

***The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin.* Ed. Donald K. McKim. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 (xvii + 352 pp.) [ISBN 978-0-521-01672-8.]**

Cambridge Companions offer some of the most up to date treatments of major thinkers and movements by world experts in their field. This *Companion* to John Calvin is no different as eighteen scholars present overviews and comment on his work. The *Companion's* stated orientation is to 'students and those with little or no background in Calvin studies' (p. xiii), and aims to present for students and scholars alike an overview of the 'premier theologian of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation' (p. xiii). The *Companion* succeeds in its goal. Divided into four parts: Calvin's Life and Context (2 chapters), Calvin's Work (9 chapters), After Calvin (3 chapters), and Calvin Today (4 chapters), the *Companion* offers a wealth of information, judiciously presented and meticulously arranged.

The first two chapters offer reliable guides into Calvin's life and context. Alexandre Ganoczy opens the *Companion* with a broad yet detailed overview of the reformers life and significance. This is a well written chapter that deserves to be read by all entering into Calvin studies, although the lack of references in this chapter was a little disappointing. William Naphy's chapter on Calvin's Geneva offers a fascinating historical sketch of the context within which Calvin worked as he details geographical, economic, political, and religious factors that made Calvin's life and ministry so difficult in Geneva.

The main section of the *Companion* on Calvin's Work covers his writings, exegesis, theology, ethics, preaching, piety, social-ethical issues, politics, and controversies. Many of these chapters were simply good basic overviews which succeeded in introducing those new to the field a solid overview, but provided nothing new to scholars of Calvin or those familiar with his work. Other chapters, however, stood out as particularly lucid and offered something distinctive and useful for students and scholars alike. One such example is John Thompson's chapter on 'Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter.' Thompson places Calvin the humanist within the late medieval period of biblical exegesis and the humanist movement back to the sources, and highlights both how and why biblical interpretation functioned in Calvin's life. He writes, 'All in all, it is easy to see why the early reformers...found biblical interpretation easier and more urgent than ever. Expository preaching and writing

was not a diversion from the cares of the world, nor a mere antiquarianism, It instead served the defence of the gospel, the salvation of souls, and it was a matter of life and death' (p. 59).

John Hesselink's chapter on 'Calvin's Theology' is another standout of the *Companion*. Highlighting the fact that 'there is more to Calvin's theology than the *Institutes*, Nevertheless, it is here that we find the reformer's thought expressed in its most comprehensive and ordered manner' (p. 75), he provides a walk-through the various editions of the *Institutes*, pointing out key features, developments, and theological moves. The first 1536 edition is dubbed the 'Lutheran edition' due to Calvin's reliance on Luther for both its form and content. It is also dubbed a 'false start' by others, a charge Hesselink considers unfair given the fact that much of the first edition remains in the final edition. With the 1539 edition Hesselink thinks Calvin 'comes into his own' with the wider scope of the project and the inclusion of key theological topics omitted in 1536. Throughout the successive editions up to the final and definitive 1559 edition, the scope and purpose of the *Institutes* remained the same but the growth is significant.

After this brief survey of the various editions Hesselink then provides commentary on the nature of Calvin's theology and its enduring significance. In the first place, it is not a dogmatics or systematic theology in the modern sense. Rather, it is a religious book, a book of piety which has the potential to nourish the spiritual life. Further, 'The *Institutes* is not a speculative system of theology deduced from some overruling principle such as the sovereignty of God' (p. 77). Hesselink claims the *Institutes* is primarily concerned with the knowledge of God and of ourselves. He then surveys the various proposals for the structuring of the *Institutes* and whether or not Calvin works from a central dogma. Hesselink thinks 'it is not very helpful to single out one of these emphases as being 'the' distinctive characteristic of Calvin's theology' (p. 79). Instead Hesselink follows several German theologians and looks for several characteristic features of Calvin's theology that distinguish him from others. Ten distinctive features of Calvin's theology are specifically noted by Hesselink: 1) an appreciation for the created order, 2) God's providential care for this universe and its inhabitants, 3) the polemic against idolatry, 4) one covenant of grace, 5) the significance of the humanity of Christ, 6) the *triplex munus Christi* (threefold office of Christ), 7) the knowledge of faith, 8) the Lords Supper, 9) the unity and

catholicity of the Church, and 10) civil government as an instrument of God. Each point is dealt with judiciously and Hesselink shows his familiarity and mastery of Calvin's theology and writes as a seasoned sage. This is one of the best concise summaries of Calvin's theology one could hope to find.

The final section of the *Companion* entitled 'Calvin Today' includes four essays assessing the enduring legacy of Calvin, his theology, and his progeny. The final chapter is especially useful in assessing Calvin resources published between 1990 – 2004. This is a fitting conclusion to an extremely helpful *Companion* that offers insightful essays, lucid surveys, historical and theological studies, and as such orients students to the life and works of Calvin admirably.

Myk Habets

Francis S Collins. *The Language of God. A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. London: Free Press, 2006. 295 pp. hb. ISBN 978 0 7432 8639 8

The language of God argues persuasively that Christian faith and science are compatible. Collins opens this work with an account of his childhood within a liberal family in rural Virginia, his parents stimulating an inquiring mind. Entering Yale University as an agnostic Collins committed himself to the study of biology he applied himself to the study of medicine and, seeking satisfaction in helping others was challenged by a dying woman as to what he believed. The author now entered a period of agonising uncertainty as spiritual concerns intruded his thoughts. He was helped when he read *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis (who had also been an atheist). His journey from atheism to belief in God follows as a fascinating story as he tells how this decision was based on faith in Jesus Christ.

The author posits the question whether, in this modern era of cosmology, evolution and the human genome it is possible to experience a richly satisfying unanimity with both a scientific and spiritual worldview. Accepting the common descent of all living creatures Collins rejects materialistic Darwinism. Just as family studies can demonstrate relationships, so genetic studies confirm human relatedness to the rest of living things. The author explains the human DNA profile, showing how it closely resembles that of