

In Defence of Calvin

Introduction

I could spend my whole life combating critics of great Reformers, there are so many slanderers out there, so I only do so sparingly. On this occasion it was in response to a friend who needed help regarding a writer that was new to me. In dealing with this particular writer I can address a number of common factors raised by many other attackers of Calvin.

The website concerned is a blog, *'Beware of the wolves'* run by a self-appointed female protector of orthodoxy called Treena Gisborn. She deems to expose heresy even when her statements contradict sound confessions of faith, historic catechisms, and synodical judgments held in esteem for hundreds of years. In fact, this current article, *'Wolves in sheep's clothing: false prophets and the Bible, teachers in the last days: Calvinism: the horrible decree'*, runs counter to the historic confessions of faith that formed the origin of all UK Protestant denominations: Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, Particular Baptists, and even the original Brethren before they were perverted by Dispensationalism.

Therefore, this unknown woman, 'defending the faith' by doing something that God forbids her to do (1 Tim 2:11-15), despises the historic foundations of Protestantism in order to denounce John Calvin as a false teacher and wicked despot. We've heard all this nonsense many times. Indeed, search the web today and you will find that Calvin was head of a conspiracy run by Roman Catholics, by Jews, by the global elite and so on. If it weren't so serious it would be laughable.

The centre of the Reformation

The key issue in the Reformation was not Calvin, not Luther and not any individual; it was not even centred in their works; it was the revelation of God's truth after the legalism, human philosophy and superstition of the Dark Ages. The central aspect of the Reformation was the exposition of God's word exposing true doctrine in order to bring about social change and church growth. The Reformation was a testimony to the glorious activity of God to witness to his word. This was a revelation of Jesus Christ through exposition of the truth that is in Jesus.

Thus the Reformation was a testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ and the dismissal of false teaching that abounded and held men in captivity for nearly a thousand years.

Now God uses men; he gives gifts of men to the church to equip the saints and to glorify Jesus. So God raised up multiple servants to do the actual work of the Reformation in various places, Bucer in Strasbourg, Luther in Wittenberg, Farel in Berne and Neuchatel, Zwingli in Zurich; and later Calvin in Geneva, as well as many others. Each had a specific job to do.

The chief human architects of the Reformation are Luther and Calvin. Luther's task was to initiate the revival and to break up the stony ground. He was the pioneering force that took on the Catholic Church head on and won when all previous reformers had been martyred.

Though a university professor and a scholar, his tough peasant background provided the right character to withstand the huge pressures thrown against him.

Calvin, however, was much weaker than Luther in terms of force of character, but much greater than Luther in terms of organising ability, scholarship and theological understanding. After the pioneering reformers had broken away from Catholicism and laid the foundations, what was necessary was an academic, systematising force to unite Protestants in the truth. Calvin provided that work in his *Institutes*, which went through several editions and enlargements during his lifetime. It is no exaggeration to say that Calvin's *Institutes* changed the world and brought intellectual liberty to men. Whole nations were set free to prosper by relying upon his explanation of theology and the modern world arose as a result of Calvin's work.

Anyone who denies all this and slanders Calvin is simply foolish and knows nothing of history. This was even taught in 'O'-level history lessons by secularists until the education system was taken captive in recent decades.

Now the devil hates the truth with a passion and does everything he can to besmirch it. Thus the Reformation is a special target of the enemy of Christ and his full venting is directed to the most important person, Calvin. Thus Calvin has been the most vilely slandered person in human history. Worse still, gullible fools who claim to be Christian have been at the forefront of this charge, doing Satan's work for him.

The lies, slanders, misrepresentation, and false teachings about Calvin are all part of the satanic attack against God and his truth.

What is very sad is that Calvin was a quiet, respected, good man. He lost his son, and then his wife, the love of his life, very early and was traumatised – but devoted his life to God and exposing the truth. He didn't even want to go to Geneva but was forced into it by Farel. Calvin was honourable, merciful, judicious, cautious and saintly. He worked incredibly hard, often preaching every day in a week, as well as teaching students. He instituted charitable schemes for the poor. He set up schools, universities and foreign mission stations.

Calvin cared nothing for money; his Catholic enemies said that they could not entrap him because of this. In fact, Calvin is the only man I know who asked the town councillors to cut his salary. Though Calvin should have been rich from his work and his publishing royalties he had little money when he died because he gave most of it away.

This is the man that detractors like Treena Gisborn slander and call a cruel, vile, inhuman despot.

Analysis of Gisborn's claims

I will try to keep this simple and concise, as the article is not worth wasting my time on; it merely parrots the lies of many others, that I have already dealt with.

Provenance issues

It is noteworthy that Gisborn's few source references are all from websites and not from books or theological journals. Sources mentioned in the text are often not properly attributed, making it difficult to locate them.

Her worst accusations are simply lifted from the works of others wholesale. Copying one author, she mentions 'See Pike' but gives no details of the work mentioned because the author she copied didn't either at that point in his text.¹

Gisborn has simply plagiarised whole sections of other people's works, paragraph after paragraph, without doing her own research or checking it.

I have not the time to spend days researching her sources to investigate their origins but it is notable that many claims on websites are simply lies, frauds and forgeries. You cannot trust that a website claiming to be the text of a historical document is accurate; you need a certified copy or manuscript, or corroborating evidence.

This is especially important when someone makes claims that run counter to what has been considered historical truth for centuries. Thousands of people have written well-researched biographies of Calvin and have not come to her conclusions. Something is wrong, therefore. Even enemies of Calvinism, such as Jacob Arminius himself, advised his students to read Calvin's works because they were academically trustworthy and Calvin's character was exemplary.

For example, implying that Calvin endorsed the beheading of a young girl for a mere misdemeanour seems to me to have no provenance at all. In fact it runs completely counter to Calvin's well-attested character.

I did search the references to Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church* volume eight since I have it in my library. This shows evidence of Gisborn's disingenuousness.

Schaff first explains Calvin's teaching on discipline, which is entirely Biblical [Matt 18:15-17], by demonstrating what he states in the *Institutes*.² In short this is: first a private pastoral warning; if that fails, followed by a warning by several elders/witnesses or the whole church; followed by excommunication from the Lord's table. In all cases, true repentance reverses the judgment. That is all one can say about Calvin's formal teaching on discipline.

Schaff then explains that the town council, due to the laxity evidenced in many other Catholic and Protestant areas, which greatly troubled even Luther, sought to be rigorous in applying discipline, influenced by Calvin's desire for a pure community (remember that Geneva was a hotbed of vice before Calvin came).

The Consistory and the Council rivalled with each other in puritanical zeal, says Schaff, and this zeal transgressed moderation. Then follows lists of examples of legalism and such transgressions. Schaff also explains that the Council introduced '*coercive laws, which are contrary to the nature of religion*'. The cruelest laws were inherited from Catholic standards of the Middle Ages and were nothing new and prevailed in all European countries until the 18th century. Schaff also defends Calvin in all this but does give some cruel examples of council decisions.

Gisborn takes this material second-hand and blames Calvin for it. Blaming Calvin for the actions of the town council, which was sometimes opposed to Calvin, is ludicrous; but this is merely following the example of Calvin's enemies at the time. The claim that Calvin was called the '*pope of Geneva*' was also a calumny made by Calvin's theological enemies and

¹ In fact it is HR Pike, 'The other side of John Calvin', no publishing details.

² Book Four, chapter 12.

was not a general term. The common feeling about Calvin inside and outside Geneva was that Calvin was a saint. Even Calvin's Romanist enemies had to admit his integrity.

The rulers of Geneva: a key mistake

Like many character assassinations of Calvin, Gisborn seems to think that he was a despotic ruler over the city of Geneva, or at least that he ruled the council. This is just nonsense.

Calvin was the city's cathedral preacher and an ethical advisor to the magistrates. Sure he was held in great esteem and his doctrinal expositions had a large effect on the city's mores. However, Calvin had no magisterial authority whatsoever; he did not make the decisions that the council implemented.

The penalty for civil and criminal offences were determined by the judicial system that operated in Geneva, of which Calvin had no part.

Even if the evidence that Gisborn cites is accurate and not a forgery,³ Calvin did not preside over these sentences. Mistakes made by the town council and judiciary are not the responsibility of Calvin at all. In fact, there were periods during Calvin's ministry in Geneva when the town council was openly hostile to him. How could Calvin be responsible for the actions of a hostile council?

Blasphemy laws: a key misunderstanding

It is absolutely necessary to understand the historic situation that existed at the time and not try to understand it by modern standards. Applying modern judgments to what happened under what were still medieval conditions is just plain stupid.

All of Europe practised the union of church and state. Offences of religion were treated as offences against the state. Thus the power of the state, including capital punishment, was applied to religious matters.

Every European nation had the same strict blasphemy laws and blasphemy was taken extremely seriously by everyone. This applied to Protestant and Catholic countries alike; their blasphemy laws were very similar. For instance, all of Europe agreed that Servetus should be executed and the King of France had already condemned him to death. If Geneva had failed in this it would have suffered consequences.

It took time for Protestant nations to develop more human and liberal sentences for certain crimes, but they set the standard for others. Remember that Roman Catholic countries were still torturing and executing Protestants long after this time.

It is curious that Gisborn, a Semi-Pelagian, hastily condemns Calvin for crimes he did not commit but completely ignores the terrible acts of the Semi-Pelagian Jesuits, the Spanish Inquisition, Portuguese Inquisition, Mexican Inquisition, the auto-de-fé, and Romanist persecutions.

The last person to be executed in Britain for blasphemy was Thomas Aikenhead in 1687. Muslims are executing children for blasphemy even today. Many Muslim countries in alliance with the west are executing blasphemers regularly, such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Kuwait, and others. Why single out medieval Geneva?

³ The illustrations from Schaff are true.

Michael Servetus

The execution of Servetus is falsely used by many Arminians to 'prove' that Calvin was a wicked, cruel despot. In fact, Calvin had nothing to do with the execution of Servetus, which was a civilian matter not an ecclesiastical matter.

In those days the civil power exercised penalties for breaking certain religious laws. This was accepted by all and was the common application of the Justinian Code. Unrepentant heretics, especially those guilty of blasphemy, were executed. In the case of Servetus, he had broken the civil law of all European countries.

Servetus was an arrogant, lying and deceitful man but possessed a spark of genius. In 1531 he published *On the errors of the Trinity*, claiming the doctrine was devilish. This united Catholics and Protestants in condemnation. He later taught pantheism, denied the pre-existence of Christ and was filled with a variety of other heresies. He was sentenced to death by the Inquisition in 1552 but was arrested while on the run in Geneva, ignoring Calvin's warning not to come. The town council holding him was actually opposed to Calvin at the time. This council tried Servetus and, with the approval of all the other Reformed Swiss cities, condemned him to burning in 1553.

Calvin had no control in this having no political power and at that time could not even vote. He was required by the council to bring the charge as the leader of the church; that was his only part in this. Despite many abusive attacks on him by Servetus (including calling him a murderer & a sorcerer), Calvin helped him prepare his defence by providing books from his own library. Calvin even pleaded that the sentence be mitigated and prayed with him in jail.

Though guilty of blasphemy and heresy, the principal charge against Servetus was sedition for seeking to undermine the government by creating a new political party and teaching rebellion. Indeed, his arrogant, obscene and violent behaviour shocked everyone and sealed his fate. The whole Christian world agreed on the execution of Servetus and Geneva had no option to let such a man go free.

Calvin neither instigated the trial, nor had any controlling influence upon it of any sort. The government of Geneva (which included supporters of Servetus and enemies of Calvin) executed Servetus as a subversive rebel, not just as a heretic. He brought his punishment on his own head by foolish behaviour and ignoring Calvin's warnings. The charges against Calvin are utterly false.

Theologians and rulers who supported Geneva in this matter:

- Melancthon [letter to Calvin, October 1554; letter to Bullinger, August 1555].
- Martin Bucer, who was a very peaceable man, stated that Servetus deserved to be disembowelled and torn to pieces (before Servetus was executed). [Calvin, 8 September 1553; Professor Frecht of Tübingen to Capito, 25 November 1538.]
- The churches and magistrates of Zurich, Schaffhausen, Basel and Bern were consulted in the trial and unanimously advised that Servetus be punished.
- Bullinger supported Geneva in punishing the heresy.
- Farel demanded execution by fire and feared that Calvin would support mitigation (which he did).
- Beza wrote a work defending the execution.
- Peter Martyr called Servetus a '*genuine son of the devil*' and justified the execution.

Specific accusations

Calvin's conversion

Gisborn doubts that Calvin was truly converted because his biographies do not mention the specifics.

This is very common in history if you read many Christian biographies. While some give details of a specific conversion turning point, many more do not. We are not certain, for example, exactly when Luther was converted but no one doubts that he was. Was he regenerated after the death of his friend by lightning? Was it after visiting Rome and realising that asceticism did not justify? Was it during his exposition of Romans (which many suspect is the case) and especially understanding that justification is by faith? Certainly the latter moment is crucial in his understanding of theology but there are grounds to suspect he was regenerated before then. His ardour in self-discipline certainly reflected a desire to please God and find salvation from his sins.

The point is that not knowing the details of Calvin's conversion is irrelevant; what is important is that he proved that he was converted by his actions; his works proved his faith. Sadly many Arminians like Gisborn place much emphasis on some crisis conversion experience which later proved to be false emotionalism.

For example, arch Arminian John Wesley is often cited as having been converted after his heart was '*strangely warmed*' on hearing the Gospel preached in Aldersgate Street in 1738 by Pietist Moravians. I ask you, is such a phrase ever cited in the Bible as a proof of conversion? It sounds to me more like fleshly emotionalism and mysticism, which is what John Wesley evidenced throughout his life. He went on to be the arch-enemy of many Biblical doctrines, such as the sovereignty of God, predestination, election, limited atonement and much more. He resorted to criminal acts in attacking godly Calvinist ministers, such as forgery (then a capital crime). He believed in ghosts and stated that sincere heathens would be saved. In the end, he wrote to his brother Charles stating that he did not love God and never had. Such a man cannot have been a true Christian. Yet his emotional experience is often cited by Arminians as the prime example of conversion.

In Calvin's case his conversion to Protestant Gospel truth and his open preaching of it was so obvious to those around him in Catholic Paris that he was forced to flee the country. A more clear evidence of conversion is hard to imagine.

Calvin's mandatory imposition on Geneva⁴

This is just rubbish.

See next regarding Calvin's lack of legal ability to impose anything upon the town council.

Calvin had been invited back to Geneva (something he did not want to do) in order to help the work of reformation by bringing sound Biblical teaching and reforming the Genevan church and education systems. Gisborn treats Calvin like some kind of king that usurped all societal power. What nonsense!

Calvin's 'control' of Geneva

I have already explained that Calvin had no political or judicial power whatsoever. Calvin didn't even want to go to Geneva as he knew it would involve a huge amount of work because it had an international reputation for godlessness, crime and immorality. Calvin

⁴ '*Calvin's mandatory implementation of his version of Christianity upon Geneva pre-empted [sic] even God himself.*' '*Calvin literally forced regeneration upon the populace by his own, rather than God's, sovereign intervention.*'

was very far from seeking worldly power over people. Far from Calvin being a city governor, he was not even a citizen of Geneva until asked to become one in 1559.

In 1541 Calvin, under pressure from Farel, went back to Geneva (he had preached there earlier) and began reforming the city's laws, but mainly reformed the church and liturgy. He also instituted a university to train young men to be of service to the community, as well as a universal system of education for the young. Of Calvin's Academy in Geneva John Knox said it was, '*the most perfect school of Christ on Earth since the days of the apostles.*'

These reforms changed Genevan morals and made it a centre of European power. However, it made enemies of some and Calvin faced continual hostility; on occasion his enemies fomented civil disturbances.

Due to the liberty that Calvin brought to Geneva, and the more stable social situation, Geneva became the chief refuge for fleeing persecuted Protestants and Waldenses from all over Europe including Britain. From being a hotbed of sin, Geneva became a model of ethics.

Calvin worked tirelessly in preaching every day on alternate weeks, counselling, advising magistrates, writing letters and writing Biblical works. He wrote commentaries on 23 OT books and all the NT except Revelation and wrote many theological tracts. His greatest work, however, is his '*Institutes of the Christian Religion*', revised five times from the 1536 handbook edition, his French translation of which even influenced the development of the French language. He risked his life by visiting the sick and often supported many from his own pocket; this is despite having multiple ailments of his own. He was in constant pain. He had continual headaches, piles, irritable bowel syndrome, kidney stones, asthma, arthritis, gout, malaria and finally TB. When sick he worked from his bed with a secretary taking notes, doing this up to his death at a young age.

In his ministry he denied himself, even to the degree of damaging his health to serve others. He sought no glory or position of power, but merely wanted to serve God faithfully. James Packer summarises him best: '*Bible-centred in his method, God-centred in his outlook, Christ-centred in his message ... [with] a passion that God should be glorified*' [*Collected Shorter Writings*, 4.162.].

Pope Pius IV stated that Calvin's dismissal of money was his strength and with a dozen Calvins could conquer the world.

His wife died in 1549 leaving Calvin heartbroken. Refusing to remarry, his tireless work (he never rested for more than 15 minutes) resulted in many ailments and great pain. But he continued to work even when confined to bed and dying, which occurred in 1564 aged nearly 55.

Calvin was such a great man and a true servant of God that many historians have praised Calvin, despite not being Christians [e.g. JA Froude]. The citizens of Geneva wept when Calvin died and claimed that they had lost their father; hardly the remarks of repressed subjects of a despot.

Calvin's focus

Contrary to Gisborn,⁵ Calvin's focus was not on double predestination but on the glory of God. His *Institutes* are not centred on predestination, but it begins with and sets forth the

⁵ 'The basis of Calvin's soteriology was double predestination aka limited atonement.' [Note double predestination is not the same as, nor is it alternatively known as, limited atonement.]

doctrine of the holy and glorious God, drawing out subsidiary doctrines from this point. His soteriology centres upon the sovereignty of God.

Despite being a brilliant theologian he considered himself to be a pastor, called to teach his people the truth as it is found in God's word but with the aid of everyday images, clarity, empathy and spirituality. This is why his books are still of great use today.

Miscellaneous issues

Regarding double predestination

Gisborn regards this as a horrible false doctrine. This proves that she has no ability whatsoever to expound Scripture.

Double predestination is a slang term to deride Calvinists who teach unconditional election and irresistible grace (to the elect).

The doctrine of election is clear to see in the Bible since it is a foundational teaching expounded from cover to cover. Everywhere we see God choosing some and ignoring others; thus God's people are 'the chosen people'. This cannot be denied, election is a Biblical doctrine. Abraham was alone chosen out of Chaldea. Jacob was chosen but Esau was hated and rejected before he was born. Israel was alone chosen out of all the nations. David was chosen but Saul was rejected; we could go on and on.

It is a logical assertion that if God chooses only certain people for salvation (the elect), then it is inevitable that he has rejected those he did not choose. Unless you live in a wacky alternative universe this is a simple fact.

It is a fallacy, in fact an invented speculation, of Arminians and other Semi-Pelagians that God elected those he foresaw would have faith in history. This is nonsense. There is no Scripture, which asserts this at all. Not only that, if it were true then salvation would be a human initiative and Scripture denies this vehemently (Eph 2:8-9). In fact the cause of election is stated to be the will and good pleasure of God and nothing at all to do with man (Eph 1:9). Arminianism is just a poor attempt to remove the sovereignty of God from salvation and replace it with the initiative of man's free will – due to human pride.

Note some clear Biblical statements that God rejects some men, hinders some men from salvation and reprobates some men in eternity:

What if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory. Rm 9:22-23.

The LORD has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom. Prov 16:4

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Jude 4

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. 1 Pt 2:8

For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; they shall be brought out on the day of wrath. Job 21:30

Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and *their* sins be forgiven them. Mk 4:12

Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind'. Jn 9:39

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. 2 Cor 2:15-16

We could multiply such verses.

Gisborn is also mistaken when she says that Calvin mandated his version of Augustinianism upon Geneva. Farel had taught the same things there before Calvin. Luther, Zwingli and Bucer were teaching the same things in other key cities. Augustine was a great influence on many Reformers. To say that Calvin '*forced regeneration upon the populace*' is foolish and false. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Double predestination derives from Augustinian Manichaeism

This is just utter rubbish pretending to be clever. It is another Arminian lie but this time to slander Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine was a Manichaean for a short time before his conversion just as he was an immoral man. When he was finally converted he rejected Manichaeism just as he rejected fornication. His written works testify against the errors of Manichaeism and all Gnostics.

To claim that Augustine gained double predestination from Gnostic fatalism is just laughable; indeed, Augustine was decidedly influenced by Ambrose [c.339–97].

When Gisborn states that, '*Augustinian predestination was not taught for the first 300 years of the early church period*', she is simply mistaken or deliberately misleading people. For a start, unconditional election and sovereign predestination were both taught very clearly in the NT. Thus the apostles and their disciples (the sub apostolic fathers) taught these doctrines.

Predestination was routinely taught by various fathers and was eventually formal church doctrine.⁶ For example: the Council of Carthage (418) affirmed Augustine's teaching. It did not need formal ratification by the church before that date until Pelagius' heresy needed to be confronted.

Predestination continued to be taught in mediaeval times by the Thomists, though it was obscured through Aristotelian philosophy.

Gisborn also needs to differentiate between God's predestination of all things and his sovereign election; they are different.

Early church fathers that taught election and predestination

- Clemens Romanus, [Clement of Rome] Letter to Corinthians, 69.
- Barnabas, 70, Letters.
- Ignatius, 110 Letters, Letters to the Ephesians, Apologetic for Christ, Apud. Ib.

⁶ If the apostolic period is taken as the first century, the period of the early church is dated from the beginning of the second century. If Augustinian predestination became formal confessional doctrine in 418, it was clearly being widely taught long before that date.

- Justin Martyr, 150, Dialog cum Trypho, Letter to Zenam and Sereu., Letter to Zenam, Letter to Diognet.
- Minutius Felix, 170, Min. Felix, Octav.
- Irenaeus, 180, Against Heresies,
- Clemens Alexandrinus, [Clement of Alexandria] 190, Stromat., Recognitions, Paedagog.
- Tertullian, 200, De Corona, De Resurrect. Carnis., De Testimon. Animae., Against Marcion.
- Origen, 230, In Josuam Homil., Contra Cells., In Matthew Homil., In Rom, Comm, in Joannem.
- Cyprian, 250, Letter to Navatianum, Contra Cells., Letter to Donat., In Rom.,
- Lactantius, 320, Lactantius Divin, Inst.
- Novatianus, 250, Novatian, de Trinitate.
- Athanasius, 350, Synops. Sacr. Cript., In Josuam Homil., Against Arius.

We could add many more. Gisborn's claims (and those people she cribbed her data from) are worthless. It would be too tedious and too long-winded to quote all the relevant passages but I am able to do so. [I am tempted to write a paper on this but only a few would be interested in something so technical. If you are interested let me know.]

Here are a few sample quotes.

To the predestined ones before all ages, that is, before the world began, united and elect in a true passion, by the eternal will of the Father. [Ignatius, d. 98-117]

... hoping that some of you may be found of the elect number which through the grace that comes from the Lord of Sabaoth, is left or reserved for everlasting salvation. [Justin Martyr, c.100-165]

God has completed the number which He before determined with Himself, all those who are written, or ordained unto eternal life ... being predestined indeed according to the love of the Father. [Irenaeus, c.130-c.200]

You are those who are chosen from among men and as those who are predestined from among men, and in His own time called, faithful, and elect. [Clement of Alexandria, c.155-c.220]

In predestination the church of God has always existed. [Ambrose of Milan, c.339-97]

[NB until there was a controversy, doctrines were not formally stated in confessions with legal technical accuracy and precision. This is why God allowed the truth to be attacked, beginning with Christology and the Trinity. The more the church was attacked, the more precise and careful her theology became. Thus, although the early fathers agree with election and predestination, their choice of words is not always in keeping with later precise statements. They are written in seed form, but the truth is still discernible.]

NB Gisborn's quotations of fathers affirming free will means nothing. She clearly has no grasp of theology at all. Calvinists affirm that man has natural free will; clearly a man can freely chose what he wants for breakfast or what colour to paint his house. What Calvinists deny (along with the Bible) is that man has free will (self-determination) to do good or to do spiritual things. Total depravity means that man is completely unable to choose good or please God or even have faith; as Scripture affirms over and over, e.g. Rm 3:10-12. Thus

Tertullian in one place affirms ordinary free will but in other places denies man's ability to do good, as well as affirming a form of predestination.

Calvin's intolerance

Calvin was no different from most of the Reformers of his day, indeed he was no different from most people: kings, Catholic priests, academics and ordinary folk. Severe penalties for heresy and sedition were the norm; that is what people lived with for another 150 years or so.

Persecution of heretics was inherited from Roman Catholic law that had prevailed for centuries. It took time for certain aspects of the Gospel to be applied in society because the task of separating from Roman Catholicism was so huge; it could not be done in one generation without tearing nations apart and disrupting social cohesion. Modern critics accuse the Reformers of being wrong and mistaken, but there was a limit on what they could do in their lifetime. If all the principles of later Protestant liberty had been applied at first, anarchy would have resulted and the Reformation would have failed and the result would have been Romanist despotism. Populations literally believed that all human society would collapse and nations would be destroyed if heresy were not punished.

Thus many aspects of Romanist social and ecclesiastical policy continued. Severe punishments for heresy were one of these things; magistrates had the right to sentence heretics to death. However, in general, the Protestant Reformers were not as severe in their punishments as the Catholics.

Luther was originally against the execution of heretics because it was a spiritual sin that corporal punishment could not change. In 1518 he said, '*to burn heretics is contrary to the will of the Holy Spirit*'.⁷ However facing facts in later years he became more intolerant, urging banishment of heretics and did not challenge the Diet of Speyer in 1529 which decreed burning Anabaptists. In 1540-1 Luther approved of the laws of the empire regarding executing seditious (not just fanatical, who were to be banished) Anabaptists.

Mild mannered Melancthon stated after Luther's death that the Mosaic Law, with its strictures against heretics, was binding upon Christian states.

All the Swiss churches took violent measures against the Anabaptists; some were drowned.

Zwingli, usually liberal, supported the punishment of Anabaptists.

Archbishop Cranmer persuaded the reluctant King Edward VI to sign the death warrant of two Anabaptists, one of them being a woman.

In England under Elizabeth I, an Englishman could only be an Anglican; dissent was to be exterminated. When the Puritans were in power they ejected 2,000 ministers but when the Stuart Episcopalians came to power they returned the favour by ejecting 2,000 Puritans.

To single out Calvin alone for what was a point universally held is deceitful and low.

Paedobaptism

Every Protestant church and nation were paedobaptists at that time. The only credobaptists were the disparate Anabaptists. Thus there is nothing to defend here.

⁷ *Resol. De Indulgentiis, Conc. LXXX.*

Gisborn's singling out of Calvin in order to attack him for paedobaptist theology is disingenuous.

Examples of Gisborn's excesses

There is no evidence that Calvin was actually a born again believer.

Calvin's rule of terror.

Calvin's vile actions.

Conclusion

I have laboured this long enough. Gisborn is just another Arminian Calvin-basher that uses misrepresentation, false arguments, quotes out of context, history out of context, plagiarism, lies, exaggeration and poor scholarship. To say that Calvin was vile and cruel is such a serious slander that God will treat it with severe condemnation on the Day of Judgement; woe to such calumniates.

Calvin was human and made mistakes just like any of us; but he was also a tireless worker, a wonderful teacher, a genuinely good man, a charitable man, a devoted saint and worthy of praise as a servant of God. Shame on critics like Gisborn.

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