

Position Paper and Call for Papers

10th International IRTI Conference on 'Calvinism and Law'

Sárospatak (Hungary) July 2 – July 7, 2013

Position Paper

The issue of 'Calvinism and Law' is a much-debated theme. It played a huge role in the historical debates around the *Barmen Declaration* (1934) in Germany and the *Belhar Confession* (1982) in South Africa. It prompts immediately vibrant discussions on civil disobedience and the relation between church and state and minorities and majorities. These debates can easily be placed against the backdrop of broader themes as 'Calvinism and Church Law', 'Calvinism and Democracy' and 'Calvinism and Ethics (human rights, natural law)'.

Often the Calvinist church order has been understood as a model for western democracy. Some consider it historically even as its cradle or breeding room. The Calvinist church order rules mirror at least principles that were constitutive for democracies such as public elections, no lifelong ministries, public discipline rules, individual ministries embedded in broader gremia and the right of gravamina. These principles were, of course, biblically founded, but their application was often also accompanied by the reference to human rights, frequently defended with the help of natural law arguments. So, as a matter of fact in Calvinism church order, democracy and human rights were always historically intertwined.

Much has been published about these relations the last decades, especially in the field of the political, social and judicial sciences. The cultural and political impact of Calvinism can be called a fiercely debated bone of contention. Having the intention to promote *Living Reformed Theology*, IRTI sees it as its task to be involved into this debate and to discuss its outcome.

Theologically many complex questions need here to be discussed. More than Lutheranism Calvinism can be characterized by its strong focus upon the meaning of law. Actually it touches the heart of the Calvinist doctrine of sanctification. Where Lutheranism preferably teaches two uses of the law (the *usus elencticus* or *theologicus* and the *usus politicus* or *civilis*), Calvinism teaches also a third use, the *usus didacticus* or *normativus*). Time and again Calvinists tried to overcome the Lutheran *simul justus ac peccator* paradox and endorsed that the law not only reveals (*usus theologicus*) and restrains (*usus civilis*) our sins, but also renews our lives (*usus normativus*). Cf. about this threefold use of the law, Calvin in his *Institutes*, II, 7, 6-11.

Within the framework of the works of thankfulness (gratitude) the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) speaks in Sunday 31, answer 86 about our renewal by Christ's Holy Spirit and the

assurance of faith by the fruits thereof. And Sunday 44, answer 114 and 115, speak about a “begin’ of a new life according to the commandments of God and a real change ‘more and more’ into the image of God. More than the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms, the Calvinist doctrine of the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ turns out to have been able to deliver the conceptual tools to reflect upon what sanctification actually means. Calvinism does not only have a ‘holistic’ approach of sin, but also a ‘holistic’ approach of redemption (Wolterstorff, 1988, 252).

If there is, however, in Calvinism no absolute gap between Gospel and Law, what is then exactly their reciprocal relation? What does that mean for church law, civil law and natural law? What does it mean to obey the Law of God as a divine command in the public sphere? What is the difference to the Muslim shari’a? The question of the relation of law to fall (sin) and to redemption (salvation) will be pivotal in each of the three subthemes of our conference (‘Calvinism and Church Law’ , ‘Calvinism and Democracy’ and ‘Calvinism and Ethics’.

During the preparation of the conference the following literature was leading. We recommend it as preparatory literature:

Allan Boesak, ‘Black and Reformed: Contradiction or Challenge?’ in: Donald K. McKim (ed.), *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, Grand Rapids 1992, 416-425

Ph. Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed. A Social History of Calvinism*, New Haven 2002

Eberhard Busch, ‘Church and Politics in the Reformed Tradition’ in: Donald K. McKim (ed.), *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, 180-195

R.M. Kingdon and R.D. Linder (eds), *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?*, Lexington 1970

David Little, ‘Reformed Faith and Religious Liberty’ in: Donald K. McKim (ed.), *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, 196-213

John Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, Allison Park 1992

John Hesselink, ‘Calvin on the Nature and Limits of Political Resistance’ in: Dirk van Keulen and Martien Brinkman (eds), *Christian Faith and Violence*, Vol.II (Studies in Reformed Theology 11), Zoetermeer 2005, 57-74

Jan Willem Sap, *Paving the Way for Revolution: Calvinism and the Struggle for a Democratic Constitutional State*, Amsterdam 2001

Christoph Strohm, *Calvinismus und Recht. Weltanschaulich-konfessionelle Aspekte im Werk reformierter Juristen in der frühen Neuzeit*, Tübingen 2008

John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism*, Cambridge 2007

Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Can a Calvinist be progressive?', *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 88 (1988) 249-258

Call for Papers

We intend to slightly change the structure of the IRTI-conferences. We prefer to introduce more brief plenary presentations and less workshops. We plan only a limited number of extended presentations of 30 minutes and maximally eight workshops. The bulk of the conference will consist of blocs of two plenary presentations of fifteen minutes (in sum 30 minutes), immediately followed by a plenary discussion of 30 minutes.

With this structure we hope to link more strictly the presentations to one of the three subthemes. In the workshops a bit more freedom will exist in relation to the subthemes. The shorter presentations will be summaries of your longer papers that you will be able to submit for publication immediately after the conference.

We invite all the IRTI members and all of them interested in the theme(s) to submit their preliminary ideas about their presentation at the conference in about 250 words to our new secretary Albert Nijboer: a.s.nijboer@pthu.nl .

We expect the proposals before January 30, 2013.

United in Christ,

Warm regards,

Martien E. Brinkman, director IRTI

Pieter Vos, vice-director IRTI

Eddy Van der Borght, vice-director IRTI

Albert Nijboer, secretary IRTI