

CALVIN AND THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Bryan D. Spinks

In the Preface to what became eventually eight volumes *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker discussed the authority accorded to John Calvin by those members of the Church of England who argued that the Elizabethan Church needed further reformation. Giving a summary of Calvin's involvement in the reformation of Geneva, Hooker noted:

'Of what account the Master of the sentences was in the Church of Rome, the same and more amongst the preachers of reformed Churches Calvin had purchased: so that the perfectest divines were judged they, which were skilfullest in Calvin's writings. His books almost the very canon to judge both doctrine and discipline by.'¹

Hooker went on to explain:

'And beyond the Seas, of them which fled in the days of Queen Mary, some contenting themselves abroad with the use of their own Service book at home authorized before their departure out of the Realm; others liking better the Common prayer book of the Church of Geneva translated, those smaller contentions before begun were by this mean increased. Under the happy reign of her Majesty which now is, the greatest matter a while contended for was the wearing of the Cap and Surplice, till there came Admonitions directed unto the high Court of Parliament, by men who concealing their names thought it glory enough to discover their minds and affections, which now were universally bent even against all the orders and laws wherein this Church is found unconformable to the platform of Geneva.'²

Hooker took the line that what Calvin did was needed at that time for the City of Geneva, but that had little bearing on what the nation of England should do. Hooker's attempt to distance himself from Calvin was slightly disingenuous, since it is fairly certain that in his earlier years at Oxford with John Rainolds, he was associated with the group of the 'godly' that did look towards the Reformed Churches for inspiration.³ Certainly Hooker knew Calvin's writings, and actually endorsed some of his theological opinions without acknowledging it. Indeed, it was difficult for learned Churchmen in the Elizabethan Church

not to be acquainted with some of Calvin's writings. However, the name 'Calvin' was used as a blanket cipher for what contemporary scholars call a 'Calvinist consensus' or 'International Calvinism'. There was no pure school of John Calvin, but an eclectic theology based on various works of leading Reformed divines, including Musculus, Vermigli, Bullinger, and Ursinus as well as Calvin, often without noticing the crucial nuanced and conflicting differences in their positions.⁴ This cumulative eclecticism yielded the 'Calvinist consensus' which was the theological position of most Church of England divines prior to the early seventeenth century. However, this seems to contrast considerably with the situation in the Henrician and Edwardian Churches. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer seems to have little interest in the position of Calvin; Luther, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli seem to have been his preferred theologians⁵. Furthermore, most of Cranmer's major efforts at liturgical revision were completed for the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*. Although it is thought that he had come to a position on the eucharist which was Swiss reformed in flavour rather than Lutheran, his views on baptism were nearer to Luther than the Reformed, and his liturgical sources were Medieval and Renaissance Catholic and Lutheran, and not Reformed.⁶ Calvin, brilliant teacher, preacher and expositor as he was, was not a good liturgist. He was content to borrow heavily from Bucer and Farel, and his own additions tended to be in exhortation and explication rather than in the actual prayers. His was not a useful source for Cranmer's needs. What influence, then, if any did Calvin exert on worship in England?

Calvin expressed his general views on Church reform in a letter to the Duke of Somerset in October 1548. He singled out in particular commemoration of the dead at the eucharist, and the use of chrism in baptism, noting:

'It is quite true we ought to bear with the weak; but in order to strengthen them, and to lead them to greater perfection. That does not mean, however, that we are to humour blockheads who wish for this or that, without knowing why.'⁷

Further encouragement was given in a letter of January 1550. Subsequent letters to Somerset and to the young King Edward urged further Reformation. A letter to Cranmer of July 1552 mentions the rumours or reports made to Calvin that the 'a mass of Papal corruptions' remained, and there is a reference to the chanting of Vespers in an unknown tongue.⁸ It may be that these reports had been made

by those less than satisfied with the ethos of the *Book of Common Prayer* as well as the pace of reform, for Calvin certainly had no first hand knowledge of English worship. From a textual approach, Calvin had practically no influence on the *Book of Common Prayer*. Cranmer's main sources were highly selective. The Sarum rite, the most widely used rite in England prior to the Reformation, was a major source. Cranmer also drew on the reformed Breviary of Cardinal Quignon, and on the Consultation drawn up by Melancthon and Bucer for Archbishop Hermann von Wied of Cologne, as well as some Lutheran sources, particularly that of the more conservative Nuremberg. Cranmer scholars tend to agree that by 1547 the Archbishop had reached a Eucharistic doctrinal position which was Reformed and certainly not Lutheran, but this does not seem to have influenced his use of liturgical sources.

The 1549 rites were short lived, being replaced by an Act of Uniformity and a revised *Book of Common Prayer* in 1552. There is certainly some evidence of Reformed influence on this revision, but the influence was not Calvin. In England, at Cranmer's invitation, were Martin Bucer, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and Peter Martyr Vermigli, Regius Professor of Oxford. Jan Laski was in London and Superintendent of the Stranger Churches – the Dutch/German, French and Italian congregations. Also in England was Valerand Poullain. Both Bucer and Martyr were invited to submit comments on the 1549 liturgy, though only those of Bucer have survived, in the *Censura*. But it would seem that Jan Laski's *Forma ac ratio* (though not published in its Latin form until 1555) may have had some influence, and possibly also Valerand Poullain's, *Liturgia Sacra*, which was an edition of Calvin's Strasbourg rite.

However, the warning of H.O. Old is pertinent here. The Reformed rites were themselves a mixture and composite form, borrowing one from the other. And the influence of the Reformed rites on the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1552 was perhaps in ethos rather than of any one particular rite.

The liturgical rites in the 1552 book retain much of the language and sources of the 1549 rites, but with a clear move towards a position more acceptable, or at least, mediating towards, Reformed worship. For example, the use of chrism retained in 1549, and singled out by Calvin, was removed. At Morning and Evening Prayer, formed from Lauds and Prime, and Vespers and Compline respectively, the services have a confession and declaration of pardon added

at the beginning of the service – important in Calvin’s Strasbourg rite, and the *Liturgia Sacra*, and in the *Forma ac Ratio*. In the communion rite, in place of the traditional Kyries retained by Luther and 1549, the Ten Commandments were recited, and numbered in the Reformed manner rather than the Lutheran numbering. Again, in accordance with Calvin’s criticisms as well as those of Bucer, petition for the departed was removed. 1552 was compiled at the same time that Cranmer was contacting many of the continental Reformers with a view to holding a protestant ecumenical council to rival the Council of Trent, and he contacted both Lutheran and Reformed leaders. The 1552 rite might be seen as an ecumenical blueprint, an English *via media* between the two protestant parties.⁹ However, any direct influence of Calvin and his Genevan rite is difficult to substantiate.

If Calvin had no direct influence on the making of the English liturgy, he was to have considerable indirect influence on English worship disputes, particularly in the post-Cranmerian period. The first English translation of Calvin’s Genevan rite was made by William Huycke in 1550, and the translation seems to have been made for use, and not just an academic exercise. There is some evidence that some groups used this rite secretly in London. Edward died in 1553, and the protestant regime quickly tumbled, and under Mary Tudor the English Church was gradually returned to the Roman fold. A number of divines fled to protestant cities for refuge, and amongst these were John Knox and William Whittingham. They came first to Frankfort am Main, and there started using portions of the Genevan rite. They were later joined by other English exiles who wished to use the 1552 Prayer Book with little or no alteration. After a dispute, Knox and Whittingham and others journeyed on to Geneva, and there helped organize the English exiles.¹⁰ The result was the 1556 Genevan Service Book. Often referred to as Knox’s liturgy, Knox was in fact just one of four compilers. It is clearly based directly on Calvin’s Genevan rites, and Huycke’s translation, with phrases and pieces from the *Book of Common Prayer*, and at least one piece from the liturgy that Knox had drawn up for Berwick on Tweed.¹¹ During the making of the Elizabethan Settlement, many of the exiles returned, and some had hoped for a liturgy similar to that used in Geneva. The book was used by some groups clandestinely in and around London. The book was reprinted and edited in 1584, known as the Waldegrave book, and was presented to Parliament in the hope that it would become the lawful replacement to the Book of Common Prayer. The Bill was quashed. Not deterred, another edition,

the so-called Middleburg edition printed by Richard Schilders, 1586, was similarly presented with a Bill which was also quashed. But Schilders, a printer in Zeeland of many Puritan or 'godly' works, printed other editions in 1587 and 1602, and we may assume that he did so because there was a market.¹² Alongside this were some attempts to gain permission to use the rites of the Stranger Churches – Micron's version of the *Forma ac Ratio*, and Poullain's *Liturgia Sacra*.¹³ Thus, Calvin's influence still hovered in some groups of the godly. The Genevan Service Book was reprinted again in the 1640s, but any hopes of its adoption were dashed by the suspicion towards set forms of the radical party in the Kirk, and by the English Independents. Given the make up and sympathies of the sub-committee that drew up the Westminster Directory, it is little surprise that suggestions and outlines rather than set texts resulted. Samuel Rutherford, when reminded of something in Knox's liturgy, retorted "We will not owne this liturgy. Nor are we tyed unto it".¹⁴ Elsewhere, Rutherford said he could find nothing in God's word to justify a set liturgy, and it would be better to have them out of God's Church. Calvin obviously had felt otherwise.

The Restoration of 1662 revised and expanded the earlier Elizabethan and Jacobean *Book of Common Prayer*. The General Thanksgiving was inspired by the outline for prayer over the bread and wine in the Directory, and thought to be the work of Edward Reynolds, but that is very different from being the influence of Calvin. Later proposed revisions never looked to Reformed sources, but either to current theological debate or the fifth century Eastern rites.¹⁵

¹ Ed. A.S. MacGrade, *Richard Hooker. Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. Preface, Book I and Book VIII*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, p.10. Laws Preface 2:8.

² Ibid., p.11. Preface 2:10.

³ R.Bauckham, 'Richard Hooker and John Calvin: A Comment', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 (1981), pp.29-33; Bryan D. Spinks, *Two faces of Elizabethan Anglican Theology. Sacraments and Salvation in the Thought of William Perkins and Richard Hooker*, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham and London 1999.

⁴ Bryan D. Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies and the Stuart Divines. Sacramental Theology and Liturgy in England and Scotland 1603-1662*, Ashgate Press, Aldershot 2002.

⁵ Gordon Jeanes, *Signs of God's Promise. Thomas Cranmer's Sacramental Theology and the Book of Common Prayer*, T & T Clark, London 2008.

⁶ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer. A Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1996; Jeanes, op.cit; Bryan D. Spinks, 'German Influence on Edwardian

Liturgies', Sister Reformations Conference, Berlin, September 2009, in Press (Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen).

⁷ Ed. Jules Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, Lennox Hill/Burt Kranklin, New York 1972, vol. II, Letter CCXXIX, p.194.

⁸ Ibid., Letter CCXCVIII, p.357.

⁹ See Bryan D. Spinks, 'Evaluating Liturgical Continuity and Change at the Reformation: A Case Study of Thomas Müntzer, Martin Luther, and Thomas Cranmer', in ed. R.N. Swanson, *Continuity and Change in Worship*, Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge 1999, pp.151-171.

¹⁰ Dan G. Danner, *Pilgrimage to Puritanism. History and Theology of the Marian Exiles, 1555-1560*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 1999.

¹¹ William D. Maxwell, *The Liturgical Portions of the Genevan Service Book*, Faith Press Impression, London 1965; Geoffrey Cuming, 'John Knox and the Book of Common Prayer: a short note', *Liturgical Review* 10 (1980), pp.80-81; Bryan D. Spinks, *From the Lord and 'The Best Reformed Churches'. A study of the Eucharistic liturgy in the English Puritan and Separatist traditions 1550-1633*, CLV, Rome 1984, pp.66-69; 76-84.

¹² Stephen Mayor, *The Lord's Supper in Early English Dissent*, Epworth Press, London 1972; Bryan D. Spinks, *From the Lord*, pp.113-122. For Schilders, see J. Dover Wilson, 'Richard Schilders and the English Puritans', in *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 11 (1909-1911), Blades, East and Blades, London 1912, pp.65-134.

¹³ Spinks, *From the Lord*, pp.96-113.

¹⁴ Rutherford, Ms. Minutes of the Westminster Assembly, Dr. Williams's Library, London, vol.2, p.492. Bryan D. Spinks, 'The Origins of Antipathy to Set Liturgical Forms in the English-Speaking Reformed Tradition', in ed. Lukas Vischer, *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, Eerdmanns, Grand Rapids 2003, pp.66-82.

¹⁵ Bryan D. Spinks, *Liturgy in the Age of Reason. Worship and Sacraments in England and Scotland 1662-c.1800*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2008.