In chapter two of the 1536 edition of *The Institutes* which was entitled Faith, we can find an explanation about the church. The strong impression we get is that Calvin was confronting Rome. However, actually his teaching about the church had a double direction: Rome and the Anabaptists which became his target. In the 1536 edition Calvin's opposition to Anabaptism was more apologetic. It was a plan on behalf of the evangelicals in France so that they would not be identified with the Anabaptists in Germany. In the later editions Calvin's exposition is colored by his own experiences with Anabaptists. There are two points we could mention in relation with it:

1. Calvin asserted that it would not be possible that the church could be so perfect at that time. This was stressed in relation to spiritualism and subjectivism in Rome and the Anabaptist groups. Therefore, it should need an order and office of the minister in the church. Consequently, he showed prominently the invisible dimension and hidden aspect of the church and also the nature of the church as one. But more than Luther, he added predestination and the glory of God.

First we believe the holy catholic church – that is the whole number of the elect, whether angels or men (Eph.1:9-10;Col.1:16), whether dead or still living, in whatever lands they live, or wherever among the nations they have been scattered – to be one church and society and one people of God. ...Consequently, the Lord when he calls his own, justifies and glorifies his own, is declaring nothing but his eternal election, by which he had destined them to this end before they were born. Therefore no one will ever enter into the glory of the heavenly Kingdom, who has not been called in this manner, and justified, and seeing that without any exception the Lord in this manner sets forth and manifests his election in all men who He has chosen.⁵⁵

2. He asserted that there could not be two or three churches since the church was catholic and universal, one body with Christ as the head, to be one congregation of God where Christ is the good shepherd, a unity of believers. From this we start to have a clear picture of Calvin's firmness in refusing all sectarian tendency.

Now this society is catholic, that is, universal, because there could not be two or three churches. But all God's elect are so united and conjoint in Christ (cf.Eph.1:22-23) that, as they are dependent on one Head, they also grow together into one body, being joined and knit together (cf.Eph.4:16) as are the limbs of one body (Rome 12:5;1Cor.10:17;12:12,27).⁵⁶

If we look up *The Institutes* of 1539, Calvin did not forsake this view.

⁵⁵ *Inst.* 1536, trans. F.L. Battles, 58-59.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 58.

However, there was a new dimension which he put forward: the visible dimension of the church. About the visible dimension of the church he commented in two points:

1. The idea of the unity of the church: that the unity of the church should be manifested in the visible church. While the traditional church was in ruin and has become an *ecclesia deformata* and the Anabaptists boasted that they had the *ecclesia perfecta* and tended to be exclusive, for Calvin it was always necessary to preserve the unity of the church. By quoting Cyprian that "there is no salvation outside the church" and Augustine who differentiated between "I believe in the church" and "I believe the church" he said that the truth was "I believe the church". It means that we are aware of our fundamental basis that we believe the church as our faith that we are also members of the church. The basis on which we believe the church is that we are fully convinced that we are members of it.⁵⁷ Therefore, to withdraw from the community of the church is an inconsistency. Claiming that we believe the church means we have to participate actively in the church.
2. The idea of the church as mother of all believers was meant to assert that it is necessary for every believer to be a church member. He said:

It is important for us to know what benefit we shall gain from this. The basis on which we believe the church is that we are fully convinced we are members of it. In this way our salvation rests upon sure and firm supports, so that, even if the whole fabric of the world were overthrown, the church could neither totter nor fall. First, it stands by God's election, and cannot waver or fail any more than his eternal providence can. Secondly, it has in a way been joined to the steadfastness of Christ, who will no more allow his believers to be estranged from him than that his members be rent and torn asunder. Besides, we are certain that while we remain within the bosom of the church, the truth will always abide with us. Finally, we feel that these promises apply to us: "there will be salvation in Zion" (Joel 2:32; Obad 17cf.Vg).⁵⁸

With this idea Calvin wanted to oppose the tendency of the Anabaptists to walk out from the church and build up a new church consisting of holy, perfect men.

b. About Discipline

In the 1536 edition, Calvin commented that the intention of apply-

⁵⁷ *Inst.* IV. i. 3, ed. J.T. McNeill.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

ing discipline in the church is:

To commit to God's hand, commend them to His goodness... We must bear with one another in mutual equity and patience and nourish peace and love, not stupidly bursting into God's more secret judgments.⁵⁹

Since the fall of Adam man is not perfect. As such he needs to be orderly, organized by law and reprimanded for mistakes. The application of discipline basically is a pastoral action, not rigorism. Discipline should be applied without rigorism or violence. The Anabaptists refused all kinds of violence but in their conception of discipline they were rigoristic. Calvin pleaded always for moderation and a pastoral attitude in discipline. The church members who are excommunicated should be guided to have better attitude.

The thought concerning human limitedness and the imperfection of the church (*ecclesia imperfecta*) has impressively appeared in the 1539 edition as Calvin's reaction towards the Anabaptists. Therefore discipline is absolutely necessary. He persistently refused the perfectionism and rigorism embodied in the Anabaptists' point of view.

The next edition of 1543 showed other development. Here Calvin pointed out the place where discipline could be applied. According to Calvin the implementation of discipline could be applied in an ecclesiastical institution like a consistory. For Calvin discipline was so important that he considered it as one of the essential elements of the church. Practically, he organized the church and the Genevan society by applying a strict discipline, which caused his exile from Geneva to Strasburg.

It is obvious that the Anabaptists were quite a significant challenge for Calvin. Most of his doctrines were related to the wrong teaching of the Anabaptists. So we could say that on the one hand Calvin confronted Rome and on the other hand the Anabaptists. It is true that Calvin strongly stressed the unity of the church and struggled for that because of his opponents. His struggle towards the unity of the church occurred as a war in two battlefields.⁶⁰

Conclusion

In sum, what we can conclude from all the above explanation is that:

1. It was very obvious that the unity of the church became the main focus of attention in Calvin's ecclesiology. From the first to the last edition, the unity of the church has always been the highlight and

⁵⁹ *Inst.* 1536, trans. F.L. Battles, 85.

⁶⁰ W. Balke, "Calvijns strijd om de eenheid van de Kerk", non-published paper, 2001, 6.

was emphasized. It has proved, by the prominent accentuation of the catholicity and universality of the church, to be the first thing which should be understood in the understanding of the church.

2. The core of the unity of the church according to Calvin was not unity in organization and church order but spiritual unity. What he referred to was the unity in and because of Christ, the unity in the basic Christian faith and the true doctrine; which can be called the criteria of the unity; the unity in mutual acknowledgment and acceptance as churches which perform the ministry of the Word and the sacraments. These are the principal and fundamental elements of the unity. This kind of unity should be apparent in the visible church. Although various structures are possible, also differences concerning unessential matters are possible.
3. We can see how necessary the unity of the church was for Calvin, so he strongly refused the tendency of schism. In this manner, he related the unity to other principles in the explanation of the sacraments, discipline and offices. These three subjects were all for the sake of unity.

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