

CALVIN, SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Paul Marshall
Hudson Institute

ABSTRAK: Bagi Calvin, seluruh ciptaan berkedudukan sama di bawah kedaulatan kehendak Allah dan segala institusi kemasyarakatan tidak disusun secara hierarkis melainkan dibedakan secara panggilan. Karena itu, panggilan Allah tidak dimediasi secara khusus melalui salah satu institusi tertentu, sehingga tidak satu pun institusi dapat menyatakan kedaulatan atas yang lainnya. Semua institusi ini diatur sejajar dalam kerjasama saling mendukung satu dan lainnya, dan pekerjaan Allah dilakukan melalui ketaatan yang bebas dan sukarela oleh umat Allah. Hal ini membawa kepada penekanan pergerakan politik dari sekadar pekerjaan elite atas menuju pekerjaan partisipatif – ini merupakan reaksi manusiawi yang dengan bebas menundukkan diri mereka kepada Allah dan yang kemudian mentransformasikan keadaan sosial, ekonomi dan politik yang merefleksikan tatanan Allah. Hal ini juga membawa kepada pandangan kovenantal dari politik yang telah menciptakan federalisme yang modern.

KATA KUNCI: *Althusius, asosiasi, Calvin, federalisme, kebebasan, partisipasi rakyat, panggilan, subsidiaritas.*

ABSTRACT: For Calvin, the whole creation is equally under God's sovereign will and the institutions of society are not arranged

hierarchically but are differentiated according to vocation. Because of this differentiation, God's calling is not mediated exclusively through one of them, so none can claim sovereignty over the others. They are to be arranged side by side in mutual support of one another, and God's work is carried out by the free, voluntary obedience by God's people. This led in turn to a stress on moving politics from being simply an elite occupation to one that is participatory-- the response of human beings who freely submit themselves to God and thus seek to transform the social, economic and political to reflect God's order. It also led to a covenantal view of politics that helped create modern federalism.

KEYWORDS: *Althusius, associations, Calvin, federalism, freedom, popular participation, vocation, subsidiarity.*

INTRODUCTION

While there has been a habit in western scholarship to ignore or underplay the influence of the Reformation on European thought, there are now many excellent studies of the Protestant Reformers' specific political and legal thought and its influence.¹ My purpose

¹ For a good overview and summary of Calvinist political and legal thought, see John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978) is an influential work that argued that Calvinists produced no specifically Calvinist innovative political ideas. For a critique of Skinner on this point, see Paul Marshall, "John Locke: Between God and Mammon," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (1979), 73-96 and Paul Marshall,

here is not to summarize these developments, though I will refer to them. Rather I wish to illustrate how some themes in Calvinists' general theology produced a view of the nature of faith and human beings that underlay specifically political and legal ideas and which had transforming effects on society. While most of the Reformers necessarily concentrated on theology, doctrine, personal life and the church, and said less on general social matters, when they sought to re-assert the primacy of faith and the primacy of scripture, they also thereby produced changes, often inadvertently, in the understanding of the "self," the structure of the family, ethics, economics, and politics.

THEMES OF CALVINIST THEOLOGY

Calvin and, indeed, all the major reformers, emphasized that each person could be related directly to God through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Because sovereignty resides only in God, no earthly institution can claim final sovereignty for itself. This had a variety of effects, of which I will mention just two, both of which relate to the Church itself. One is that, while the church was the central institution of Christians, it was no longer, in principle, regarded as the head, the leader of society. This meant that the question of the relation of the church to other institutions in society and of these different institutions to each other is opened up.

"Calvin, Politics, and Political Science," 142-161 of *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, edited by David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2010)

Another stress, especially in the Free Church tradition, was to stress that the church is, *inter alia*, a body of believers. This encouraged what we might call, loosely, more democratic structures—especially in the Calvinist and Anabaptist traditions. I shall argue that this had an effect on modern democracy and constitutionalism.

Along with this changing view of the church, there were changes in the view of human callings. In later medieval Catholicism, the priest, monk and nun tended to be seen as the ones who were, potentially at least, the ones who could be most holy. They were an elite who could devote their whole lives to truly spiritual things. Of course, other people and other forms of life were believed to be good, vital and necessary, but generally they were held to be of a lower spiritual order. Almost without exception Protestants, including Calvin, criticized this division of a lower and a higher life and asserted the potential equality of all ways of life. God is sovereign over everything in the world so all of life may be holy; all people were called in Christ to be prophets, priests and kings. ²Whereas medieval Christians usually used the term "vocation" to refer only to the priesthood and to religious orders, Protestants stressed that not only clergy and monastics lives but in principle all tasks and ways of life were "vocations," "callings," or "professions."³

² On the role of every person as prophet, priest and king, see John Witte, "Introduction" to *Christianity and Law: An Introduction*, edited by John Witte and Frank Alexander (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

³ See Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order*

This re-assertion of all different work and ways of life as equal avenues of Christian service orientated Christians toward a divine vocation in the world. One of the accusations of heresy against William Tyndale, for example, was that he had claimed, "There is no work better than another to please God: to pour water, to wash dishes, to be a souter (cobbler) or an apostle, all is one; to wash dishes and to preach is all one, as touching the deed to please God." This charge appeared to be aimed at Tyndale's assertion that "if thou compare deed to deed, there is a difference betwixt washing of dishes, and preaching of the word of God; but as touching to please God, none at all: for neither this nor that pleaseth, but as far forth as God hath chosen a man, hath put his spirit in him, and purified his heart by faith and trust in Christ."⁴

Similar themes were consistently propounded by Luther, who wrote: "If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor ...just look at your tools ...at your needle and thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardstick or measure. ...and you will read this statement inscribed in them ...You have as many preachers as you have transactions, goods, tools, and other equipment in your house

from Tyndale to Locke (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Paul Marshall, "Calling, Work and Rest," in *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World: Theology from an Evangelical Point of View*, edited by Mark Noll and David Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 199-217, 324-328.

⁴ William Tyndale, "A Parable of the Wicked Mammon" (1527) in *Doctrinal Treatises and Portions of Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1848), 98, 102.

and home."⁵ Such themes continued throughout the Protestant, especially Calvinist world, and had major effects on social, economic and political views.⁶

Connected with this view of vocation, one of Calvin's central themes is that the world, and all that is in it, is created by, is ordered by, points towards and can be used to give honour to God and succour to man: "The infinite wisdom of God is displayed in the admirable structure of heaven and earth." The "end for which all things were created" was that "none of the conveniences and necessities of life should be wanting to men. In the very order of the creation the paternal solicitude of God for man is conspicuous."⁷ While full knowledge certainly requires revelation, Calvin stressed that we can learn of God's will through the creation: "...[M]en who have either quaffed or even tasted the liberal arts penetrate with their aid far more deeply into the secrets of the divine wisdom."⁸

This focus on the order of the entire creation tends to undercut any ascetic rejection of the world. It also tends to undercut any scheme of nature and grace wherein certain parts of the world, or certain types of activity such as piety or contemplation, are treated as necessarily more holy than others. At times, Calvin still retains a nature/grace scheme and treats churchly activities as a higher realm than others. Nevertheless a major thrust of his work is devoted to

⁵ *Luther's Works*, vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 39-40.

⁶ See Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man*.

⁷ "Argument" of *Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1948), 57, 96.

⁸ Institutes 1.5.2, quoted in Hall and Padgett, eds., *Calvin and Culture*, xvi.

stressing God's integral sovereignty over every dimension of life. Hence he says that "civil authority is a calling not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honourable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men."⁹

CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIETY

As noted, within this ordered world, all human activities can be "callings" that are, in principle equal in the eyes of God. This view affected not only views of individual conduct, but also, as with Luther, Tyndale and other Protestants, this equality could pertain not only to human activities themselves, but also to the organizations and institutions to which human callings give rise and in which they are lived out and manifest. Proper institutions and organizations are, so to speak, structured divine callings. This differentiation of diverse institutions applies to society generally, for "the Maker of the world has given... [the human race], as it were, a building regularly formed, and divided into several compartments."¹⁰ "The community at large is divided, as it were, into so many yokes, out of which arises mutual obligation."¹¹

In relating these callings one to one another, Calvin depicts society as composed of functionally diverse but mutually supportive

⁹ *Institutes* 1, 20, 4 [Battles translation] (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1960), 59; David Little, *Religion, Order and Law* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 42.

¹⁰ Commentary on I Peter 2:13-16 in *Commentary on Hebrews, I and II Peter* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1963), 269.

¹¹ Commentary on Ephesians 5:21-27 in *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1957), 317.

groups defined by vocation. He sums up the duty of one person to another as the duty of "mutual subjection"--there should be amongst all a "universal bond of subjection." "God has bound us so strongly to each other that no man ought to endeavour to avoid subjection; and wherever love reigns mutual services will be rendered." "I do not except even kings and governors, whose very authority is held for the service of the community...all should be exhorted to be subject to each other in their turn."¹²

This subjection to one another, and the equality of ways of life and activities, leads to a stress that no institution should have a primacy of authority over others. As Carney notes: "Calvinist political literature... asks what is the vocation (or purpose) of any association, and how can this association be so organized as to accomplish its essential business. Authority (or rule) becomes a function of vocation"¹³

This stress on vocation means that Calvin tends to have a functional view of economic life rather than a hierarchical one. What is true of the economy is true of institutions in society generally. They are not to be arranged in a hierarchical order reaching up to God, but are arranged side by side supporting one another in mutual

¹² Commentary on Ephesians 5:21-27, 316-317. See also Gordon Spykman, "Pluralism: Our Last Best Hope?" *Christian Scholar's Review* 10 (1981), 99-115; Gordon Spykman, "Sphere Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, edited by D. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 189-206.

¹³ F.S. Carney, "Associational Thought in Early Calvinism" in *Voluntary Associations*, edited by D.B. Robertson (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966) 46.

service to God in their specific vocations. All work, all vocation, all institutions, are all equally Coram Deo.

The actual lines that Calvin seeks to draw between activities and institutions, especially those between church and state, can seem, especially to the "modern" mind, quite jumbled. But, he consistently emphasised that there is a "great difference between the ecclesiastical and civil power" so that it would be "unwise to mingle these two which have a completely different nature."¹⁴ Hence, as Little points out, "even in the ideal conditions of Geneva, Calvin never allowed the Church to become organizationally coterminous or identical with the magistracy. Calvin maintained the independence of the Church over against civil society."¹⁵

HUMAN ACTIVITY

Calvin's stress on equality comports with an emphasis on voluntariness and human responsibility. He stressed that a Christian's obedience should not in the first place be given fearfully because of the penalties of the law, nor be given grudgingly to earn salvation, nor be given nervously to prove salvation. Instead,

¹⁴ Institutes 3.19.15; 4.2.1-2; 4.11.3. [Battles translation]. See the discussion by John Witte, *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 48-49, and John Witte, *God's Joust, God's Justice: Law and Religion in the Western Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 380.

¹⁵ David Little, *Religion, Order and Law*, 78. See also André Biéler, *La Pensée Economique et Sociale de Calvin* (Geneva: Librairie de l'Université, 1961) 129-130 and Francois Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (London, Collins, 1963), 74; Oliver O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 210-211.

obedience should be given thankfully in response to God's gift of grace in Jesus Christ: "part of Christian liberty is that the consciences do not observe the law, as being under any legal obligation; but that, being liberated from the yoke of the law, they yield a voluntary obedience to the will of God... They will never engage with alacrity and promptitude in the service of God unless they have previously received this liberty."¹⁶

This free obedience is all the greater because we are not, in the first place, subjects of God nor servants of God but, rather, children of God: "See how all our works are under the curse of the law if they are measured by the standard of the law! Those bound by the yoke of the law are like servants assigned certain tasks for each day by their masters. These servants think they have accomplished nothing, and dare not appear before their masters unless they have fulfilled the exact measure of their tasks. But sons, who are more generously and candidly treated by their father, do not hesitate to offer them incomplete and half done and even defective works, trusting that their obedience and readiness of mind will be accepted by their fathers, even though they have not quite achieved what their fathers intended. Such children ought we to be, firmly trusting that our services will be approved by our most merciful Father, however small, rude, and imperfect these may be."¹⁷

While it might seem paradoxical to the modern mind, precisely because of Calvin's stresses on the sovereignty of God and

¹⁶ *Institutes* III, 19, 4. [Allen translation] (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1936)].

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3. xix, 5. [Battles translation].

the bondage of the human will to sin, he also repeatedly calls for a free and voluntary response to God.¹⁸ For Calvin, since mankind lives in a state of sin, there must of course still be an order of coercion, usually administered by the state, but we should always strive for patterns of voluntary obedience. This stress on a free and voluntary response affects Calvin's entire view of society. As noted, he sums up the duty of one person to another as the duty of "mutual subjection". "God has bound us so closely to each other that no man ought to endeavour to avoid subjection; and wherever love reigns mutual services will be rendered."¹⁹

Combined with this stress on the sovereignty of God and mutual subjection is Calvin's stress on usefulness. He emphasizes that we must use the diverse gifts that God has given us. "It is not the will of the Lord that we should be like blocks of wood . . . but that we should apply to use all the talents and advantages which he has conferred upon us."

Calvin's view of economic activity illustrates this pattern of mutual servitude and usefulness. While, because of the fall, work is often hard and painful, yet it was given before the Fall by God at the beginning explicitly as a gift and responsibility to humankind. Work should be taken up willingly and mutually as service to God and our

¹⁸ See "Calvin and the Prospects for a Christian Theory of Natural Law," in *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics* in G. Outka and P. Ramsay, eds. (New York: Scribners, 1968) 175-97.

¹⁹ Commentary on Ephesians 5:21, *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 316-7. See also R. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 157.

fellows. Commerce itself is a natural way for people to commune with one another: "it is not enough when one can say, 'Oh I work, I have my trade, I set the pace.' This is not enough; for one must be concerned whether it is good and profitable to the community and if it is able to serve our neighbours.... And this is why we are compared to members of a body."²⁰ "The life of the Godly is justly compared to trading, for they ought naturally to exchange and barter with one another in order to maintain intercourse...."²¹

André Biéler, in his classic work on Calvin's social and economic views, summarizes him thus: "God has created man," Calvin says, "so that he may be a creature of fellowship." ... Companionship is completed in work and in the interplay of economic exchanges. Human fellowship is realized in relationships which flow from the division of labour wherein each person has been called of God to a particular and partial work which complements the work of others. The mutual exchange of goods and services is the concrete sign of the profound solidarity which unites humanity."²²

This free and voluntary principle is also illustrated strikingly in marriage. Calvin has what John Witte calls the "first comprehensive covenantal model of marriage."²³ His *Ordonnances*

²⁰ Sermon on Ephesians 4: 26-28, quoted in F. Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1971), 80-81.

²¹ Commentary on the *Harmony of Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), vol. II, 441-5.

²² Biéler, *La Pensée Economique*, 321.

²³ John Witte, *God's Joust, God's Justice: Law and Religion in the Western*

sur les Mariages declares "that no father may force his children into whatever marriage may seem good to him without their good pleasure and consent, but that the son or daughter who may not wish to accept the party which the father may wish to give him, may excuse himself... and the refusal will not entail any punishment by the father..."²⁴ If the children marry without parental consent then, provided they are of legal age and that the lack of consent was due to "the negligence or over-rigour of their parents," a dowry and financial settlement must still be made "as if they had consented."

The same motif occurs even with reference to divorce: "Although from antiquity the right of the woman has not been equal to that of her husband in case of divorce, since according to the witness of the apostle the obligation is mutual and reciprocal pertaining to the marital bed, and because in that regard the wife is not more subject to her husband than the husband to the wife; if a man is convicted of adultery and the wife demands to be separated from him, it should be granted her as well."²⁵

POLITICS AND LAW

Calvin's view of the goodness and diversity of human callings, that each and every part of society is called to reflect the order and glory of God, that each part is differentiated according to vocation

Tradition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 380.

²⁴ Quoted in F. Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 153.

²⁵ F. Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*. See also Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 922

and none is the centre of God's rule on earth, and that each part is to be taken up by the free, committed, and active response of God's people, has major implications for how we understand politics and, indeed, transforms how we understand politics.

One political effect was produced by his stress on the committed activity of all God's people. As Michael Walzer argued, what Calvinism produced often "tended to be practical and social, programmatic and organizational. Manifestos, exhortations, polemics--these were the forms of its literary expression; covenants, assemblies, congregations, and holy commonwealths --these were the results of its organizational initiative." Specifically, what was new in Calvinism was the idea that "organized bands of men might play a creative part in the political world... reconstructing society according to the word of God or the plans of their fellows."²⁶ Relatively speaking, Calvinism stressed popular participation in politics, and downplayed hierarchical rule.

He strictly avoided seditious language, and continually urged submission to the ruler. Whatever political system we live in, it is our duty to honour and obey the ruler as a minister of God. Mankind is sinful and so God has providentially provided a political order to punish evildoers and check the spread of sin. We are subject to this order and to the coercion that it necessarily involves. It is possible to resist, and perhaps even overthrow, an unjust ruler, but this

²⁶ Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 1-2

should not be done by the population at large but only those in subordinate authority – the “lesser magistrates.”²⁷

Nevertheless, his view went beyond stressing popular, engaged political action, innovative and important as that is. He continually voiced scepticism about kingship. Because of the dangers of a monarch becoming proud or overbearing Calvin writes that the “vice or inadequacy of men thus renders it safer and more tolerable that many hold the sway so that they may mutually be helpers to each other, teach and admonish one another, and if one asserts himself unfairly, the many may be censors and masters, repressing his wilfulness.”²⁸ Elections are very useful in order to maintain such mutual admonishment, hence: “the condition of the people most to be desired is that in which they create their shepherds by general vote. For when anyone by force usurps the supreme power, that is tyranny. And where men are born to kingship, this does not seem to be in accordance with liberty.”²⁹

In turn, the liberty from out of which springs such suffrage is a great good. Calvin even describes it as “more than half of life.”³⁰ Hence “if we have the liberty to choose judges and magistrates, since this is an excellent gift, let it be preserved and let us use it in good conscience... Let those to whom God has given liberty and freedom

²⁷ *Institutes.*, 4. 20. 31.

²⁸ *Institutes* IV, xx, 8, translation by McNeill in *John Calvin: On God and Political Duty* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), xxii.

²⁹ Commentary on Micah 5:5, quoted in McNeill, *John Calvin*, xxii-xxiii.

³⁰ Commentary on Deuteronomy 24:7, *Commentaries on The Four Last Books Of Moses: Arranged in the Form Of A Harmony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) vol. I, 310.

use it... as a singular benefit and a treasure that cannot be prized enough."³¹ "This is the most desirable kind of liberty, that we should not be compelled to obey every person who may be tyrannically put over our heads; but which allows of election, so that no one should rule except he be approved of by us."³² This liberty even extends to the making of law. Calvin maintains that God did not intend that the Mosaic law should be "proclaimed among all nations and to be in force everywhere." It is up to us, guided by our faith, to "make our laws with regard to the condition of times, place and nation."³³

The system of government that Calvin advocated was not a democracy. It has been described as a "conservative democracy" or, in his own terms, "aristocracy, or aristocracy tempered by democracy." In modern terms, we should simply describe it as a republic.³⁴ The American system is, for example, a mixture of monarchic (the Presidency), aristocratic (the Senate) and democratic (the House) elements. Calvin, perhaps strangely, given his stress on human responsibility and action, does not exhort his readers to erect such a system; he merely tells them that it is a good system and that

³¹ McNeill, *John Calvin*, xxiv.

³² Commentary on Deuteronomy 1:16; *Calvin's Commentaries - Volume 3 - Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 310. For a good overview of Calvin's political thought, see Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

³³ *Institutes*, 4.20.16. See also 4.20.3.

³⁴ See David W. Hall, *The Legacy of John Calvin: His Influence on the Modern World*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008) on Calvin's stress on a republican form of government in the church.

if they live in one then they should count themselves blessed and give thanks to God.

This praise of liberty combined with a stress on obedience are constant themes in Calvin's, and Calvinist, thought. This means that because of sin there must always be political coercion and control, but this coercion is in constant tension with the new order brought into being as a free response to the Word of God. Ideally, Calvin wanted a consensual polity in Church and State, but this ideal is always held back by the reality of sin. This form of government presupposed, primitively, to be sure, a system of checks and balances whose importance was not lost on later Calvinist, and non-Calvinist, political thinkers, including the founders of the American republic."³⁵

Calvinism produced a number of political theorists, including Theodore Beza, Christopher Goodman, Peter Viret, Phillippe Du-Plessis-Mornay, John Ponet, and Samuel Rutherford.³⁶ One of the most notable and influential was Johannes Althusius, who developed a distinct notion of politics, and may even have coined the

³⁵ Little, *op. cit.*, 72, 76, 167. Witte's *The Reformation of Rights* shows effects on ideas in Puritan New England, and Marci A. Hamilton, "The Calvinist Paradox of Distrust and Hope in the Constitutional Convention," in *Christian Perspectives on Legal Thought*, edited by Michael W. McConnell, Robert F. Cochran, Angela C. Carmella (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 293-306, shows how a Calvinist worldview helped shaped the political thought of America's founding.

³⁶ Witte's *The Reformation of Rights* shows the later influence of Calvinists as they react to new challenges—paying particular attention to Beza, Althusius, and Milton.

term “political science.”³⁷ Althusius also shaped federalism.³⁸ Daniel Elazar argues that his *Politics* “was the first book to present a comprehensive theory of federal republicanism rooted in a covenantal view of human society derived from, but not dependent on, a theological system. It presented a theory of polity-building based on the polity as a compound political association established by its citizens through their primary associations on the basis of consent rather than a reified state, imposed by a ruler or an elite.” Furthermore, “Althusius serves as a bridge between the biblical foundations of Western civilization and modern political ideas and institutions.... Althusius confronts the same problems of modern politics without jettisoning or denying the biblical foundations.”³⁹

³⁷ F. S. Carney “Associational Thought in Early Calvinism, 40-1, maintains that similar themes can be found in the writings of Hofman, Mornay, Beza, Buchanan, Ponet, Vermigli, Zanachuis and Rutherford. The best recent summary overview of Althusius’ political and legal views is John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 143-207. A summary of this, and of Calvin’s legal views, is given in John Witte, “Law, Authority and Liberty in Early Calvinism,” in *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, ed. David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2010) 17-21 and 30-33. See also Robert M. Kingdom, “Althusius’ Use of Calvinist Sources,” *Rechtstheorie* 16 (1997) 19-28.

³⁸ Thomas O. Hueglin, “Johannes Althusius: Medieval Constitutionalist or Modern Federalist?” *Publius* 9, no. 4 (1979): 9–41; Thomas O. Hueglin, *Early Modern Concepts for a Late Modern World: Althusius on Community and Federalism* (Waterloo, Ont; Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999). Otto von Gierke regarded Althusius as a pivotal figure in the development of modern constitutionalism, see his *The Development of Political Theory* (New York: Norton, 1939), 71.

³⁹ Daniel Elazar, “Althusius’s Grand Design for a Federal Commonwealth,” in *Politica: An Abridged Translation of Politics Methodically Set Forth and Illustrated with Sacred and Profane Examples*, ed. and Trans. Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), xxxv. See also Thomas Hueglin,

Indeed, as John Witte points out, Althusius' understanding of religious freedom was more expansive than English philosopher John Locke's vastly more famous and influential understanding that came 75 years later.⁴⁰ Althusius also appears to be the father of the currently much discussed notion of 'subsidiarity,' loosely understood as the principle that matters ought to be handled by the least centralized competent authority. Subsidiarity is a major feature of thought about the European Union and its law. It has also been a major feature of Catholic thought since it was developed in the 1891 encyclical Rerum Novarum by Pope Leo XIII and its origins are usually ascribed to Catholic thought. However, no less than a European Union research team, led by then EU President Jacques Delors, concluded that its origins really lay in Calvinism, especially Althusius.⁴¹

CONCLUSIONS

For Calvin, the whole creation is equally under God's sovereign will, hence all human vocations are in principle equal. This also means that the institutions of society are not arranged

"Covenant and Federalism in the Politics of Althusius," in *The Covenant Connection: From Federal Theology to Modern Federalism*, ed. Daniel J. Elazar and John Kincaid (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2000), 31-54. For a summary of Calvin and Althusius see David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 223 ff.

⁴⁰ John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights* 175-176.

⁴¹ Ken Endo, "The Principle of Subsidiarity: From Johannes Althusius to Jacques Delors," *Hokkaido Law Review* 44, no. 6 (1994).

hierarchically but are differentiated according to vocation and so are to be arranged side by side in mutual support of one another. And God's work is carried out by the free, voluntary, useful obedience of God's people.⁴² Since each of these institutions is differentiated according to its vocation, and God is not mediated exclusively through one of them, then none can claim sovereignty over the others.⁴³

This led to a stress on reshaping politics from being simply an elite occupation to one that is more participatory. It also led to a covenantal view of politics that has shaped modern federalism. Calvin situated human action as a response of human beings who freely submit themselves to God and thus seek to transform the social, economic and political order in order that it might reflect God's order.⁴⁴

⁴² Carney, "Associational Thought in Early Calvinism."

⁴³ Spykman, "Pluralism: Our Last Best Hope?" 106.

⁴⁴ For recent expositions of Calvinist views of politics, see James W. Skillen, *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014); David T. Koyzis, *Political Visions and Illusions*.