

The Church One and Holy

Introduction

It is good for us to gather here at Princeton Theological Seminary to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin (1509-1564), our father in the faith. It is appropriate that we do so in what he calls “a teachable spirit” as we set ourselves to the task of asking what he has to say about the church that can be of help to us as the church yet today. Of course, this is complicated by the change in circumstance from the relative unity of the church in his day, before and during the Protestant Reformation, to the almost unimaginable disunity of the church today, with tens of thousands of divisions and denominations around the world.

That complication is farther tinged by the realization that to a great extent the divisions defining the Presbyterian Church as distinct from other denominations trace their birth to the one whose birth we are gathered to celebrate. That could make his counsels to church unity difficult. But lest we retreat from apparent contradictions, let me invite us to learn what we can about ecclesiology from these tensions. It is appropriate that we return to the source and examine what Calvin wrote about the church one and holy in hope of learning what he has to say to benefit us yet today.

This is not without danger. No less a teacher than Karl Barth lamented to his friend Eduard Thurneysen, “Calvin is a cataract, a primeval forest, a demonic power, something directly down from Himalaya, absolutely Chinese, strange, mythological; I lack completely the means . . . even to assimilate this phenomenon, not to speak of presenting it adequately.”¹ Of course, Barth never let that stop him, and in the second sentence after this he added, “I could gladly and profitably set myself down and spend all the rest of my life just with Calvin.” Charles Partee appears more recently to have done just that, and so he is able to assure us, “In short, the theology of John Calvin is not only a permanent, but also a present, resource for Christian understanding and faith.”² Having been warned, let us also be made bold to spend a few moments under this waterfall to hear again what he has to say to us today.

Overview

It is my intention to examine first what Calvin has to say about the true church with which we must keep unity as he sets this forth in chapter one of Book Four of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.³ We shall then look at his comparison of this true church with the false church, which he makes in chapter two. The point of this is that it is not enough to seek or to enforce church unity apart from the question of whether the church in which unity is sought is true. Only truthfulness will lead to the unity of the church, so that unity without truthfulness is no church at all. Thus unity and holiness cannot be separated, but they must be distinguished.

It is also my intention to explore two other points of entry into the question of what Calvin says about ecclesiology that can apply to the life of the church today. One has to do with provincial councils in the context of general councils and their authority, about which Calvin writes in chapter nine of Book Four. These geographically limited expressions of the church can help us understand the nature of today’s denominations. The other has to do with church constitutions, as dealt with in chapter ten of Book Four. Words matter. Threats to the

constitutional order of the church threaten the existence of the church, and this danger is exacerbated in provincial denominations.

The Church One

Let us begin with Book Four, chapter one. The unity of the church is confessed and affirmed as an article of faith over and against the apparent and all too real disunity of the church. The confessed and actualized unity of the church is threatened by splits within, and by departures from, the church. So it is that much discussion of the unity of the church has to do with questions of leaving the church: Is it possible to leave the church? Is it proper or permissible to leave the church? If so, under what circumstances? If not, why not?

Moreover, might it ever be not only permissible but mandatory to leave the church if the church ceased being the church? Would not the leaving then be not from the church but from what used to be the church? Within the context of these sorts of questions, Calvin's discussion of church unity in the *Institutes* might be understood in this way: chapter one of Book Four says why we cannot leave the church, and chapter two of Book Four says when we must leave the church. We should not hear the one without the other, but it is in trying to hear both fairly that we encounter tensions.

Let me elaborate now upon what Calvin says, offering first a few quotations about the nature and unity of the church from Book Four, chapter one:

Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists. . . .

If it has the ministry of the Word and honors it, if it has the administration of the sacraments, it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church. For it is certain that such things are not without fruit. (IV.1.9)

That is to say, if a local congregation exhibits these realities, Calvin understands and affirms that such a congregation is a true part of the larger true and universal church of Jesus Christ. Because such a congregation is a true part of the true church, unity with and within it is to be maintained, and disunity or departure from it can only be regarded in a profoundly negative way: "The Lord esteems the communion of his church so highly that he counts as a traitor and apostate from Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of Word and sacraments" (IV.1.10).

Calvin emphasizes the importance of these marks of the church by indicating that even a host of other negative realities cannot be allowed to count against them:

The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults. (IV.1.12)

In fact, even if these marks of the church are marred with error, as so often they are, that would not justify leaving:

Some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments, but this ought not to estrange us from communion with the church. For not all the articles of true doctrine are of the same sort. Some are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the proper principles of religion. Such are: God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; our salvation rests in God's mercy; and the like. Among the churches there are other articles of doctrine disputed which do not break the unity of faith. . . . Does this not sufficiently indicate that a difference of opinion over these nonessential matters should in no wise be the basis of schism among Christians? (IV.1.12)

This passage raises the issue of what is and what is not an essential doctrine and of what is and what is not a nonessential matter. For our discussion, suffice it to say that even arguments about what is essential and what is nonessential are not a sufficient reason to spurn the unity of the church:

We must not thoughtlessly forsake the church because of any petty dissensions. For in it alone is kept safe and uncorrupted that doctrine in which piety stands sound and the use of the sacraments ordained by the Lord is guarded. In the meantime, if we try to correct what displeases us, we do so out of duty. (IV.1.12)

Turning to the New Testament for an example, Calvin catalogs the vices of the Corinthians and still insists that they are part of the church: "The church abides among them because the ministry of Word and sacraments remains unrepu diated there" (IV.1.14). After many such declarations, Calvin summarizes his teaching on the unity of and with the true church as follows:

Let the following two points, then, stand firm. First, he who voluntarily deserts the outward communion of the church (where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered) is without excuse. Secondly, neither the vices of the few nor the vices of the many in any way prevent us from duly professing our faith there in ceremonies ordained by God. For a godly conscience is not wounded by the unworthiness of another, whether pastor or layman; nor are the sacraments less pure and salutary for a holy and upright man because they are handled by unclean persons. (IV.1.19)

Observations

I observe two things here. On one hand, no amount of simple immorality or even wickedness provides an excuse for leaving the church. There has always been sin in the church, and there always will be sin in the church, and the church is about forgiveness. Calvin has no patience with overly strict or harsh discipline.

On the other hand, however, his definitions of the church are laced with a series of qualifiers: purely, honors, true, pure, uncorrupted, and unrepu diated. These are not rhetorical

flourishes. Instead, only when these qualifiers are met is the entity being discussed a church. When these qualifiers are not satisfied, it is no longer a church with which we are dealing. This is not merely my conclusion. Calvin himself, in setting forth the true church, explicitly acknowledged the possibility of an entity claiming to be the church not actually being so:

We see what great heed we are to take. . . . [I]n order that the title “church” may not deceive us, every congregation that claims the name “church” must be tested by this standard. . . . [I]f, devoid of Word and sacraments, [a congregation] advertises the name of church, we must . . . scrupulously beware such deceits. (IV.1.11)

Again, Calvin’s definition of what it means to be the church necessarily sets forth at the same time those circumstances under which a group of people is not a church. Moreover, when that happens, departure is not only allowed but, we must think, mandated precisely in order to continue to be the church. Calvin, of course, argued strenuously for the unity of the true church. But by that very qualifier, he pointed to the reasons for the departure of the reformers from what was no longer the true church.

The Church Holy

This leads to Book Four, chapter two, where Calvin expands upon the significance of these qualifiers by contrasting the true church with the false. It is not only the case that the church must be marked by the Word of God but also that the church must be ruled by the Word of God alone: “To sum up, since the church is Christ’s Kingdom, and he reigns by his Word alone, will it not be clear to any man that those are lying words by which the Kingdom of Christ is imagined to exist apart from his scepter (that is, his most holy Word)?” (IV.2.4). If there were a gathering of people with the appearance and perhaps even the intention of being the church, but the Word was neither reigning over them nor even present among them—and I, for one, have attended what purported to be Sunday morning services where the Word was neither read nor preached—if people congregate in the form of a church but the Word either is not present or is present but not reigning alone, there, it is not to be doubted, is no church at all.

Calvin saw as much in his day, and for such reasons, despite everything we all know he said about church unity, in fact, precisely because of everything he said about the unity of the true church, those we know as reformers were expelled from, or, as he characterized it, withdrew from, what had been, but what they judged no longer to be, the church:

Now they treat us as persons guilty of schism and heresy because we preach a doctrine unlike theirs, do not obey their laws, and hold our separate assemblies for prayers, baptism and the celebration of the Supper, and other holy activities.

This is indeed a very grave accusation but one that needs no long and labored defense. Those who, by making dissension, break the communion of the church are called heretics and schismatics. Now this communion is held together by two bonds, agreement in sound doctrine and brotherly love. Hence, between heretics and schismatics Augustine makes this sort of distinction: heretics corrupt the sincerity of the faith with false dogmas; but schismatics, while sometimes even of the same faith, break the bond of fellowship.

But it must also be noted that this conjunction of love so depends upon unity of faith that it ought to be its beginning, end, and, in fine, its sole rule. . . . Apart from the Lord's Word there is not an agreement of believers but a faction of wicked men. (IV.2.5)

Now let them go and shout that we who have withdrawn from their church are heretics, since the sole cause of our separation is that they could in no way bear the pure profession of truth. . . . It is enough for me that it behooved us to withdraw from them that we might come to Christ. (IV.2.6)⁴

Not only did Calvin and others withdraw from what they no longer regarded as the church, but also he found it important to say explicitly that what they left was no longer a church:

In the same way if anyone recognized the present congregations—contaminated with idolatry, superstition, and ungodly doctrine—as churches (in full communion of which a Christian man must stand—even to the point of agreeing in doctrine), he will gravely err. For if they are churches, the power of the keys is in their hands; but the keys have an indissoluble bond with the Word, which has been destroyed from among them. . . . Instead of the ministry of the Word, they have schools of ungodliness and a sink of all kinds of errors. Consequently, by this reckoning either they are not churches or no mark will remain to distinguish the lawful congregation of believers from the assemblies of Turks. (IV.2.10)

If we are not willing to say that churches bereft of the Word are not churches at all, there will be no way to distinguish true churches from any other human assembly, even those of different faiths. If the reformers had not said as much then, there would not have been a Reformation. Surely Calvin teaches us that if we cannot say it now, there is not, and cannot be, any continuing Reformation.

Observations

Here we come to the heart of the matter: the true church is tied to the Word of God. When that Word and the Christian faith founded upon it are abandoned, there is no Christian church. Calvin has already pointed out that there are nonessential doctrines, on which disagreement should be allowed. Surely, however, the repudiation of the plain content of the Scripture and therefore the rejection of the authority of the Scripture, the Word of God upon which all true doctrine rests, would involve nothing less than the rejection of the foundation of the Christian faith, and therefore the rejection of the Christian faith itself, and therefore indeed the very rejection of the lordship of Jesus Christ himself. It could be difficult to determine when such a repudiation had occurred, and I want to return to that in a moment. For now, if we can agree that it could occur, my point is that such a rejection of the Scriptures would form the basis for legitimate and necessary separation.

And let us be clear that such a separation from a body committing such an action would not be schismatic. It would be, instead, an acknowledgment that a body which used to be a part of the church of Jesus Christ was, by its own actions, no longer so. Such a separation from what used to be a part of the church, far from being schismatic, would be, instead, an attempt to reunite with the larger body of the church of Jesus Christ.⁵

Again, simple immorality is not an excuse for leaving the church. If, however, that immorality were to be compounded by the church declaring it not to be immorality, something different would have occurred. A line would have been crossed. Decisions would have been made on a basis alien to the faith of the church and therefore alien to the church itself.

If, for example, a church or churches in the context of, and under the influence of, our sexually charged culture became enamored of, and condoned, sex outside of marriage, that would be out of accord with the Scriptures. If a church condoned and promoted gambling, which has become so pervasive in our society, that would be out of accord with the Scriptures. If a church winked at and endorsed fraud, theft, or embezzlement, the extent and devastation of which have become so obvious around the world, that would be out of accord with the Scriptures.

If, moreover, this church or some portion of the church, such as a denomination in today's structuring of the church, were to go farther than such condoning to formal approving of the same, such as by knowingly, willingly, and officially removing all barriers to ordination for those engaging in sex outside of marriage, for gamblers, or for embezzlers, that would be an action in opposition to the Scriptures and in disregard for the Scriptures. Of course, it is almost certainly the case that the church has always ordained as ministers, elders, and deacons some who engaged in sex outside of marriage, who gambled, or who committed fraud. It is likely that the church always will do so. That is not the question. The question has to do with official approval of such.

Would it not be the case with Calvin's ecclesiology that such an action not by an individual but by the duly constituted decision making body of the church would be a knowing and willing rejection of the authority of the Scriptures, a knowing and willing rejection of the content of the Scriptures, and a knowing and willing rejection of the Lord of the Scriptures, even Christ Jesus himself? Would it not be the case that by such an action a body which had once been part of the church would have rendered itself no longer a part of the church? Would it not be the case that departure from such a body not only would not be disallowed but actually would be mandated?

This would not be a light or inconsequential matter. This would not be a matter of indifference. This would not be a nonessential doctrine. This would be an issue that struck at the foundation of the faith. This would be a matter of what used to be a church becoming no longer the church. Such an action, if in fact it occurred, would not only permit but require a separation. I want to return to this example of a church making a decision contrary to the Word of God when we look at church constitutions.

Two Points of Entry

Provincial Councils

Now let us explore two other points of entry into the question of what Calvin has to say about ecclesiology that can apply to the life of the church today. One has to do with provincial councils in the context of general councils and their authority, about which Calvin writes in chapter nine of Book Four. These geographically limited expressions of the church can help us understand the nature of today's denominations. Of the "ancient councils," Calvin professes, "I venerate them from my heart, and I desire that they be honored by all" (IV.9.1).

And yet, he is willing to be "rather severe" with them. "[H]ere the norm is that nothing of course detract from Christ. Now it is Christ's right to preside over all councils and to have no

man share his dignity. But I say that he presides only when the whole assembly is governed by his word and Spirit” (IV.9.1). That is to say, any teaching even of a general council falls under, and is overruled by, the higher authority of the Scriptures. And while the authority of councils rests in Christ’s promise of his presence where two or three are gathered in his name, this qualifier of “his name” disqualifies all councils which take it upon themselves either to add to, or to take away from, his Word (IV.9.2).

Calvin elaborates for some pages on the problem of councils consisting of evil pastors, and he concludes from this that we certainly must not make the mistake of thinking that the church consists of its councils (IV.9.2–7). And while Calvin willingly embraces and reverences as holy some of the ancient and general councils, such as Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus I, and Chalcedon, “for they contain nothing but the pure and genuine exposition of Scripture” (IV.9.8), he goes on to show how subsequent councils have contradicted each other and were marred by serious human failings—even Nicaea suffered from accusations and “foul recriminations” flying back and forth among its participants and presented in writing to Emperor Constantine—so that Calvin finally infers this: “[T]he Holy Spirit so governed the otherwise godly and holy councils as to allow something human to happen to them, lest we should put too much confidence in men” (IV.9.11).

This critique of general councils leads to Calvin’s observation about provincial councils which is of interest today: “There is now no need to make separate mention of provincial councils, since it is easy to estimate from general councils how much authority they ought to have to frame articles of faith and to receive whatever doctrine pleases them” (IV.9.11). This is downright dismissive! And while it would be anachronistic to ask Calvin questions of our denominations as a way of structuring the life of the church, his lack of regard for provincial councils provides a point of entry for us to explore the question.

If today’s denominations—typically defined by geography as well as by confessions and often limited by language, race, and class—can be understood to be part of the church of Jesus Christ but not the whole of the church of Jesus Christ, should we not be as cautious of their status and of their decisions in our day as was Calvin of that of provincial councils in his day? What the church as a whole did poorly acting through its representative general councils, provincial churches did more poorly acting through their provincial councils.

Those who insist today that the denomination *is* the true church, as if leaving the denomination would be leaving the true church, miss the mark most widely. Indeed, from what we have read today, those who would most laud the wisdom and authority of denominational “general” assemblies, provincial councils of provincial churches, may be the least Calvinist of all.

Constitutions

The other point of entry into the question of what Calvin has to say about ecclesiology that can apply to the life of the church today has to do with church constitutions, with which he deals in chapter ten of Book Four. In short, words matter. Threats to the constitutional order of the church threaten the existence of the church, and this danger is exacerbated in provincial denominations. We begin to see the importance of a church being well constituted as early as chapter two:

However, when we categorically deny to the papists the title of *the* church, we do not for this reason impugn the existence of churches among them. Rather, we are only contending about the true and lawful constitution of the church, required in the communion not only of the sacraments (which are the signs of profession) but also especially of doctrine. . . . [W]e by no means deny that the churches under his [i.e., the Roman pontiff's] tyranny remain churches. . . . But on the other hand, because in them those marks have been erased to which we should pay particular regard in this discourse, I say that every one of their congregations and their whole body lack the lawful form of the church. (IV.2.12)

Moreover, Calvin continues, in such churches not properly constituted, “Christ lies hidden, half buried, the gospel overthrown, piety scattered, the worship of God nearly wiped out.” That is to say, when the church is not properly constituted, the truth is obscured, and we have already seen the importance of truth to the church.

So it is that Calvin rails against the Roman Church constitutions as nothing more than a heaping up of traditions, ceremonies, observations, laws, and commandments (IV.10.13). These mandates for worship attempted to bind the conscience apart from and even contrary to the Word of God, and Calvin vehemently rejects them. But that does not mean that he wishes to overthrow all constitutions, for he elevates those kinds of agreed upon structures of organization that we use as constitutions today, understanding them to apply to worship, order, and discipline:

We see that some form of organization is necessary in all human society to foster the common peace and maintain concord. We further see that in human transactions some procedure is always in effect, which is to be respected in the interest of public decency, and even of humanity itself. This ought especially to be observed in churches, which are best sustained when all things are under a well-ordered constitution, and which without concord become no churches at all. . . .

Yet since such diversity exists in the customs of men, such variety in their minds, such conflicts in their judgments and dispositions, no organization is sufficiently strong unless constituted with definite laws; nor can any procedure be maintained without some set form. Therefore, we are so far from condemning the laws that conduce to this as to contend that, when churches are deprived of them, their very sinews disintegrate and they are wholly deformed and scattered. (IV.10.27; see also IV.10.29)

Calvin goes on to clarify that such church constitutions must not be regarded as necessary for salvation, cannot bind consciences, and are not to be venerated. Nevertheless, church constitutions are necessary for good order, and good church constitutions are needed for the church to exist.

The Church Today

Of the several things at which we have looked today, including church unity, church truthfulness, and provincial councils, this matter of church constitutions may speak to our situation most directly. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a constitution. This constitution includes two parts: *The Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*. This constitution

“constitutes” the denomination. That is what a constitution does. It names us, it defines us, it forms us, it structures us, it guides us, and it constricts us. All of these are good and necessary things. Without some constitution, we would, as Calvin says, become no church at all.

Within this constitution, in Part II, the *Book of Order*, it is indicated that those engaging in sex outside of marriage are not to be ordained.⁶ Everyone knows that. Everyone understands what that means. Not everyone likes it. But even those working hard to overturn it know what it says and understand what it means. Their very efforts are proof of this. So, that is part of the constitution. The *Book of Order* says that those engaging in sex outside of marriage are not to be ordained.

At the same time, the recent General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (which council is not to be confused with the church but which was acting within its powers granted by the constitution to make decisions for the church) authoritatively interpreted the *Book of Order* to mean that those engaging in sex outside of marriage can be ordained, that the ordination of those persons cannot be ruled out in advance, that each possible ordination must be considered individually, and that each ordaining body can ordain whomever it wishes.⁷ But do you see where this leaves us? Totally apart from the presenting issue of sex outside of marriage, the real and substantive issue now is that the provincial council of our denomination, as our highest governing body and acting on behalf of the whole denomination, has formally, officially, knowingly, willfully, and authoritatively declared that the constitution of the denomination means exactly the opposite of what it says. The General Assembly has ruled that while the constitution says that those engaging in sex outside of marriage cannot be ordained, what it means is that they can be ordained.

This ruling applies to many things. The constitution says that self-acknowledged gamblers cannot be ordained, but the General Assembly has ruled that it means that such gamblers can be ordained. The constitution says that self-acknowledged thieves, frauds, and embezzlers cannot be ordained, but it means that they can be ordained. This list could go on and on. But the application is not the point. The point is the cost of the decision, which is far more serious.

By way of background, consider the law of non-contradiction. The law of non-contradiction states that you cannot simultaneously affirm and deny the same thing in the same regard. Another way of saying this is that you cannot simultaneously affirm both A and not-A. If A is true, not-A is not true. I understand that there are some philosophers today who would argue against this principle, but for the most part this is understood to be part of the foundation of western thought and logic and of how we understand truth and reality. For instance, Barack Obama is not both president of the United States of America and *not* president of the United States of America. He is either one or the other, but he is not, and cannot be, both at the same time. For him both to be president and not to be president at the same time would violate the law of non-contradiction, and most people understand that such cannot be the case.

Now consider where this leaves us in regard to the status of the constitution of the denomination and therefore of the denomination itself. Totally apart from any one of the presenting issues or from all of them put together, we have now reached a whole other level of difficulty or impasse. Far beyond any individual act of disobedience or potential immorality, we now have the official declaration of the highest governing body of the Presbyterian Church that words mean the very opposite of what they say. The constitution has not been amended. But it has been undone by a single declaration. Language has been utterly debased. A means not-A, and

not-A means A. But when words mean the opposite of what they say, they have no meaning at all. When the constitution means the opposite of what it says, we have no constitution at all. It is still being printed. It is still available for purchase. But it has no substance. It has no reality. The words swim around on the pages at night and the letters rearrange themselves when no one is looking. Nothing in it can possibly be binding anymore. There is nothing there.⁸

And while some may exult in the claim that there is no text but only interpretation, we who live in the real world of the church are left with the harrowing realization that when we have no constitution, we have no denomination. There is nothing left. There is nothing by which we are properly constituted. That is what a constitution does: constitutes. The denomination still exists in name. Congregations appear to be members of it. The denominational offices are open. Dues continue to be collected, and salaries continue to be paid. But there is nothing there. Without a constitution, there is no remaining substance or reality to what used to be a provincial church.⁹

Surely even those working against the prohibition of the ordination of those engaging in sex outside of marriage did not intend the entire deconstruction of the constitution and the concomitant dissolution of the denomination! And yet, when the ends have been determined to justify any means, so that language, thought, truth, and reality are debased, then surely chaos ensues.

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.¹⁰

We noted earlier that it could be difficult to determine whether one or another decision of the church rises to the level of repudiating a teaching of the Scriptures. This ruling, however, leaps over that difficulty by rendering language itself and therefore all of Scripture meaningless. This is repudiation writ large.

Conclusion

As we gather here to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin, it is appropriate that we set ourselves to the task of asking what he has to say about the church that can be of help to us today. We do so in the midst of divisions in the church, many of which trace their origins to him. And we do so at a time of unprecedented risk in the life of the church. For a council of the church to rule for the church that words mean the opposite of what they say is not merely to engage in wishfulness or to win political victory but is also to commit falsehood and untruthfulness. But Calvin knew, “[N]o church can exist where lying and falsehood have gained sway” (IV.2.1). It would no longer be a church. Part of what Calvin has to teach us today is that constitutions matter, that words mean what they say, and that provincial councils of provincial churches err grievously, leaving us orphaned and homeless. Surely he would admonish us that so long as deficits in these areas continue, we are not constituted as a church, and we are not, and cannot be, any part of the true church one and holy.

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1. *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914–1925*, trans. James D. Smart (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964), 101.

2. Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), xiii.

3. John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. from the 1559 Latin ed. by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., in *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), cited by book, chapter, and section.

4. Calvin protested Rome's exclusive claim to be the true church and held up the Greek churches as a counterexample (IV.2.2). It is fascinating that he felt no compulsion to unite with a Greek church but instead was content to withdraw and form another part of the one true church.

5. Compare Carl E. Braaten, "An Open Letter to Bishop Mark Hanson."

6. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Part II. Book of Order, 2007-2009* (Louisville, Kentucky: The Office of the General Assembly, 2007), G-6.0106b.

7. 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2008, Item 05-12.
www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/218th-general-assembly-actions.pdf

8. In that the words of the constitution have been ruled to mean the opposite of what they say, the ordination vows have been rendered null and void, releasing all who have taken them. Structure has been dissolved, discipline has been obliterated, and the confessions are left without content.

9. If a subsequent General Assembly were to rescind this authoritative interpretation, the argument in this section would be abrogated. The constitution and the denomination could be restored.

10. William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," 1921.