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  - **Pierre Berthoud, Aix-en-Provence**
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## RÉSUMÉ

Après avoir évoqué brièvement la nature de l'hérésie par rapport à la centralité de la vérité au sein de la foi chrétienne, cet article aborde l'importance de la discipline ecclésiastique du point de vue réformé tout en se référant spécifiquement à la perspective équilibrée que J. Calvin exprime dans l'Institution de la religion chrétienne. Quelques aspects de la question sont traités :

- la nature, les marques et la raison d'être de l'Église, corps du Christ;

- le fondement et les différents aspects de l'autorité spirituelle de l'Église sans pour autant occulter les ministères dans leur rapport avec le sacerdoce universel ;  
- la mission essentielle de l'unité du corps du Christ qui cherche à faire face aux divisions et à vivre une saine diversité.

Dans la dernière partie des critères, à la fois doctrinale (J. Stott) et philosophiques (F.A. Schaeffer), sont mise en œuvre dans une tentative d'établir les limites de la tolérance au sein de l'Église contemporaine.

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## Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel beginnt mit einer kurzen Diskussion des Wesens von Häresien in Bezug zur Zentralität der Wahrheit innerhalb des christlichen Glaubens, und behandelt dann die Bedeutung der Kirchenzucht aus reformierter Perspektive mit besonderer Betonung des ausgewogenen Ansatzes von J. Calvin, den er in seiner Institutio dargelegt hat. Die folgenden Aspekte der Frage werden bedacht:

- das Wesen, die Charakteristika und die Endgültigkeit der Kirche als Leib Christi;

- die Grundlage und die verschiedenen Aspekte der geistlichen Autorität der Kirche, inklusive der Beziehung der speziellen Dienste zum allgemeinen Priestertum;

- den fundamentalen Aspekt der Einheit des Leibes Christi im Spannungsfeld zwischen Bewältigung von Spaltungen und gelebter gesunder Vielfalt.

Bei dem Versuch, Grenzen der Toleranz innerhalb der zeitgenössischen Kirche zu markieren, werden im abschließenden Teil des Artikels sowohl lehrmäßige (J. Stott) als auch Kriterien aus dem Bereich der Denkvoraussetzungen (F. A. Schaeffer), behandelt.

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## Introduction

Church discipline is probably one of the most unpopular subjects today. Within a society that has 'come of age' it is difficult

to accept that an institution, especially the church, could have the calling to question our erroneous thinking and our complacent life styles. For many of our contemporaries, church discipline brings to mind

the life stifling sanctions of the infallible decrees of the Church of Rome or the paralysing legalism of many protestant communities. In the midst of a society characterised by professional, administrative and social constraints, individual freedom tends to become for many the ultimate value, a sanctuary that suffers no intrusion, particularly when church authorities initiate such an intrusion.

But if a proper understanding of God's truth, as he has communicated it in Scripture, is vital to our having a proper world and life view, to the appropriation of salvation as it is offered in Jesus Christ and to the enacting of a new life style rooted in the working of the Holy Spirit, then we cannot avoid the issue. Does not the Lord himself establish the distinctiveness and separateness of the church when he says: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men (Matt 5.13).'<sup>1</sup>

The centrality of truth within the Christian faith compels us, therefore, to consider the question of heresy within the church as it seeks to persevere in faithfulness to its Lord. Since the notion of heresy has negative connotations within contemporary culture, and has been substantially diluted and often ignored in non-Evangelical churches, we will attempt to define it in order to prevent unnecessary misunderstandings. Heresy involves doctrinal perversion and deviation from the fundamental truths taught by Scripture and the Orthodox Christian Church. It includes an obstinate persistency in error and its active propagation. It is often distinguished from schism or faction. But Calvin in his controversy with the Roman Catholics plays down this distinction. He maintains that both heretics and schismatics undermine the unity of the church. 'The name of heretics and schismatics is applied to those who, by dissenting from the church, destroy its communion. Two chains hold this communion together—viz. consent in sound doctrine and brotherly charity.' The reformer further argues that 'this union of charity so depends on unity of faith,

as to have in it its beginning, its end, in fine, its only rule.'<sup>2</sup> This implies that faction and division can, for carnal reasons also be considered a doctrinal offence and therefore be included in the concept of heresy. With Augustine we can conclude that heresy upholds Scripture that it misinterprets; it professes to be of the household of faith which it troubles with its strife; it claims to pay reverence to the truth of apostolic tradition, but only substitutes its own traditions for those that have their roots in the apostolic faith.<sup>3</sup>

As we pursue this present study, we will seek to touch on some aspects of the question at hand. We will deal, as has been suggested, with the place and significance of church discipline from a Reformed perspective. The following topics will be discussed: the church, its nature, characteristics and finality; spiritual authority as well as unity and diversity within the church. As we look on the contemporary scene we will emphasise the importance of referring to doctrinal as well as to presuppositional and conceptual criteria in our endeavour to establish limits to tolerance within the church. Indeed it is crucial also to take into consideration the concept of the divided field of knowledge and its implications for it remains one of the major characteristics of our culture.

### **The Church, its nature characteristics and finality**

The Church as the body of Christ has two aspects to it. On one hand, the Church is invisible and made up of the elect both alive and dead. According to J. Calvin, this is 'the Church as it really is before God, into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are sons of God, and by sanctification of the Spirit true members of Christ. In this case it not only comprehends the saints who dwell on the earth, but all the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world'.<sup>4</sup> This is where the notion of the communion of the saints takes its plenary meaning. On the other hand the Church is visible and made up of the Christians who are assembled within the local church community (par-

ish). In this case, continues the reformer, 'it designates the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ, who by baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord's supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity, agree in holding the word of the Lord, and observe the ministry which Christ has appointed for the preaching of it. In this church there are several hypocrites<sup>5</sup> who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance. . . who are tolerated for a time, either because their guilt cannot be legally established, or because due strictness of discipline is not always observed. Hence, as it is necessary to believe the invisible church, which is manifest to the eye of God only, so we are also enjoined to regard this church which is so called with reference to man, and to cultivate its communion.'<sup>6</sup> It is important to emphasise that we are dealing here with two aspects of the same body, the church as God sees it and as it appears to us. Its distinguishing feature is to have Jesus-Christ as its head, and as a consequence to honour and serve him.

The visible and local church is therefore the church of Christ in the midst of the world, his body as it appears on earth, even though it may not be perfect and without blemish. Indeed it is not possible to discriminate with total certainty between the justified and the reprobate, between the faithful and the hypocrites. Furthermore, the believers themselves continue to sin until the end of their lives on earth. This means that the visible church, not being made up of saints only, cannot be considered as perfect. But since it is important to know who are his sons, God has instituted, says Calvin, 'the judgement of charity, by which we acknowledge all as members of the church who by confession of faith, regularity of conduct, and participation in the sacraments, unite with us in acknowledging the same God and Christ.'<sup>7</sup> Even then the quality of the individual members would not be sufficient for us to recognise that a church has Jesus Christ as its head and is serving him in truth. Such criteria would be too subjective. More objective criteria need to be found. They are the means

of grace that Jesus Christ has instituted: the faithful preaching of the word and the proper administration of the sacraments. Let us quote Calvin again: 'Whenever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the church of God has some existence, since his promise cannot fail (cf. Matt 18.20).'<sup>8</sup> In the words of F. Wendel 'the church is established when it is founded upon the communion with Christ which is externally shown by the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.'<sup>9</sup>

We can now further consider the ministry of the church. It is called to guide, instruct and thereby to contribute to the sanctification of its members. In other words, it is to encourage an individual and community life style that is in harmony with the written and living Word and a reflection of God's holiness, both his justice and love.

This ministry implies a church order, derived from the lordship of Christ over the community of believers and from the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which seeks to be in conformity with the principles laid down in the Scriptures. The diversity of ministries in the local church is thus related to both the priesthood of believers and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Calvin distinguishes between temporary and permanent ministries. Among the ordinary functions, which are to be exercised in the church, he mentions the pastor, the teacher, the presbyter and the deacon. It is not our concern to enter into a detailed discussion of this question, but simply to recall some points of interest: the pastor and the teacher have the responsibility of teaching the divine doctrine and of interpreting the Scriptures. Though these two functions seem to overlap, Calvin does attempt a distinction when he says: '. . . I think there is this difference that teachers preside not over discipline, or the administration of the sacraments, or admonitions, or exhortations, but the interpretation of Scripture only, in order that pure and sound doctrine may be maintained among believers. But

all these are embraced in the pastoral office.<sup>10</sup> Notice the importance of 'pure and sound doctrine' being dispensed within the church. This implies that the pastor and the teacher adhere to the fundamentals of the Christian faith as they are expressed in Scripture and specifically in the teachings of the Apostles.

The presbyter's task was to govern the church and to exercise discipline. The presbytery includes both pastor and teacher, the pastor presiding over the governing body and thus exercising the ministry of unity within the local church in conjunction with the other elders. Here the emphasis is on both the integrity of doctrine and of life style. It is important to note though that discipline is not one of the marks of the true church. It is not part of the *esse* of the church; it contributes significantly to its *bene esse*. Its ultimate aim is to contribute to the maturity of the people of God. As F. Wendel says: 'Though the church remains imperfect as long as it lives on earth, it must nevertheless work without ceasing at its own sanctification, as well as of each of its individual members.'<sup>11</sup>

In summary the church, through these four basic ministries, is enabled to exercise its calling: to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments, to teach Christian doctrine, to encourage and admonish the faithful and to practice brotherly love. All this in view of the growth and maturity of the body of Christ and its individual members, as well as the furthering of the Gospel and expanding of the kingdom.

### **Spiritual authority of the church**

This ministry, this service of edification, the church is to enact because of its spiritual authority. As Calvin says this 'spiritual power consists either in doctrine, or jurisdiction or in enacting laws.'<sup>12</sup> Its basis and strength lie in the recognition of the unique and ultimate authority of Scripture. In matters of doctrine, Scripture alone is infallible as it interprets itself. As the church and its officers submit to Christ, the living word of God and to Scripture, the written word of God, their

teaching is binding. But this also means that it is the duty of each believer to check that the teaching he receives is true to Scripture according to the analogy of faith. As A. Lecerf argues, Calvin strikes a judicious balance between the authority of the church and the responsibility of the individual. All parties involved are to submit in humility to one another and to the ultimate authority of the living and written word of God.<sup>13</sup> As to the ecclesiastical ordinances, they should be inspired by biblical principles alone and ought to be conceived so that 'everything in the church 'be done in a fitting and orderly way' (Cor 14.40), enhancing piety and leading the believer to Christ. In the area of external discipline and ceremonies the rules and regulations should therefore rest on biblical grounds, but be enacted in practice according to the 'varying circumstances of each age and nation.'<sup>14</sup> The reformer is very careful though to specify that they must not become an end in themselves: 'In these ordinances, however, we must always attend to the exception, that they must not be thought necessary to salvation, nor lay the conscience under a religious obligation; they must not be compared to the worship of 'God, nor substituted for piety.'<sup>15</sup>

As we have noted the presbytery had the responsibility of exercising discipline within the local assembly. The officers are not called to read the hearts of the church members in order to discern between the true believers and the hypocrites but they are not to tolerate disorder and scandal, be it in the fields of doctrine or conduct, within the covenant community. All that could touch on one's communion with Jesus Christ and weaken it, all that could offend, sadden and dishonour the head and Lord of the church, was to be dispensed with. In a fallen world, the practice of discipline is a means the Holy Spirit uses in order for the church of Christ to keep its true character, to persevere in the integrity of its teaching and to stimulate sanctification. Here again Calvin is careful to tone down its jurisdictional dimension and its coercive nature by underlining its pedagogical and therefore educational role. In agreement with Augustine he argues that in Scripture 'the

correction of a brother's fault is enjoined to be done with moderation without impairing the sincerity of love or breaking the bond of peace.<sup>16</sup> Though discipline, as has been indicated is not to be considered as a mark of the church, it contributes significantly to its edification.

In summary I would like to leave you this quote from the introductory epistle to the 1666 edition of the Discipline of the Reformed churches in France written by M. D'Huisseau:

'Doctrine and discipline are the sacred ties of the Holy assembly of believers which is the church; the two principles of all the beautiful and salutary motions that the members of this mysterious Body shows forth. Doctrine teaches what the Christian is to believe and do; discipline teaches him how to do it. Doctrine inspires the heart of the believer with holy thought, the most firm and generous resolutions; discipline regulates all its external conduct as well as its circumstances. In one word, Doctrine is the life (*âme*) which animates the church; discipline concludes in adding its final features and its glorious lineaments which make it so beautiful and loving.'

### **Unity and diversity within the church**

From what we have just discussed we can infer that truth has a significant place within the theological perspectives stemming from the Reformation. In fact, doctrine, moral integrity and sanctification are woven together and are dependent on the lordship of Christ and the communion we have in Him. It is not surprising since both the written and living truth are central to the historical Christian tradition which the reformers were careful to uphold in their conflict with the Church of Rome. But it is important to remember that the theological and spiritual awakening was intended to be a movement of reformation within the existing church. D'Huisseau makes an interesting comment concerning the failure of this noble design and the establishment of new churches. He argues that it was only after having exhausted

every possible solution to avoid such a painful separation that his forefathers found themselves constrained to leave the communion of Rome.<sup>18</sup> It is in fact possible to say that in a way, the reformation was a failure since it did not bring about the anticipated change within the church and that it produced division.<sup>19</sup> But it must be stressed that the reformers chose separation and the raising up of new churches only reluctantly. Once the decision made it was crucial then to clarify the system of doctrine and to establish a discipline that was to characterise the new assemblies. In fact, the reformed churches of France accepted both the Confession of Faith and the Discipline at the Synod of Paris in 1559.<sup>20</sup> In the face of the communion of the Church of Rome, the communion of the Reformed churches had been set up and we can be thankful for all it has brought to the following generations even until today in France and beyond.

We must not forget though that that the reformers strove for unity, especially between the new church families that had been established, such as the reformed and the Lutheran. They were in fact very severe towards the divisive and sectarian state of mind that they considered a manifestation of the sinfulness of the individual or of the community. So in the practice of discipline for example, Calvin insisted that the church, aware of its misery and of its own sin, should show caution and moderation. It should 'distinguish between those that are still at a distance but are walking towards Christ and those who have deliberately turned their backs to him.'<sup>21</sup> Calvin, while quoting Augustine goes as far as saying: 'Every pious reason and mode of ecclesiastical discipline ought always to have regard to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This the apostle commands us to keep by bearing mutually with each other. If it is not kept, the medicine of discipline begins to be not only superfluous, but even pernicious, and therefore ceases to be medicine.'<sup>22</sup> In a letter to Cranmer, Calvin laments the fact that between the different Reformation churches there is hardly any human fellowship let alone the shared communion

that all the members of Christ profess with their lips but very few in fact seek to cultivate genuinely.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the tearing apart of the body of Christ, be it schisms or harshness in correction, can only sadden the Holy Spirit and offend the Lord of the church.

Furthermore, Calvin distinguishes in his struggle to maintain the unity of the church between the articles that are necessary to the preservation of the marks of a true and living church and those that are object of controversy between the churches and yet these differences of understanding do not touch on the essential unity given to the believers in Christ.<sup>24</sup> It is not that the reformer 'wishes to patronise even the minute errors' but that we 'are not on account of every minute difference to abandon a church, provided it retain sound and unimpaired the fundamental doctrine of our salvation and keep the use of the sacraments instituted by the Lord.'<sup>25</sup> This means that the churches should not consider separation and therefore undermine the unity of the church on matters that are not essential. This would be all the more true for individual members.

Is it possible to identify those fundamentals which are not negotiable and which, if not respected, endanger the integrity and authority of the church as 'the pillar of the truth' and the 'tabernacle of the living God?' Calvin gives some indications when he says; 'some doctrines are so necessary to be known, that all must hold them to be fixed and undoubted as the proper essentials of religion: for instance, that God is one that Christ is God and the Son of God, that our salvation depends on the mercy of God and the like.'<sup>26</sup> In an even more concise formula, he writes in his Commentary on Corinthians: 'The fundamental doctrine, which it were unlawful to undermine, is that we learn Christ; for Christ is the only foundation of the church.' He who has learned Christ, adds the reformer, 'is already complete in the whole system of heavenly doctrine.'<sup>27</sup> To put it in Lecerf's words, the doctrines which are fundamental are those which express 'the formal principle of the authority of Scripture and the material principle of salvation by grace

(*le salut gratuit*).<sup>28</sup>

But how can a doctrine or a practice be termed fundamental? It is the life of faith which brings the answer. Lecerf's definition of faith is appropriate here: 'Faith designates the outcome of the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit which not only leads the sinner to receive, without doubt, the revealed truths in Scripture, but also consists mainly in the steady and sure knowledge of the love of God, as it is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, in the promises of the Gospel. This knowledge is never separated from love (*charité*) and hope.'<sup>29</sup>

Calvin's position being therefore confessional, there are limits which cannot be transgressed. This means that true and substantial communion between churches can only exist if they come to a common understanding of the foundation of faith, and therefore agree on the basic Christian truths. If this is not the case and dissent is blatant, this would involve a breach of communion and therefore render separation a responsible and legitimate act.

According to the Reformed perspective, the fundamental articles are therefore those which rightfully make clear the Gospel: 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (Jn 3.16). The early church creeds, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds are an accurate summary of God's message of salvation as it is stated in Scripture and specifically in the Apostles' teachings. The acknowledgement of these articles is essential to the continuation of 'the life of the church.' But if we are to think in terms of its 'spiritual health,' of its 'normal state of being' then we must also include as fundamental the confessions of faith and the catechism<sup>30</sup>—their basic content—that the Reformation has passed down to us. Under the Lordship of the Trinitarian God and in the light of the authority of Scripture, these articles are the wise foundation of faith contributing to its nurture and growth.

### **The contemporary scene**

Some might wonder if the principles put

forth in this paper are still applicable within the contemporary cultural environment, characterised by secularisation, relativism, pluralism and now the ambiguous inter religious dialogue. Especially when one considers the state of the Christian churches whether they are established multitudinous, pluralistic and yet affirming to be confessional,<sup>31</sup> or evangelical confessional churches.

In a recent book, *Evangelical Truth, a personal plea for unity*, J. Stott presents a similar approach as the one put forward by the reformers. In his plea for evangelical truth which he argues is apostolic, in continuation with historic Christianity and distinct from a warped view of fundamentalism, he makes a clear distinction between 'the primary and the secondary, between what belongs to the centre and what lies somewhere between the centre and the circumference.'<sup>32</sup> His approach is Trinitarian and therefore relates the essentials to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. His suggestion is 'to limit the evangelical priorities to three, namely *the revealing initiative of God the Father, the redeeming work of God the Son, and the transforming ministry of God the Holy Spirit*. All the other evangelical essentials will then find an appropriate place somewhere under this threefold or Trinitarian rubric.' These three priorities correspond to the first three of the six fundamentals J. I. Packer enumerates: The supremacy of Holy Scripture (because of its unique inspiration); the majesty of Jesus Christ (the God man who died as a sacrifice for sin); the Lordship of the Holy Spirit (who exercises a variety of vital ministries). The last three—the necessity of conversion (a direct encounter with God effected by God alone); the priority of evangelism (witness being an expression of worship); the importance of fellowship (the church being essentially a living community of believers)—are to be understood according to J. Stott not as an 'addition' but as an elaboration of the preceding points.<sup>33</sup>

Within the context of the historical Christian faith and in the light of the Reformed perspective as we have summarised it, J. Stott's Trinitarian proposal

establishes clear limits to tolerance within the church. In fact, these fundamental truths are not negotiable.<sup>34</sup> But 'whenever equally biblical Christians who are equally anxious to understand the teaching of Scripture and to submit to its authority, reach different conclusions, we should deduce that evidently Scripture is not crystal clear in this matter, and therefore we can afford to give one another liberty. We can also hope—through prayer, study and discussion—to grow in our understanding and so in our agreement'.<sup>35</sup> We thus have both form and freedom, limits and an appeal to responsibility.

But within the context of our present culture we need to go a step further. One of the characteristics of modern humanism is its acceptance of the divided field of knowledge inherited from E. Kant and which has far reaching implications not only in the area of knowledge, but also in the interpretation of Scripture. It can be very tempting, even for evangelicals, to adopt this approach that implies a total separation between the phenomenal and the noumenal, between the sphere of reason and faith. To adopt this dichotomy means making concessions to the relativism of the modern mind. The biblical concept of revelation and truth implies a united field of knowledge. This concept has far reaching consequences in the area of being, epistemology and morals. It is a prerequisite to a proper understanding of the objective existence of God, of revelation as He has communicated it in the categories of human language and of the significance of moral absolutes.

F. A. Schaeffer, in a short study that is not well known, has attempted to deal with the question of the limits of tolerance from this angle while seeking to maintain a balance between form and freedom. Rather than dealing with specific doctrines, he seeks to identify some of the fundamental concepts inherent to the historic Christian faith.<sup>36</sup> The author compares Christianity to a circle which provides form. He then adds: 'Within this circle there is freedom to move in terms of understanding and expression. Christianity is a circle with definite limits, limits which tend to be like twin cliffs. We find ourselves in danger of



falling off one side or the other, that is, we have to be careful not to avoid one sort of doctrinal error by backing off into the opposite one.<sup>37</sup>

Schaeffer presents seven fundamental concepts which he considers to be absolute limits as one seeks to really grasp the nature of Christian truth. We shall briefly enumerate them:

- 1) *God and significance*: God exists and he is free; he did not have to create. On the other hand, man can glorify God. What he does makes a difference to God.
- 2) *Chance and history*: There is no chance behind God who created all things out of nothing. On the other hand, history has meaning. The rational, moral creatures (angels and men) are not programmed; they can influence history by choice. Schaeffer draws three corollaries: the things God has made have an objective existence; having created history God chooses to act into it – to Him history has meaning; since the Fall it is the Holy Spirit that brings a person to salvation and yet there is a conscious side to justification.
- 3) *Unity and diversity*: the persons of the trinity must be kept distinct ontologically without forsaking unity within God (Jn 17.24). Further, the Creator and the creature must remain distinct. This is apparent in Jesus Christ. He is one person and yet he has two natures, human and divine. On a different level this is also true of each believer: he is distinct from the creator, and yet he experiences a mystical union with the Lord. Furthermore, in the church the individual Christians are unified as the body of Christ.
- 4) *Holiness and love*: God has a character and his holiness is part of his character. God's holiness involves moral content. On the other hand, God is love, but this love has the truths and the laws of God's revelation lay down the tracks for it. This has far reaching consequences for both the individual and the church in the area of doctrine and life.
- 5) *Objectivity and subjectivity of history*: the Christian faith is rooted within his-

tory, within space and time. This is true of the Fall in the Garden of Eden which reminds us, if need be, that we live in an abnormal world, under the shadow of death. But this is also true of Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension. On the other hand, these historical facts and doctrines are also to have an existential meaning in our present lives.

- 6) *Justification and sanctification*: justification is once-for-all and introduces the believer into a significant Christian life. Sanctification is a process sometimes accompanied by crises which will bring greater maturity to the believer in his walk with the living God. Conscious of his sinfulness, the Christian nevertheless continues to strive for perfection.
- 7) *Absolute right and wrong*: there is such a thing as right and wrong in systems. This is also true of churches. But when critical evaluations are made, it is important to practice compassion and be aware that no one is consistent in his Christian thinking. This has far-reaching consequences in the way we consider for example churches or systems of doctrines. Within the sphere of the absolute limits there is room for diversity both in understanding and faithfulness.<sup>38</sup>

This double approach with its emphasis on both the presuppositional-conceptual and doctrinal aspects of the Christian faith can help us better understand and counter the modern theological trends that have so diluted the specific identity of the church. It can help us to respond and to refute with pertinence the neo-Christian thought that tends to undermine the existence and the personality of God, the divine inspiration and objective aspect of biblical revelation as well as the divine nature and the substitutionary atonement of Christ Jesus. If the church is to have a renewed impact upon our secularised culture we must have the courage to stand firmly on the foundation of the written and living Word of God and strive for an ever greater purity of the church as it seeks to fulfil its calling to be the bride of Christ. But as the covenant community endeavours to practice

truth and pursue holiness and perfection it will only contribute to the maturity of its members, be credible and the salt of the earth if compassion is the ultimate motivation of its active involvement in the midst of the present crisis. As we conclude let me leave you a famous proverb that captures the heart of the matter in a nutshell:

'In truth unity, in doubtful matters (non-essentials) liberty, in all things charity.'

## Notes

- 1 J. G. Machen, 'The Separateness of the church,' in *God Transcendent*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh 1982 (1949), p 104.
- 2 J Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.2.5 vol. II, translated by H. Beveridge, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids) 1983 p 309. In this paper we shall seek to draw on Calvin's major work in dealing with the question at hand.
- 3 'Heresy' in *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology*. Ed. J. H. Blunt, Ringtons (London), 1872, pp. 306-307. Cf. also B. Damarest, *New Dictionary of Theology*. Ed. S. B. Ferguson, D. F. Wright, J. I. Packer, I.V.P. Leicester 1988, pp. 291-193. Some have considered the history of heresies as another way of looking at the history of the church. Cf. H.O.J. Brown, *Heresy And Orthodoxy in the History of the Church*. Hendrickson, Peabody, (U.S.A.) 1998.
- 4 J. Calvin, *ibid* IV, 1, 7, vol. II, p. 288.
- 5 Beveridge has 'a very large mixture of hypocrites.'
- 6 *Ibid* p. 288.
- 7 *Ibid* IV, 1, 8 p. 288.
- 8 *Ibid* IV, 1, 9 p. 289.
- 9 F. Wendel, *Calvin, sources et évolution de sa pensée*. Labor et Fides, Genève 1985, pp. 221-237, specifically p. 226.
- 10 J. Calvin, *op. cit.* IV. 3.4 p. 319.
- 11 F. Wendel, *op. cit.* p. 288.
- 12 J. Calvin, *op. cit.* IV 8.1. p. 389. The spiritual power is to be distinguished from the temporal power, which is the prerogative of the political institution. Both institutions are complementary as they exercise authority and are to seek wisdom and guidance from Scripture itself.
- 13 A. Lecerf, 'La doctrine de l'Eglise dans Calvin' in *Etudes calvinistes*, Ed Kerygma (Aix-en-Provence) 1999 (1949) pp. 66, 67.
- 14 J. Calvin, *op. cit.* IV 10. 27-32 pp. 433-437.
- 15 *Ibid* p. 434. For the last sentence the French version reads: 'ou qu'on n'y constitue l'honneur et le service de Dieu, comme si la vraie piété y était située.' In 1559, the Discipline of the Reformed Churches of France numbered 40 articles. A century later the Synod of Loudun (1659) established a new version including 14 chapters and 252 articles! The titles of the chapters are as follows: Pastors; Schools; Elders and deacons; The deacons and the welfare of the poor; The presbyteries; The union of churches; Debates (*colloques*); Regional synods; National synods; Church worship; Baptism; The Lord's Supper; Weddings; miscellaneous rules.
- 16 *Ibid* IV 12.12 p. 461.
- 17 M. D'Huisseau, 'A messieurs les Pasteurs' in *La Discipline des Eglises en France* (1666) p. 1.
- 18 *Ibid* p 1.
- 19 Cf. P. Courthial, and his comments on the articles regarding the Church in the Gallican Confession of faith. P. Courthial, *La Confession de Foi de la Rochelle*, Commentaire, Kerygma, Aix en Provence, pp. 88-95.
- 20 D'Huisseau, *op. cit.* pp. 1, 2.
- 21 A. Lecerf, 'L'unité de l'Eglise et le principe formel du Protestantisme' in *Introduction à la dogmatique réformée*. Editions Kerygma et APEB, Aix en Provence 1999 (1938) vol. II, p 216.
- 22 J. Calvin *op. cit.* IV.12.11 p 460.
- 23 Cf. F. Wendel *op. cit.* p 236.
- 24 Cf. A. Lecerf, 'La doctrine de l'Eglise. . .' p 64-68; 'L'unité de l'Eglise. . .' pp. 220-226 ; F. Wendel, *op. cit.* pp. 236-37.
- 25 J. Calvin, *op. cit.* IV.1.12 p. 291.
- 26 *Ibid.* p. 291
- 27 J. Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, vol. 1 translated by J. Pringle. Eerdmans (Grand Rapids), 1948, pp. 135, 136.
- 28 A. Lecerf, 'L'unité de l'Eglise. . .' p 222.
- 29 *Ibid*, p 225.
- 30 The catechism contains an exposition in the light of Scripture of the Apostles' creed, the Decalogue, the Lord's Prayer and the sacraments. Cf. in particular A. Lecerf 'L'unité. . .', pp. 221 and 225.
- 31 In France, the Reformed Church of France claims to be a confessing church (it adheres to the Gallican Confession of Faith, at least in spirit), but it allows in practice for a diversity of doctrines which includes for

example a unitarian concept of God, the non recognition of the divinity of Christ and of his atoning work at the cross even among its elders and pastors! A similar diversity is found on ethical questions.

- 32 J. Stott, *Evangelical Truth, a personal plea for unity*. Inter Varsity Press, Leicester (G.B.) 1999, p 28.
- 33 Ibid pp. 26-28.
- 34 Ibid p 143.
- 35 Ibid p. 142. The author establishes a list of twelve suggestions which he includes in the category of the adiaphora. They touch

on secondary points of doctrine and questions of church discipline. Cf. pp. 142, 143.

- 36 F. A. Schaeffer, 'The Absolute Limits' in *The Complete Works*, vol. 4. Crossway Books, Wheaton (U.S.A.) 1996 (1982), pp. 165-179.
- 37 Ibid p. 179.
- 38 Ibid pp. 167-178. Schaeffer distinguishes between the intrinsic concepts and concepts that are valid only since the fall. The first four are intrinsic (except for the 3rd corollary of the 4th concept) and therefore valid before and after the fall.

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