

John Calvin의 정치사상
(THE POLITICAL IDEA OF
JOHN CALVIN)

권태경
(교회사)

John Calvin의 정치사상 (THE POLITICAL IDEA OF JOHN CALVIN)

BY TAE-KYUNG KWON(교회사)*1)

I. Introduction

John Calvin is a sixteenth century Reformer who is a leading figure of Reformed and Presbyterian theology. Many scholars have studied the political thought of Calvin.²⁾

1* 서울 성경신학대학원 대학교 교수 (종교개혁사). 이 글은 원래 미국의 헨리미터 연구소에 제출한 논문의 일부이지만, 최근 칼빈 신학 연구의 권위자인 존 헤셀링크 교수의 도움으로 수정 보완하여 기고한다.

2 For more information on Calvin's political thought, see the following sources: Emile Doumergue, Jean Calvin: Les hommes et les choses de son temps, 7 vols. (Lausanne, 1899-1927); J. W. Allen, A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century (New York: Baren's & Nobles, 1928); Marc-Edouard Cheneviree, La pensee Politique de Calvin

Regarding the relevance of Calvin and Calvinists' thought to modern democracy, the research trends have been divided into two parts. Some insist that the resistance theories of Calvinists contributed to modern democracy. On the other hand, others argue that Calvin's thought was not related to modern democracy and did not influence modern political development.³⁾

(Geneve: Slatkine, 1937); Hans Baron, "Calvinist Republicanism and its Historical Roots," Church History, 8 (1939); Winthrop S. Hudson, "Democratic Freedom and Religion and Religious Faith in the Reformed Tradition," Church History, 15 (1946); John T. McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," Church History, 18 (1949); Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1960); Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvinism and Democracy: Some Political Implication of Debates on French Reformed Church Government, 1562-1572," American Historical Review, 69 (1964); G. Hunt, ed. Calvinism and Political Order (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965); Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints (New York: Atheneum, 1973); Quentin Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978); C. Jungen, "Calvin and the Origin of the Political Resistance Theory in the Calvinist Tradition," Westminster Theological Seminary Th. M. Thesis, (1980); Harro Hopfl, The Christianity Polity of John Calvin (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985); Ralph C. Hancock, Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989); Ralph Keen, "The Limits of Power and Obedience in the Later Calvin," Calvin Theological Journal, 27 (1992).

3 For the relevance of Calvin to democratic thought,

The purpose of this paper is to explore the true Reformed tradition of political thought, examining the political thought of Calvin. In this paper, I investigate the political ideas, civil government, the magistrates and the laws in Calvin's writings. I hope this paper will be helpful in understanding the Reformed perspectives on the church and state for the Korean church today.

II. The Political Ideas of John Calvin

1. On Civil Government

First, I deal with the basic nature of Calvin's thinking on civil government. According to Calvin, its [civil government's] function among men is no less than that of bread, water, sun, and air; indeed, its place of honor is far more excellent (IV.20.3).

John I. Hesselink maintains that Calvin had a high view of civil government: the state, or political order, is to Calvin a very positive blessing. Civil government is a gift of God, a positive means toward realizing the kingdom of God on earth.⁴⁾ John McNeill argues similarly that the Calvinist piety

especially see the following scholars' works: J. W. Allen, Hans Baron, Marc-Edouard Cheneviree, Emile Doumergue, Ralph Hancock, Winthrop_Hudson, C. Jungen, Robert M. Kingdon, John McNeill, Quentin Skinner, Michael Walzer.

⁴ John Hesselink, Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 168.

embraces all the day-by-day concerns of life, in family and neighborhood, education and culture, business and politics. More emphatically than most theologians, he calls for active and positive political behavior.⁵⁾ In this context Calvin writes that man is the subject of two kinds of government.

There is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men (III. 19.15).

Although there is a twofold government in Calvin's exposition, the two are distinguished from each other, but they are fundamentally not different and are indispensable to each other.⁶⁾ The point to keep in mind at this juncture is that civil [political] government is a divinely established order (IV.20.1), and that, although the spheres of church and state must not

5 John McNeill, "Calvin and Civil Government," Readings in Calvin's Theology, ed. Donald McKim, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 260-61; For the politics of Calvin, see Hopfl's The Christian Polity of John Calvin. As a political scientist, Hopfl treats the vision of the church and civil polity of Calvin.

6 Cf. John Calvin, Institution of the Christian Religion, tr., Ford Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV.20.2.

be confused, ultimately both of them serve the same end. They are in the relationship of assistance to and cooperation with each other.⁷⁾

Civil government, for Calvin, is God's provision and instrument for human's good. In his Institutes Calvin says:

Civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquillity. All of this I admit to be superfluous, if God's Kingdom, such as it is now among us wipes out the present life.⁸⁾

For Calvin, it is clear that the character of the civil government does not in any sense bring it into conflict with the spiritual rule of Christ when we inquire into the nature of the tasks which are incumbent upon secular rulers.⁹⁾ Regarding the relationship of the two realms, Calvin condemned the Anabaptists who regard civil government as

7 Hesselink, Calvin's First Catechism, 169.

8 Institutes, IV.20.2.

9 Willelm Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, tr. Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 232.

unworthy for Christians, and Machiavelli who admits the absolute power by the prince. It seems to me that this point reflects Calvin's main ideas, which would keep a balance and order in his political thought, rather than the extreme views seen in Anabaptist and Absolutist thinking. For Calvin, these were too negative in their [Radical Reformation] attitude toward the state, society, and culture and toward those outside their own select fellowship. Therefore, Calvin felt that something else was needed beyond the Radical Reformation of the Anabaptists.¹⁰⁾ The Anabaptists received his attention in numerous works. In Against the Sect of the Anabaptists (1544), Calvin refutes seven of their typical teachings, including their detachment from civil government.¹¹⁾

On the other hand, we can see a balanced idea and order in Calvin's view of three forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. In Calvin's exposition, it is difficult to say which is best among the three forms of government. According to Calvin:

It is not easy to distinguish which one of them excels in usefulness, for they contend on such equal terms, the fall from kingdom

10 M. Eugene Osterhaven, The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 27.

11 John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), 207. For Calvin's view of the Anabaptists, see Willem Balke, Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals, tr. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

to tyranny is easy; but it is not much more difficult to fall from the rule of the best men to the faction of a few; yet it is easiest of all to fall from popular rule to sedition. I will not deny that aristocracy, or a system compounded of aristocracy and democracy, far excels all others (IV.20.8).

Among scholars, there is a dispute whether Calvin was hostile to monarchy or not. It seems to me that Calvin does not have any antagonism to monarchy itself. Yet he stands against the tyrannical rule of unqualified kings. In fact, Calvin is primarily concerned for secure and ordered liberty as opposed to both tyranny and anarchy. Nothing is more desirable than liberty, he writes of Joseph in Egypt. Calvin also notes the concept of liberty.¹²⁾ For Calvin, the blend of aristocracy and democracy is superior to all other forms of government. Some argue that Calvin was an exponent of theocracy or modern democracy. However, it seems that these are too extreme views, caused by a misunderstanding of Calvin's form of government.

Therefore, we need to pay attention to Hesselink's and McNeill's views. Regarding theocracy, Calvin hastens to explain that the laws of a state are different from Mosaic legislation, which was designed specifically for God's chosen people. Accordingly, Calvin rejects any notion of a theocracy based on Mosaic legislation.¹³⁾ On the other hand, democracy

12 Comm. Gen. 39:2; Homilies on 1 Sam. and Comm. Jer. 38:25-26, and 1 Cor. 10:29; Cf. Institutes, IV.20.8. n. 21.

is also not a term favored by Calvin. He does not advocate democracy in and of itself; he fears its deterioration into anarchy. Nevertheless, his notion of aristocracy tempered by democracy approaches our conception of representative democracy. It becomes unmistakably clear in his later writings that the ideal basis of government is election by the citizens. Generally, Calvin holds the best defense against tyranny to lie in a form of government in which aristocracy (the rule of the best) is mingled with democracy.¹⁴⁾ In my opinion, Calvin did not intend to design either a theocracy or democracy. Of course, Calvin was not thinking of modern democracy in terms of its modern secular versions. However, as we look back at Calvin's political thought, we can see that he not only set forth ideas which exercised a powerful influence for democracy in his own day, but also that his ideas had a broad influence on subsequent political thinking in the Western world.¹⁵⁾

2. The Magistrate and The Laws

The magistrate is a category of civil government for Calvin. For Calvin, a magistrate is a father of his country, a shepherd of his people, guardian of peace, protector of

13 Hesselink, Calvin's First Catechism, 171.

14 McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," 169; McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism, 224-25.

15 W. Stanford Reid, John Calvin: "One of the Fathers of Modern Democracy," Christian History, 2 (1986), 30.

righteousness, and avenger of innocence.¹⁶⁾ In his first Catechism, Calvin says:

It is the task of princes and magistrates to ponder who it is they are serving in their office and not to commit anything unworthy of God's ministers and vicars. Moreover, nearly all their care ought to be exerted to keep the public form of religion uncorrupted, to form the people's life by the best of the laws, and publicly and privately to look after the welfare and tranquility of the realm (Catechism. sec. 33).

In the Institutes, Calvin also writes about the duties of magistrates:

If they [magistrates] remember that they are vicars of God, they should watch with all care, earnestness, and diligence, to represent in themselves to men, some image of divine providence, protection, goodness, benevolence, and justice (IV.20.6).

In this context, Calvin's primary concern is to keep liberty and justice and to restore order by the magistrates in civil government. For Calvin, to be a government official is a

16 Institutes, IV.20.24. Cf. Hesselink, Calvin's First Catechism, 174.

singular honor comparable to that of being a minister of the gospel.¹⁷⁾ Hence political office is a sacred ministry. Magistrates are the guardians of the laws, and their very making and enforcement of law are presided over by God. For this reason the magistrate who enforces the law is giving expression to God's natural law, and in so doing is to be regarded as the living law itself. Concerning the relationship between the magistrate and the law, Calvin insists that although the magistrate is the living law, he too is subject to the law.¹⁸⁾

As one of the magistrate's responsibilities, I discuss Calvin's important political principle, justice. Justice, according to Calvin, is to receive into safekeeping, to embrace, to protect, vindicate, and free the innocent, whereas judgment is to withstand the boldness of the ungodly, to repress their violence, and to punish their misdeeds (Catechism. sec. 33). In the Institutes (IV.20.9) Calvin cites other passages in addition to Jeremiah 22:3, particularly from Deuteronomy 1:16, 17:16-19 and the Psalms 101: vs. 4, 5, 7, which refer to the obligation of kings and rulers to execute justice and righteousness, defend the rights of the poor and the needy, and so forth. However, godly rulers can only effectively promote such civic righteousness when they are equally concerned about honoring God. In other words, the second table of the law (love of

17 Institutes, IV.20.6 and IV.20.22; Hesselink, Calvin's First Catechism, 168.

18 W. Robert Godfrey and Jesse Boyd III, ed. Through Christ's Word (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985), 156.

neighbor) always depends on the first (love of God).¹⁹⁾ Calvin clarifies his position of justice in his Commentary on Jeremiah: justice refers to the defense of the innocent, and judgment to the punishment by which the wickedness of those is curbed who, unless they are restrained by fear of the law, would violate all order.²⁰⁾ The principle of justice is related to Calvin's view of the law. It is clear that justice is based on Calvin's view of the purpose of the law as related to equity. In short, for Calvin, magistrates should promote true justice by conforming their decisions and petitions to the law of God.

Next, I discuss the other category of civil government for Calvin, the law. Calvin says of the interdependence of the magistrate and the law:

The laws, stoutest sinews of the commonwealth, or, as Cicero, after Plato, calls them, the souls, without which the magistracy cannot stand, even as they themselves have no force apart from the magistracy. Accordingly, nothing truer could be said than that the law is a silent magistrate: the magistrate, a living law (IV.20.14).

Thus, the laws are a fundamental concept in Calvin's theology. Regarding Calvin's concept of the law prior to the Fall, Edward Dowey contends that the concept of law here is

19 Hesselink, Calvin's First Catechism, 170.

20 Comm. Jer. 33:15.

seen to belong to the revelation of God the Creator and to carry no hint of sin or disharmony. It is not something that comes in between God and man, destructive of a personal relation, but is the mode of that relation.²¹⁾ In this context, one can say that law is, for Calvin, the instrument for maintaining the relationship between God and man.

Following Aquinas, Calvin divides the Mosaic law into moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws.²²⁾ The judicial law supplied a political constitution with rules of equity and justice by which men might dwell together in peace. Then, the ceremonial laws aided piety in the childhood stage of the development of the Jewish nation. As valuable as these were, they were of passing validity.²³⁾ It seems to me that these two aspects of law are no longer valuable and meaningful for civil government today because the ceremonial law has been rendered obsolete by the coming of Christ and the judicial laws were intended only for Israel's special situation. Of the three forms of law, the moral law of the Old Testament is most important for Calvin's view of the law and his political thought. For Calvin, the moral law is a true rule for Christians: It is a fact that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men.²⁴⁾

21 Edward A. Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 225.

22 Cf. Institutes, IV.20.14.

23 McNeill, "Calvin and Civil Government," 266.

24 Institutes, IV.20.16.

In an earlier passage of the Institutes, Calvin gives an extended treatment of the moral law as expressed in the Ten Commandments. He there refers to that interior law ... imprinted on the heart of everyone, which in some sense conveys the teaching of the Commandments. The inner monitor that expresses this is conscience, which ever and anon arouses us from moral sleep. The written moral law of the Bible is given by God to attest and clarify the precepts of natural law, and fix them in the memory.²⁵⁾ It seems to me that for Calvin the moral law is ultimately a divine law, which is related to the special revelation and will of God.

On the other hand, Calvin identified moral law with natural law.²⁶⁾ Concerning the meaning of natural law, one can

25 Institutes, II.8.1; McNeill, "Calvin and Civil Government," 267.

26 For Calvin's view of natural law, see his Comm. Rom. 1:21-27, 2:14-15. The problem of natural law in Calvin has proved to be a major battleground in twentieth-century scholarship. Two main groups have contended on this critical issue, each claiming to be the true interpreters of Calvin's teaching. One group of scholars holds that natural law plays no real role in Calvin's thought except to make us inexcusable. The other group claims that Calvin built his social, ethical, and political ideas on the foundation of natural law, and a few of them even profess to find in Calvin's view a basis for establishing a Christian theory of natural law in our day. John Hesselink, Calvin's Concept of the Law (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 51ff&69ff; William Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," John Calvin and the Church, ed. Timothy George (Louisville:

say that in English 'natural' can be contrasted with 'supernatural', used as equivalent to universal, to innate, to sinful, and as opposed to contrived or designed, and these are but a few of its most prominent meanings.²⁷⁾ According to Calvin, the law of nature is discovered by the use of reason in cooperation with conscience. For Calvin, conscience is knowledge of general principles. Dowey explains Calvin's concept of conscience as being both a divine and natural term:

Conscience is a native and irrepressible knowledge of God's will in the sense that these terms imply: that is, as the no longer actual (because of sin) and the not yet reconstituted (in the process of redemption) *ordo nature*. Conscience is not contrary to the natural order or the law of nature. Rather, the innate knowledge and power of distinguishing between good and evil which is conscience, is precisely recognition of the natural as divine, as the expression of the will of the Creator.²⁸⁾

In addition, a close association of conscience and natural law is made in the Commentary on Romans 2:14-16: There is,

Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 72..

27 Paul Helm, "Calvin and Natural Law," The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology, 2 (1984), 6.

28 Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology, 69. Cf. Institutes, II.2.23.

therefore, a certain natural knowledge of the law which states that one action is good and worthy of being followed, while another is to be shunned with horror.²⁹⁾

Now I wish to review the role and purpose of the law. According to Hesselink,

Calvin was indeed a man of the law, but not in the negative sense suggested by certain Reformation scholars of a past generation. For Calvin, as we have seen, the law is a dynamic entity primarily expressive of the gracious will of God for the benefit of his people. Because of sin it can also play a negative role, but even then the ultimate goal is the redemption of individuals and the restoration of order in the church and the cosmos.³⁰⁾

Related to the role of the law, there are two extreme views. First, as was the case for the Anabaptists, civil law was for the purpose of restraining the wicked, and therefore had no real applicability to the Christian. Then there are others [Theonomists or Christian Reconstructionists such as R. S. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen and Gary North] who maintain that the Mosaic law is the only proper law for Christians and for Christian society. They would seek, apparently, to revert

²⁹ Comm. Rom. 2:15; Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," 82-83.

³⁰ Hesselink, Calvin's Concept of the Law, 277.

to the economic, social, and spiritual conditions of Israel in the Promised Land.³¹⁾ Calvin, however, rejected all of these views. As early as 1536 he insisted that civil law is absolutely necessary for a truly Christian society, because law and political government are the gift of God to man.³²⁾

Now I review the function and use of the law (the moral law) in Calvin's theology. Because in terms of the uses of the law, Calvin insisted the continuing necessity of the law as a guide in Christian life. For Calvin, there are three uses of the law: *usus theologicus*, *usus politicus* and *usus tertius ligus*. Calvin explained the so-called first use of the law (*usus theologicus*) as a mirror. In the Institutes, Calvin writes:

The law shows the righteousness of God, and as a mirror discloses our sinfulness, leading us to implore divine help. In it, we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both—just as a mirror shows the spots on our face (II.7.6-7).

On the other hand, the second function and use of the law in Calvin is *usus politicus*. For Calvin, the second function and use of the law is as follows:

The law restrains malefactors and those

31 For more information of Old Testament law and the laws of nations, see Institutes, IV.20.1, 2, 14.

32 Godfrey and Boyd III ed. Through Christ's Word, 154-55.

who are not yet believers. certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats in the law. But they are restrained, but because their inner mind is stirred or affected, but because, being bridled, so inside the depravity that otherwise they would wantonly have indulged. Consequently, they are neither better nor more righteous before God (II.7.10-11).

Calvin affirms unequivocally the third use of the law, *usus tertius legis*. As for the need of the law, the first two functions of the law are essentially negative in that they either restrain, condemn, or reveal the nature and power of sin, (for Calvin the principal use) the third use pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, for it finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns (II.7.12). In this context, the believers benefit from the law: Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it.³³⁾ Calvin in various connections either speaks of the law as an expression of the will of God or simply directs all of our activity to the will of God as the ultimate and most comprehensive norm of the Christian life.³⁴⁾

33 Institutes, II, 7 12; Hesselink, Calvin's Concept of the Law, 251. At this point one can find that Calvin places the sanctification on the role of the law.

There are some arguments of the third and positive use of the law among scholars. The notion of such use of the law for Christians was rejected by certain types of Lutherans, liberals, and fundamentalists (especially dispensationalists). Concerning this rejection, Hesselink contends that this is precisely where one must begin with Calvin in seeking to determine what is the ultimate norm for the Christian, or what we today would call responsible decision making. (II.7.12).³⁵⁾ With regard to the use of the law, Hesselink especially notes that:

Calvin, more than any other Reformer, stressed in particular the concerning need of the law as a norm and guide in the Christian life... The important thing to keep in mind is that this is what Calvin means by the third use of the law!³⁶⁾

In Calvin's view of the law, we can see his practical mind, an important key to understanding Calvin's theology rightly. The term practical here signifies that Calvin's view of

³⁴ John Hesselink, "Christ, the Law, and the Christian," Readings in Calvin's Theology, ed. Donald Mckim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 184, 191.

³⁵ Hesselink, "Christ, the Law, and the Christian," 179-180, 183.

³⁶ Hesselink, "Christ, the Law, and the Christian," 179, 191. Cf. Institutes, III.3.6-7; Comm. Titus, 2:11-17 and I Cor. 13:4-5.

the law is specially related to the Christian life. It seems that Calvin's consideration of the Christian life is only based on Jesus Christ. At this point one sees that there is a close relation between the law and gospel in Calvin's thinking. For Calvin, no one will truly pursue holiness unless he has first imbibed the doctrine that we are justified by Christ's merit alone. The prime motive for the Christian life is thus the grace and forgiveness we have received in Jesus Christ. Jesus is also the model of the Christian life.³⁷⁾ In Calvin's thinking, there is no contradiction between the law and Christ because Christ is the goal and end of the law. Christ is thus not only the best interpreter of the law; He is also its substance and fulfillment. Hence, for Calvin there is no inconsistency in referring sometimes to the law and other times to Christ as the norm or rule of godly living and as the expression of the will of God.³⁸⁾

We find Calvin's explanation of the nature of the Christian life in his Institutes and Commentaries.³⁹⁾ According to Calvin, we are not our own masters, but belong to God. Let this therefore be the first step, that a man depart from himself in order that he may apply the whole force of his ability in the service of the Lord.⁴⁰⁾ Calvin notes that we should deny ourselves through devotion to God. This is

37 Institutes, III.6.3; Hesselink, "Christ, the Law, and the Christian," 188.

38 Hesselink, "Christ, the Law, and the Christian," 189.

39 Cf. Institutes, III.6-11; Comm. Rom. 14:8; Comm. I Cor. 6:19 and Gal. 2:20.

40 Institutes, III.7.1.

Calvin's Christian philosophy. There is another key text in his understanding of the Christian life. For in Ephesians 4:23 he finds the two basic principles of Christian living, namely, putting off the old nature and putting on the new nature. In reference to this passage Calvin also refers to two rules for a godly and holy life. The first is the denial of ourselves and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. The second is to live, not by our own spirit, but by the Spirit of Christ.⁴¹⁾

Now I turn to principles concerning Calvin's view of the law. With respect to Calvin's principles of the law, love, equity and justice are important concepts for the purpose of the law. William Klempa states:

For Calvin love is served not only by maintaining the rights of all but also in defending the civil magistrate as the guardian of peace and equity: Paul meant to refer the precept respecting the power of magistrates to the law of love. Calvin says in his comments on Romans 13:8: It is as though he [Paul] had said, 'when I require you to obey princes I require nothing more than what is demanded by the law of love. He then who introduces anarchy, violates love.'⁴²⁾

41 Cf. Hesselink, "Christ, the Law, and the Christian," 190.

42 Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," 87. Cf. Comm. Rom. 13:8-10.

In Calvin's thinking of the law, we see the concept of equity. Calvin stated that this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws (IV.20.16).⁴³⁾ Equity is the perpetual rule of love, from which all legal as well as moral obligations derive and to which they all point.⁴⁴⁾ Calvin shows the place of equity in a well-ordered life. Basing his discussion on Titus 2:11-14, Calvin states: Now he [the apostle] limits all actions of life to three parts: soberness, righteousness, and godliness. Now righteousness embraces all the duties of equity in order that to each one be rendered what is his own.⁴⁵⁾ Again and again Calvin speaks of equity in conjunction with justice and love as a quality which must characterize the execution of the legal system. Indeed for Calvin, the magistrates must exercise equity in the courts of justice (IV.20.4).⁴⁶⁾

Furthermore, with regard to the concept of equity, Calvin introduces the grace of God. Kings, he [Calvin] points out, can keep themselves within the bounds of justice and equity only by the grace of God; for when they are not governed by the Spirit of righteousness, proceeding from heaven, their government is converted into a system of tyranny.⁴⁷⁾ According to Battles,

43 For more information on equity and the Law, see Guenther H. Hass, The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).

44 Klempa, "John Calvin on Natural Law," 86.

45 Institutes, III.7.3.

46 Hesselink, Calvin's First Catechism; 171.

Equity, then, is the prime principle for Calvin in understanding true justice. The social justice sought, for example, by the civil rights movement, in direct conflict with unjust laws, if examined under the rule of equity, would demonstrate the superiority of *aequitas* over *summum jus*. It is this principle that should animate the framers of laws as well as the judges whose verdicts stand upon laws. It is upon this foundation that all human laws and their just application must rest. In this sense all human law is a great unity.⁴⁸⁾

In general, Calvin identifies natural law with equity. Calvin deals with the concept of equity in the popular sense of common justice. Equity is natural, and hence the same for all mankind, and all laws should have equity for their end.⁴⁹⁾ For Calvin, equity is an important principle and a foundation of civil government along with justice.

Comparing Calvin with Luther, for Luther law suggests images of a theology of self-salvation and a devilish perversion of the divine promise; whereas for Calvin, law

47 Hesselink, Calvin's First Catechism, 172; Comm. Mt. 12:18 and Ps. 72:4.

48 Robert Benedetto, ed. Interpreting John Calvin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 314-15.

49 McNeill. "Calvin and Civil Government." 267-68.

suggests images of order and structure, indeed the very structure of God's love in both creation and redemption.⁵⁰⁾ In short, one can say that Calvin regards the law as the binder of society. For him, good laws promote and further the true prosperity of the state.⁵¹⁾ Therefore, law plays the most important part along with the magistrates in Calvin's view of civil government. One can see principles of love, equity and justice as the important principles in Calvin's understanding of the law. For Calvin, law is ultimately an instrument to re-establish order and to restore the image of God.

III. Conclusion

For the right understanding of the political thought of the Reformed tradition, I have examined the political thought of Calvin. In examining the relationship between church and state, Calvin's major concern was to bring church and state in mutual interdependence. As I have noted in this paper, the magistrate and the law for Calvin are significant elements in the civil government. In Calvin's view, magistrates are regarded as the living law itself, while the law is a silent magistrate leading to a just government.

In reviewing the political thought of Calvin, one should understand that their primary concern is to keep order and to check power in the civil government. In this connection, G.

⁵⁰ Edward A. Dowey, "Law in Luther and Calvin," Theology Today, 41 (1984), 153.

⁵¹ Godfrey and Boyd III, ed. Through Christ's Word, 158.

Joseph Gatis states the matter succinctly:

Calvin's view of the institutions of church and state, checks and balances on power, and the government's relationship to God stem from his theological convictions. His [Calvin's] hatred of tyranny, love of limited government, and passion for justice are values not to be ignored.⁵²⁾

It is clear that Calvin's ideas have influenced strongly the entire economic, social, political, and cultural spheres from the sixteenth century to the present day. I do not claim that Calvin was an exponent of democratic thought in modern terms.

Above all, one must keep in mind that Calvin's political thought should be understood in their theological context. The political thought of Calvin is based on the Scripture. The gist of their political thoughts is mainly to set up a godly commonwealth in accordance with teachings of the Bible. Finally, one should note that the political thought of the Reformed tradition was primarily to recognize and reveal God's sovereignty and glory to the world.

52 Cf. G. Joseph Gatis, "The Political Theory of John Calvin," Bibliotheca Sacra 153 (1996), 467; Harro Hopfl, ed. Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), xxiii.