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Alan C. Clifford

John Calvin and the *Confessio Fidei Gallicana*

*We celebrate this year the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the first edition of what is without any doubt the most important compendium of Christian doctrine ever written, the *Christianae Religionis Institutio* of John Calvin. Dr Clifford's essay is not directly about this work, but it was written as a contribution to the celebration of this anniversary, and we are grateful to him for this discussion of another important document of the Protestant Reformation.*

The years 1985/86/87 constitute something of a 'trio' of Huguenot anniversaries. Last year was the tercentenary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; this year is the 450th anniversary of the publication of the first edition of Calvin's *Institutes*, and 1987 will be the bicentenary of the Edict of Toleration which, on the eve of the French Revolution, officially brought the cruel persecution of the Huguenots to an end.¹

As the Calvin anniversary is the centre-piece of these events, so in a highly significant sense, Calvin's role and contribution both explain and give meaning to the other two. As Basil Hall wrote, "There is a sense in which the French Reformed Church would not have come into being if Calvin had never lived, for he was perhaps the greatest of the Huguenots. It was Calvin who gave to French Protestantism a body of writings, an organization, a flavour and an attitude to life, which have endured through many changes to our own day."²

Calvin and his theology have received considerable attention in

¹ See Janet Glenn Gray, *The French Huguenots, Anatomy of Courage* (Baker, 1981). For older studies in English see W. Carlos Martyn, *A History of the Huguenots* (American Tract Society, 1866); Samuel Smiles, *The Huguenots . . . in England and Ireland* (John Murray, 1880) and *The Huguenots in France* (Routledge, 1893) and Richard Heath, *The Reformation in France* (2 Vols) (Religious Tract Society, 1888) Samuel Smiles provides a select bibliography of works by French authors in *The Huguenots in France* (p.xiii), including Elie Benoît, *Histoire de l'Edit de Nantes* (Beman, 1693-95) and Edmund Hughes, *Histoire de la Restauration du Protestantisme en France au xviii Siècle* (2 Vols) (1875).

² *Calvin Against the Calvinists* in *John Calvin* (Sutton Courtenay, 1966), 19.

recent years. In particular, the Reformer's theology of the atonement vis-à-vis the formulations of later 'Calvinists' has occasioned lively discussion, resulting in a sizeable corpus of scholarly literature.³ In many respects, Basil Hall's article, written twenty years ago, may be seen to have inaugurated the current phase of a long-standing debate.⁴ In 1969, Brian G. Armstrong's *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* gave substance to Hall's suggestions that 'Calvinism' had exceeded the balanced biblical insights of John Calvin himself. Since then, several academic theses and numerous articles have reflected the obvious ferment produced by the earlier contributions.⁵

This brings us to a neglected area of interest. While Calvin's *Institutes* and *Commentaries* have been carefully examined, no attention has been paid to his part in the formation of the confession of faith of the French Reformed Church. The *Confessio Fidei Gallicana* was drawn up by Calvin and his pupil De Chandieu, and revised and approved by the first National Synod at Paris in 1559. It was delivered by Theodore Beza to King Charles IX at Poissy in 1561 and adopted by the Synod of La Rochelle in 1571, a year before the appalling massacre of St. Bartholemew.⁶

The *Confessio* is of interest for at least two reasons. Firstly, it was drawn up within months of the publication of Calvin's final edition of the *Institutes*. It thus correlates with Calvin's maturest theological judgement. Secondly, the *Confessio* reflects in a straightforward and pastoral manner Calvin's view of what a confession of faith should be like. It not only reflects his theology, but also his aversion to an excessive and over-systematic scholasticism.

Whilst Theodore Beza subscribed to the *Confessio*, his own significantly different theological emphases do not appear in it. The entire document breathes the pure, warm biblicism of John Calvin. What Hall describes as Calvin's 'more dynamic and vivid

³ See *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LV, No.2 (April, 1983).

⁴ Earlier writers have drawn attention to Calvin's views on the atonement. See Richard Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* (1675), Bk. 2, 51; Isaac Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind* (1740) in *Works* (1753), Vol. 6, 287-288; Philip Doddridge, *Lectures on Divinity* (1763) in *Works* (1802), Vol. 5, 214; J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (1865), (St. John Vol. 1), 160.

⁵ For a detailed and comprehensive survey of the literature, see Roger Nicole, *John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement* in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, 47 (1985), 197-225.

⁶ For the full text of the *Confessio Fidei Gallicana*, see *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, ed. H. B. Smith and P. Schaff (Hodder, 1877), 356-382. The French text and English translation appear in parallel columns. Hereafter quoted as 'Creeds'.

style' when compared to the 'scholastic formalism' of Beza is fully evident in the French confession. A brief survey of the contents will demonstrate this observation.

The Theology of the *Confessio*

I.

After articles dealing with the being of God, the Scriptures and Creation (I–VII), there is the statement on Providence. This clearly follows Calvin's attempt to avoid the kind of supralapsarian determinism rightly associated with Beza. It was Beza who reverted to the medieval scholastic method of discussing predestination under the doctrines of God and providence, thus paving the way for the kind of metaphysical determinism Calvin was anxious to avoid. The systematic rigour with which Beza discussed these matters had no precedent in Calvin. As Hall comments, Calvin would have regarded discussion of the purposes of God as being 'impertinently precise.'⁷ So Article VIII of the *Confessio* expresses Calvin's essential humility at this point: 'Confessing that the providence of God orders all things . . . we humbly bow before the secrets which are hidden to us, without questioning what is above our understanding . . .'⁸ As in the *Institutes*, the *Confessio* utters profound things with a devotional and practical spirit typical of Calvin: '. . . God, who has all things in subjection to him, watches over us with a Father's care . . . our enemies cannot harm us without his leave.'

II.

Articles IX–XI contain clear and forthright statements about the fall, depravity and guilt of human nature. However, unlike Beza's precise formulation of the imputation of Adam's sin,⁹ Article X of the *Confessio* shows the same kind of restraint with which Calvin discusses the doctrine in his *Institutes*. Whilst sin 'is an hereditary evil, and not an imitation merely, as was declared by

⁷ See Hall, *op. cit.*, 27.

⁸ *Creeds*, 364.

⁹ See William Cunningham, *Calvin and Beza in The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (1967 rep.), 376. See R. L. Dabney's critique of the 'over-refined' theology of immediate imputation advocated by Charles Hodge (*Systematic Theology*, (James Clarke rep. 1960), Vol. 2, 192f.) in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, (Banner of Truth rep. 1967), Vol. 1, 253f. For an excellent survey and analysis of the different theories of imputation, see A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Armstrong, 1890), 308–340.

the Pelagians . . . we consider that it is not necessary to inquire how sin was conveyed from one man to another . . .¹⁰ This is not to say that Calvin does not formulate a doctrine of imputation at all¹¹—and one that is different from Beza's, but to say that he resists the temptation to commit the faithful to a particular interpretation of the Scriptural data. Unlike Chapter VI of the *Westminster Confession*, a document owing much to Beza's influence, the *Confessio Fidei Gallicana* refrains from using the term 'imputation' at all. This much is clear, it avoids exposing itself to the objection validly levelled against the later Federalism of Cocceius (1603–1669), that Adam's posterity are unjustly condemned for *his* transgression on the basis of an alleged covenant made between God and the human race in him. Article 10 of the *Confessio* simply acknowledges the organic unity of fallen humanity:

. . . what God had given Adam was not for him alone, but for all his posterity; and thus in his person we have been deprived of all good things, and have fallen with him into a state of sin and misery.¹²

III.

With regard to the sovereignty of God in salvation, Article XII of the *Confessio* provides a predictably clear statement about election. the language of Scripture is faithfully reproduced when it declares that 'God . . . calleth those whom he hath chosen by his goodness and mercy alone in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works, to display in them the riches of his mercy . . .' However, the doctrine of 'double predestination' is nowhere evident. Others are left in their 'corruption and condemnation to show in them his justice.' In this respect, the *Confessio* is even more moderate than the equivalent statement of

¹⁰ *Creeds*, 365.

¹¹ Calvin's views on the imputation of Adam's sin clearly avoid the unfortunate dispute of later times over 'immediate versus mediate' imputation. He certainly leans towards the view of Joshua de la Place (1606–1655), a theological professor at Saumur, without entirely excluding the idea, reinforced by a later Federalism, that the guilt of Adam's sin is, in a sense, ours too. However, Calvin is careful to avoid the idea that Adam's posterity are 'liable for another's fault' as if they were not personally guilty themselves. See *Institutes* II:1:8 and *Comment* on Romans 5:17. Calvin was essentially Augustinian in his view.

¹² *Creeds*, 365–366.

the XXXIX Articles of the Church of England (1562).¹³ One cannot escape the conclusion that, in the view of Calvin and the French Reformed Church, the awesome character of the 'dreadful decree' is not to cast a shadow over the church's affirmation of 'the riches of God's mercy.'

IV.

What is even more remarkable is the *Confessio's* treatment of redemption (Articles XVI—XVII). There is not the least hint of the doctrine of limited atonement. The High Calvinism of Beza and his successors is conspicuous by its absence. The language of Article XVI is perfectly general:

We believe that God, in sending his Son, intended to show his love and inestimable goodness towards us, giving him up to die to accomplish all righteousness, and raising him from the dead to secure for us the heavenly life.¹⁴

Whilst Beza and others might equate 'us' with the 'elect', Calvin would not allow the language of the *Confessio* to be subject to such scholastic precision. The clue to this confident judgement is found in the supporting texts for the article. They are John 3:16 and 15:13. In his comment on John 3:16, Calvin does not deny that, ultimately speaking, 'God opens the eyes only of the elect' but neither does he deny that 'the heavenly Father does not wish the human race that he loves to perish.'¹⁵ Even if Article XVI does not assert universal atonement as explicitly as the Anglican Article XXXI does, or as Calvin himself does in numerous places,¹⁶ its language is as general as that of the *Institutes*, where Calvin declares:

And the first thing to be attended to is, that so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us.¹⁷

¹³ *Article XVII* which says 'So, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall . . .'

¹⁴ *Creeeds*, 369.

¹⁵ *The Gospel According to St. John*, tr. T. H. L. Parker (1959), 73.

¹⁶ Calvin's *Comment* on Galatian 5:12 is representative of his frequently expressed view: ' . . . God commends to us the salvation of all men without exception, even as Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world.' *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* . . . tr. T. H. L. Parker (Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 99.

¹⁷ *Institutes* III:1:1 (James Clarke rep. 1962), Vol. 1, 463.

It has of course been argued that had Calvin been faced with Arminianism, then his formulation of the doctrine of the atonement would have reflected the precision of the Canons of Dort.¹⁸ However, in view of the evidence, as well as Calvin's distaste for scholastic exaggeration, this thesis is more than doubtful. When he was faced by the Decrees of the Council of Trent, he did not feel obliged to oppose the doctrine of limited atonement to the decree which said that Christ died for all men.¹⁹

Remembering Richard Baxter's surprising acquiescence in the Canons of Dort,²⁰ it is doubtful whether even Calvin would consider them consistent with their popular image—that they advocate the classical doctrine of limited atonement. Article 3 of the second canon states that 'The death of the Son of God . . . is . . . abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.' Calvin would only add that, notwithstanding the *efficacious* redemption of the elect, the universal *sufficiency* of the atonement was as much part of the design of the atonement as its efficacy, and its sufficiency did not merely arise as an incidental consequence of its 'infinite worth and value.' It is clear from Calvin's numerous utterances on the extent of the atonement that he sees a correlation between the 'free offer' of the gospel and a universal, all-sufficient provision of grace in the atonement. From the perspective of God's revealed will, 'Christ died for all' means 'there is a sufficient provision for all' whilst from the perspective of God's secret will, the efficacy of the provision is restricted to the elect. Calvin is prepared to formulate matters thus because he accepts the mysterious paradox between God's revealed and secret wills without attempting to grasp the inscrutable. In a recent article, Roger Nicole produces a contradictory account of Calvin's position because he fails to perceive Calvin's full-orbed

¹⁸ See J. I. Packer, *Calvin the Theologian* in *John Calvin, op. cit.*, 151. Dr. Packer is careful to say that Calvin did not insist on particular redemption (the third of the traditional 'Five Points' of Calvinism) but he assumes Calvin would not have dissented from the Dort formula.

¹⁹ Hall's remarks are more accurate than Packer's, *op. cit.*, 27. See Calvin, *Antidote to the Council of Trent* in *Tracts and Treatises* (C.T.S. ed., 1851), Vol. 3, 93, 109. With regard to the Canons of Dort, it is more probable that, viewing the Gospel as a universal, conditional covenant, Calvin would have affirmed that 'Christ died for all men' notwithstanding its restricted efficacy in regard to the eldest.

²⁰ Baxter wrote, 'In the article of the extent of redemption, wherein I am most suspected and accused, I do subscribe to the Synod of Dort, without any exception, limitation, or exposition, of any word, as doubtful and obscure.' See Orme's *Memoir* of Baxter in *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter* (1830), Vol. 1, 456.

acceptance of the 'two-sidedness' of the atonement.²¹ Although the eminent John Owen paid lip service to the sufficiency/efficiency distinction, his commitment to the commercial theory of the atonement led him to evaluate the universal sufficiency of the atonement of all value.²² For Calvin, there really is something 'on offer' which all but the elect refuse. If Christ has not made a *provision* which extends to all, then what are unbelievers guilty of rejecting? Thus Article XX of the *Confessio* states that 'He suffered for our salvation, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish.'²³ In the face of an aristotelian rationalism, reinforced by a crude commercialism, Moise Amyraut and Richard Baxter were simply attempting to rehabilitate Calvin's original 'dualistic' soteriology.²⁴ Only by adopting this position is it possible to avoid 'particularising' the 'general' expressions of texts like John 3:16 and 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, etc., as 'high' Calvinists always do. It is this kind of exegetical 'piracy' that provokes Arminians to explain away election. But both approaches betray a kind of rationalistic mentality which Calvin rightly abhorred. Humility is prepared to accept the ultimate paradox when the exegetical data demands it.

It is more than probable that Calvin would have rejected the *Westminster Confession* for its failure to make an explicit statement about the sufficiency of the atonement.²⁵ In this respect, the Westminster divines were victims of the momentum of an anti-Arminian *over*-reaction. In pursuing the particularist tendencies

²¹ Nicole says that 'Most of the well-meant offers and invitations, human as well as divine, are not grounded in coextensive provision!' (*op. cit.*, 213) He then says that 'Calvin is also concerned to express the sufficiency of the work of Christ so that no one inclined to claim this work and to cast himself or herself on the mercy of God should feel discouraged by thinking that somehow the cross would not avail for him/her.' (*Ibid.*, 217) Once it is seen that Calvin views the 'sufficiency' of the atonement in terms of 'coextensive provision' there is no need for such contradictory statements as these. Unless there was such a provision, there would be no basis for encouragement.

²² '... it is denied that the blood of Christ was a sufficient price and ransom for all and everyone . . .' *The Death of Death* (Banner of Truth rep. 1959), 184 (or *Works*, ed. Gould, (Johnstone and Hunter, 1852)), Vol. 10, 296.

²³ *Creeeds*, 370-371.

²⁴ See Armstrong, *op. cit.*, 59, 187; Baxter, *Universal Redemption of Mankind by the Lord Jesus Christ* (1694), 59.

²⁵ Although R. L. Dabney is correct to say that the *Westminster Confession* avoids the scholastic debates over imputation, his observations about the Confession's position on the atonement are questionable. Dabney declares that 'it carefully avoids implying any limitation upon the infinite value and merit of Christ's sacrifice.' However, unlike the Canons of Dort, the Confession says nothing at all about the 'sufficient for all/efficient for the elect' distinction. Furthermore, the language is explicitly restrictive. Christ

of the Synod of Dort one stage further, they formulated a doctrine of the atonement significantly different from the language of Calvin and the *Confessio Fidei Gallicana*. In following the plain, uncluttered language of Scripture, Calvin and the Huguenots provided a sufficient confessional formulation with which to rebut Arminian heterodoxy, without being needlessly provocative. Thus, on the basis of the Huguenot confession, it is possible to demonstrate that the Arminian's only quarrel is with plain Scripture itself, rather than with the exaggerated dogmatic formulations of an 'ultra' orthodox mentality.

From the perspective of Calvin's balanced, biblical orthodoxy, the *Westminster Confession* represents a policy of 'over-kill' in its handling of the Arminian problem. English Puritanism's answer to the sub-orthodox evangelicalism of the Arminians was an ultra-orthodox evangelicalism. This 'over-reaction' led to the more fatal extreme of hypercalvinism in the 18th century via the Congregationalist and Particular Baptist Confessions of Faith (1658, 1689).²⁶ Wesleyan Methodism appears as an almost justifiable corrective against this background.²⁷ However, while these extremes are perpetuated, the orthodoxy of the *Confessio*

purchased reconciliation 'for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.' i.e. the elect. There is no suggestion of a wider sufficiency. Dabney also says that the 'mischievous over-refinement' of the commercial theory of the atonement is avoided in the Confession. Again, the fact that Christ is said to 'purchase' salvation for the elect, and that such is applied to them, is to employ the restrictive language of the commercial theory. See Chapter VIII of the *Westminster Confession* and R. L. Dabney, *The Westminster Confession and Creeds* (Presbyterian Heritage Publications 1983 rep.), 12-13.

In the light of these remarks, one wonders whether Dabney was attracted by an Amyraldian outlook. He certainly takes a wider view of the love of God than the Westminster divines and John Owen do. See his *God's Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy in Discussions*, *op. cit.*, 282f. The same could be said of Charles Hodge, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, 553-562, and Thomas Chalmers, see *Institutes of Theology* (Sutherland and Knox, 1849), Vol. 2, 402f. See also Dabney's *Speech on Fusion with the United Synod in Discussions*, Vol. 2, 305f, and especially his reference to the Answer to Q. 37 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), which says that Christ 'bore in his body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the universal human race . . .'

²⁶ It is interesting to note that the *Savoy Declaration* (1658) includes a chapter (Of the Gospel, and of the extent of the Grace thereof) (XX), the general tone of which tends to relax the restrictive tendencies of the *Westminster Confession*. See the edition by A. G. Matthews (Independent Press, 1959), 101-102. *The Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689) follows the *Savoy* here. However, the particularist language of the three confessions in their agreed statements on the atonement ensured the gathering momentum of Hypercalvinism.

²⁷ It is interesting to observe just how close John Wesley came to embracing a Baxterian style of Calvinism. See his statement *Calvinistic Controversy* in *Works*, ed. Jackson (Mason, 1841), Vol. XIII, 478. However, Whitefield's attachment to limited atonement reinforced Wesley's Arminian convictions.

Fidei Gallicana—with all its biblical simplicity, will stand as a conciliatory *via media*, a synthesis of all that is demonstrably scriptural in the two opposing extremes. Once it is seen that Arminian ‘foreknowledge’ is as inevitably ‘particularising’ as Calvinist ‘foreordination’ with respect to the final success of the Gospel—for neither affirm universal salvation, then Calvin and the Huguenots might be seen as the apostles of evangelical harmony and peace. However, Calvin discusses the relationship between condemnation of the unbeliever and the secret will of God in his *Institutes* and *Commentaries*, the *Confessio* does justice to that aspect of the matter usually stressed by Arminians, viz. human responsibility. In short, the influence of human sin is taken seriously. In Article XI, we are told that in fallen human nature, there is ‘a perversity always producing fruits of malice and of rebellion . . .’²⁸ Thus, by inference, men are not saved because of a wilful failure to ‘appropriate to our use the promises of life which are given to us through Christ’ (Article XXII).²⁹ Thus the realities of divine omnipotence and human wilfulness are fully acknowledged. By affirming the sovereignty of divine grace, the incipient humanism of Arminianism is checked, but equally, the recognition of human choice deters the fatalistic propensities of High Calvinism.

V.

The *Confessio* shed light on that other area where scholastic over-refinement has manifested itself—the doctrine of justification. Beza argued that justification is more than forgiveness—a ‘positive’ righteousness is necessary to establish the believer’s acceptance before God. Therefore, Christ’s passive obedience in death and his active obedience to the law form the basis of that righteousness imputed to the believer.³⁰ This led to the doctrine that the believer is delivered from the *precept* as well as the *penalty* of the law, a speculation which opened the way to antinomian abuse. The embarrassing consequence was highlighted by William Sherlock in his criticism of John Owen, ‘That if the righteousness

²⁸ *Creeds*, 366.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 371.

³⁰ See Beza, *Tractationes Theologiae* (Geneva, 1570–1582), Vol. 3, 248, 256.

and obedience of Christ be imputed to us, then what need we yield obedience ourselves?³¹

The problem posed by Beza's 'double righteousness' theory is avoided by the language of the *Confessio*. Article XVII states that by Christ's 'perfect sacrifice . . . we are fully justified.'³² According to Article XVIII, this is 'the obedience of Jesus Christ which is imputed to us . . .' Thus, 'We believe that all our justification rests upon the remission of our sins, in which is our only blessedness, as saith the Psalmist (Ps.32:2).'³³ In short, justification is nothing more than pardon, and Christ's *passive* righteousness alone is necessary to affect this. The very silence of the *Confessio* about the imagined imputation of Christ's active obedience confirms the conclusion that there is no shred of evidence for the idea in the New Testament. Indeed, once remission of sin is seen as the very substance of that *gracious* righteousness which is imputed to the believer, then there is no further need to propose a supplementary imputation. The believer's justification before God is guaranteed by Christ's death alone. His law being satisfied, God makes no further meritorious demands.

Of course, even John Owen and the *Savoy Declaration* (1658) refrain from arguing that the justified believer has no concern with the law in his sanctification.³⁴ However, the Antinomians proper pursued matters further by insisting that the believer is totally delivered from the *precept* (as well as the *penalty*) of the law, in both justification *and* sanctification. This was the consistent logical outcome of Beza's theory of justification.

Unlike the Bezan school, the *Confessio Fidei Gallicana* avoids the problem completely. It is not being inconsistent when it says that believers 'must seek aid from the law and the prophets for the

³¹ See Owen, *Works*, Vol. 2, 275–6 for details of the controversy. Sherlock's criticism of Owen brought forth a reply which, in turn, led to Owen's treatise *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through The Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ* (1677) in *Works*, Vol. 5. In this work, Owen has difficulty in dealing with some of the implications arising from the Bezan type of 'double-imputation' theory.

³² *Creeds*, 369.

³³ *Ibid.*, 369.

³⁴ See Chapter XIX *Of the Law of God*, Section VI. Unlike the *Westminster Confession*, which, in Chapter XI *Of Justification*, speaks of the 'imputing' of the 'obedience and satisfaction of Christ', the *Savoy* makes an explicit alteration. There is an imputation of 'Christ's active obedience unto the whole Law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness, . . .' See Matthews ed. p. 90. It was Piscator (1546–1625) who exposed the inherent contradiction of this view of imputation. See my *The Gospel and Justification* in *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LVII, No. 3 (July 1985), 257.

³⁵ *Creeds*, 372–373.

ruling of our lives.’ (Article XXIII)³⁵ Since the moral law remains an expression of the unchanging holiness of God, the believer is no more ‘delivered from the law’ than he is from the God whose law it is. Thus Calvin and the Huguenots were as concerned to avoid antinomianism as they were to avoid Roman legalism: the justified sinner is free, not from the precept of the law—ever, but from its penalty.

In the *Institutes* and the *Commentaries*, Calvin gives frequent expression to the theology of the *Confessio*. ‘Justification . . . consists solely in the remission of sins . . . God justifies by pardoning . . . Thus the Apostle connects forgiveness of sins with justification . . . to show that they are altogether the same . . .’³⁶ Whenever Calvin discusses the ‘obedience of Christ’ on which the sinner’s justification rests, he always means ‘his sacrifice’.³⁷ Lastly, the abrogation of the moral law only applies to its *penalty*. ‘. . . we are not so exempted from the law by Christ’s benefit that we no longer owe any obedience to the teaching of the law and may do what we please. For it is the perpetual rule of a good and holy life.’³⁸

Conclusion

It becomes increasingly clear that the *Confessio Fidei Gallicana* is, for all its neglect, a model confession.³⁹ The range and character of its statements fully reflect the chaste, balanced biblicism of John Calvin, anxious as he always was to avoid any unwarranted extra-Scriptural speculation. The ‘regulative principle of Scripture’, so clearly propounded in Article V⁴⁰ is strictly adhered to within the confession itself. Whether dealing with Pelagianism, or the anti-trinitarian sentiments of Servetus, or the excesses of the Anabaptists, so in such other vitally important matters as providence, imputation, the atonement and justification, the *Confessio Fidei Gallicana* is a worthy monument to a truly biblical evangelicalism. It further demonstrates why William

³⁶ *Institutes*, III:XI: 21, 11, 22. See also *Comment* on Romans 4:6–8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II:XVII:1. See also *Comment* on Colossians 1:22.

³⁸ *Comment* on Galatians 4:4. See also *Comments* on Galatians 3:25 and Romans 6:15, and *Institutes* II:VII:12–15.

³⁹ In *The Confession of Faith* (Banner of Truth rep. 1961), A. A. Hodge does not consider the *Confessio* worthy of specific mention. See Chapter I *A Short History of Creeds and Confessions*, 9–10. The single chief deficiency of the French Confession is its omission of an article on the Last Judgement and Christ’s return. However, this was remedied in the the *Belgic Confession* (1561), which also includes a fuller statement on infant baptism.

⁴⁰ ‘No authority . . . should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures but, on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them . . .’ *Creeds*, 362.

Cunningham's attempt to harmonize John Calvin and Theodore Beza was such a monumental failure.⁴¹ It is hardly surprising that such an advocate of the *Westminster Confession* should feel obviously embarrassed by Calvin's explicit statements—they are as significantly different from the pronouncements of a later scholastic Calvinism as they are from those of the Arminian alternative. The Huguenot confession remains a standing rebuke to inadequate and exaggerated theologies alike. It also offers itself as a guide to those who would seek a sound, confession-based unity. It invites us to embrace one another in evangelical harmony and peace.

⁴¹ *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation, op. cit.*, 345f.