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CALVIN AND TRENT: CALVIN'S REACTION TO
THE COUNCIL OF TRENT IN THE CONTEXT
OF HIS CONCILIAR THOUGHT

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IT is self-evident from a survey of the Calvin Corpus that the Reformer's polemic with the Roman Catholic Church was one of the most important and essential aspects of his labors. However, it is distressing to note that this area of Calvin's thought, which finds its fullest expression in the many tracts which he penned in the 1540's, has been all but neglected in recent Calvin scholarship. The purpose of this brief essay is to outline one aspect of Calvin's attack on Rome: his reactions to the Council of Trent.¹ Nowhere in Reformation literature are the essential theological and ecclesiastical issues which divided Rome and the Reformers more lucidly delineated.

To isolate Trent in Calvin's thought, however, is to do him an injustice. For his rejection of Trent did not mean a repudiation of a conciliar solution *per se* to the schism in the Church. Nor does it justify Cochlaeus's assertion that the Geneva Reformer's attack on the Council was proof enough that he was an intransigent schismatic. For, in actual fact, Calvin was part of that conciliar tradition which had its source in the conciliar thought of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and included all of the principal thinkers of the Reformation. As early as his Strasbourg period, Calvin had joined with common voice the emphatic demand of the German Reformers for a *frei general concilium teutscher nacion* — "a free general council of the German nation" — "free," because independent of the Pope; "general," because universal in personnel;

¹ The literature on this topic is limited to a few paragraphs in broader studies dealing with Protestant reactions to the Council of Trent: ROBERT M. KINGDON, *Some French Reactions to the Council of Trent*, *Church History* (1964), 379-81; WILHELM PAUCK, *The Heritage of the Reformation* (New York, 1961), 157-60; ROBERT STUPPERICH, *Die Reformation und das Tridentinum*, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 47 (1956), 48-52.

and "of the German nation," because free from Italian influences.² Indeed, this formula became the cornerstone of Calvin's program for the reunification of the dismembered Body of Christ. And it is only within this larger conciliar context that Calvin's reflections on Trent can be properly understood and equitably judged.

I. CALVIN AND THE GERMAN COLLOQUIES: THE ROAD TO TRENT

It was during Calvin's exile in Strasbourg that he was first exposed to the various attempts to effect a *rapprochement* between Protestants and the Roman Church. He made several journeys abroad during these years in order to attend the great Colloquies organized by Charles V in the hope of putting an end to the schism in the Church.³ "So much do I continue to be like myself," Calvin wrote, "which is to say never willing to appear at or to follow the great assemblies, they nevertheless brought me, I know not how unless by force, to the imperial deliberations, where I found myself in the company of a great many people."⁴

Then, as at the time of the analogous efforts made by Francis I, Melancthon and Bucer were the defenders of the Protestant point of view in these controversies, where they were confronted by the cleverest and most conciliatory of the Catholic theologians. It was at Bucer's request that the French Reformer came to Frankfort in February, 1539, accompanying Bucer and Sturm, Strasbourg's official deputies. Reluctantly overcoming his timidity, Calvin agreed to participate, having been told that he could intervene better than anyone else in behalf of the persecuted members of the Reform in France.⁵ Calvin's efforts were not crowned

² PAUCK, 146f.; cf. ROBERT E. McNALLY, *The Council of Trent and the German Protestants*, *Theological Studies* 25 (1964), 8f.

³ FRANÇOIS WENDEL, *Calvin* (New York, 1963), 62.

⁴ IOANNIS CALVINI, *Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia (Corpus Reformatorum)* (Brunswick, 1863-1900), XXXI, 28. Hereafter referred to as *Opp.* This glimpse of the timid, unpretentious and human side of the Geneva Reformer is something seldom noticed by his biographers, but has received some attention of late. Cf. RICHARD STAUFFER, *Calvins Menschlichkeit* (Zürich, 1964); T. H. L. PARKER, *Portrait of Calvin* (Philadelphia, 1954); EBERHARD GROSSMANN, *Beiträge zur psychologischen Analyse der Reformatoren Luther und Calvin* (Basel, 1958).

⁵ Letter to Farel, 15 March 1539: *Opp.*, X, 322-29; cf. EMILE DOUMERGUE, *Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps*, 7 vols. (Lausanne, 1899-1917), Vol. 2, 536ff.; WENDEL, 62.

with success; however, he did have the opportunity to make the acquaintance of Melancthon and exchange opinions with him during this interlude on the banks of the Main.⁶

Calvin was to attend three more Colloquies during his stay in Strasbourg. At Hagenau in June, 1540, and at Worms during the winter of 1540-1541, he still figured as only a brilliant successor to Bucer, and was without official status.⁷ For the great assembly at Regensburg, however, which met in April and May of 1541, Bucer persuaded the Magistrates that Calvin, like Jacques Stein and Bucer himself, should be accredited as a delegate of the City of Strasbourg.⁸

Regensburg was the most important and one of the last efforts to unite the Church of the Empire. It failed like the others, and for the same reason — the impossibility of finding a ground of understanding which would not destroy the very foundations and the reason for existence of one or the other of the rival confessions.⁹ Again Calvin expressed reluctance to attend, but his attitude soon changed; he states in a letter to Farel of May 11, 1541, that "I shall never regret having come."¹⁰ Concessions were made on both sides at the Diet. Calvin soon became concerned with the extremely flexible stance of Melancthon and Bucer, and warned them against making concessions too easily in the hope of peace.¹¹ He defended them as to the sincerity of their purpose, but judged in a letter to a friend:

So far as I could understand, if we could be content with only half a Christ we might easily come to understand one another. Philip and Bucer have drawn up ambiguous and insincere formulas concerning transubstantiation, attempting to satisfy the opposing party while yielding nothing. I could not agree to this device. . . . they hope that in a short time it would so happen that they (the Catholics)

⁶ Letter to Farel, March 1539: *Opp.*, X, 330-32; WENDEL, 63.

⁷ For CALVIN'S reactions to these conferences see his letters to Farel: 21 June 1540: *Opp.*, XI, 50-54; 27 July 1540: *Opp.*, XI, 63-64; Oct. 1540: *Opp.*, XI, 83-86; 21 Oct. 1540: *Opp.*, XI, 90-93; Letter to the Seigneury of Geneva, 12 Nov. 1540: *Opp.*, XI, 104-06; Letter to Farel, 13 Nov. 1540: *Opp.*, XI, 113-14f.

⁸ DOUMERGUE, Vol. 2, 625-40; WENDEL, 63; JACQUES PANNIER, *Une Année de la vie de Calvin*, *Bulletin de la Société Calviniste de France*, No. 45, p. 2.

⁹ WENDEL, 63.

¹⁰ *Opp.*, XI, 215.

¹¹ *Opp.*, XI, 215, 217. WENDEL, 64.

would begin to see more clearly, while the matter of doctrine shall be an open question for the present; therefore they wish to skip over it, and do not dread equivocation in matters of conscience, than which nothing can possibly be more hurtful.¹²

Calvin's own optimism, which at first had been sincere, faded away more quickly than Bucer's; he was cooler and more suspicious. He had soon managed to bring to light the real intentions of the organizers of the conference; and, even today, the letters which he sent from Germany to his friends are among the most telling documents we have concerning these last efforts to prevent the schism from becoming irremediable.¹³

Calvin's final letters concerning Regensburg, written in July, 1541, from Strasbourg, are filled with despair. "From the time when we split on the question of the Eucharist, agreement became impossible on any other."¹⁴ Disgusted, he left the Diet before it officially closed, arriving in Strasbourg toward the end of June, 1541.¹⁵

The next two years found Calvin preoccupied with the problems and tasks which he met upon his return to Geneva. It is not until February, 1544, that we again find the Reformer actively engaged in ecumenical activities — this time on the occasion of the Imperial Diet of Speyer. At this time, at the request of Bucer,¹⁶ Calvin addressed a tract, *De Necessitate Reformandae Ecclesiae*,¹⁷ to the Emperor and the Diet, which took the form of a "Supplicatory Remonstrance" in reference to a General Council after the manner of the Early Church.¹⁸

The Protestants had reason to hope that the Emperor would honor his promise for a national council at the Diet. Charles was in need of the assistance of the Empire for an offensive against

¹² *Opp.*, XI, 215.

¹³ WENDEL, 64.

¹⁴ *Opp.*, XI, 251.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Opp.*, XI, 634-35; HASTINGS EELLS, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven, 1931), 339.

¹⁷ *De Necessitate Reformandae Ecclesiae: Supplex exhortatio ad Caesarem Carolum Quintum et Principes aliosque ordines Spiraie nunc imperii conventum agentes, ut restituendae ecclesiae curam serio velint suscipere* (1544), *Opp.*, VI, 453-534.

¹⁸ Many of CALVIN's tracts, including the one above, are available in translation in *Tracts and Treatises*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, 1958). Volume I contains an excellent introduction by T. F. TORRANCE.

France, which he planned to carry out in conjunction with England in the course of the summer of 1544. To crush Francis I, he needed the help of the Empire, both Catholic and Protestant.

De Necessitate Reformandae Ecclesiae is perhaps the best of Calvin's *apologiae* for the Reformation. The Emperor is asked to regard this treatise "as the common address of all who so earnestly deplore the present corruption of the Church."¹⁹ In the first half of the work Calvin carefully sets forth the reasons which made the reforming of the Church so essential an operation at that time; he expounds the principles and teachings of the Reformation, answers the charge of novelty, schism, and heresy, and exposes the gross errors and improprieties of the papal system.

Having described the ills which have led to the corruption of the Church, and having prescribed the remedy for those ills in the form of Reformation doctrines and practices, Calvin, in his concluding pages, moves to the question of implementing a cure: "Let us now attend to the only remedy left us by those who think it impiety to move a finger, no matter how great the evils by which the Church is oppressed."²⁰ Calvin urges Charles to convene a Provincial Synod of the Empire. Papal intransigence precludes the possibility of a General Council. True, says the Reformer, Rome has talked much of a General Council, but it is only a delaying tactic.²¹ The proof of this is that their words have never been demonstrated in deeds. But, Calvin asks, what if the Pope, who advises procrastination, were to have a change of heart and call a General Council? What would such a Papal-sponsored conclave be like?

The Roman Pontiff will, of course, preside, or if he declines to come, he will send one his Cardinals as Legate to preside in his stead, and he will doubtless select the one who he believes will be most faithful to his interests. The rest of the Cardinals will take their seats and next to them the Bishops and Abbots. The seats beneath them will be occupied by ordinary members, who are, for the most part, selected for subservience to the views of those above.²²

¹⁹ *Opp.*, VI, 458.

²⁰ *Opp.*, VI, 525.

²¹ *Opp.*, VI, 526.

²² *Opp.*, VI, 529.

Such a judicatory surely would not be suited for the serious task of mending the Body of Christ. Indeed, these are the very people ("The Roman Pontiff and his whole faction") who would have the most to lose if the Church were reformed. Their advantage is in maintaining the *status quo*. "Sir, will you leave the Church to them, that they may decide concerning its reformation at their own will. . . ? They will decide that things must remain as they are." ²³

Having shown the nefarious end to which any papal effort toward reconciliation would inevitably lead, Calvin implores the Emperor and the Princes to charge themselves with the task of reforming and reuniting the Church. Answering the charge that it would be "unprecedented" for Germany alone to undertake this reforming, Calving points to the precedents set in the Ancient Church. "As often as some new heresy emerged, or the Church was disturbed by some dispute, was it not the usual custom to convene a Provincial Synod, that the disturbance might thereby be terminated? It was never the custom to recur to a General Council until the other remedy had been tried." ²⁴ Several such synods were held in the East to discuss the Arian heresy before the General Council of Nicea was called. Such examples from the Ancient Church, then, establish a precedent for provincial synods and refute the charge of novelty. "Assuredly, after such examples, your Imperial Majesty is not to be prohibited from using the means within your reach for bringing back the body of the Empire to sacred concord." ²⁵

The Diet of Speyer ended with Charles, much in need of a united front against France, making far-reaching concessions to the Protestants in the ecclesiastical-political sphere.²⁶ Charles lured them with the prospect of another Diet in the autumn or winter of 1544 when the religious question would be discussed anew. At that Diet "devout, learned, peace-loving men" would submit a plan for a "Christian Reformation." ²⁷

As soon as Pope Paul III became aware of the Emperor's activi-

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Opp.*, VI, 526f.

²⁵ *Opp.*, VI, 528.

²⁶ HUBERT JEDIN, *A History of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis, 1957), I, 495.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 496.

ties at Speyer, he instructed Cardinals Crescenzo, Cortese, and Pole to draw up a comprehensive warning brief for the Emperor.²⁸ The definitive text, *Admonitio paterna Pauli III*,²⁹ completed on August 24, 1544, was couched in grave but fatherly terms.

Referring to the events which had just transpired at Speyer, the Pope alleges that the Emperor has agreed to decide the ecclesiastical affairs of Germany at an Imperial Diet and even speaks of a future council without mentioning the Pope. Paul firmly reminds Charles that in the ecclesiastical sphere the Emperor's role is that of the arm, not the head.³⁰

With obvious reference to the accusation that he had prevented the convening of a council by underhanded practices, the Pope insists that he himself had clung to the project as long as there remained a spark of hope. Out of consideration for the Germans he had designated Trent for its assembly and had sent his delegates there. However, "we called, but there was none to hear. We came, and there was no man."³¹ Yet, in spite of everything, Paul assures Charles that he stands by his plan for a council: the council is not dissolved; it is only suspended.³²

The brief ends with certain specific demands. The Emperor must refrain from encroaching on the ecclesiastical sphere, from discussing religious questions at the Diet, and from disposing of church property. If peace cannot be brought about by any other means, he must accept the arbitration of a council. The concessions made to the Protestants must be revoked. In the event that the Emperor refuses to comply with these demands, he will be sternly dealt with.³³

Several copies of the brief came into Protestant hands, and led to a flurry of responses by the leaders of the Reformation. It aroused Luther to fury and inspired his last and most virulent pamphlet against the Papacy.³⁴ To a man the pamphleteers

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 497.

²⁹ *Admonitio paterna Pauli III. Romani Pontificis ad invictissimum Caesarem Carolum V (1544)*, *Opp.*, VII, 253-88.

³⁰ *Opp.*, VII, 257-62.

³¹ *Opp.*, VII, 281f.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Opp.*, VII, 281-86; JEDIN, I, 499.

³⁴ *Wider das Papsttum zu Rom, vom Teufel gestiftet (1545)*. MARTIN LUTHER, *Werke* (Weimar, 1928), LIV, 195-299. Here the Pope is characterized as "the

argued that it was the Emperor's prerogative to convoke a council, not the Pope's.

Calvin published the *Admonitio Paterna* in 1545 "cum scholiis" of his own. By numerous examples he shows that during the period of the Ecumenical Councils these assemblies, as well as the provincial synods, were not called by the popes, but by the emperors.³⁵

It is in this tract that Calvin first mentions the Council of Trent. Underrating the constructive phase of Paul III's policy, Calvin believes that the Council now called at Trent will never assemble. The projects of Mantua and Verona have both "vanished into bull." "And now, in unsettled times, amidst the sound of arms, he bestirs himself as if he had found the fittest opportunity."³⁶ If there should be a meeting at Trent, the Germans "will hardly be so foolish as to throw themselves into the wolves' jaws."³⁷ As to the composition of the Council, Calvin envisions it being made up of "Milesians,"³⁸ "who cannot bear the shadow of a good man among them."³⁹ In caustic language, he pictures the procedure which may be expected, since the cause "which is to be brought under discussion (the Reformation) has already been condemned."⁴⁰

However, Calvin conjectures, the Tridentine Fathers, not wanting to seem too stern and cruel, will assume the "pose" of objectivity and declare their willingness to hear the Protestant case: "Go, officer, call the Protestants; if they desire to propose anything to the Council, let them give the substance of it in humble

most all-hellish father," "the Ass Pope with long asses' ears," "the destroyer of Christianity," etc.

³⁵ *Opp.*, VII, 261ff.

³⁶ *Opp.*, VII, 281.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ The source of this allusion is difficult to ascertain. CALVIN may have been referring to the *Milesian Tales*, a class of voluptuous romances, usually witty and frequently erotic if not obscene. A more likely reference is probably to the residents of Miletus, a city in Asia Minor which was known in classical times for its opulence and flourishing culture. The city fell in 494 B.C. to the Persians, fulfilling an oracle that had been given by the priestess at Delphi:

"Then shalt thou, Miletus, so oft the contriver of evil,

Be to many, thyself, a feast and an excellent booty."

CATHERINE B. AVERY (ed.), *Classical Handbook* (New York, 1962), 712f.

³⁹ *Opp.*, VII, 281.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

petition, that they may not offend the delicate ears of the Holy Fathers.”⁴¹ Having heard the demands of the petitioners, it will be convenient first of all for the Tridentine Fathers to ascertain whether the Protestants concede to the tribunal without challenge the power of judging them and their doctrine; and next, whether, abandoning the reformation which they have established, and renouncing the doctrine they have embraced, they are prepared to swear anew the faith and all the ritual of the Holy Roman See. “If they hesitate as to the former, they will immediately be declared schismatics; if they refuse to do the latter, they will be twice heretics.”⁴²

With the specter of such a “kangaroo court” in his legal mind, Calvin renews his plea to the Emperor for a German Council. Building on the Emperor’s promise for such a national synod, Calvin exclaims in closing: “But now we are in another age. . . . There is an Emperor who will never be induced to bring his faith and dignity into bondage to Farnese.”⁴³

II. CALVIN AND TRENT

Despite Calvin’s predictions, Charles V made peace with Francis I, the promised national synod championed by the Reformers never materialized, and the Council of Trent, after many delays, was finally convened in late 1545. Response from Protestant polemicists was not long in coming. The Reformers felt compelled to voice their opinion concerning this event as well as the first decrees enacted by the Council. After Luther had published his last antipapal tract, Melanchthon developed his views on the basis of his *Wittenberg Reformation* of 1545 and began his public attack upon the Council. As was to be expected, the tracts and letters in which he dealt with the decrees of the Council were decidedly negative. He sharply criticized the decree concerning justification, especially the denial of the certainty of justification.⁴⁴ The Council, Melanchthon maintained, could not establish

⁴¹ *Opp.*, VII, 282.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Opp.*, VII, 287.

⁴⁴ *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melancthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia* (Brunswick, 1863-1900), VI, 432, 450. Cf. ROBERT STUPPERICH, *Die Reformation und das Tridentinum*, *Archiv* 47 (1956), 38-41.

new dogmas, but could only preserve scriptural doctrines. Similar to this attitude was that of Martin Bucer, who by no means could consider the Council of Trent to be the council which had been promised to the German Estates.⁴⁵ Bucer attacked, among other things,⁴⁶ the church prelates at the Council, calling their attention to their mistakes and referring them to biblical doctrines.⁴⁷ The Swiss theologians soon joined Bucer in his attack on Trent. The Council was refuted by both the Zurich theologians and the evangelical Spaniard, de Enzinas, at Basel, who was in touch with them.⁴⁸

The sharpest and most extensive refutation of the Council of Trent, however, was left to John Calvin. This was his *Acta Synodi Tridentinae Cum Antidoto*, published after the first seven sessions of the Council in 1547.⁴⁹ It was followed the next year by a French translation, which was somewhat longer and earthier than the Latin original.⁵⁰ This extended comment on Trent took the form of a full reprint of the text of the decisions by these early sessions of the Council, with Calvin's opinion of each appended. From a purely polemical point of view this method would seem to have obvious disadvantages. It makes accessible to one's

⁴⁵ *Ad patres in synodo Tridentina, qui Deum timent, de causis, quae pios homines ab ea synodo absterrent.*

⁴⁶ BUCER attacked Trent in two other tracts. In August of 1545 he penned his *De concilio et legitime iudicandis controversiis religionis, criminum, quae in Mart. Bucerum Ioh. Cochlaeus ad Illustrissimos . . . perscripsit, Confutatio*. While this was an extended polemic dealing with several issues, it includes a defense of his concept of a national council and a strong denunciation of the Council of Trent. The next year BUCER published another invective against Trent under the title *Zwei Decret des Trientischen Concili*. Here the Strasbourg Reformer attacked the decrees on the authority of tradition and the infallibility of the Vulgate. In the preface he asserted that Protestants were justified in rejecting the Council, for the intransigent attitude of the Catholics precluded all chance of a religious agreement. The Council assembled at Trent was neither free, as had been promised, nor superior to the Pope, as the Council of Constance had decreed an ecumenical council should be. HASTINGS EELLS, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven, 1931), 368, 382.

⁴⁷ STUPPERICH, 43f.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 46-48. FRANCISCO DE ENZINAS (Dryander) is noted for his translation of the Wittenberg Bible in Spanish. He was a widely traveled refugee who was arrested in Brussels, and finally sought refuge in Basel.

⁴⁹ *Opp.*, VII, 365-506.

⁵⁰ *Les Actes du Concile de Trent, avec le remède contre la poison* (1548). Cf. ROBERT M. KINGDON, 379-81. Our next three paragraphs are based on KINGDON's general critical introduction to the text of the *Antidoto*.

readers not only one's own views, but also those of one's opponents. But it was a method which Calvin used many times.⁵¹

The principal source of the *Antidoto*, as with all of Calvin's writings, is Scripture. He insists generally upon plain and literal readings of Scripture, and occasionally hinges interpretations of its meaning on such fine points as the grammatical constructions of specific Scriptural passages.⁵² As a guide to authoritative interpretation of Scripture, Calvin is frequently willing to rely on such Church Fathers as St. Augustine. In this work he makes particularly heavy use of Augustine's anti-pelagian tracts, above all of the *Contra duas epistolas pelagianorum* and the *De predestinatione sanctorum*.⁵³ Occasionally Calvin refers to a medieval figure like St. Bernard or a contemporary scholar like Erasmus. But he never depends heavily upon their authority.⁵⁴

One cannot gloss over the fact that the language which Calvin uses with reference to Trent is often harsh and abusive.⁵⁵ And yet, this document is too carefully conceived and too concerned for theology to be just another example of cheap name-calling. A more considered examination of Calvin's reactions to the Tridentine decisions reveals a degree of agreement which is surprising in a strongly polemical tract of this kind. To some of the Tridentine Decrees his only comment is simply "Amen." This accolade he accords, for example, to a number of canons anathematizing Pelagian views and some anathematizing Antinomian

⁵¹ Another example is provided by CALVIN's refutation of Servetus, where there was even more reason, from CALVIN's point of view, to suppress statement of the rare but dangerous doctrinal position he was combating. KINGDON notes, however, that "such was Calvin's confidence in the irresistible logic of his own arguments, that it never seems to have occurred to him that his readers might find superior merit in those of his opponents." KINGDON, 149f. CALVIN used the same method in several other important tracts: cf. *Articuli Facultatis Parisiensis Cum Antidoto* (1544), *Opp.*, VII, 1-44; *Admonitio paterna Pauli III Cum Scholiis* (1545), *ibid.*, 253-88; *Interim adultero-germanum* (1549), *ibid.*, 545-674.

⁵² In his refutation of the fourteenth decree on justification, for example, CALVIN's argument depends in part on the tense of a verb translated as "live" in a passage from the prophet Habakkuk (2:4). *Opp.*, VII, 465. KINGDON, 150.

⁵³ LUCHESIUS SMITS, *Saint Augustin dans l'oeuvre de Jean Calvin* (Assen, Louvain, Paris, 1957-58), 88-91, identifies and tabulates these references.

⁵⁴ KINGDON, 150.

⁵⁵ This is especially true of the French edition: at one point he compares the Council to "a diseased whore," while at another the Tridentine Fathers are referred to as "horned beasts" with "stinking mussels." KINGDON, 150f.

views.⁵⁶ To other Tridentine texts he registers a partial assent. Occasionally he objects to details of wording. Calvin even makes some concessions which have far-reaching implications. In discussing the fundamentally divisive Decree on Scriptures, adopted at the Fourth Session, he grants some authority to an unwritten apostolic tradition,⁵⁷ although not as much as Trent did.⁵⁸ In short, the *Antidoto* is a serious theological tract, providing a lucid expression of the major points at issue between Rome and Reformed Protestantism.

In the "Praefatio in Antidotum" of the tract, Calvin admits that "a council was long and ardently demanded by many who hoped that by this means all evils would be ended."⁵⁹ An ecumenical council had long been sought "by the common voice of Christendom." Many concerned Christians who wished well of the Church anticipated some good to come from a council. In this hope they were mistaken, for no alleviation of the evils of the Church could be hoped from those who had the power of calling and holding a council.⁶⁰ France was represented at Trent by only two bishops, both "dull and unlearned." The Council as a whole was composed, as to be expected, of a "hired crew of the Pope's followers," as far as possible removed from the character of the early Ecumenical Councils.⁶¹

Calvin then follows up his general critique of the Council of Trent with the particular. With great precision and keen logic the Reformer analyzes the decrees of the individual sessions, paying special attention to the Fourth and the Sixth, which deal with Scripture and justification.

Calvin summarized the Decrees of the Fourth Session thus:

⁵⁶ Canons I, II, III, VIII, & XXII, of the Sixth Session. KINGDON, 151.

⁵⁷ *Opp.*, VII, 413.

⁵⁸ KINGDON, 151.

⁵⁹ *Opp.*, VII, 380.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ "Adsumt forte quadraginta aut circiter episcopi. Neque enim numerum teneo, neque etiam admodum curo, quia parum ad rem pertinet. Respondeant mihi bona fide patroni conciliorum. Si quis ordine ipsos omnes recenseat, quotumquemque ex illis non contemnent? Imo, quum se illi ipsi venerandi patres mutuo aspiciunt, fieri non potest, quin eos sui pudeat. Nam et sibi noti sunt: et quale sit aliorum de se iudicium, non ignorant. Proinde, si removeas concilii nomen, nihil nisi quisquillas fuisse, quidquid illic episcoporum fuit, totus papatus fatebitur." *Opp.*, VII, 382.

First, they ordain that in doctrine we are not to stand on Scripture alone, but also on things handed down by tradition. Secondly, in forming a catalogue of Scripture, they mark all of the books with the same chalk, and insist on placing the Apocrypha in the same rank with the others. Thirdly, repudiating all other versions whatsoever, they retain the Vulgate only, and order it to be authentic. Lastly, in all passages either dark or doubtful, they claim the right of interpretation without challenge.⁶²

Calvin then systematically responds to the Decrees point by point. With regard to traditions (*ἄγραφα*), the Reformer admits that the ancient writers made frequent mention of them. Indeed, Calvin is willing to honor tradition in its proper place; tradition can have a measure of authority in matters dealing with "external rites subservient to decency and discipline,"⁶³ but only if it is proved to be part of the apostolic tradition. In this matter, however, Trent has overstepped its bounds: "We especially repudiate their desire to make certainty of doctrine depend not less on what they call *ἄγραφα* (unwritten), than on the Scriptures." In matters of doctrine *sola scriptura* is the final and authoritative norm. "We must ever adhere to Augustine's rule: 'Fidem ex scripturis conceptam esse.'"⁶⁴

Calvin then marshals the testimony of the Church Fathers against Trent's inclusion of the Apocrypha in the canon. Jerome and Rufinus called these books not canonical, but ecclesiastical, and therefore not entitled to establish doctrine. Moreover, a close look at the Apocrypha by any educated man would reveal to the observer that those books do not deserve so high a place as the Tridentine Fathers have reserved for them. Indeed, the author of the History of the Maccabees himself was not so pretentious as to think that he was writing a book destined to become sacred canon.⁶⁵

A grosser error still, in Calvin's mind, was the condemning of all translations of Scripture save the Vulgate. Any man acquainted

⁶² *Opp.*, VII, 411.

⁶³ *Opp.*, VII, 413.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ ". . . quisquis Machabaeorum scripsit historiam, in fine optat, ut bene et congruenter scripserit; sin minus, veniam deprecatur." *Ibid.*

with Greek and Hebrew will perceive that this version teems with innumerable errors.⁶⁶ To decree the Vulgate infallible is to deprive the Church of God of the benefit of learning. Even the Ancients, who often were not acquainted with the Biblical languages,⁶⁷ "always candidly acknowledge that nothing is better than to consult the original, in order to obtain the true and genuine meaning."⁶⁸ For a trained humanist and diligent exegete like Calvin, the purification of the Scriptures was a holy task. Tying the Church to the erroneous Vulgate was indeed barbarous. Calvin concludes: "The Council . . . insists that we shall shut our eyes against the light that we may spontaneously go astray."⁶⁹

The arrogance of the Tridentine Doctors does not end here, however. Having determined the error-filled Vulgate to be infallible, they further reserve for themselves the right of interpreting the Holy Writ whenever the meaning is doubtful. Lest he be misunderstood, Calvin emphatically denies that he is condoning the interpretation of Scripture by the private intuition of man. "No, in the case of an obscure passage, when it is doubtful what sense ought to be adopted, there is no better way of arriving at the true meaning than for pious doctors to make common inquiry, by engaging in religious discussion."⁷⁰ But, says Calvin, this is not the problem. These "dreaming monks" have given themselves an authority above Scripture and willfully distort it at their whim. Many of the Fathers at Trent hardly know the elements of grammar. Scarcely one in a hundred "has read an entire book of the Prophets, or one of the Apostolic Epistles, or one of the Gospels."⁷¹ Are these the kind of men who should be given the august charge of interpreting Holy Scripture? Hardly, says Calvin. Modestly he asserts that the Reformers "have thrown

⁶⁶ CALVIN cites several examples, particularly from the Psalms, to illustrate how the Vulgate has departed from the Hebrew. With regard to the Vulgate version of the N.T., Calvin states: "Quid? Vulgatam novi testamenti versionem authenticam facere, an eos non pudet? quum in omnium manibus versentur Vallae, Fabri et Erasmi scripta, quae innumeros in ea locos vitiatos digito vel pueris demonstrant." *Opp.*, VII, 416.

⁶⁷ Especially Hebrew.

⁶⁸ *Opp.*, VII, 414.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Opp.*, VII, 416.

⁷¹ *Opp.*, VII, 418.

more light upon the Scriptures than all the Doctors who have appeared under the Papacy since its commencement." ⁷²

John Calvin's special concern with the decrees of the Fourth Session of the Council must be understood in the light of the "inflexible law" which permeates all of his theology: that the Church exists *under* the Word. At Trent, he believed a group of ignorant bishops had arrogated to themselves an authority above the Word on the pretext that they were guided by the Holy Spirit. At the Fourth Session these men had even allowed themselves to tamper with the authority of the Bible. They had given that dubious entity "tradition" a place alongside the Scriptures; they had decreed the erroneous Vulgate to be infallible; finally, they had set themselves above the Scriptures and proclaimed it their sole right to interpret it. Such blasphemous conduct Calvin could not let go unnoticed. "The sum is, that the spirit of Trent wished, by this decree, that Scripture should only signify to us whatever dreaming monks might choose." ⁷³ The priority of Scripture above the Church (or a council that calls itself the Church) was not a "formal" Scriptural principle for Calvin, not an incidental subdivision of dogmatics, but a principle of faith in which the Church was constantly shown its place: under the Word. "The power of the Church . . . is not unlimited, but subject to the Word of the Lord, and, as it were, included in it." ⁷⁴

Of the seven sessions upon which Calvin comments in the *Antidoto*, the one which absorbs by far the greatest amount of his attention is the Sixth — at which the Decree on Justification and thirty-three related canons were adopted. Analysis of them occupies more than a third of the entire book. Since this section lies at the heart of the tract and indeed at the focal point of Reformation theology, we will spend the next few pages analyzing it in depth. Let us first look at the Tridentine Decree on Justification. ⁷⁵

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ CALVINI, JOANNIS, *Opera Selecta*, ed. P. Barth & W. Niesel (Munich, 1926-1936), V, 136. Cf. G. K. BERKOUWER, Calvin and Rome, in *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet* (Grand Rapids, 1959), 190.

⁷⁵ Literature on this topic is rather scarce: cf. HANNS RÜCKERT, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre auf dem Tridentinischen Konzil* (Bonn, 1925); STEPHEN C. SULLIVAN, *The Formulation of the Tridentine Doctrine of Merit* (Washington, D.C., 1959); HEIKO OBERMAN, *The Tridentine Decree on Justification in the Light of*

The Tridentine Decree on Justification is the Roman Church's answer to the teaching of Luther and the *Confessio Augustana* on grace and justification. The Reformed doctrine of Zwingli and Calvin were only lightly touched upon in the course of the extensive debate that developed at Trent over this crucial doctrine.

Hubert Jedin has structured the Decree on Justification into a triple gradation, which I will follow in my analysis. In the first part (cap. 1-9) the sinner's incapacity to save himself by his own efforts is shown, and the utter gratuitousness of the first justification, for which the sacrament of Baptism is required. The second part of the Decree (cap. 10-13) treats the so-called second justification, that is, the increase of justifying grace through the fulfillment of God's commandments, which is a duty laid upon us by God, and not merely a token of the fact that we are justified. The third part of the Decree (cap. 14-16) declares that justifying grace is forfeited for any grievous sin, but that it can be recovered by the sacrament of Penance.⁷⁶

The Council of Trent begins the Decree on Justification with the fundamental statement that original sin has weakened and deflected, but not entirely destroyed, the freedom of the human will.⁷⁷ According to this view, Adam was endowed at his creation with many natural and supernatural gifts of marvelous value and dignity. The greatest of these gifts was the supernatural gift of sanctifying grace, by which he had the privilege of communicating with God.

But, after the Fall, Adam was stripped of his sanctifying grace. He could no longer communicate with God, and his will was weakened and inclined toward evil. The "wounds" inflicted upon Adam as a result of the Fall fell upon the whole human nature as a result of our first parent's sin. It was one of the major emphases of the Council of Trent that when Adam fell, the whole human race fell with him.⁷⁸

Late Medieval Theology, in ROBERT W. FUNK, ed., *Journal for Theology and the Church* (New York, 1967), III, 28-54.

⁷⁶ JEDIN, II, 307f.

⁷⁷ HENRICI DENZINGER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Freiburg, 1952), # 793.

⁷⁸ "Si quis praevaricationem sibi soli et non eius propagini asserit nocuisse, acceptam a Deo sanctitatem et iustitiam, quam perdidit, sibi soli et non nobis etiam eum perdidisse; aut inquinatum illum per inobedientiae peccatum mortem

There is necessity, therefore, for the reestablishment of the original state. How is this to be accomplished? It starts with the grace which touches the heart of the sinner and calls upon him to repent.

Now they (adults) are disposed to that justice when, aroused and aided by divine grace, receiving faith by hearing, they are moved freely toward God, believing to be true what has been divinely revealed and promised, especially that the sinner is justified by God by His grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.⁷⁹

This is the so-called "Gratia Actualis" which gives the recipient the impulse to seek God and His salvation. Salvation is beyond the knowledge of man, and without this impulse, initiated by grace, man could not seek God. This grace is the free gift of God's love and cannot be merited in any way. Moreover, man is free to refuse or to accept it. If a man should choose to cooperate with God's grace of his own free will, then certain preparation or disposition is required of him. It consists of faith in revelation, acknowledgment of sin, fear, hope, initial charity, and finally "suscepere baptismum, inchoare novam vitam et servare divina mandata."⁸⁰

Chapter Seven of the Decree lays bare the core of the Tridentine doctrine of justification. When the initial gift of God is accepted by the ethical activity of man by his own free will,⁸¹ an added gift of grace is given which raises his human acts to a higher level. This is the "Gratia Habitualis," also called sanctifying grace, by which the human nature of man is elevated to the place where he is capable of performing all those things which God requires of him. One can see that the Tridentine Fathers were suggesting that the grace of God and the human will work together. As a result of this twofold action, justification takes place gradually, partly by faith and partly by works.

Faith alone cannot effect full justification, because, in itself,

et poenas corporis tantum in omne genus humanum transfudisse, non autem et peccatum, quod mors est animae." DENZINGER, # 789.

⁷⁹ DENZINGER, # 798.

⁸⁰ DENZINGER, # 798; "to receive baptism, to begin a new life, and to serve the divine commandments."

⁸¹ DENZINGER, # 814.

faith is nothing but the simple assent to the truths of revelation, especially, as interpreted by the Church. As such, faith places the sinner on the road to justification, but it is not the direct instrument, still less the only one of receiving that gift.⁸²

The objective ground of justification, according to the Council of Trent, is the propitiatory death of Jesus Christ; but the apprehension of it is not by faith alone. Faith has justifying power only in so far as it is the beginning of salvation, the root of justification.⁸³

If there is one thing that is particularly emphasized all through the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent, it was the fact that faith is not the only disposition required for justification. Indubitably, this emphasis was aimed at the heretical Reformers who, with one voice, ascribed all of the glory of man's salvation to God alone. The Tridentine Fathers thundered in return:

If anyone saith, that by faith alone the impious are justified in such a way as to mean that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to the obtaining of the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by movement of his own will — let him be anathema.⁸⁴

This resounding emphasis is the key to the understanding of the whole decree on justification. Justification becomes complete only by means of good works flowing from faith. It is not just an *act*; it is a *process*. Moreover, justification has different degrees according to the character and number of the works which flow from faith.⁸⁵

This leads us into the second part of the Decree (cap. 10-13) as defined by Jedin, where the Tridentine Fathers treat the so-called second justification — the increase of justifying grace through the fulfillment of God's commandments, which is a duty laid upon us by God, and not merely a token of the fact that we are justified.

Thus justification is a process which not only rests upon man's preparatory dispositions, but is preserved and increased by his

⁸² DENZINGER, # 801.

⁸³ *Ibid.* Also DENZINGER, # 819.

⁸⁴ DENZINGER, # 819.

⁸⁵ DENZINGER, # 803.

own good works.⁸⁶ The logical consequence of this is that the grace of divine filiation conferred by God is unequal in the case of different justified persons, and is capable of continual increase. Indeed, inequality is one of the essential characteristics of the Tridentine notion of justification.

Moreover, in spite of all the preparation and good works done by a man, the Tridentine Fathers declared that no one can be entirely certain of his salvation unless by special revelation.⁸⁷ Here the Decree is emphatic that, though no one may doubt God's mercy, the merits of Christ, and the efficacy of the sacraments, no one is in a position to know "with the certitude of faith which cannot be subject to error" that he is in the grace of God. The certitude of man's predestination to eternal salvation is known but to God. Man remains liable to sin and is bound to work out his salvation in fear and trembling.⁸⁸

The third and last section of the Decree (cap. 14-16) declares that the justifying grace is forfeited not only through unbelief, but also by the commission of mortal sin.⁸⁹ However, justifying grace for those fallen into uncertainty or amissibility may be recovered through the sacrament of Penance.

Those who through sin have forfeited the received grace of justification can again be justified when, moved by God, they exert themselves to obtain through the sacrament of penance the recovery, by the merits of Christ, of grace lost. For this manner of justification is restoration for those fallen, which the holy Fathers have aptly called a second plank after the shipwreck of grace lost.⁹⁰

He who perseveres until the end obtains everlasting life, because, joined as he is to Christ, like a branch to the vine, he has fulfilled God's law by his good works performed in the state of grace and has thus merited eternal life. Yet, there is no room for vain boasting by man, for even merit is a gift of God. The details of the doctrine of merit are explicated in the concluding chapter.

⁸⁶ DENZINGER, # 806.

⁸⁷ DENZINGER, # 805.

⁸⁸ DENZINGER, # 806.

⁸⁹ DENZINGER, # 808; see also DENZINGER, # # 825, 826, 827, & 837.

⁹⁰ DENZINGER, # 807.

Here the important notion of the union of the justified with Christ on the basis of meritorious works is embodied in the Decree.

Justification by faith alone was, of course, one of the most far-reaching Biblical doctrines of the Reformers. It cuts away from the bottom all attempts at self-justification either through works of the flesh or through works of the mind; that is to say, it calls into question all natural goodness and all natural knowledge and will not allow us to build upon either, but solely upon the grace of God in Christ imputing to us the righteousness of Christ. In the appended canons to the Decrees of the Sixth Session, the Tridentine Fathers misrepresented this central Reformation doctrine, making it mean that it is faith that saves us and not the grace of God — that it is by his own subjective act of faith that a man is saved.⁹¹ And then the Fathers went on, as John Calvin is quick to point out in the *Antidoto*, to teach a semi-pelagian doctrine of salvation which was in fact their fundamental heresy. “The whole matter may be summed up thus: their error consists in sharing the work between God and ourselves, so as to transfer to ourselves the obedience of a pious will in assenting to divine grace, whereas this is the proper work of God Himself.”⁹² In other words, while the Tridentines repudiated the notion that the subjective act of faith alone saves us, they held that the subjective act of faith cooperates with the grace of God in saving justification. Calvin showed that Biblical and Reformed theology repudiates both of these errors. “(Justification) is one and simple and wholly included in the gratuitous acceptance of us by God. . . . It is without us because we are righteous in Christ only.”⁹³ This is the doctrine that through His obedience Christ has fulfilled all righteous on our behalf, and that we are saved solely through participating in His righteousness, which He by grace alone imputes to us and imparts to us.⁹⁴ Faith is nothing but an empty vessel⁹⁵ that receives the righteousness of Christ, but receives it in such a way as to place everything in Christ and nothing in itself.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Especially canons 11, 14, & 19.

⁹² *Opp.*, VII, 446.

⁹³ *Opp.*, VII, 448.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Cf. *Inst.* (III, xi, 7).

⁹⁶ TORRANCE, XXXV.

This involved, of course, a discussion of the true nature of faith. "Let us remember," Calvin said, "that the nature of faith is to be estimated from Christ. For that which God offers us in Christ we receive only in faith. Hence, whatever Christ is to us is transferred to faith, which makes us capable of receiving both Christ and all of His blessings."⁹⁷

Certainly, then, we must have faith in order to be justified, but it is not faith itself that justifies, but that in which we put our faith, namely, the faithfulness of God in Christ.⁹⁸ "Thus faith precedes justification, but in the sense that in respect to God it follows justification. What they (the Tridentine Fathers) say of faith might perhaps hold true, were faith itself, which puts us in possession of righteousness, our own. But seeing that this too is the free gift of God, the exception which they introduce is superfluous. Scripture removes all doubt on another ground, when it opposes faith to works, to prevent it from being classed among merits. Faith brings nothing of its own to God, but receives what God spontaneously offers. Hence it is that faith, however imperfect, nevertheless possesses a perfect righteousness, but it has respect to nothing but the gratuitous goodness of God."⁹⁹

But even more important than their misunderstanding of the nature of faith is the Tridentine Fathers' misunderstanding of the term "justification." For the Tridentines, justification consists not only in the remission of sins, but in the *infusion of inherent righteousness*.¹⁰⁰ The former is grounded in the latter as "its formal cause," and both are imparted in the sacrament of Baptism. This is sometimes called the "first justification." As, according to Trent, by commission of sins after Baptism, the infused grace may be impaired or lost, there is another expedient, as mentioned earlier, called the "second plank after the shipwreck,"¹⁰¹ by which grace lost can be recovered through the sacrament of Penance accompanied by priestly absolution. At any rate, justi-

⁹⁷ *Opp.*, VII, 451.

⁹⁸ TORRANCE, xxxvi.

⁹⁹ *Ibid. Opp.*, VII, 455.

¹⁰⁰ "Si quis dixerit, homines iustificari vel sola imputatione iustitiae Christi, vel sola peccatorum remissione, exclusa gratia et caritate, quae in cordibus eorum per Spiritum Sanctum diffundatur atque illis inhaereat, aut etiam gratiam, qua iustificamur, esse tantum favorem Dei: anathema sit." DENZINGER, #821.

¹⁰¹ DENZINGER, #807.

fication is a process, a matter of degrees, and something capable of being increased or diminished. Moreover, this process of infusion of grace in the so-called "second justification" is accomplished by the merit of good works and priestly blessings.¹⁰²

Calvin takes the term "to justify" to mean something quite different. For him it means "to declare or pronounce righteous." "I say that it is owing to free *imputation* that we are considered righteous before God."¹⁰³ The word "imputation" is critical here. It is quite incompatible with the conception of the Tridentine Fathers of an "iustitia inhaerens," or new qualities bestowed upon the heart of the believer. The distinctive characteristic of Calvin's notion is that justification consists not at all in any change of the moral character or the internal state — though these always accompany it — but solely of man's relative position toward God, his righteous judge.

For Calvin, this change of relation to God is a complete work, once and for all, and incapable of degrees. "Is there any expression of doubt or uncertainty when Paul boldly asserts that a crown of righteousness is laid up for him?"¹⁰⁴ As Calvin states elsewhere: "there is no right faith except when we dare with tranquil hearts to stand in God's sight. This boldness arises out of sure confidence in divine benevolence and salvation."¹⁰⁵ Conversely, as we have shown, Trent asserted that when one lays hold of Christ in faith and begins his trek down the road of justification, Eternal Life becomes a possibility, not an actuality; he now only has the opportunity and the capacity "truly to merit Eternal Life."

The difference between these two conceptions of the meaning of justification is not merely a controversy on points of abstract theology, but a basic conflict between two different conceptions of the Divine-human relationship. On the one hand, at the heart of Calvin's view of justification there is a sense of a direct and personal relationship of the believer to God, at the beginning and at the end of the whole life of faith. On the other hand, at the bottom of the Tridentine notion of justification there seems to be

¹⁰² DENZINGER, # # 793, 798, 803, 806, 807, 809.

¹⁰³ *Opp.*, VII, 458.

¹⁰⁴ *Opp.*, VII, 465.

¹⁰⁵ *Inst.* (III, ii, 15).

a sense of dependence upon a whole ecclesiastical machinery, beginning with Baptism and continuing with an elaborate system of Penance, good works, confession, and priestly absolution, which by their combined effect is supposed to change a sinner gradually into a truly righteous man. As the words which immediately follow the Decree on Justification state: "To complete the doctrine of justification . . . it is fitting to treat the most holy Sacraments of the Church, through which all true justice either begins or, being begun, is increased or, being lost, is repaired."¹⁰⁶

The *Antidoto* is testimony to the fact that the major divisive factor between Trent and Calvin, as it was between Luther and Rome, was the question "on what grounds are men justified?"¹⁰⁷ Calvin stood solidly with Luther in his belief that justification was by faith alone: "For that which God offers us in Christ we receive only by faith."¹⁰⁸ He ascribes all of the glory of man's salvation to God. More specifically, Calvin grounds salvation solely in Christ. There could be no salvation, or declared righteousness, unless something was done to furnish a real and substantial ground for such a declaration. Here the work of Christ meets the demands of the Law, and the needs of the sinner. Through Christ, apprehended by faith, the sinner is regarded and treated as if he were righteous.

Throughout the *Antidoto*, then, Calvin has expressed an antipathy to the Council of Trent and its Decrees. Its composition, consisting solely of "the Pope and his henchmen," could hardly be considered ecumenical. Moreover, these "dreaming monks" had the audacity to elevate themselves above Scriptures, and, in doing so, had distorted that doctrine at the heart of all truly Biblical theology — justification by faith alone. The Reformer still favors a conciliar solution to the schism in the Church: "It were indeed most desirable that the dissensions by which the Church is now disturbed be settled by a pious council, but as matters are we cannot yet hope for it."¹⁰⁹ He concludes on a triumphant note: "But, in affairs so desperate, let us be sustained

¹⁰⁶ DENZINGER, # 843a.

¹⁰⁷ "Haec autem praecipua obscuritatis causa, quod aegerrime adducimur, ut uni Deo in solidum relinquamus iustitiae gloriam." *Opp.*, VII, 441.

¹⁰⁸ *Opp.*, VII, 451.

¹⁰⁹ *Opp.*, VII, 506.

and animated by the promise that . . . the Lord, armed with His own justice and with the weight of His own arm, will Himself perform all things."¹¹⁰

On April 20, 1548, the arch-polemicist, Johannes Cochlaeus, published an answer to Calvin's *Antidoto* (*Ioannis Calvinii in Acta Synodi Tridentinae Censura, et eiusdem Brevis Confutatio . . .*).¹¹¹ In strong and often abusive language, Calvin is labelled a heretic of the worst sort.¹¹² Nor did the other Reformers escape Cochlaeus' scorn. Bucer and Melancthon, among others, are also condemned for their "scurrilous, atrocious, and malicious" attacks against the Acts of the Council of Trent.

The tract rarely reaches beyond the name-calling stage. The only matter of theological substance from the *Antidoto* which is discussed in any detail is Calvin's refutation of the Decree on Confirmation from the Seventh Session.

Appended to the tract are the chapter heads from six books of a certain D. Conrad Bruni's *De Concilio Universali*.¹¹³ Although Cochlaeus believed that they would provide an authoritative corrective to the erroneous writings of the Reformers, the rubrics give little clue as to the nature and substance of the work.

III. THE AUGSBURG INTERIM

Until the Council of Trent had done its work, Charles V tried to impose upon Germany an interim arrangement, effecting a compromise between the teaching of the Papacy and the teaching of the Reformers, which was rejected by both sides.¹¹⁴ In the midst of these dissensions Calvin came forward at the request of Bullinger to pen a powerful refutation of the *Interim Declaration of Religion* (May, 1548). This tract took the form of a full

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ JOHANNES COCHLAEUS, *Ioannis Calvinii in Acta Synodi Tridentinae Censura, et eiusdem Brevis Confutatio, circa duas praecipue calumnias* (1548).

¹¹² "Qua supra omnem leprosororum foeditatem abominabilis et contaminatus est." *Ibid.*, A3.

¹¹³ CONRAD BRUNUS was canon of Augsburg. Born in 1491, he was educated at Tübingen, where he received the doctorate in canon law. Because of his fame in jurisprudence, he attended the Imperial Diets at Augsburg, Worms, Speyer, and Regensburg. He died in 1563. *Allgemeines Gelehrten Lexicon*, I, 1433.

¹¹⁴ TORRANCE, xxxiiif.

printing of the *Interim* text, with Calvin's remarks (*Vera Christianae Pacificationis et Ecclesiae Reformandae Ratio*) appended.¹¹⁵ He treats the *Interim* as an adulteration of the pure doctrine of Christ, shows why this is so by refuting the arguments adduced in support of this compromise in doctrine and in usage, and denounces the attempt to secure peace by the sacrifice of what he holds to be the truth. The *Interim* is a specious pacification which leaves us only half a Christ, and, by falsifying every part of His teaching, can only lead to the ultimate undoing of the Reformation.¹¹⁶

While in this tract Calvin again manifests his passionate desire for the unity of the Church and his readiness to have a meeting of a truly ecumenical council in order to give peace to Christendom, he seems less hopeful than in his earlier writings. Perhaps Trent had dampened his hopes that a national or universal council free from Papal control was still a possibility. He states resolutely his opposition to any compromise with heresy,¹¹⁷ and concludes by voicing his readiness to seal the faith he professes by tongue and pen with his own blood, if necessary.¹¹⁸

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

John Calvin renewed his plea for an ecumenical council in a memorandum dated near the end of 1560 (*Mémoire sur le concile*):¹¹⁹ "In order to put an end to the divisions which exist in Christianity, there is need to have a free and universal council."¹²⁰ The letter presents Calvin's alternative to the Council of Trent in a positive and remarkably nonpolemical tone.

Calvin then lays out his formula for such a council: "The

¹¹⁵ *Interim adultero-germanum: cui adiecta est Vera christianae pacificationis et ecclesiae reformandae ratio* (1549). *Opp.*, VII, 545-674.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ ". . . non est cur nobis fucum faciant concordiae nomine, qui a sincera evangeli professione abducere nos tentant. Quid ergo? Optanda quidem est pax, summoque studio quaerenda. Sed potius quam redimatur ulla pietatis iactura, coelum terrae, si ita opus est, misceatur." *Opp.*, VII, 591.

¹¹⁸ *Opp.*, VII, 672; cf. *Opp.*, VII, 674, TORRANCE, xxxiv.

¹¹⁹ *Opp.*, XVIII, 285-87. French translation by Anthony DeLuca. The context of the memorandum is difficult to ascertain; it seems to have been inspired by Pius IV's desire to reconvene the Council of Trent on November 12, 1560.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

liberty (of a council) consists in three points — to know the place, the persons, and the way to proceed.”¹²¹ The location should be “in the middle of the nations” which should attend and accessible to all those who should be present. Moreover, safe conduct must be provided for all by the neighboring princes.¹²²

In addition, such a council should be truly representative. An assembly of Bishops only (such as Trent) cannot help but be prejudiced and party-oriented. The Bishops are tied too closely to the Pope to be competent judges:

The remedy will be that people should be elected from the party of those who desire and demand the reformation of the Church in doctrine as well as in customs, that they should be accorded a decisive voice in opposing all resolutions repugnant to the Word of God, and that they should be heard in all their protestations, showing by good reason why they have contradicted what the bishops would like to have passed.¹²³

Above all, it is untenable that the Pope preside over the council as head. Although Calvin reserves “le premier lieu” for him at the proceedings, he must submit himself in all things to the council, and swear to observe all that is decided.¹²⁴

The agenda will consist of matters of doctrine, “ceremonies,” and ecclesiastical polity, which Calvin sets out in detail. The prime doctrinal matters to be considered are the authority of Scripture and tradition in the Church, and “upon what the basis of our salvation is founded — whether we are justified by the merit of good works or by the freely given grace of God.”¹²⁵ In reference to ecclesiastical polity it is interesting to note that Calvin’s interest is not in abolishing the offices of bishop or pope, but rather in redefining these offices and in causing the current holders of these offices to “renounce all the domination which

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 286.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ “Mais encore que le premier lieu luy fust accordé, il faudroit qu’il se submist devant toutes choses au concile, et jurast d’observer tout ce qui y seroit décidé et conclu, se démettant de la domination qu’il a usurpée, et que les évêques aussy jurassent de se conformer à l’estat présent pour maintenir, quand il se trouvera des corruptions et abus tant en la doctrine qu’aux cérémonies et aux moeurs.” *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 287.

they have usurped.”¹²⁶ On all points in dispute discussion should be resolved by the norm of Holy Scripture.

It is clear that by 1560 Calvin had given up on his project for a National Synod.¹²⁷ Local or national solutions would not remedy the deep divisions within the Church; nor would a “partial” council which calls itself universal, as witnessed by Trent. Such ineffectual solutions would only add fuel to the fire and increase discord. The only vehicle capable of reuniting the Church is a free and universal council, to whose authority all (Protestant and Catholic alike) must submit: “It is required that all those who demand reformation accept the council which will be held, in order that all of Christianity will be reunited: as for those who do not want to achieve union and agreement, they should be declared and held to be schismatics.”¹²⁸

As Robert Kingdon has noted, modern Protestant historians have widely acclaimed John Calvin as an advocate of union, but only within the context of other orthodox Protestant bodies.¹²⁹ They feel that he did not seriously consider the possibility of union with Rome. Jean Cadier sums up the current climate of opinion: “we must make it clear that Calvin’s position vis-à-vis Rome was quite distinctly one of separation.”¹³⁰ Our study leads us to conclude that Calvin certainly would not have endorsed such a statement. Throughout his life he labored in the hope that the Church might again be made one. His desire was not to found a new church, but rather to restore the One Church to its apostolic character. The Geneva Reformer saw the best hope for reconciliation in a truly ecumenical council — a project which he championed until the end of his life.

¹²⁶ On CALVIN’s views on the episcopacy and papacy, see ALEXANDRE GANOCZY, *Calvin: Théologien de L’Église et du Ministère* (Paris, 1964), 386ff., 416; J. T. McNEILL, Calvin and the Episcopacy, *The Presbyterian Tribune* (1942), 14–39.

¹²⁷ *Opp.*, XVIII, 287.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ KINGDON, 380; KINGDON was here referring to W. NIJENHUIS, *Calvinus Oecumenicus* (The Hague, 1959), and JOHN T. McNEILL, Calvin as an Ecumenical Churchman, *Church History* XXXII, 4(Dec., 1963), esp. 390f. To these I would add JEAN CADIER, Calvin and the Union of the Churches, in G. E. DUFFIELD (ed.), *John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, 1966), 118–30.

¹³⁰ CADIER, 118.