



## ■ CALVIN, JOHN (1509–1564)

*Protestant theologian*

The French Protestant reformer and humanist John Calvin (in Latin, Johannes Calvinus) developed the notion of holy community, a godly Christian society, which still exercises much influence on Protestant evangelical movements who strive to ground all spheres of life on God's word. For Calvin, the common goal of the Christian social organism, the glory of God, should be placed before the individual's interests. In this context there is a close affinity between Calvin and contemporary communitarianism, which stresses the social nature of individual rights and obligations.

### LIFE AND WORKS

Calvin was born in Noyon, Picardy, in France. He studied arts in Paris from 1521 to 1526; there he was introduced to humanistic scholarship and appeals to reform the church. On his father's insistence, he transferred into the University of Orléans in 1528 to study civil law. At the University of Orléans he became more familiar with the ideas of Humanism and of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546). Upon the death of his father in 1531, Calvin went back to Paris and returned to his first love—classics and theology.

Forced to flee France in 1535 because of his support for the ideas of the Protestant Reformation, he went to Basel, Switzerland, where he composed the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), in which he set down his reformed belief and defended the cause of the persecuted French Protestants, or Huguenots. The book provided a



A Renaissance portrait of John Calvin, French reformer and founder of Calvinism.

Source: Archivo Iconografico, S.A./Corbis; used with permission.

massive account of Protestant doctrine and soon became the most important theological text of the Protestant Reformation. It was the Reformation's only genuine systematic theology and for that reason exerted extraordinary influence on future generations of theologians.

In 1536, while passing through the city of Geneva,



## Selections From the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, by John Calvin (1541)

First there are four orders of offices instituted by our Saviour for the government of his Church: namely, the pastors, then the doctors, next the elders nominated and appointed by the government, and fourthly the deacons. If we wish to see the Church well-ordered and maintained we ought to observe this form of government.

### *The duty of pastors*

Pastors are sometimes named in the Bible as overseers, elders and ministers. Their work is to proclaim the Word of God, to teach, admonish, exhort and reprove publicly and privately, to administer the sacraments and, with the elders or their deputies, to issue fraternal warnings.

[...]

### *There follows the second order which we have called the doctors*

The special duty of the doctors is to instruct the faithful in sound doctrine so that the purity of the gospel is not corrupted by ignorance or wrong opinion.

As things stand at present, every agent assisting in the upholding of God's teaching is included so that the Church is not in difficulties from a lack of pastors and ministers. This is in common parlance the order of school teachers. The degree nearest the minister and closely joined to the government of the Church is the lecturer in theology.

[...]

### *Here follows the third order, or elders*

Their duty is to supervise every person's conduct. In friendly fashion they should warn backsliders and those of disorderly life. After that, where necessary, they should report to the Company [of pastors] who will arrange for fraternal correction...

As our Church is now arranged, it would be most suitable to have two elected from the "council of 24," four from the "council of 60" and six from the "council of 200." They should be men of good repute and conduct...They should be chosen from each quarter of the city so that they can keep an eye on the whole of it.

[...]

### *The fourth order of ecclesiastical government, namely, the deacons*

There have always been two kinds of these in the early Church. One has to receive, distribute and care for the goods of the poor (i.e. daily alms as well as possessions, rents and pensions); the other has to tend and look after the sick and administer the allowances to the poor as is customary. In order to avoid confusion, since we have officials and hospital staff, one of the four officials of the said hospital should be responsible for the whole of its property and revenues and he should have an adequate salary in order to do his work properly.

Source: Bergier, J. F., & Kingdon, R. M. (1983). *John Calvin* (G. R. Potter & M. Greengrass, Trans.). London: Edward Arnold, p. 71. (Originally published 1962–1964)

ing the next years devoted himself to establishing a theocratic regime there. The city adopted his ecclesiastical ordinances, which dealt with the form of church government, and accepted his view that ecclesiastical discipline should be placed in the hand of a consistory. This church-run moral and religious judiciary, a type of morals court with the power to impose spiritual penalties, was established in order to control the behavior of the entire population and to see that everyone accepted the Reformed doctrine and behaved in a godly, Christian way. By these means and others, Calvin transformed Geneva into Protestant Rome. In 1559, with the founding of the Genevan Academy for the education of theologians, the city became the center of international Protestantism.

## HOLY COMMUNITY

According to Calvin, life should be based on total obedience to God, whose moral order is declared in the scriptures. A well-ordered Christian community results from a synthesis of rule, cooperation, and order emanating from the divine laws of God, and it should be unified, organized, and structured in order to advance the glory of God in the world. Accepting the views of classical writers, especially Aristotle and Seneca, Calvin argued that human beings are social animals by nature, hence community is essential to human life.

Calvin was persuaded by the minister Guillaume Farel (1489–1565) to assist in organizing the reformation in that city. Strong opposition from civil authorities led to his departure in 1538. He went to Strasbourg, staying there for three years, continuously revising his *Institutes*.

In 1541, Calvin was invited back to Geneva and dur-

Calvin thought that human beings were under two kinds of government: spiritual, by which piety is formed, and political, by which they are instructed in the duties of humanities and civility. A well-ordered community is based on the concept of calling, or vocation, the notion that God calls people to serve him in

their own appointed place and sphere of activity in the world. By God's own will, then, human beings are not equal; each has a calling and vocation, some lowly and some high.

A holy community is a godly society in which the secular and ecclesiastical authority's main responsibility is to glorify God by obeying and realizing his word. Church and state are but two means for ordering godly society; the magistrate ought to punish in order to clean the church of offenses, and the minister should help the magistrate in combating sin. Civil government should cherish and protect the worship of God and defend sound doctrines of piety, while the church should adjust members' lives in light of society, shape their social behavior to civil righteousness, reconcile them one with another, and promote general peace and tranquility. Calvin thus put community squarely under the sovereignty of God, believing the state should order all functions of life, from hunting heretics to closing taverns.

For Calvin, the common good of the Christian social body, the *corpus christianum*, should be placed before selfish interests. The glorification of God in action, in the world, is the community's goal. In contrast to Luther, Calvin was not interested in passively enduring and tolerating the world, but in transforming it according to the divine will and word.

## CALVIN AND CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITARIANISM

While liberalism and libertarianism are committed to individualism, stressing individual self-sufficiency, for Calvin, God is the ultimate source of all rights and obligations. Yet, given that, God has ordered human existence socially so that divine rights and obligations are mediated by social institutions, and the individual's sphere is defined and shaped by the larger community in which he or she lives. Hence, Calvin anticipated contemporary communitarians, for whom individual rights and obligations derived from the social and political institutions to which individuals belong.

—Avihu Zakai

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## ■ ■ CASTE

The term *caste* is derived from *casta*, a word used by the Portuguese to describe the Hindu religious system. The caste system categorizes people into various hierarchical levels, which determine and define their social, religious, and hegemonic standings within the society. The caste system has also maintained a nexus and a sense of community for caste members for more than 2,000 years. A classic example of the caste system is the one found in India, which has existed there for hundreds of years.

## ORIGIN AND DESCRIPTION OF THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

Hinduism has been aptly described as a way of life rather than a set of religious dogma and principles. Accordingly, there is a great deal of variation in the religious practices. Citations and references about caste in India go back to the ancient scriptures—such as the Veda, Purana, and Upanishad texts and the works of legal or religious scholars like Manu—but the caste system has evolved and changed significantly over the years, and the system often varies significantly from one region to another in India. Thus it would not be hard to discover exceptions to most of the descriptions and statements of the caste system in the literature, because of the disagreements between