

Calvinism and Politics

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This is a bibliographical essay written to guide those wanting a better overall grasp of Christian reflection upon public governance. I am necessarily limited to references in English, and what follows seeks to provide readers with historical and philosophical pointers that can help in the interpretation of Calvinist contributions to a contemporary understanding of political responsibility. This essay is written with the assumption that there will be other contributions that attempt to highlight both positive, negative and problematic aspects of other Christian traditions as well.

The basic question this bibliographical essay attempts to answer goes like this: what, if anything, has “Calvinism” and “reformed Christianity” contributed to public governance and political life, and particularly to a Christian understanding of political (and civic) responsibility? What does political theory that can be termed “Calvinist” have to say about the role of government and the formation of public policies whether they be for our own country or for the positive formation of international relations? And again: where is a distinctively *Calvinist* understanding of politics evident in contemporary Christian contributions to political life and the theoretical reflection that accompanies such efforts?

As much as the results of Calvinist political reflection can be found in English-speaking polities, these can also be found in many other countries around the world: the application of principles derived from a Calvinist “world-view” for politics can be found in Dutch, French, German, Afrikaans, Hungarian, Japanese, Korean, Bahasa, Spanish and even in Mandarin Chinese. As with other historical streams of Christianity, Calvinist perspectives are disseminated by the efforts of Christian individuals, associations, colleges and churches. With this broad question in mind, this bibliography will consider “Calvinist” or “reformational” contributions to politics under five headings:

- 1. An Initial Limitation and Preliminary Caution**
- 2. The Emergence of a Calvinist Worldview in the 20th century**
- 3. 16th Century Calvinism and 20th & 21st Century Politics**
- 4. Important Persons**
- 5. Characteristic Themes**

1. Initial Limitation and Preliminary Caution

Our aim is not made any easier by the fact that we are limiting ourselves to “political theory” and “public policy”. A comprehensive overview of the extensive field of “Calvin and Calvinism studies” is out of the question. Our aim is to give those seeking greater understanding of politics some insight into how to begin to address Calvinist political reflection and movements. Political life is very complex. In this review, the literature that refers to itself as “public theology” is not included here, although such literature will tend to want to classify some or most of the literature cited as “political theology”. This is not because I believe such contributions are not “Calvinist” but rather because they are not centrally concerned with political theory. They may argue for a particular theological or

ethical interpretation of some or other contentious public policy issue that churches and Christian groups are concerned about. But to include the literature of “public theology” would, I judge, take this bibliography too far afield, and also have to deal with the scholastic presumption that a “Christian” approach is begun with theology. Indeed the scholarship that refers to itself in “Calvinist political theory” terms, which we refer to below, and which can be traced through the *political theories* of this “line” of Calvinist and neo-Calvinist scholarship, has also drawn attention to the disastrous consequences for a biblically-directed world-view from Calvinistic *theology's* persistent historical support for a reformed version of scholasticism and natural law theory. Indeed, that issue also cannot be avoided and needs investigation but I do not propose to engage in that necessary scholarly discussion here.

We also begin with an apology. I have deemed it important to begin with explaining the caution that is needed when approaching this subject. This might seem to be a digression but I do not believe it is. There are special historical and philosophical reasons why reference to John Calvin (1509-1564) and Calvinism in relation to politics can easily become problematic. To begin therefore I am seeking to provide readers with a broad survey of this problematic.

Sometimes, perhaps not very often, a politician will appeal to a particular Christian teaching to either support or reject policies under discussion in parliament or debated elsewhere in the public domain. But in the English-speaking world, and in Australia in particular, it is likely that Christian politicians will avoid making reference to Calvin and Calvinism even if they are referring to principles that can be said to have a Calvinist origin or background. Why? The answer is not difficult to understand. To make an appeal to John Calvin or Calvinism can very easily draw fire from political opponents and what started out as a naïve reference becomes embroiled in distracting references to the burning of Michael Servetus (1511-1553), the armies of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) at Drogheda, the Salem witch trials (1692), or more latterly Apartheid in South Africa.

The fact that distracting comments may be “red herrings” should not blind us to the fact that these references have enduring political clout. It is important to understand something about the events referred to by those who simply “know” that reference to Calvin spells trouble. In political terms we need to grow wise as to why references to Calvin and Calvinism can be problematic. Even reformed preachers will tend to avoid references to Calvin if by doing so they will generate problems in their congregation or denomination or cast doubt upon the “political correctness” of their pulpits. Is it so surprising that Christian public officials would avoid such references as well?

That will have to suffice to identify some *superficial* ambiguities that have to be faced from the impacts of populist responses to appeals made to signifiers that are dogmatically deemed to be “politically incorrect”. There are other potential and highly likely responses to references to “Calvinism” that require our more focused attention.

Sometimes any such reference will simply evoke comment on the “Protestant work ethic” and presumably “everyone knows” what that is about, even if there is no appreciation for the historical insights of Max Weber (1864-1920), Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) or Richard H Tawney (1880-1965). In recent times, “Calvin studies” has made a contribution which, to a considerable extent, offsets any

narrow mechanistic view that ties Calvinism to capitalism. There is a better *scholarly* appreciation for the economic and market-place contribution of the Genevan reformer and Calvinist movements these days. Calvin's enduring historical impact upon public policy debates in the "west" cannot be swept aside as it was earlier in the 20th century, particularly in the social science. That was when such "data" was eclipsed by the dogmatic assumption that "religion" was in retreat.

There has also been the impetus to a fresh appreciation of Calvin's teaching from Karl Barth (1886-1968) by his drawing attention to what was enunciated on the very first page of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) ("The Knowledge of God the Creator Book 1, Chapter 1), that we humans can only understand ourselves by knowing God and know God only by knowing ourselves. That statement alone is enough to challenge common Calvin stereotypes. A sharper historical appreciation of the Calvinist side of European reformation has emerged as the 20th century went on. Even the dogmatic equation of "Calvinism" with an extremely stern version of Augustine's "double predestination" is no longer so easily maintained in sociology texts, let alone in theology, as it was when I first confronted Weber's "Protestant Ethic" thesis over 45 years ago. Even so, knowledge of such scholarly clarification is only sporadically appreciated within "main line" social sciences.¹

But the weight of "reformation studies" now means that the significant philosophical differences between Calvin and Theodor Beza (1519-1605), to mention a notable example, can not easily be ignored. Beza was Calvin's successor at the Genevan academy. It is generally understood that Calvinism was broader and much more diverse than Weber's construct of the "ideal type" Calvinist can allow. Moreover, Weber's hypothesis is often taken in a way that assumes that the Canons of Dordrecht (1618-1619) - the so-called 5 points, or TULIP - along with the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith are simply what Calvin would have taught had he been faced with the later developments which resulted in these two documents which have since become church confessions. The assumed characteristics of Calvin's person from passages in Weber's famous study are barely consonant with the accounts given in well-respected Calvin biographies.

Apart from its highly contentious approach to the study of Calvin and Geneva's reformation, such a presumption about the predestinarian core of Calvinist thought actually ignores the provisionality that Weber explicitly build into his

¹ Ineed the confident academic appeal to "mainline" disciplinary understanding is not so prevalent these days - with perhaps the exception of "management studies" - and is a tragic misrepresentation of how scholarship is structured, let alone how social life is shaped by religious belief.

hypothesis; clearly he did not consider his article to be a last word, but rather a framework for ongoing historical research.²

But there has indeed been a long history of Christian and Calvinist historiography that wants to assert that the West is part of a glorious history that flows from the same Genevan reformer. And the aforesaid assumption of a single “line” of historical development from Calvin to 19th and 20th century English-speaking evangelicals may not be completely dead among some presbyterian and reformed scholars and their denominations. But generally speaking, the attempt these days to appeal to a “glorious history” is usually confined to a fundamentalist reaction that promotes a “Christian nationalist” mythology, blind to the evils and blight of colonial advancement, because of its historicist desire to make the so-called “Christian heritage” into a normative point of reference.

There is, however, much scholarly consideration of the way in which Christianity, in its many streams, has influenced the development of what we would call open democratic public governance, the rule of law, the independence of the courts, a free press, and the unfettered investigations of science. But it would be a big stretch to suggest that the form of our contemporary political institutions is simply the result of Christian, let alone reformed or “Calvinist”, influences or even, negatively, primarily a reaction against such Christian-imperial or Christian-colonial influences.

But before going further I would note *en passant* other examples, related to the US, that demonstrate an ambiguous “connection” between Calvinism and politics.

Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), US President from 1913-1921, had been a Princeton University academic and from 1902-1910 that academy's President. Princeton was a staunchly Presbyterian institution. That Wilson suggested that Geneva should be the headquarters of the League of Nations is often interpreted an evidence of his “Calvinist” leanings that influenced his policies and view of the world. Yes, that suggestion needs exploration. Yes, Geneva had been the centre from which John Calvin's influence spread in the 16th and 17th centuries. Calvinism may well have been influential in some of Wilson's political doctrines, not least his view of America's “manifest destiny” (“American exceptionalism”) and its New Israelite mission, allegedly conferred by Providence with the blessings that had come upon that nation found by the Puritans as a “city on the hill” after 1630. This New Israelite ideology cannot be ignored, nor can the attempts of some of its advocates to suggest that it is indeed compatible with a Calvinist view of politics. The nostrum of US as a “New Israel” with its latter-day Christian-Zionist redaction, also implicates Calvinism in various ways. But this bibliography is written assuming that such an ideology, as much as the Afrikaner Calvinist support for Apartheid, is a Christian heresy, a significant secularisation of the Calvinist world-view.

To explore this further, even before we specifically deal with “Calvinist world-view”, the following two books are recommended: William Lee Miller ***The First Liberty: Religion and the American Republic*** (Alfred A Knopf, 1986) and James W Skillen ***With or Against the World? America's Role Among the Nations*** (Rowman and Littlefield,

2. Though this writer by no means follows Weber's philosophical direction, it is quite feasible for scholars who retain Weber's methodological approach to correct his “ideal-type” construction of “Calvinist” to accommodate what is evidently revealed by subsequent historical scholarship. The genuine Christian philosophical confrontation with Weber's “Protestant Ethic” thesis has to make its case in careful detailed critique of the dogmatic insistence that lies at the basis of Weber's method and the results of his empirical sociological account, namely that all scientific reflection (including historical analysis) has to be kept free from religious faith if one is ever to rationally “understand” religion. Confusingly, Weber's historical account makes the claim that he is explaining that historical process by which science emancipated itself from “religious constraint”. That is the source of the tension in his thesis and this is also indicative of the deeper “spiritual” problem in which his theorising is cast and seemingly cannot resolve. Why? Because it depends upon an altogether different “religious” constraint (not acknowledged as such) that dogmatically denies its own (scientifically circumscribed) piety. In other words Weber's sociology of religion does not inquire deeply enough as to which religion has taken the place hitherto ascribed to Christianity - his thesis assumes that Calvinism is but the half-way house between a previous society dominated by religion in the Christian sense, and the secularity of modernity where religion is redefined by wearing the “secular” mantle of the “Spirit of Capitalism”.

2005). Miller's background is dissenting baptist and his book is a contribution to American historiography; Skillen's background is evangelical presbyterian and reformed and his book seeks to consider the way the US has come to define itself and its policies in terms of the civil religious appeal that regularly justifies them, in a global-historical context.

Another example of a “Calvinist” connection in the midst of the rough and tumble of political debate, is found in George W. Bush's “commencement address” at Calvin College in 2005.³ In this speech, the US president connects the White House “faith based initiative” to Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), a prominent Dutch Calvinist much revered among that college's constituents. (Kuyper will be discussed separately below). Indeed, the President's faith-based initiative did owe much to initiatives in the 1990s taken by the Center for Public Justice (CPJ), a body with a decidedly Calvinist and Kuyperian political understanding.⁴ The background to CPJ's effort to influence public policy can be appraised in, Stanley W Carlson-Thies and James W Skillen (eds) **Welfare in America: Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis** (Eerdmans 1996). This is the proceedings of a conference reporting on an inquiry running from 1992 to 1995. But the manner in which the US President linked his understanding of the “faith based initiative” to Abraham Kuyper shows that he (or his speech-writer) ignored Kuyper's Calvinistic doctrine of “sphere sovereignty” by suggesting that Kuyper was an advocate of the sociological views of Tom Paine (1737-1809) in which human society is ascribed sovereign creative power with which governments should never interfere. Yes, with Bush's appeal to America's “exceptional” role in world affairs, plus his salute to Kuyper, it might seem that “Calvinism” had a powerful place in American politics. And there is just enough in that suggestion to make us more careful about how we analyse political “influence”.

We have spent some time considering these “contextual issues” because without pointing to the politically problematic nature of attempts to appeal to Calvin and Calvinism, we may simply compound some difficulties about understanding the Calvinistic contributions to political life, to public governance, jurisprudence and political theory. Of course, appeals to a Calvinist tradition is not unique in this regard. Confronting misunderstandings and public mythologies is something that all involved in public life will have to do at some time. It's part of the confrontation. It goes with the job. Appeals to Roman Catholic, Anabaptist, Lutheran or Evangelical teaching also need to be accompanied by deepened critical contextual understanding if appeals are to make a genuine contribution in the midst of policy debate.

2. Contemporary Efforts to Promote a Calvinist Worldview

Why, in this second decade of the 21st century, should citizens be in need of a better understanding of the impact of Calvinism upon political life and civic responsibility? Let me emphasize that our concern can not simply be with trying to ensure that our fresh understanding of Calvinism will help us to distance ourselves from obviously erroneous American exceptionalist redactions which view the US as the world's “new lead” society, or even the “new Holy Roman Empire”. Even so, the US does in many respects tend to view itself as the historical carrier of the valuable insights derived the 16th and 17th century reformation as well as being the bastion and front line of “liberty” and “tolerance”.

In addressing this question we face other questions as well, one in particular concerned with our study of the past, with “history”. Whatever our “background”, our church confession or denomination, do we not need sharper *historical*

³. The controversy erupted publicly when Nicholas Wolterstorff of Yale, a former Calvin professor of philosophy, was required to step aside to allow the American President to make the address.

⁴ In recent times this concern has been continued by a body known as the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance, www.IRFAAlliance.org.

insight? And I am assuming that Christians will need to find a way to a *biblically-directed historical understanding*.

In our polity we don't have to be elected representatives or public servants to carry *political* responsibility. As “mere citizens” we are accountable (to God and to our neighbours) for our *political* conduct. That is a distinctive feature of the kind of public-governance structure in which we find ourselves. We are citizens who have a part to play in “public-governance” in what we call the “state”. And to carry this responsibility also means we need to appreciate how this calling is being formed and malformed by contemporary political developments, local, regional, national and international.

Not all “states” allow for the kind of extensive political accountability that is formally ascribed to the citizenry, as assumed for our parliamentary democracy in our polity. That recognition of citizenship as an integral part of our human vocation is indeed a facet of Calvinist political thinking. It relates to the biblical idea of “office” in which we are called to serve and in which, as I have said, we are accountable. And, of course, we are also accountable as citizens for how citizenship is formed and malformed. Such processes should not be ignored.

But then as marriage partners, parents, members of wider family networks and associations, teachers, professionals, workers, church members, business persons, commuters and volunteers, in all of these offices which have public and civic side to them, each with indispensable connections to our political life. In making our contribution to “politics” we will also have to take account of our historical background and that means taking note of how our many responsibilities have been shaped by our political context. The various ways by which we give expression to political responsibility have been formed historically, for decades and centuries before we came of age and were eligible to vote. That indicates that politics is part of our *historical* task, something we enact as members of communities, and this too Calvinist political thinking endorses. In this regard Max Weber’s emphasis upon the “this worldly” calling of the Christian - also the citizen and the worker - was quite right.

So, let us now turn to consider what we can learn from “Calvin” and “Calvinism” as one important Christian movement that arose out of those European movements usually called the “Reformation” of the 16th and 17th centuries. What we are considering now, in 2013, might seem “academic”. But the question has in fact arisen as Christians throughout the 20th century, and before that, considered it as well. But if there is a substantive connection with the 16th century movement called “Calvinism”, we will need to ask why knowledge of it has been lost, or at least why this question has had to be raised. What is it about “modern developments” that has meant that such a “connection” from our “Christian past” needs to be “recovered” because it has, at least to some extent, been lost? But then, as I have already indicated, the connection has not been entirely lost and let me give three more (non-US) examples that illustrate that modern times can show itself to be more “connected” to Calvinism than is often thought.

A first example is that of Laszlo Tokes (1952-), the Hungarian Reformed pastor who helped initiate the Romanian revolt that led to the downfall of the Ceausescu régime. Since 2004 he has been a member of the European Parliament, its Vice-President since 2010.

Another example is, as we have already noted, the strong Calvinist support for Apartheid in South Africa. It was not only various South African Dutch Reformed churches that gave this ideology an ecclesiastical backbone, but a significant number of Afrikaner scholars, also some associated with a “reformational philosophy” that developed in The Netherlands from the 1920s and 1930s, who were also members of the Broederbond. There were those who attempted a justification of Apartheid by claiming to extend Kuyper's “sphere sovereignty” to include race or ethnicity as a “sovereign sphere”.

A third example is, perhaps not so very significant in “global, historical” terms. It is the submission by Sir James Ah Koy made to the 2012 constitutional consultation set up in Fiji by the military government.⁵ That consultation has since then been aborted by the military régime, but it has been a public attempt to outline in broad terms a Christian understanding of public governance by appealing to Calvinist political theory. The “magistrate” as much as the “preacher”, the State as much as the Church, is subject to the Lord God's rule over heaven and earth. They are accountable in the first and last instance to His commands for the way in which they conduct their respective affairs.

These are three instances where a public political connection with “Calvinism” can be readily identified. It is by no means a one-way street. We have already mentioned Max Weber's “Protestant Ethic” thesis and the influence this historical hypothesis has had. Many scholars in Weber's line will construe “Calvinism” as an important background factor to contemporary economics and also to the ongoing secularisation of “western” political life. They may even link it, as Weber does, to the universal dominance of Western developments. But these days, as much as dogmatic demands are made to “keep religion out of public discussion” recognition of religion is no longer constrained by assumptions that it be considered a purely private and individual matter. In western societies, not least because of widespread immigration from Asian and Arabic countries, but also because of the disillusionment with the humanist enlightenment presumption that humans are autonomous, there is a new appreciation for the public manifestation of religious faith.

That may indeed be strange, even mysterious, for those who believe that religion is best kept in a purely private sphere. And in this context many Christians have come to question the status quo privatisation of religion, just as some of their newly arrived neighbours to western societies might do. And thus we may see the emergence of a new public acknowledgement of the relevance of different religious movements, including Calvinism, and notably of the implications from this plurality of publicly expressed faiths, for how we are governed.

The recognised 20th century authority for setting forth the “Calvinist's” view of history and politics is Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). His **Lectures on Calvinism** (Eerdmans 1931), delivered in 1898 at Princeton University, is still the best contemporary Calvinist rationale for public involvement on the basis of a Calvinist world-view. It may even be a “core document” for understanding “Calvinist political involvement” at least in the English-speaking world. It should

⁵ This was the submission of Sir James Michael Ah Koy, one of hundreds, made to a Constitutional commission chaired by an international jurist Yash Ghai which submitted a new constitution to the military government only to have it trashed by the illegal regime and its military backers. Appendix One of Ah Koy's document is titled: Secular State or Christian State? see <http://fijiconstitution.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/4/6/12466522/pillarandappendicesubmissionfinal2012final.pdf>

be borne in mind that those active within this movement, that derives from a significant cultural development in The Netherlands from the 1880s to 1920s, have reservations about the indiscriminate use of the term “Calvinist” to describe the distinctive character of their work. It is not that they wish to deny that they are the historical benefactors of the Dutch Calvinistic contribution to the 19th century “Revéil” movement that had considerable impact upon churches across Europe and Great Britain.

As well Kuyper’s 1891 address, translated and published as the ***The Problem of Poverty*** (Baker 1991), is this one-time Dutch Prime Minister's trenchant statement that social welfare is a necessary part of promoting public justice for all. Peter S Heslam ***Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*** (Eerdmans 1998) provides a sharp and critical exploration of the background to Kuyper's famous Princeton lectures. I list two other volumes which provide a broadly Calvinist understanding of politics: these are James W Skillen ***A Covenant to Keep - Meditations on the Biblical Theme of Justice*** (Center for Public Justice 2000), an exposition of biblical teaching; and Bob Goudzwaard et al ***Hope in Troubled Times*** (Baker 2007), an expansion of an earlier work, ***Idols of our Time*** (IVP 1981), an overview of global issues in “architectonic” terms. These days Abraham Kuyper has an established niche in North American book publishing. There are many publications lauding his insights, and one can find his views being quoted to justify policies across the entire political spectrum.

3. 16th Century Calvinism and 20th & 21st Century Politics

As may be plain from what I have outlined above any serious attempt to examine “Calvinism and Politics” will also have to come to some appraisal of the voluminous historical, sociological and legal literature that has reckoned with the emergence of democracy in the west, with religious and political rights, social and confessional pluralism, federalism and the ways in which the assumed accountability of Parliaments to their electors has been given form to political parties and elections.

An important part of that story is suggestively presented by John Witte in ***The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism*** (Cambridge, 2007). His “Introduction” provides a cogent and impelling overview of the way in which the teachings of Calvin and Calvinism became a pre-Enlightenment driver of Western constitutionalism. As a result this volume tells the “human rights” side of the story of the Calvinist contribution to the West and significantly challenges the “progressive liberal” view that, building upon “schoolboy texts” have long maintained that concern for rights began in the later 17th and early 18th centuries. Such taken-for-granted views reduce the story of political rights to the Enlightenment background of contemporary dominant political ideologies whether of liberalism and/or socialism. The work is full of suggestive lines of enquiry for how the ideas and insights derived from this historical lineage maintain an enduring relevance for a political contribution that seeks to be truly self-critical in its appraisal of political institutions and not simply accommodate the global twittering clamour of “rights talk”. Witte explicitly notes that his work is aimed at complementing the significant Roman Catholic scholarship that traces the impact of Catholic rights doctrine (xii). He also makes provocative suggestions as with his recognition that Calvinist recognition of the

original creation mandate to “dress *and* keep the Garden” (Gen 2:15) “made them reflexive environmentalists long before green became fashionable” (36).

There is another feature of Witte’s book that deserves appreciation particularly by scholars and associations and research projects that seek to link their understanding of Calvin and Calvinism to the “neo-Calvinism” of Abraham Kuyper and movements that take their lead from him. In the final chapter of his book, Witte refers to the astute observation of Herbert Butterfield in ***Christianity and History*** (1949, 1) about the tendency of English Protestants “to hold some German up their sleeves ... and at appropriate moments to strike the unwary Philistine in the head with this secret weapon, the German scholar having decided in a final manner whatever point may have been at issue.” (321) Witte’s remark is that for Anglo-American Protestants, Abraham Kuyper functions very much as that kind of secret held up the sleeve.

Some readers of this bibliography might well do better by now putting this aside and taking up Witte's study instead. In certain respects that work is an extended “bibliographical essay”, wanting to see further detailed studies in response to his provocative stimulus. That aim for his book takes on the stamp of Calvinist scholarly self-efacement (19-20).

The famous essay of Max Weber ***The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*** (Allen and Unwin 1930) was translated into English and published 1930 but had first appeared in German in 1904-5 as a journal article. Whatever it has been interpreted to mean for the English-speaking scholarly and academic world, it should be kept in mind that it was also the result of an extensive study in historical-economics. It also aimed at explaining why Germany, with its prevailing Lutheran and Catholic cultural inheritance, had been so slow, compared with other “western” polities, in adapting to a capitalist mode of industrial organisation and economic management. Weber's analysis of the impact of the 16th century reformation led him to formulate his famous hypothesis in terms of “a line of development having *universal* significance and value”.

The Protestant Ethic may also be read as a statement about what to expect from Germany’s rapid industrialisation, that might also have bequeathed further rationalisation of an inherited way of life increasingly amenable to further rigorous capitalist discipline within the German realm.

The “Protestant ethic” thesis, along with the multitude of studies inspired by Weber’s analysis, has endorsed a persistent political view that the religious “Weltanschauung” that was the child of Calvin's scholarship in turn gave birth to the “worldly asceticism” of the modern entrepreneur.

There is another equally important side to this modern scholarly and scientific re-appraisal of Calvin, the Genevan reformation and the world-wide movement known as Calvinism. It concerns the impact of the reformation movement upon what we would now call the cultural and social life of the west.

The “world-view” of Calvin and those who followed in the “Calvinist” line of development, is now widely acknowledged for its significant and distinctive contribution to the development of modern science and cultural life as such. It might not have been as extensive as some claim, but then its impact was certainly not negligible. The subsequent growth of the nation-state, religious tolerance, parliamentary democracy and human rights has also been linked to

this diverse but confessionally identifiable movement. The idea of a religiously-neutral public realm is, however, certainly not what Calvinist political theory has promoted, even as it has had to struggle with ways of ordering public life and governance with religious freedom for all.

Alongside Weber's *Protestant Ethic* we should also mention the work of Ernst Troeltsch *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches and Sects* (Allen and Unwin 1931) and R H Tawney *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1925). These were works that appeared (in English) in the first decades of the 20th century. The salience of these works hold their value down to this day. But to consult them without reckoning with the social, cultural and historical scholarship that has appeared subsequently is not only to risk misunderstanding their value for political understanding of their own time, it would seriously underestimate the further insights and understandings that have become evident since they were penned. They have been extremely formative on subsequent historiography of the 16th and 17th centuries. But we can provide here only a very schematic guide to what has been written and published since the early decades of the 20th century.

In terms of research into Calvinism's origins and initial efflorescence in the 16th and 17th century we note that the standard text *The History and Character of Calvinism* by John T McNeil (1954) has, since 2002, been superseded by Philip Benedict *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: a Social History of Calvinism* (Yale University Press, 2002). This carefully documented account gives an overview of Calvinism in its various national and international contexts. Another volume that will throw helpful light on the nature of Calvinism as an historical movement is Heiko A Oberman *The Two Reformations: the Journey from the Last Days to the New World* (Yale UP, 2003). Oberman, a brilliant and trenchant Luther-scholar provides four Chapters on Calvin and Calvinism (VII-X) that are incisive and helpful. Oberman identifies the importance of Calvin's basic tenets and thereafter of Calvinism public respect for those in flight, for asylum seekers. Here is an important facet of Calvinism's subsequent embrace of a political creed that distinguished membership in the congregation of the faithful from citizenship in the city or nation while upholding the rights of residents and respect that is due to all neighbours. The extensive discussion in Part Three, "Roger Williams: the Root of the Matter" of Miller's *First Liberty* will repay careful study, as will the exchange between David Little "Conscientious Individualism: A Christian Perspective on Ethical Pluralism" (113-140) and James W. Skillen "Pluralism as a Matter of Principle" (140-152) in John A. Coleman (ed.) *Christian Political Ethics* (Princeton University Press 2008).

W Fred Graham *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (John Knox Press 1971) is a solid discussion which, following the example of André Biéler *La pensée économique et sociale de Calvin* (Georg & Co 1961), effectively offsets interpretations of Calvin which not only misrepresent him in his social context but ignore the actual positive impacts of his social and ethical teaching. A definitive translation of Biéler's *magnum opus* is now available *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought* (Ed. Edward Dommen, Trans, James Greig, WARC & WCC Geneva 2005).

The term "Calvinist" has been regularly used in sociology and psychology in particular to refer to a predisposition to an authoritarian personality, and Weber's analysis is sometimes referred to as justification for this. For this kind construal

one can refer to Talcott Parsons' early contribution "Jean Calvin (1509-1564)" to the ***Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*** (MacMillan 1930). Parsons pictures the Genevan reformer as an obsessively busy theologian constructing an all-embracing moral scheme.

There have been no end of scholarly attempts to challenge this stereotype of Calvin and the typical "Calvinist" as has been inferred from Weber's "worldly ascetic", the modern entrepreneur. To mention only a few recent examples that are relevant for specifically political theorising. There is John Witte, Jr.'s (*op.cit*); William R. Stevenson, Jr. ***Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought*** (OUP 1999); Menna Prestwich, ed., ***International Calvinism, 1541-1715*** (Clarendon Press, 1985); Ralph C. Hancock, ***Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*** (Cornell UP 1989). The novelist Marilynne Robinson gives some attention to Calvin's influence in her book of essays ***The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought*** (Mariner Books 2000). These are but a select few. Nevertheless, there has not been all that much scholarly work from the neo-Calvinist side to critically examine the implicit deistic imputation to Calvin's spirituality that is, I believe, overlooked when Max Weber's account is referred to by those who follow him. This is an important aspect of the ongoing debate about Weber's ***Protestant Ethic*** thesis that is regularly overlooked.

In his essay, "Reformed ... and Always Reforming" in Sandra F Joireman ***Church, State and Citizen: Christian Approaches to Political Engagement*** (OUP 2009), James W Skillen provides a "Calvinist" way of understanding politics which, while emphasizing the one creation, receives the revelation of the gospel as God's definitive announcement that in His Son creation will be brought to its sabbatical rest (Genesis 1-2:3). In this context responsibility for political life is grounded in creation and, after the fall, is integral to Christ's redemption, a way of fulfilling the great commandment of love for God and self-denying service of our neighbours with love.

The influence of Calvin's work as pastor, teacher, educator and social reformer spread from Geneva where he did most of his life's work, to other realms, firstly to Swiss, German and French cities and communities, and from there to exercise considerable formative influence upon the development of public government in The Netherlands, Hungary, Scotland, England, North America and South Africa.

Whether it actually had an impact within the Australasian colonies is another question worthy of careful scholarly investigation. On the one hand, there has been a persistent appeal to a Calvinist theology in the Anglican diocese of Sydney, even within a denomination that, in the terms of Philip Benedict, derives from "The Unstable Settlement of a Church 'But Hafly Reformed'" (*op.cit* Chapter 8). On the other hand, Nicholas Aroney ***The Constitution of a Federal Commonwealth: The Making and Meaning of the Australian Constitution*** (CUP 2009) notes that there is a possible residual impact of the political-legal theory of the Calvinist writer Johannes Althusius (1563-1638) upon the way in which federation was discussed in the decades before 1900 in the Australasian colonies. The ideas of Althusius may not have been central or even prominent in the discussions leading to Australia's federal constitution. But the mention of Althusius who, according to Otto von Gierke (1841-1921) was the first early modern systematic writer upon federalism, indicates that a consideration of his views and his legacy may be helpful now that political theory and jurisprudence

has developed a better appreciation of the problems, if not inner weaknesses of the federal commonwealth outlined in Australia's constitution. It may indeed be constructive for political debate as well, if views like those developed by Althusius in the 17th century, and extended by fellow Calvinist political theorists in the 20th and 21st century, are to receive serious reconsideration.

Althusius was also mentioned by James Bryce in ***The American Commonwealth*** (1889) particularly because of his principled rejection, on Calvinist grounds, of the Statist view of sovereignty put forward by Jean Bodin (1530-1596).

A distinctly “Calvinist” view of the political separation of powers may indeed have had some residual background impact upon Australia's federal constitutional discussions although the influence is indirect. In this regard, as well, we should keep in mind that the pragmatic political orientation known as “realpolitik” and “raison d'etat” that is traced from Machiavelli (1469-1527), is quite antithetical to Calvin's view of the civil magistrate *coram Deo* (***Institutes*** (1559), Chapter XX). But then it hasn't simply been the Calvinist scholars who have shown an interest in Althusius. Althusius' work has been receiving attention in political theory since Carl J Friedrich's Introduction to the ***Politica methodice digesta of Johannes Althusius*** (1932) and the publication of Frederick S Carney's translation ***The Politics of Johannes Althusius*** (Beacon Press, 1964).

The considerable efforts by those of Calvinist persuasion to recapture insights that are basic to the Calvinist understanding of human responsibility within creation and redemption do not take place in a vacuum. They are undertaken in a scholarly context where efforts from other persuasions are also reconsidering our modern political inheritance from classical Greek and other sources.

This is the concern of the reader brought together by James W Skillen and Rockne M McCarthy (eds) ***Political Order and the Plural Order of Society*** (Scholars Press, 1991) which presents a useful cross-section of *pluralist political theories*: those based on historical doctrines of custom and tradition, Catholic doctrines of natural law and subsidiarity alongside of Calvinist expositions of “sphere sovereignty” and creational responsibility.

As noted, there are “neo-scholastic” attempts to re-read Calvin and Althusius as exponents of variations of natural law theory, and there have even been attempts to argue that Althusius was a precursor to late 20th century “critical social theory”.

It is a task for this and subsequent generations of citizens in this Federal Commonwealth to embark upon a serious reconsideration of the dominant ideas about the origin and character public governance that have shaped Australian political life. Should not Christians be drawing on all available resources to develop a coherent biblically-directed understanding of political responsibility? Are we not called to contribute to political life by helping to re-define this Federal Commonwealth's place in this region and the globe in terms of the call from Heaven to love our neighbour with public justice for Jesus Christ's sake?

Now, of course, the question of Calvinism's role in the emergence and dominance of capitalism has been debated at length and there is no let up in that regard. But it is a debate that arises from interpretation of economic history and sociological theories rather than with questions about political theory and jurisprudence.

Some time before Weber's work was published in German, and decades it was published in English, the English-speaking world had been made aware of a new Calvinist movement that had arisen in Europe as a result of the mid-19th century Revéil movement. In places this revival of Christianity became associated with conservative and reactionary anti-revolutionary movements. But as Michael P Fogarty points out in his important study ***Christian Democracy in Western Europe 1820-1953*** (Routledge & Kegan Paul 1957), the Christian democratic movement that arose in The Netherlands was initially a Calvinist movement, led first by the archivist of the House of Orange, Mr Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876).

The initial focus of his anti-revolutionary efforts was in promoting a Gospel-inspired public response to the advance of liberalism particularly by promoting the establishment of Christian schools. Groen's famous book ***Ongeloof en Revolutie*** (The English translation of which is ***Unbelief and Revolution: A Series of Lectures in History***. Abridged and trans. Harry Van Dyke 1989)⁶ appeared in 1847 and sought to expose the French Revolution's determined historic departure from Christian faith because of its alternative *religious* conviction - faith in reason. This faith had taken hold first among the French and then progressively captured the hearts of all of Europe's "enlightened" peoples.

This book was originally published 4 years before the famous manifesto of Marx and Engels. Groen laboured against the system of belief that considers that Reason enables those enlightened to outgrow any need for Christian faith. It was and is believed that Reason allows a person to transcend whatever the religious imagination can concoct.

Groen became a formidable political public opponent of this neopagan world-view, and of the dominant liberalism promoted by the conservatives in the Dutch Parliament. He stood against the incipient Statism that had emerged in Dutch politics after Napoleon, and is particularly remembered for the impact of his resistance that is still evident in Holland's pluralist educational system. His forthright Christian statesmanship helped lay a foundation for what would later be characterised as the "pillarisation" of Dutch public life.

In this context that relativized the Enlightenment's pretensions, those of Calvinist, Roman Catholic or secularist religious belief found new ways to assert their cultural contributions to public life. This pluralism would subsequently become evident in education, labour relations, political parties and in the mass media. Late in his life, Groen handed leadership of the Anti-Revolutionary movement to Abraham Kuyper and Kuyper organised Holland's first mass-membership political party.

In 1898, Kuyper was brought to Princeton University to deliver the L P Stone lectures which are now available in his well-known ***Lectures on Calvinism***. This published series of lectures contains, particularly in its first three chapters, the definitive neo-Calvinist statement on its world-view and approach to politics.

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), a Dutch jurist, worked for most of his professional life at the university founded by Kuyper, the Free University in Amsterdam.

⁶ Available on line at <http://www.freewebs.com/reformational/groenvanprinsterer.htm>

According to A T van Deursen ***The Distinctive Character of the Free University in Amsterdam 1880-2005*** (Eerdmans 2008), the philosophical contribution of Dooyeweerd and his brother-in-law D H Th Vollenhoven (1892-1978) constituted the purest expression of the Kuyperian university ideal. They were scholars with an international appeal and, in following in "Kuyper's line", they raised some pertinent critical issues that have had to be re-assessed and re-formulated in the Calvinist and "neo-Calvinist" tradition. By his careful and painstaking research, Dooyeweerd produced what is thus far the most comprehensive statement of a critical political theory and jurisprudence in a Calvinist sense.⁷

An authoritative introduction to this body of literature in English is Jonathan Chaplin ***Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society*** (University of Notre Dame Press 2011). The volume subjects Dooyeweerd's theory to a searching critique although the ongoing appraisal of Dooyeweerd's work would seem to be still in an early phase of development.

The Calvinistic wing of the reformation has taken the following motto which gives its understanding of its historical mission in a nutshell: *Ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda* - "the Church [may be] reformed but [it is] always reforming". The Calvinistic world-view therefore considers that not only the church, but all of life's responsibilities, are to be considered as pathways for thankfully heeding the call of the Good Shepherd.

But any responsibility in life which gives expression to the reforming power of God's word will, in time, require further ongoing efforts to both conserve what is good and bring to expression the new possibilities for service that are thereby disclosed in obedience to the Gospel.

"If you love me you will keep my commandments" is the Master's description of the way of life of those who follow Jesus Christ. In this regard Calvinist political theory has begun to confront a biblically-anchored view of historical development in which progress and conservation are inter-related facets of the one human cultural task - the cultural mandate (Genesis 1-2). Progress and conservation should not be viewed as alternative (political) options. The biblical justification of this is found in the "cultural mandate" given to Adam to "dress and to keep the garden". From Jesus Christ, this mandate has been given its definitive redemptive formulation in the "Great Commission" by which Jesus' disciples, servants of creation's King, are called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16; 28:16-20).

And thus integral to the Calvinistic world-view is the assumption that the preaching of the Gospel goes hand in hand with the development of a distinctly Christian way of life: locally, nationally, regionally, globally. Further, any insight developed by any Christian stands in need of ongoing extension, correction and refinement. Only the work of Jesus Christ is to be complete and no disciple's work - whatever the profundity of his or her leadership, vision, insight or scholarship - should ever be elevated to normative status.

Thus *semper reformanda* serves not only as a caution against any elevation of human cultural activity, it is also a spur to further work 'while it is still day'.

⁷ Van Deursen makes reference to the international impact of another neo-Calvinist, Hans Rookmaaker (1922-1977) whose contribution is known through his diagnostic analysis of the west in *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (IVP 1970).

4. Important Persons

John Calvin (1509-1564). **Institutes of the Christian Religion** Chapter XX “Civil Government”.

Johannes Althusius (1557-1638) **Politica methodice digesta atque exemplis sacris et profanis illustrata** (1603).

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) **Ongeloof en Revolutie** translated and published as **Unbelief and Revolution: a Series of Lectures** (Wedge 1989).

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) **Lectures on Calvinism** (1898);

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) **Roots of Western Culture: pagan, secular and Christian Options** (Wedge 1979); **The Struggle for Christian Politics - an essay grounding the Calvinistic worldview in its law-idea** (Paideia 2008); **Encyclopedia of the Science of Law** (Paideia 2002).

5. Some Characteristic Themes

Sphere sovereignty:

Drawing on Calvin's view that the office of Magistrate is accountable directly to God, and does not need to have its relationship mediated by the Church, Kuyper set forth his view that from creation there certain basic spheres of responsibility have been disclosed which, while inter-dependent, have their own distinctive integrity and are irreducible one to the other (i.e. the state, the church, the family, the school, business enterprise). Dooyeweerd observes that Kuyper effectively derived his view from Althusius, even if it had been Groen who had initially coined the phrase “sovereiniteit in eigen kring” (sovereignty in its own sphere).

Kuyper's formulation of the principle was to assert its relevance for an entire “way of life”. And as such it would challenge not only the blurring of boundaries between social “spheres”, but also ways of life which in various ways blurred these boundaries because they ignored the various and diverse distinctive human responsibilities. Kuyper's concern was that if these boundaries were ignored then they would be in danger of being wiped out. For Kuyper this was how State absolutism arises, and over against this he posited his principle of “Sphere Sovereignty” which he said was deeply rooted in the creation. It is a basic cosmological principle, but as Herman Dooyeweerd pointed out it is important to sharply distinguish this principle from the ages-long commitment to the presumption that thinking and theoretical thinking is **self-sufficient** in its own domain.

The Kuyperian, or neo-Calvinist, opposition to State Absolutism may be evident among those advocating “sphere sovereignty” even if the subtleties of populist democracy are yet to find a sufficient challenge from such a *Christian* political option. See “principled pluralism” below.

Public Justice:

Public justice is the distinctive normative task of Governments. A State by law and regulation has the task of administering, ensuring and maintaining public justice. This can and does take many forms. It can be retributive / distributive / restorative. Public justice is a norm; it is a calling. Citizens too are called to ensure public justice.

Principled pluralism:

- i. structural pluralism (differentiated responsibility);
- ii. confessional pluralism (diverse faiths in one polity).

The enunciation of “principled pluralism” in contemporary neo-Calvinist political theory seeks to reckon with a common misperception that pluralism means relativism. Structural pluralism refers to the diversity of structured human responsibilities; confessional pluralism derives from a recognition that the membership of citizens in the polity - the State or political community - should be distinguished from the membership of believers in a church (or synagogue, temple, mosque).

Pluralism has, as noted in the text above, come back into vogue in political theory in recent decades, because of a general recognition that human responsibility cannot be encapsulated in any one social institution or structure, but comes to expression, normatively, in all kinds of institutions, organisations, associations and relationships. It is also in terms of this renewed political appreciation for the diversity of social structures, and the attempt to reduce human responsibility to being functions of one or other of that, that Calvinist political theory has sought to set forth its own view of social structure and historical differentiation.

Nevertheless, a Calvinist “Christian political option” has found it extremely difficult to articulate its alternative view of parliamentary democracy and the public-legal upholding of civil society in the face of various pressures. On the one hand there is the hegemonic neo-liberal individualism that commercialises all of life and even allows for the free trade in human sperm and ova, in order to facilitate all assertions of individual identity. On the other hand, there is the ongoing projects of totalitarian terror that demand submission.

Office:

A stewardship, a sphere of competence in which a given responsibility is to be enacted is an office. A parent's office is concerned with the raising of children and the forming of a loving household. The marital office involves the mutual responsibility of wife and husband to love one another, and to thereby reflect the bond of Christ to His church. The teacher's office is worked out with respect to the students or pupils who are taught in the teacher's class-room. The office of the public official in administering public justice is to render to such offices their due, and to ensure that each human office is ascribed the (public) respect that is its due (*suum cuique tribuere*). In Calvinist political theory, citizenship is respected as an important office. Citizenship is a human responsibility that has been formed historically according to the norm of public justice for all.

Pillarisation:

This is a term that has been used to translate the Dutch “*verzuiling*” being the cultural process that in the late 19th century and early 20th century saw the establishment of the “pillars” of Dutch public life: the humanist, the Roman Catholic and the Calvinist. It is with reference to this as historical precedent that later political theory in the Calvinist line refers to “principled pluralism” in its recognition that the public square is the domain in which various religious world-views make their contribution to civil society and public governance. But with a pluralistic school system becoming the domain of terrorist madrassa cells, such

civic pluralism has lost much credibility. On other hand political arguments for a public-legal recognition of educational pluralism in public schooling have been dealt a savage blow by the revelations of systemic sexual abuse of children in some prominent schools and systems.

Anti-Revolutionary Movement

This movement was a European-wide conservative movement that gained ground initially in reaction to the French Revolution and the persistence dominance of the secular ideology that simply accommodated the humanist world-view. The Dutch contribution to the movement was provoked by Groen's 1847 series of lectures **Unbelief and Revolution** (see ref. above) and was initially allied with the German anti-revolutionary movement and the Lutheran perspectives of Friedrich Julius Stahl (1802-1861). It eventually was organised in The Netherlands by Abraham Kuyper as the Anti-Revolutionary Party. The ARP ceased to exist as a distinct party in 1980 and was replaced by the Christian Democratic Appeal, a union of Protestant and Catholic political parties.

Antithesis

When cultural activity is promoted by Calvinist churches, associations and political parties, the biblical doctrine of the two ways - the way of obedience as opposed to the way of disobedience - will be referred to as the "antithesis". This is closely related to the Augustinian teaching of the "two cities", the City of God (De Civitate Dei) and the City of this World (De Civitate Terrena). In 19th and 20th century Calvinist thought this has often been taken to mean that Christian obedience means alternative Christian organisations "in all spheres of life".

Sometimes this has developed to a point where the demarcation line between obedience and disobedience is not understood in terms of God's speaking of His word to a person "in the heart", but in a social and demographic sense thus implying that the antithesis has a kind of ethnic or sub-cultural manifestation that can be organised by human initiative. Such a displacement must have extremely serious implications, as can be seen with political régimes that seek to privilege a certain "Christian sector" of their national population.

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