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*MISSIO CALVINI
JOHN CALVIN, PREDESTINATION, ELECTION,
REPROBATION AND MISSIONS*

CONDUCĂTOR DE DOCTORAT
DOCTORAL SUPERVISOR
Prof. univ. dr. BUZOGANY DESIDERIU

Student-doctorand
Doctoral student
REGINALD DEAN WEEMS

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SUMMARY

John Calvin possessed a fully developed doctrine of predestination, election and reprobation and an equally rigorous missional theology. Although he never formally developed a theology of mission as he did a theology of predestination, election and reprobation, Calvin's preaching, teaching, lifestyle and ministry evidence such a theology as the natural outcome of his study and practice of Scripture. The reformer did not view predestination and missions as antithetical but symmetric, even essential to mission. His major works on predestination, election and reprobation reveal no contradiction between the aforementioned doctrines and missions. Scattered throughout Calvin's writings on predestination, election and reprobation are positive proofs of Calvin's thinking on the subject of preaching the gospel as a missionary-minded pastor and preacher.

Calvin understood that Scripture plainly taught predestination, election and reprobation. It's clear and consistent exposition enabled his argument to be heard and engendered the success of his apologetic on the matter. In his attempts to veer the conversation to the Bible as the ultimate authority he wrote "Let this then be our sacred rule, to seek to know nothing concerning it, except what Scripture teaches us: when the Lord closes his holy mouth, let us also stop the way, that we may not go farther."¹ As such, Calvin's exegetical genius and his various commentaries, particularly his *Commentary on Romans*, naturally created the platform for his explanation and defense of predestination, election and reprobation in works like *A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God* and even the *Institutes*. For Calvin, there was no better explanation or endorsement for predestination than the Bible itself.

With equal ferocity Calvin taught the twin biblical realities that God is sovereign and humanity is responsible.² Nonetheless, the final cause of election or reprobation does not lie in the person but in God's perfect, sovereign good pleasure and will.³ "The efficient cause is the good pleasure of the will of God; the material cause is of Christ; and the final cause is the praise of His grace..."⁴ Predestination then is God's eternal decree and necessarily involves both election and reprobation. Election "makes a distinction between individuals where there is none by nature."⁵ At its core, election is motivated by and reveals God's mercy while reprobation is resourced by and reflects God's justice.

As such, Calvin taught double predestination. "The conclusion must be drawn that Calvin regarded the relation of election and of reprobation as symmetrically related to the will of God, that election and reprobation are correlatives standing in identical relation to God's will and equally expressing it. We are thus led to the forbidding doctrine of predestination duplex."⁶ For him, both election and reprobation served the single and highest cause of God's glory. Thus, God does not have a will for the elect and a will for the reprobate but election and reprobation stem from one single will of God. 'It is only we, because of our defective understanding who may speak of the will of God 'in two sorts.'

¹ John Owen. ed., *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans by John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 363.

² Calvin, *Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God*, 41.

³ Fred H. Klooster. *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 27-29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶ J.K.S. Reid, ed., *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (London: James Clarke and Co., 1961), 36.

His ultimate will has an object only His own glory, and this is equally served by election and reprobation.”⁷

All of this is naturally confusing the finite mind. Calvin recognized this natural conundrum and acknowledged a universal limitation to humanity’s understanding; this included his own inability to comprehend the matter. “No one can be more averse to paradox than I am, and in subtleties I find no delight at all.”⁸ But to respond appropriately “it becomes a man rather to adore them [God’s counsels] with reverence than to investigate them with presumption.”⁹ God’s ways are far beyond that of mortal comprehension. In addition, God does not have to justify himself before his creation. A simple acknowledgement of what is known about God, his good and just character, solves any dilemma concerning predestination, election and reprobation. Too, election, as Calvin’s opponents incorrectly perceived it, is not based on the foreknowledge of God in perceiving that people will turn to him. Foreknowledge, according to Calvin’s mentor, Augustine is simply “the counsel of God by which He predestinates His own unto salvation.”¹⁰

Calvin’s nemeses purveyed their perspective on predestination as a concern that the Church might not understand the doctrine and find it confusing to the point of rendering it of disadvantage. For that reason, they encouraged it not to be preached or taught. But Calvin counted “Why should these men of our day think they act rightly in the matter of their teaching by keeping themselves shut up in silence within the strong tower of invincible truth...?”¹¹ Rather, the truth should be preached for assurance and encouragement. Since God spoke of it in the Bible, it should be preached. However, it should only be taught from the Scripture and confined to what God said. Where God speaks, the minister should speak and where God is silent, the minister should be silent.

But did Calvin’s doctrine of predestination, election or reprobation hinder his theology of missions? Absolutely not. As is evidenced by historical fact, the exact opposite is true. Calvin wrote “The proclaiming of God’s glory on the earth is the very end of our existence.”¹² A survey and analysis of Calvin’s major teaching on the subject offer no evidence that his thinking detracted from mission thinking or activity. Predestination fueled Calvin’s passion for God’s glory across the globe. In effect, Estep’s claim that Calvinism is “logically antimissionary”¹³ is wholly inaccurate, as is evidenced by the historical record concerning John Calvin.

For the reformer, the gospel should be preached extensively and expansively. Calvin’s doctrine propelled him and others in Geneva to risk their lives taking the gospel through any door God opened. Calvin both taught and practiced missions and particularly a missions dependent on the Spirit’s application of the divine word preached throughout the world.

The fact is, the high doctrines of Calvin’s pulpit never diminished his evangelism, but only emboldened it. With an eye on God’s sovereignty, Calvin said, “There is nothing we ought to desire more earnestly than that the whole world should bow to the authority of God.” Accordingly, he knew that such submission necessitates the preaching of the gospel. Calvin wrote “God begets and multiplies His Church only by means of His Word....It is by the preaching of the grace of God alone that the Church is kept from perishing.” Elsewhere Calvin stated: “The Gospel is preached indiscriminately to the elect and to the reprobate; but

⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁸ Klooster, Calvin’s Doctrine of Predestination, 17.

⁹ Calvin, *A Treatise On the Enteral Predestination of God*, 190.

¹⁰ Ibid., 48.

¹¹ Ibid., 148.

¹² Steve Lawson. “The Biblical Preaching of John Calvin.” <http://www.onepassionministries.org/the-biblical-preaching-of-john-calvin> (accessed June 26, 2013).

¹³ William Estep. “Calvinizing Southern Baptists.” *Texas Baptist Standard*, March 26, 1997.

the elect alone come to Christ because they have been ‘taught by God.’” To accuse Calvin of being non-evangelistic is to be ignorant of him and his preaching.¹⁴

For the majority of his life and ministry in Geneva Calvin struggled to maintain his existence and that of the reformation. But in 1555 his supporters won the majority position in the town political scene. This freed Calvin to create a long-desired Academy for training ministers. Between 1555 and 1570 Geneva sent more than two hundred ministers throughout France and Europe. Robert Kingdon’s research has revealed that 142 missionaries left Geneva for France in 1561 alone. More than one hundred underground churches had been planted in France by 1560 and the number increased to 2150 by 1562, and in the years that followed the number of Protestant believers rose to over two million.”¹⁵ It has been estimated that if the Wars of Religion had not broken out in France, the entire country could have been evangelized by Calvin’s Geneva. More, even though “transoceanic missions were not a realistic option for Protestants in the earliest decades of the Reformation era”¹⁶ Calvin even responded to the opportunity for a mission endeavor to Brazil.

Bosch wrote “It is absurd to summon the Reformers before the tribunal of the modern missionary movement and find them guilty for not having subscribed to a definition of mission which did not even exist in their time.”¹⁷ Yet with Calvin at its center, Geneva became a center for global missionary endeavors. Refugees flocked to the city and its most famous resident only to be taught, trained and mobilized for the evangelization of France, Europe and the world. This is because Calvin’s theology was a missionary theology; a revelation incomplete without a gospel proclamation, i.e., the further revelation of the God who made himself known in Scripture and Christ.

John Calvin simultaneously preached and practiced the doctrine of predestination, election, reprobation and missions. When one considers the circumstances in which he ministered, the missionary accomplishments that were realized and the time-frame in which Calvin completed those endeavors, it may well be said that Calvin’s missionary work has never been equaled, much less surpassed.

*

“The sixteenth was a great century. It was the century of Raphael, El Greco and Michelangelo, of Spenser, Tyndale and Shakespeare, of Erasmus, More and Rabelais, of da Vinci, Copernicus and Galileo, of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. Of all the figures that gave greatness to this century, none left a more lasting heritage than Calvin.”¹⁸ Yet apart from the Lord Jesus, John Calvin (1509-1564) is undoubtedly the most provocative figure in Christianity and history has only served to amplify the controversy surrounding him. Calvin is a polarizing person, without peer in his ability to arouse emotion and divide theologians and common believers. Those outside of Christianity disagree about his beliefs and actions; those inside the church all the more. As Cole has written “No servant of Christ, probably, since the days of the apostles, and of the Gospel witnesses of their century, has been more grossly misrepresented, or more maliciously maligned, than the faithful, fearless, and beloved Calvin.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Eroll Hulse. “John Calvin: An Appreciation,” http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article_detail.php?1632 (accessed June, 25, 2013).

¹⁶ Kenneth J. Stewart “Calvinism and Missions: The Contest Relationship Revisited.” Themelios, Vol. 34, Issue 1, April 2009. http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/calvinism_and_missions_the_contested_relationship_revisited (accessed June 25, 2013).

¹⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Number 16 in the American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 244.

¹⁸ Georgia Harkness. *John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1931), 3.

¹⁹ John Calvin. *Calvin’s Calvinism, Part 1: A Treatise on The Eternal Predestination of God* (1856), (London: Wertheim and Macintosh, 1856), ix.

That “misrepresentation” has created a predisposed negative bias against the Reformer. “Prejudice dies hard; and there are few figures around whom prejudice has accumulated more tenaciously than that of John Calvin....With regard to Calvin’s personal character, it was for a long time a popular practice of his enemies to blacken his name as one of the most unnatural monsters ever to have been born.”²⁰ Georgia Harkness wrote “No man in the history of the church has been more admired and ridiculed, loved and hated, blessed and cursed.”²¹

On one hand, “John Calvin (1509-1564) stands with Martin Luther (1483-1546) as the premier theologian of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.”²²

Calvin belongs to the second generation of reformers. His place chronologically, and, to a large extent, theologically, is among the heirs rather than with the initiators of the Reformation. At his birth Luther and Zwingli were already 25 years of age. Melancthon was about to take up a student’s career at the University of Heidelberg, and Henry VIII had just begun his eventful reign. None of these leaders had entered, indeed, upon his reformatory work; but the thorough development of the Reformation in Germany and in Germany-speaking Switzerland was achieved before Calvin reached the activities of manhood. Yet in spite of his lateness in point of time, Calvin must be ranked among the most influential leaders in the gigantic struggle of the sixteenth century.²³

On the other hand, Richard Stauffer writes “Through the course of four centuries, the reformers have been exposed to critiques as varied as they are severe. Among them, however, there is not one who has been more bitterly discussed than Calvin.”²⁴ In the Introduction of his *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea*, McGrath writes that a new study of the Reformation is needed in part because “many existing analyses have been unduly influenced by popular stereotypes of Protestant leaders....The most glaring example of such a misrepresentation is John Calvin...”²⁵ And Naphy notes “In part, the existing emphasis upon men like Calvin was as much a matter of sources as it was a matter of historiographical ‘taste’ and prejudices.”²⁶

The truth about Calvin is undoubtedly somewhere in between that of angelic and demonic. Benjamin Warfield wrote “The Reformation was the greatest revolution of thought which the human spirit has wrought since the introduction of Christianity; and controversy is the very essence of revolution. Of course Calvin’s whole life, which was passed in the thick of things, was a continuous controversy...”²⁷ He was a man greatly used of God but, like all men, just a man whose fallennes incapacitates any real possibility of sainthood. Alister McGrath wrote about his biography of Calvin that “The book has been written in the conviction, not that Calvin is a saint or a rogue, but simply that he is profoundly worthy of study by anyone concerned with the shaping of the modern world in

²⁰ Philip E. Hughes. “John Calvin: Director of Missions” in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, ed., John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1973), 40-41.

²¹ Harkness. *John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics*, 3.

²² Donald K. McKim, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xi.

²³ Williston Walker. *John Calvin: Revolutionary, Theologian, Pastor* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 7.

²⁴ Richard Stauffer. *The Humanness of John Calvin*, trans. George Shriver (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 1971), 19.

²⁵ Alister McGrath. *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Reformation – A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: Harper One, 2007), 9.

²⁶ William G. Naphy, “Developments in the history of Geneva since the 1960s,” in *Revisiting Geneva: Robert Kingdon and the Coming of the French Wars of Religion*, ed. S.K.Barker (Center for French History and Culture of the University of St. Andrews: School of History, University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, 1012), 85.

²⁷ Benjamin Warfield. *The Works of Benjamin Warfield, Vol. 5, Calvin and Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1932) 10.

general and western culture in particular.”²⁸ McGrath finds him noteworthy in part because “Through the extraordinary dynamism and brilliance of his colleagues, agents and successors, Calvin’s ideas were fashioned into one of the most potent intellectual forces history has known...”²⁹

The vast majority of theologians and historians agree. “Any honest historian of any point of view and of any religious conviction would agree that Calvin was one of the most important people in the history of western civilization.”³⁰ Steinmetz penned

Yet there is no Protestant leader in the sixteenth century, with the obvious exception of Martin Luther, who left a more profound mark on Western culture than he did. For more than four hundred years Calvin has influenced the way successive generations of Europeans and Americans have thought about religion, structured their political institutions, looked at paintings, written poetry and music, theorized about economic relations, or struggled to uncover the laws which govern the physical universe.³¹

But that doesn’t mean his importance is considered entirely virtuous. Calvin admitted about himself that he was a man subject to the fall and its various depravations. Those who opposed his work in Geneva caricatured every fault until Calvin was a larger-than-life monstrosity. Yet the same may be said of any portrait painted by his friends. “The life and work of John Calvin have always been controversial as well as influential. Some have loved him, and some have hated him. All would agree that he was a man with a brilliant mind and a powerful will who had a profound impact on the development of western civilization. But was that impact positive or negative?”³²

Opinions about the man, his ministry, theology and legacy are as diametrically opposed as the North and South poles of the earth. “Having been a spectator of his conduct for sixteen years...” wrote Theodore Beza, Calvin’s initial biographer, close friend and co-laborer, “I can now declare, that in him all men may see a most beautiful example of the Christian character, an example which it is as easy to slander as it is difficult to imitate.”³³ Will Durant disagreed. He wrote “...we shall always find it hard to love the man who darkened the human soul with the most absurd and blasphemous conception of God in all the long and honored history of nonsense.”³⁴ Quoting Hume, Durant wrote that Calvin’s God “was a demon, cruel, malicious, arbitrary, and difficult to appease.”³⁵

Lindberg explains some of what lauds and haunts Calvin.

He has been portrayed as both a narrow dogmatist and an ecumenical churchperson; a ruthless inquisitor and a sensitive, caring pastor; an ascetic, cold authoritarian and a compassionate humanist; a rigorous individualist and a social thinker; a plodding systematizer and the theologians’ theologian who finally completed the doctrine of the trinity; a man dominated by logic and a man of contradictory traits and inconsistencies; a theoretician of capitalism and socialism; the tyrant of Geneva and a defender of freedom; a dictator and a revolutionary.³⁶

²⁸ Alister E. McGrath. *A Life of John Calvin* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), xv.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, xii.

³⁰ W. Robert Godfrey. Calvin: Why He Still Matters, *Evangelium*, Vol. 7, Issue 1, April 1, 2009.

³¹ David C. Steinmetz. *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

³² W. Robert Godfrey. *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2009), 8.

³³ Theodore Beza. *The Life of John Calvin, in Selected Works of John Calvin*, Vol. 1, ed. H. Beveridge and J. Bonnet (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), xcvi11.

³⁴ Will Durant. *The Story of Civilization: The Reformation*, Part VI (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 490.

³⁵ Will and Ariel Durant. *The Story of Civilization: The Age of Voltaire*, Part IX (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 152.

³⁶ C. Lindberg. *The European Reformations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 250.

Yet Warfield confessed “No man ever had a profounder sense of God than he; no man ever more unreservedly surrendered himself to the Divine direction.”³⁷ Calvin’s own thought concerning his life and ministry was excessively modest when compared with the influence and controversy that has arisen since his death. He wrote about his commentary on Genesis “This is my especial end and aim, to serve my generation; and for the rest if, in my present calling, an occasional opportunity offers itself, I shall endeavor to improve it for those who come after us.”³⁸

Indeed, it appears that Calvin’s commitment to Geneva in the midst of such a hostile environment won him the respect and support of his contemporaries furnishing true evidence of his character and mission.

Those who wish to focus denigration of Calvin, and what he stood for, on his supposed cruelty and dictatorial powers fail to come to grips with two major facts. First, if Calvin was a cruel man how did he attract so many, so varied, and so warmly attached friends and associates who speak of his sensitiveness and his charm? The evidence is plain for all to read in the course of his vast correspondence. Secondly, if Calvin had dictatorial control over Genevan affairs, how is it that the records of Geneva show him plainly to have been the servant of its Council which soon many occasions rejected out of hand Calvin’s wishes for the religious life of Geneva, and was always master in Genevan affairs? A reading of Calvin’s farewell speech to the ministers of Geneva made shortly before he died should resolve doubt upon this point. To call Calvin the ‘dictator of a theocracy’ is, in the view of the evidence, mere phrase-making prejudice.³⁹

It is perhaps a prejudice against Calvin’s theology more than the person. Much of the source of disagreement, even disgust concerning Calvin originates primarily from his doctrine of predestination and his relationship to Michael Servetus. Timothy George correctly assesses the historical knowledge of Calvin when he wrote “Most Christians, including Protestants, know only two things about him: He believed in predestination, and he sent Servetus to the stake.”⁴⁰ Arthur Custance wrote “Mention of the words Election or Predestination today, in any but a theological environment, almost inevitably brings to people’s minds the name of Calvin.”⁴¹ There is little question that the doctrine of predestination and Servetus’ execution weigh negatively on the historical remembrance of John Calvin. “No Christian leader has ever been so often condemned by so many. And the usual grounds for condemnation are the execution of Servetus and the doctrine of predestination.”⁴²

Loraine Boettner wrote “In the minds of most people the doctrine of Predestination and Calvinism are practically synonymous terms.”⁴³ Predestination, according to its critics, destroyed man’s free-will, moral responsibility and presented grace as random, subjective and without regard to the objects of its choice. It also denied any reason for evangelism or mission. Lawrence M. Vance writes “The doctrines of Calvinism, *if really believed and consistently practiced*, are detrimental to evangelism, personal soul winning, prayer, preaching and practical Christianity in general... Calvinism is the greatest ‘Christian’ heresy

³⁷ Warfield, *The Works*, 24.

³⁸ John Calvin. “Letters,” July 28, 1542, in *Selected Works of John Calvin*, Vol. 4, ed. H. Beveridge and J. Bonnet (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 339.

³⁹ Basil Hall, “The Calvin Legend,” *The Churchman*, LXXIII, No. 3, September 1959, 124f.

⁴⁰ Timothy George. *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 167.

⁴¹ Arthur C. Custance. *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979), 3.

⁴² Otto Scott. *The Great Christian Revolution* (Windsor: The Reformer Library, 1994), 100.

⁴³ Loraine Boettner. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1932), 1.

that has ever plagued the church.”⁴⁴ Vance self-published a massive treatise against the person and doctrine associated with John Calvin “to show that Calvinism is beyond all doubt not the teaching of the Bible...to prevent the spread of Calvinism...to *not* believe, and to cease to propagate this *anti*-biblical system of doctrine...in the hope that much of the abuse that is hurled at the Calvinistic system of theology will be sustained...to protect the church from the heretical doctrines of *Calvinistic* teaching...”⁴⁵

Does the record of Calvin’s own life, doctrine and ministry demonstrate a lack of passion or even neglect of concern for the lost? Or is it true as Philip Schaff claimed, that “the better he is known, the more he is admired and esteemed”⁴⁶ This paper intends to prove that Calvin was personally a man of mission, that his doctrine and teaching on predestination, election and reprobation encouraged missions and that he influenced others toward mission.

The history of Christian missions is a study in Christian theology. The evangelistic enterprises of famous missionaries were all grounded in deep theology. These names would include John Elliot, William Carey, Henry Martin, David Brainerd, Robert Moffat, Robert Morrison, Adonirum Judson, and George Whitefield. Cities of great theological centers like Basel, Emden, Geneva, Lausanne, London, Philadelphia, Wheaton and Zurich have been the international hubs of missionary fervor and for good reason. Effective, long-term missions require theological depth. Thankfully God himself is our resource for global engagement. Missions is rooted in the very nature of God who is a missional God. “Only as mission has its source in and derives its nature and authority from the triune God can it truly generate lasting and enduring motivation and become really Christian, really meaningful.”⁴⁷

Everything humans know about God in the Bible involves God on mission to declare and to redeem a people to himself. The entire Bible can be viewed with missions as its underlying principle; the platform on which the various ongoing scenes of God’s redemptive activity are acted out in human history. From Genesis to Revelation, God is on mission. God and mission are synonymous. David Hesselgrave writes, “The most hopeful future for missions and missiology depends on the ‘re-missionizing of theology’ on the one hand, and the ‘re-theologizing of missiology’ on the other.”⁴⁸ Ultimately missions is all about knowing God. The missionary gospel evangelizes us and then propels us the gospel of missions.

God’s declaration in Genesis 3:15 and Jesus’ directive in Matthew 28 reveal the Old and New Testament continuity of God’s mission. The cross thrust God’s love between his own holiness and justice in a redemptive mission to reconcile all things to himself (Colossians 1:20). We live in the time between the promise of “he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15) and the declaration of “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:11-12). In that interim all that we know about God is associated with his mission.

The phrase “In the beginning God created” expresses the biblical basis for a theology of mission. Nature was created as a witness to God’s existence and glory (Psalm 18:1). The apostle Paul wrote that God’s “invisible attributes...have been clearly perceived...in the things that have been made” (Romans 1:20). Creation is God’s first missionary endeavor to reveal himself to humanity. Thereafter, God’s mandate for the first couple to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...” (Genesis 1:28) is an expression of God’s desire to be acknowledged amongst all the people of the earth. God is redeeming all of creation but only

⁴⁴ Lawrence M. Vance. *The Other Side of Calvinism*: Revised Edition (Pensacola: Vance Publications, 2002), x.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, x-xi.

⁴⁶ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol 8. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910), 834.

⁴⁷ George W. Peters. *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), p. 25.

⁴⁸ David J. Hesselgrave. “Third Millennium Missiology and the Use of Egyptian Gold,” (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, [n.d.], p. 589.

humanity, the object of God's saving work through Jesus on the cross consciously cooperates with God in this grand reversal. This is why the Bible centers upon Jesus Christ and his cross as the means by which God accomplishes all he intends in redemption. The Bible is replete with references to that redemptive mission.

After humanity's initial transgression God promised a redemptive plan to reconcile Adam's posterity to himself (Genesis 3:15). This means the Bible is not only a book about theology but a record of theology in mission. God's intent to save people across the globe is evidenced in the "some 100 times"⁴⁹ *panta ta ethne* occurs in the Old Testament Septuagint. Christ employed that same terminology (*panta ta ethne*) in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. He also employed the similar phrasing of *pasin tois ethnesin* when quoting Isaiah 56:7 to link His mission to that of the Father's Old Testament vision (Mark 11:17). The whole Bible really is the historical narrative of God keeping his promise; the story of God's redemptive agenda told through sixty-six books all pointing to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:44) who is the center of all created reality.

The promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 is repeated in chapters 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 and 28:14. New Testament authors continued this theme of global redemption by citing the Abrahamic covenant in Acts 3:25 and Galatians 3:6-8. "God's purpose for the world is that the blessing of Abraham, namely, the salvation achieved through Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, would reach to all the ethnic people groups of the world."⁵⁰ Hints of this global redemption can be viewed throughout the Old Testament. God redeemed Israel from Egypt proving himself the only true God. He strategically situated his chosen people in the midst of seven pagan nations so that the heathen might exclaim "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Israel could then respond "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?" (Deuteronomy 4:6-7). Israel was created to be the conduit of God's blessing; a blessing intended make the surrounding nations jealous to know God.

New Testament evangelistic commissions uttered by Jesus also reiterated the Father's original design to proclaim his Son's name throughout the world. After his resurrection, the Lord Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:45-57). "So Jesus is saying that his commission to take the message of repentance and forgiveness to all nations 'is written' in the Old Testament 'Scriptures.'"⁵¹ The entire Bible is God's revelation of his missional activity. It is one story about one God on one mission to redeem one people to one place and all through one person, Jesus Christ. All theology is the theology of mission.

God is a missional God whose Old Testament work climaxed in the New Testament passion of Jesus Christ at Calvary. The Scriptures are nothing other than the revelation of God on mission. Hence, all theology proper, i.e., the study of God, is the theology of mission. Theology of mission is the revelation of the triune God who is missional in all that He is and does. It defines God for his people and demonstrates his activity among them. It reveals who we are and the purpose of our salvation. It is disobedient to accept the gospel message without propagating it. Hoarding the gospel is foreign to its nature, message and purpose. Maturing believers naturally grow in the fullness of their commitment to Christ's kingdom agenda.

Historically, *missions* is "the word used for the specific task of making disciples of all nations."⁵² George W. Peters writes that missions "is the sending forth of authorized

⁴⁹ John Piper. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, Fourth Edition, Ralph D. Winter, Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), p. 133.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

persons beyond the borders of the New Testament church and her immediate influence to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ...⁵³ According to that definition, *missions* occurs as local churches replicate the model of the church at Antioch in Acts 13 by sending believers to represent the gospel in areas other than the geographical location of the sending church. Henry Blackaby defines *missions* as “the activity of God’s people—the church to proclaim and to demonstrate the kingdom of God cross-culturally in the world.”⁵⁴ Fundamentally, *missions* is sending Christians away from their original culture to a differing people group for the purposes of evangelism.

The term “*missions*” is appropriately differentiated from *mission*. *Mission* “is everything the church does that points toward the kingdom of God.”⁵⁵ Whereas *missions* is the local church reaching the world beyond its own natural borders, *mission* is “the total biblical assignment of the church.”⁵⁶ *Mission* includes *missions* because *mission* is anywhere and anything the church does to increase the knowledge of God. The church’s *mission* naturally includes *missions* but *mission* is not limited to another country. *Missions* is “over there.” *Mission* is everything everywhere. The concept of *mission* brings the divine agenda home. *Missions* may be what other people do but *mission* is the human response to God’s kingdom expansion. *Mission* is anything and everything the church corporately does and everything individual Christians do to expand God’s kingdom – in temporal human existence and into the world. In that regard, John Calvin is an exemplar of *mission* and *missions*, working to expand God’s kingdom in Geneva and beyond.

Both *mission* and *missions* rest the validity of their existence upon the *missio dei*, the mission of God himself. “It is in the very being and character of God that the deepest ground for missionary enterprise is to be found. We cannot think of God except in terms which necessitate the missionary idea... The grounds are in the very being and thought of God.”⁵⁷ *Missio dei* recognizes “that mission originates in God, not in the church or in people.”⁵⁸ While *mission* may be “church-centered” (what the corporate body does) and *missions* may be “people-centered” (what the missions organization or the individual missionary does), *missio dei* is “God-centered” (what God does).

Missio dei is God’s work in the world. It is everything God does to reveal himself to mankind. It existed before the church. It is not a church program. It is not a church initiative. It is not something the church created but the singular purpose for which the local church were created. It is God’s mission, something to which he calls every believer and every congregation. *Missio dei* is simply riding the crest of an omnipotent wave. It is the recognition of where God is working and joining him in that work.

Missio dei is humanly expressed in *mission* and *missions* but the core of *mission* and *missions* is *missio dei*, God’s mission and God himself. This is because first and foremost, *mission* defines the very being of God. All that exists proves that God is by nature, a missional God. All creation is simply the overflow of a Trinitarian existence that loves itself and desires and deserves to be known, loved and glorified. God is a missional God and all that humanity knows about God declares this passion.

The church is on *mission* because of *missio dei*. This encourages the church when it is weary or stymied. It is not the work of humans. It is God’s work and the church is called to work alongside him. The church’s endeavors are resourced by the omniscience and omnipotence of *missio dei*. The church’s existence and success doesn’t ultimately rest on the wisdom or skill of its leadership or congregants, on human effort or ingenuity. The

⁵³ George W. Peters. *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), p. 11.

⁵⁴ Avery T. Willis and Henry T. Blackaby. *On Mission with God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), p.

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⁵⁵ Moreau, Corwin & McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Robert E. Speer. *Christianity and the Nations* (New York: Revell, 1910), pp. 17-18.

⁵⁸ Moreau, Corwin & McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, p. 73.

church is founded in, lives and continues by God himself. *Missio dei* is the foundation, reason and paradigm for all the church does in mission. *Missions* and *mission* is simply God expressing himself through his body, the church. *Missions* and *mission* are supernaturally funded by *missio dei*.

Calvin never wrote a treatise on mission or missions but his life demonstrated the realities. *Missio dei* was *missio Calvinus*. From ministering to impoverished refugees in Geneva and educating Genevan children to sending men to France, Europe and even South America, Calvin's life demonstrates a life on mission. An analysis of his practice, writings, sermons, commentaries, doctrine of predestination, election and reprobation will evidence that nothing about these subjects would have theoretically deterred Calvin from missions. And a review of the historical data concerning Calvin's participation in mission endeavors provides further proof that Calvin was a man on mission who preached and practiced world missions. As Hughes suggests "Today, however, no self-respecting historian would seek to perpetuate the details of the crude calumnies that have been invented against the person of John Calvin."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Hughes, "John Calvin: Director of Missions," in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, 41.

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