

# **JOHN CALVIN: THE STATESMAN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649618569

John Calvin: The Statesman by Richard Taylor Stevenson

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**RICHARD TAYLOR STEVENSON**

**JOHN CALVIN:  
THE STATESMAN**



Men of the Kingdom

John Calvin: The Statesman

By

RICHARD TAYLOR STEVENSON

Chair of History Ohio Wesleyan University



CINCINNATI: JENNINGS AND GRAHAM  
NEW YORK: EATON AND MAINS

## PROLOGUE

As a system of theology Calvinism has no place in this volume. As a mighty force in the organization of ecclesiastical and political disciplines it will demand fair if not full treatment. Contrasted with Lutheranism Calvinism was the real strength of the Reformation. Extinguished in France only after a brutal war, glorious in the Netherlands, the power behind the throne of Elizabeth, forbidding the banns between the rocky fastnesses of Scotland and the sunny plains of France, and in America holding a thin frontier between the seaboard and the savage until the day dawn of a fairer opportunity broke upon the young Republic, this new power justifies all efforts at explanation.

Sober judges like Mark Pattison have said, "In the sixteenth century Calvinism saved Europe;" like Bancroft, "He that will not honor the memory and respect the influence of Calvin knows little of the history of American liberty;" even John Morley has lately declared, "To omit Calvin from the forces of Western evolution is to read history with one eye shut." John Calvin interests us far more than

his doctrine of predestination. "History, as Dörlinger has said, is no simple game of abstractions; men are more than doctrines. It is not a certain theory of grace that makes the Reformation; it is Luther, it is Calvin. Calvin shaped the mold in which the bronze of Puritanism was cast. That commanding figure, of such vast power yet somehow with so little luster, by his unbending will, his pride, his gift of government, for legislation, for dialectic in every field, his incomparable industry and persistence had conquered a more than pontifical ascendancy in the Protestant world. He meets us in England, as in Scotland, Holland, France, Switzerland, and the rising England across the Atlantic."<sup>1</sup> John Calvin was the "sharp edge of Protestantism" drawn against two forces; Roman Catholicism, more virile than ever in its new organization and moral revival, and the pagan impulse which swept in with the abuse of the freedom of the Reformation. Calvin's discipline was as potent as his theology.

The most permanent contributions of Calvin's genius lay less in the line of theology than of statesmanship. Calvin cherished the belief that the Reformation could be accomplished only by regeneration, by separation, and by negation. His change of view-point with regard to the Church in which he saw that men could conform with giving up their sins, his experiences at Geneva, where he

<sup>1</sup> Morley's *Cromwell*, p. 47.

found preachings, tumults, and image-breakings with no true improvement, brought him face to face with his "master problem, namely, by what means could he best secure the expression of a changed faith in a changed life." Calvin's chief title in modern history is that of the statesman, not of the theologian. And we agree with the scholar of Oxford in his statement that we have less cause to be grateful to Calvin for the system called Calvinism than for the Church he organized. His theology was derivative and less original than his polity, yet he so interpreted the former as to make the latter its logical outcome.

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Fairbairn. *Reformation. Camb. Mod. History, 2, 364.*

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**NOTE.**—The manuscript was in the hands of the printer before the issue of Professor Williston Walker's "John Calvin," by Putnam. References to this volume, an admirable one, have been possible in the proof sheets.

R. T. S.





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