

"THE SINEWS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST"
CALVIN'S CONCEPT OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Stephen M. Johnson

In 1554 Calvin, writing to Gaspar Lister, pastor at Nürtingen, sounds a warning to those who neglect the exercise of church discipline.

I congratulate you on the tranquility of your churches, but it is greatly to be regretted that you do not possess, along with it, the sinews of discipline so necessary to insure its continuance.[1]

His admonition to exercise discipline (including excommunication) is not an isolated emphasis in his writings or practice.

The metaphors Calvin uses to describe discipline demonstrate its importance. Discipline is pictured as: 1)"a *bridle* to restrain and tame those who rage against the doctrine of Christ," 2)"a *father's rod* to chastise mildly ... those who have more seriously lapsed, and 3) his favorite metaphor, "*sinews* through which the members of the body hold together." [2] The last of these metaphors

underscores discipline's role in the preservation and health of the church as a body. He remarks:

Therefore, all who desire to remove discipline or to hinder its restoration--whether they do this deliberately or out of ignorance--are surely contributing to the ultimate dissolution of the church.[3]

Although inadequately treated by Calvin scholars, the importance of discipline for Calvin can be demonstrated by its place during his pastoral ministry. In fact, to trace discipline through Calvin's ministry is essentially to write anew his biography. The rejection of Calvin's disciplinary proposals by the Genevan counsels, at the instigation of the "Libertines," led to Calvin's expulsion in 1538. His pastoral labors at Strasbourg (1538-41) display significant progress in implementing the pioneering work of Martin Bucer in the realm of church discipline. Discipline was a condition for Calvin's return to Geneva in 1541 and discipline was one of the first items on the agenda on the day following his return. Calvin in later reflection on his return said, "I would never have accepted the ministry unless they had sworn to these two points: namely to uphold the *Catechism* and the discipline." [4]

For fourteen years Calvin struggled with the Genevan counsels to obtain for the church a critical element of church discipline--the right of excommunication. In 1543 Calvin wrote to Viret concerning the issue: "The Syndic brought us word that the Senate retained in its own hand the right of excommunication. I immediately replied, that such a decree could only be ratified by my

death or banishment." [5] Ten years later he wrote the pastors of Zurich concerning the stir caused by Philip Berthelier who attempted to "force his way to the Holy Table" contrary to the decision of the church.

I consider that it would be perfidious cowardice in me, so long as I occupy my present position, not to contend keenly, even to the utmost, in behalf of a holy and lawful discipline. I have resolved that I should a hundred times rather leave this life-not to say this place-than suffer to be overthrown, that which I am confident is taken from the word of God. [6]

T.M. Lindsey described the remaining nine years of Calvin's ministry (1555-64) as a "period of triumph." The register of the Consistory during this period documents the role of church discipline as an important part of the daily affairs of the Genevan church. No doubt, the success Calvin achieved in discipline is the basis of John Knox's claim that the church of Geneva was "the most perfect school of Christ that was ever on the earth since the days of the Apostles." Knox adds, "In other places I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion to be so sincerely reformed, I have not yet seen in any other place besides." [7]

Given the importance of church discipline for Calvin, it is our purpose to sketch the Genevan reformer's understanding of these "sinews of the body of Christ." Calvin devotes chapter XII, sections 1-14 of Book IV of his *Institutes* to an explanation of the principles of church discipline. However, prior to our consideration of this central section it is helpful to treat four topics set forth elsewhere in the *Institutes* that bear upon Calvin's

concept of church discipline: 1) the power of the keys, 2) the marks of the church, 3) church constitutions, and 4) spiritual and civil government.

I. *Church Discipline and Calvin's Concept of the Church*

1. *Church Discipline and the Power of the Keys.*

In discussing the "power of the keys" which he relates to the "binding and loosing" of both sinners and the repentant respectively, Calvin distinguishes two shades of meaning. The first, drawn from Matthew 16:19 and John 20:22-23, concerns the preaching of the gospel, by which the repentant are loosed and the unrepentant are bound. This is conceived by Calvin to be a ministry rather than a power; it belongs to genuine ministers of the Word.[8]

The second shade of meaning, drawn from Matthew 18: 17-18, is church discipline. Calvin states, "Discipline depends for the most part upon the power of the keys and upon spiritual jurisdiction."

[9] This connection between discipline and the keys he explains as follows:

For this power which we speak depends entirely upon the keys which, in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, Christ gave to the church. There He commands that those who are contemptuous of private warnings be severely warned in the name of the people; but if they persist in the stubbornness, He teaches that they should be cut off from the believer's fellowship (Matt. 18:15-18). Now these admonitions and corrections cannot be made without investigation of the cause; accordingly, some court of

judgment and order of procedure are needed. Therefore, if we do not wish to make void the promise of the keys and banish excommunication, solemn warnings, and such things, we must give the church some jurisdiction. [10]

In this connection Calvin issues an important caveat: "But when it is a question of keys, we must always beware lest we dream up some power separate from the preaching of the gospel; any right of binding or loosing which Christ conferred upon His church is bound to the Word." [11] The exercise of the power of the keys via discipline, in accordance with the Word and under the guidance of the Spirit, is not to be viewed lightly by the members of the Church.

Therefore, that no one may stubbornly despise the judgment of the church, or think it immaterial that he has been condemned by the vote of the believers, the Lord testifies that such judgment by believers is nothing but the proclamation of His own sentence, and that whatever they have done on earth is ratified in heaven. For they have the Word of God with which to condemn the perverse; they have the Word with which to receive the repentant into grace. [12]

The church, therefore, must not neglect the power of the keys in either sense, preaching or discipline.

2. *Church Discipline and the Marks of the Church*

Martin Bucer, reformer and co-laborer with Calvin at Strasbourg and a man who exercised no small influence on Calvin's ecclesiology, considered ecclesiastical discipline along with the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments to be the three "marks" of a true church.[13] Some of the later Reformed creeds,

the *Scots Confession* of 1560 (Article 18) and the *Belgic Confession* of 1561 (Article 29), follow this three mark *scheme*. Calvin, however, lists only two marks in his *Institutes*--the Word and Sacraments.[14]

The same two marks are listed by Calvin in the eighteenth article of the *Genevan Confession*. The absence of explicit reference to discipline as a mark of the church raises the question of how Calvin related this important function of the church to his concept of the "marks of the church." Wilhelm Niesel suggested that the Christological nature of Calvin's thinking explains the omission of the discipline.[15] Francois Wendel explained that Calvin is emphasizing the objective criteria (i.e. the Word and Sacraments) and to include discipline would interject a subjective element into the criteria.[16] While it is true that Christology is a central theme in Calvin's thought, and that he conceives the marks of a church to be objective in nature, neither is the basis for Calvin's exclusion of discipline as a mark of the church. In fact, had Calvin included the exercise of biblical church discipline as a mark of the church, it would have placed in him in an embarrassing position indeed. In his reply to Cardinal Sadolet Calvin states:

That *our discipline is not such as the ancient Church professed we do not deny*. But with what fairness is it that we are accused of subverting discipline by those who themselves quite abolished it, and have hitherto opposed us in our attempts to restore it to its rights?[17]

If discipline is a mark of a true church, Calvin would have to admit the deficient nature of his early work in Geneva. Indeed during the majority of Calvin's ministry discipline fell short of what he considered to be the scriptural standard (e.g. the Consistory having the authority to excommunicate). Calvin's omission of discipline as a mark is not an expedient to avoid embarrassment, rather he is following Paul's assessment of the church at Corinth.

Among the Corinthians no slight number had gone astray; in fact almost the whole body was infected. There was not one kind of sin only, but very many. *Yet the church abides among them because the ministry of the Word and Sacraments remains unrepudiated there.* [18]

Thus, Calvin concludes that a church may exist without discipline; however, he is also convinced that without discipline a church has no guarantee that it will exist for long. He writes Sadolet, "There are three things upon which the *safety* of the Church is founded and supported: Doctrine, discipline and the sacraments." [19] Discipline for Calvin, while not a mark of the church, serves to preserve the marks of the church. To remove or hinder discipline "contributes to the ultimate dissolution of the church." [20]

3. *Church Discipline and Church Constitutions*

Another issue in Calvin's thinking which bears upon church discipline is the development of church constitutions. Church constitutions, Calvin says, are useful and indeed necessary because the Lord purposefully has not described in Scripture all the details

that pertain to the *outward* discipline or worship of the church.

[21] Consequently, in these areas the church should draw up regulations and procedures to insure that things are done "decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40) and in harmony with the general principles of Scripture. For example, in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1541 Calvin states concerning the elders:

Their office is the oversight of the life of everyone, to admonish those whom they see erring.... In the present condition of the Church, it would be good to elect two of the Little Counsel, four of the Counsel of Sixty and six of the Counsel of Two Hundred.... These should so be elected that there be some in every quarter of the city, to keep an eye on everybody. [22]

Likewise, a constitution may provide other regulations which will insure the decorous administration of the Word and Sacraments. For example, it may prescribe time and place of meeting, the posture of kneeling in prayer, quietness and silence during the sermon, a procedure for catechizing, interviews with a minister prior to the Supper, etc.

Such regulations, Calvin notes, provide the church an atmosphere of modesty, gravity, peace and quietness. They are not to be regarded as necessary for salvation (and thus binding upon all locations and upon all times), nor are they to be considered as the essence of piety, for they are only aids to piety. Calvin notes that revision of church constitutions "as the advantage of the church will require," may be desirable; but he tempers this with a warning:

We ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe . [23]

The practical result of Calvin's approach was a drastic reduction of the "impious and pernicious" human traditions by which Rome bound the consciences of men contrary to the Word. There remained, in spite of the protests of the "Libertines," such regulations as were necessary for the order of the church and the implementation of discipline.

4. *Church Discipline and Civil Government*

Calvin's formulation of the relationship between spiritual and civil jurisdiction gives separate responsibilities to each entity. Each is to serve God by faithfully governing those things properly within its sphere, by using the means of restraint allowed by God. Church and state, while distinct in these jurisdictions, are to be mutually supportive. Each should, however, not usurp jurisdiction properly belonging to the other.

The relationship between church discipline and civil government in Calvin's approach is different from the Anabaptists on the one hand, and that of Zwingli and Bullinger on the other. Comparing Calvin and Menno Simon in this matter yields considerable similarities with regard to the scope of the church's spiritual jurisdiction, especially the emphasis both place on excommunication. Menno could agree with Calvin's statement:

the severest punishment of the church, the final thunderbolt, so to speak, is excommunication.... Now, this requires no physical force but is content with the power of God's Word.
[24]

A significant point of difference between them lies in the Anabaptist contention that it is inappropriate for a Christian to be a magistrate,[25] with the result that an Anabaptist "Consistory" could not contain magistrates. Calvin rejects this radical dichotomy in principle: 1) by declaring the office of a magistrate to be a proper and laudable Christian vocation and 2) in practice, as we have seen, by suggesting the advisability of selecting elders from the three city councils. In fact, a syndic of the city, and not Calvin, was the moderator of the Consistory.[26]

However, Calvin insisted upon the necessity of placing excommunication within the church's jurisdiction even when there is a Christian magistrate.[27] He writes the pastors of Zurich indicating his conviction on the matter:

All are not agreed at the present time regarding excommunication. Nor am I ignorant that there are pious and learned men who do not consider excommunication necessary under Christian princes. And yet I am confident that no person of sound mind, and unbiased disposition, would discountenance the employment of it. To me it is clearly the doctrine of Christ.
[28]

In his *Institutes* Calvin also alludes to this difference of opinion and defends excommunication as the ongoing responsibility of the church in discipline.

Some imagine that all those things were temporary, lasting while magistrates were still strangers to the profession of our religion. In this they are mistaken, because they do not

notice how great a difference and unlikeness there is between ecclesiastical and civil power. For the church does not have the right of the sword to punish or compel, not the authority to force; not imprisonment, not other punishments which the magistrate commonly inflicts. [29]

Calvin maintains that ecclesiastical excommunication is both the ancient teaching of Christ and entirely within the scope of jurisdiction allowed to the church; therefore, to abdicate this responsibility is to fall short of the Lord's teaching.

Also, in connecting Calvin's thought about church constitutions with his ideas about the church's spiritual jurisdiction it is important to observe what he writes in *Ordinances for the Supervision of Churches in the Country*. These ordinances were drawn up by the ministers and submitted to the magistracy for implementation ("at the complete discretion of their Lordships") in the villages surrounding Geneva. They were approved by the Syndics of Geneva and implemented in 1547. The document contains both ecclesiastical and civil regulations which illustrate how church and state in Calvin's thinking were to cooperate to insure a well-ordered church and community. For example, the *Ordinances* stipulate the following:

Those found to have any paternosters or idols for adoration are to be brought before the Consistory, and, besides the punishment imposed upon them there, they are to be brought before their Lordships.... Those who have attended Mass, besides admonition, are to be brought before their Lordships. In such cases, their Lordships will have the right of chastening by means of prison or otherwise, or of punishing by extra-ordinary fines, at their discretion. [30]

This document concretely illustrates how inappropriate behavior may bring disciplinary action from the Consistory, or civil punishment from the magistrates, or both when the offense results in both ecclesiastical and civil disturbance.

Thus far we have explored four topics which Calvin links to church discipline. Now we turn to Calvin's treatment of discipline *per se*. Here we shall discuss: 1) the three purposes of discipline, 2) the subjects of discipline, 3) two distinctions regarding sin and discipline, 4) the process of discipline, and 5) the appropriate attitude in discipline.

II. *Church Discipline as a Function of the Church*

1. *The Three Purposes or Ends of Discipline*

Discipline involves both correction and when necessary excommunication. It is to be exercised by the church with three ends in view.

The first end is the protection of the Lord's honor against those who are called Christians yet lead a "filthy and infamous life." [31] Calvin asserts: "For since the church itself is the body of Christ, it cannot be corrupted by such foul and decaying members without some disgrace falling upon its Head." [32] This end also has implications for the administration of the Lord's Supper,

namely that the ministers may not indiscriminately permit unworthy persons to profane the sacrament.

For it is very true that he to whom its distribution has been committed, if he knowingly and willingly admits an unworthy person whom he could rightly turn away, is as guilty of sacrilege as if he had cast the Lord's body to dogs.[33]

The second end of discipline is the prevention of corruption of "good people" through the "constant company of the wicked." Here Calvin draws from Paul's admonition in 1 Cor. 5. In his commentary on this passage he emphasizes the infectious nature of undisciplined sin:

It may be asked why they ought to have mourned over another's sin. I can give two reasons. (1) Because of the fellowship which exists between members of the church, it was only right that they should all be affected by such a fatal lapse on the part of one of them. (2) When such a shameful act is committed in any church the guilt is not confined to the person responsible for it, but the whole company is to some extent contaminated. [34]

Calvin underscores this danger of pollution by noting Paul's injunction prohibiting association with such disorderly persons (1 Cor. 5:11).[35]

Discipline, therefore, in its first two ends preserves Christ's honor and protects from temptation those who would honor Christ. Yet discipline has a third purpose, one which has in mind the ultimate benefit of the guilty individual. Discipline, Calvin argues, serves to promote repentance in the wicked by bringing shame upon them.

They who under gentler treatment would have become stubborn so profit by the chastisement of their own evil as to be awakened when they feel the rod.[36]

The design is: discipline produces shame and shame promotes repentance--all under the influence of the Spirit and in conjunction with the prayers of the church.

2. *The Subjects of Discipline*

In discussing the discipline process Calvin is careful to note that princes and presbyters, as well as the common people are its proper subjects. In the case of the submission of magistrates to discipline, Calvin declares that this is a practice consistent with the practice of the ancient church.

No one was exempt from this discipline, both princes and common people submitted to it. And rightly! For it was established by Christ, to whom it is fitting that all royal scepters and crowns submit. Thus Theodosius, when he was deprived of the right of communion by Ambrose because of the slaughter committed at Thessalonica, threw down all his royal trappings; in church he publicly wept over his sin... and begged pardon with groaning and tears. For great kings ought not to count it any dishonor to prostrate themselves before Christ, the King of Kings; nor ought they to be displeased that they are judged by the church. [37]

Calvin, in the case of Roman Catholic church officials, laments the absence of discipline of his day.

There is scarcely a bishop, not one in a hundred parish priests, who, if his conduct were to be judged according to the ancient canons, would not be subject either to excommunication or at least deposition from office. I seem to be saying something unbelievable--so far has the former discipline fallen into disuse. [38]

He argues that the clergy, by virtue of their office and influence, are to be the recipients of a stricter rather than a more lenient discipline.

For just as presbyters show the way to others by the example of an honorable life, so, if they go wrong, it is right that severe discipline should be exercised against them as an example to all. For why should greater forbearance be shown to men whose faults do more serious harm than those of other men? [39]

In the 1541 *Ordinances* Calvin specifically lists items of ministerial conduct which merit discipline. Some required immediate ecclesiastical judgment, others of a lesser nature required simple private admonition. [40] This discipline of clergy was not only to be administered to when a breach of the *Ordinances* was made known, but preventative discipline was also provided for through periodic evaluation.

To keep this discipline in operation, let the ministers every three months take special notice whether there be anything to discuss among themselves, to remedy it as is reasonable. [41]

Because the honor of Christ is at stake and because church members look to their leaders as examples, no one as a member of the body of Christ was exempted from the application of discipline.

3. *Two Distinctions Regarding Sin and Discipline*

The proper exercise of discipline requires that sins be classified according to two distinctions. The first distinction is based upon the number of people who are aware of the offense. That is, sins may be: 1) public, 2) private, or 3) completely hidden

from men. The last sort, sins known only to the one sinning, is obviously outside the jurisdiction of the church. Public sins Calvin defines as "those sins witnessed not by one or two persons but are committed openly and to the offence of the entire church."

[42] These sins should lead *at once* to solemn rebuke by the church.

[43] Sins which are neither unwitnessed or public Calvin terms "secret or private," and are to be dealt with according to the pattern established by the Lord in Matthew 18. (We will deal further with the process of discipline in the next section.)

The second distinction asserted by Calvin concerns the gravity of the offense. He explains:

Adulterers, fornicators, thieves, robbers, seditious persons, perjurers, false witnesses, and the rest of this sort, as well as the insolent (who when duly admonished of their lighter vices) mock God and His judgment. [44]

William Monter's study of the records of the Genevan Consistory during the period 1559-64 reflects the proportion of lesser and greater moral offenses brought for discipline. Monter observes that "grave sins" were involved in about one third of the cases handled, resulting in about five excommunications per week.[45] These statistics highlight the time and attention given to discipline in Geneva.

4. *The Process of Discipline*

Cases requiring discipline could reach the Consistory (which was comprised of twelve ruling elders and the ordained

ministers)[46]in two ways. *Open sins* due to their public nature are to be dealt with by the Consistory without delay so that the good members will not suffer added temptation to sin occasioned by delay. Solemn, public rebuke or excommunication followed depending on the gravity of the sin. This procedure Calvin draws from the Pauline injunction of 1 Tim. 5:20 and the example of Peter's rebuke in Gal. 2:11,14.

The second, less direct manner in which a case was brought to the Consistory concerns *private sins*. These offenses call for the prior use of two intermediary steps described in Matt. 18. The first of these is private admonition by a witness to the offense. This may be done by any member of the church, but it is especially the function of the both elders, whose office is to "have oversight of the life of every one," [47] and the pastors, whose duty it is not only to preach to the people, but "to warn and exhort in every house." [48] Should the offender either stubbornly reject this admonition or scorn the advice by persistence in sin, the second step is taken--private admonition in the presence of witnesses. A negative response at this level results in bringing the matter before the Consistory.

Calvin stresses that the third step is not to be entrusted to an individual, but rather to a "lawful assembly." [49] "Paul," Calvin maintains, "though an apostle, does not himself as an individual excommunicate according to his pleasure, but consults

with the church, that the matter may be transacted by common authority." [50] Once a case is brought before the Consistory and the charges are sustained, either censure or excommunication may result. Censure, if not heeded, may lead to further censure or excommunication. "Excommunication," says Calvin, "is done with the knowledge and approval of the church; in this way the multitude of the people does not decide the action but observes as witness and guardian so that nothing may be done according to the whim of a few." [51]

Calvin explains the significance and spiritual consequences of excommunication as follows:

Those who are excommunicated are not cast into everlasting ruin and damnation, but in hearing that their life and morals are condemned, they are assured of their everlasting condemnation unless they repent. Excommunication differs from *anathema*, in that the latter, taking away all pardon, condemns and consigns a man to eternal destruction; the former, rather, avenges and chastens his moral conduct. And although excommunication punishes the man, it does so in such a way that, for forewarning him of his future condemnation, it may call him back to salvation. But if that be obtained, reconciliation and restoration to communion await him. Moreover, *anathema* is rarely or never used. Accordingly, though ecclesiastical discipline does not permit us to live familiarly or have intimate contact with excommunicated persons, we ought to strive by whatever means we can in order that they may return to the society and the unity of the church. [52]

5. *The Appropriate Attitude in Discipline*

Calvin repeatedly stresses the point that attitude is every bit as important as procedure in the success of church discipline. For example:

We ought not to pass over the fact that such severity as is joined with a 'spirit of gentleness' (Gal. 6:1) befits the church. For we must always as Paul bids us, take particular care that he who is punished be not overwhelmed with sorrow (II Cor. 2:7). Thus a remedy would become destruction. But from the purpose intended it would be better to take a rule of moderation. For in excommunication the intent is to lead the sinner to repentance and to remove bad examples from the midst, lest Christ's name be maligned or others be provoked to imitate them. If, then, we look to these things, it will be easy to judge how far severity ought to go and where severity ought to stop. [53]

Both gentleness and severity are to be balanced by the desired ends of discipline. Calvin heartily agrees with Augustine's comment:

All pious method and measure of ecclesiastical discipline ought ever to look to the 'unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:3), which the apostle orders us to keep by 'forebearing one another' (Eph. 4:2), and when this is not kept, the medicine of punishment begins not only to be superfluous but also harmful, and so ceases to be medicine. [54]

Conclusion

Calvin was not the first to introduce moral regulations to Geneva. The city Councils before him had recognized the need and made efforts to insure orderly behavior.[55] Calvin's contribution consists both in his endeavor to establish morality upon biblical principle rather than expediency and in his delineation of the role of church and state in insuring order.

Calvin's success has been variously evaluated. As we noted earlier, Knox's glowing remarks, describe the Geneva of Calvin's day in idyllic terms. Yet, examples of excessive scrutiny and censure of activities harmless by today's standards, are readily available.[56]

However, it is unfortunate that such items are often displayed out of context or out of proportion. Real progress in moral reform was made under Calvin. Robert Kingdon, for example, states that prior to Calvin's ministry prostitution and adultery were accepted as inevitable and were subject to little regulation calling for minor penalties. Under Calvin these practices were taken seriously as violations of God's law and thus both spiritual and civil attention was directed toward the punishment and consequent reduction of them.[57]

Calvin's endeavors and achievements in the restoration of "the sinews of the body of Christ" in Geneva demonstrate the connection of theory and practice in his mind. He was both a theologian and a pastor and in this dual role willingly endured personal risk and ridicule to implement his ecclesiology. Luther, in contrast to Calvin, believed the Word preached was the measure of the church's responsibility; beyond that she was only to offer advise to, and support the civil authorities. Accordingly, Luther implemented no ecclesiastical discipline but rather merely encouraged the Princes to act.[58] Calvin's understanding of the biblical concept of the "power of the keys" was broader than Luther's and consequently he not only articulated a "theology of discipline" but having done so labored tirelessly to see it implemented in Geneva.

In the matter of discipline and its application Calvin also shows that he is capable of being both idealistic and patient. To

the pastors of Zurich he writes, "From the time of my return to this church, discipline has at least made *tolerable advancement*." [59] Calvin, unlike the Anabaptists (who sharply separated church and state and who were unwilling to wait for the implementation of their ideal of discipline), was committed to working with the city councils and was willing to wait patiently (or in some instances impatiently) for discipline's implementation and development. Warfield best summarizes this aspect of Calvin's character:

Were we to attempt to characterize in a phrase the peculiarity of his work as a reformer, perhaps we could not do better than to say it was the work of an idealist become a practical man of affairs. He did not lack power to wait, to make adjustments, to advance by slow and tentative steps. He showed himself able to work with any material, to make the best of compromises, to abide patiently the coming of fitting opportunities. The ends which he set before himself he attained only in the last years of his strenuous life. But he was incapable of abandoning his ideals, of acquiescing in half measures, of drifting with the tide. Therefore his whole life in Geneva was a conflict.[60]

To sum up: The essence of Calvin's thought on church discipline, as well as the motivation of his labors, is succinctly stated in the *Institutes*:

As the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the Church, so discipline serves as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own place. Therefore, all who desire to remove discipline or hinder its restoration—whether they do this deliberately or out of ignorance—are surely contributing to the ultimate dissolution of the church. [61]

Without discipline a church may continue to exist as a true church, but not for long.

2443 Horseshoe Ridge

Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

NOTES

1. John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin* (ed. Jules Bonnet, 4 vols.; Philadelphia, 1958) 3:66-7. Hereafter: Bonnet, *Letters*.
2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, 20-21; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) 1.12.1. Hereafter: *Institutes*.
3. *Institutes* 4.12.1 Note also Calvin's remark to Sadolet, "For to hang together the body of the Church must be bound together by discipline as with sinews." John Calvin, *Theological Treatises* (ed. and tr. J.K.S. Reid, Library of Christian Classics, 22; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954) 245. Hereafter: Reid, *Treatises*.
4. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York: Robert E. Krieger, 1975) 97.
5. Bonnet, *Letters* 1:377.
6. Bonnet, *Letters* 1:377. See also Calvin's letter to Viret in Bonnet, *Letters* 2:424.
7. A letter to Anne Locke dated 9 December 1556, cited by Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977) 1:460n.
8. *Institutes* 3.4.20 and 4.11.1.
9. *Institutes* 4.12.1.
10. *Institutes* 4.11.1.
11. *Institutes* 3.11.4.
12. *Institutes* 4.11.2.
13. Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origin and Development of His Religious Thought* (trans. Philip Mairet; New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 301.
14. Calvin's commentary on Acts 2:42 makes mention of four marks: 1) preaching and hearing the gospel, 2) the Supper, 3) fellowship, and 4) prayer. Either Calvin is following the pattern of the text

and employing the term "marks" in different sense than employed in the *Institutes*, or he is inconsistent here. His omission of baptism would favor the former.

15. Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (trans. Harold Knight; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956) 199.

16. Wendel, *Calvin* 297. Discipline, however, does not have to be a "subjective criterion." Those who include discipline as a mark note that it its exercise rather than its result that is in view.

17. Reid, *Treatises* 232-3. Emphasis is mine. See also John Calvin, "The Necessity of Reforming the Church," *Tracts and Treatises* (ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge, 3 vols; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 1:201.

18. *Institutes* 4.1.14. Emphasis is mine.

19. Reid, *Treatises* 232.

20. *Institutes* 4.12.1

21. *Institutes* 4.10.30.

22. Reid, *Treatises* 63-4.

23. *Institutes* 4.10.30.

24. *Institutes* 4.11.5.

25. This is the view of the *Schleitheim Confession* (1527), Peter Ridemann, Menno Simon, and the Dutch Mennoites (Hans de Ries). Balthasar Hubmaier, in contrast, argued for Christian participation in government and as a result is considered by some a "marginal Anabaptist." Walter Klassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981) 244-64.

26. Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* 137.

27. Monter sees this as a unique contribution of Calvin: "The originality of Calvin's Consistory lay in its power of excommunication, which was definitive confirmed in 1555; elsewhere in Protestant Europe this remained the prerogative of the civil government." Ibid. 138-9.

28. Bonnet, *Letters* 2:444.

29. *Institutes* 4.11.3.

30. Reid, *Treatises* 79-80.

31. *Institutes* 4.12.5.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. John Calvin, *Commentaries* (22 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979). *Commentary* on 1 Cor. 5:2.

35. Such disassociation did not exempt the excommunicated from the requirement to attend the preaching of the Word at services when Communion was not administered (i.e., all services save four per year). Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* 140.

36. *Institutes* 4.12.5.

37. *Institutes* 4.12.7. Monter cites Amblard Corne, a Genevan magistrate, as an example of a magistrate who upon censure by the Consistory (for dancing at a wedding) conformed willingly. Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* 102, 138.

38. *Institutes* 4.4.14.

39. *Commentary* on 1 Tim. 5:20.

40. Reid, *Treatises* 60-1.

41. *Ibid.* 61.

42. *Institutes* 4.12.6.

43. *Institutes* 4.12.3.

44. *Ibid.*

45. William Monter, "The Consistory of Geneva, 1559-1569," in *Renaissance, Reformation, Resurgence* (ed. Peter de Klerk; Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1976) 67.

46. Robert Kingdon, "The Control of Morals in Calvin's Geneva," in *The Social History of the Reformation* (eds. Buck and Zophy; Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1972) 9. The pastoral staff (i.e., ordained ministers) at Geneva totaled nine in 1542 and nineteen in 1564.

47. Reid, *Treatises* 70.

48. *Institutes* 4.12.2.

49. *Institutes* 4.11.5.

50. *Commentary* on 1 Cor. 5:4.

51. *Institutes* 4.12.7. Calvin in *Institutes* 4.12.4 speaks of "condemnation by the vote of the believers." This is most likely a reference to the Consistory, which would harmonize with our quotation in the text of this paper which avoids a "decision by the common people." Believers, Calvin argues, are to exercise the "power of the keys" and not the ungodly.

52. *Institutes* 4.12.10. Calvin's hesitancy regarding the employment of anathemas perhaps is due to his admission that 1 Cor. 5:5 is open to more than one interpretation.

53. *Institutes* 4.12.8.

54. *Institutes* 4.12.11.

55. Herbert D. Foster, "Geneva Before Calvin," *American Historical Review* 8(1902-03) 217-40.

56. Monter in *Calvin's Geneva* 138-9 notes the following disciplined offenses: a widow saying *requiescat in pace* over her husband's grave, a goldsmith who made a Catholic chalice, a man who owned a copy of *Amadis of Gaul*, a person who said the pope was a fine man, and a woman who drank from a sacred spring near Geneva.

57. Kingdon, "Morals in Calvin's Geneva" 4-5.

58. James J. Raun, "Church Discipline: A Comparative Study of Luther and Calvin," *Lutheran Church Quarterly* 4(1933)71.

59. Bonnet, *Letters* 3:443. Emphasis is mine.

60. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 15.

61. *Institutes* 4.12.1.