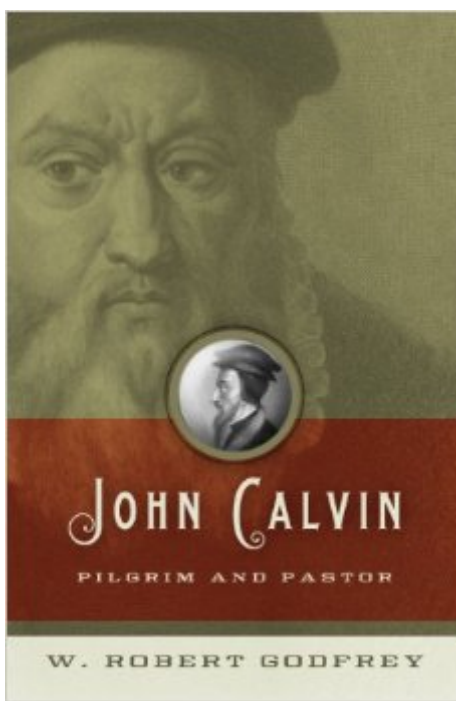


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John Calvin: Pilgrim And Pastor



Synopsis

An introduction to the essential life and thought of one of history's most influential theologians, who considered himself first and foremost a pilgrim and a pastor. July 10, 2009, marks the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. As controversial as he was influential, his critics have named a judgmental and joyless attitude after him, while his admirers celebrate him as the principal theologian of Reformed Christianity. Yet his impact is unmistakable—a primary developer of western civilization whose life and work have deeply affected five centuries' worth of pastors, scholars, and individuals. What will surprise the readers of this book, however, is that Calvin did not live primarily to influence future generations. Rather, he considered himself first and foremost a spiritual pilgrim and a minister of the Word in the church of his day. It was from that "essential" Calvin that all his influence flowed. Here is an introduction to Calvin's life and thought and essence: a man who moved people not through the power of personality but through passion for the Word, a man who sought to serve the gospel in the most humble of roles.

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Customer Reviews

We oftentimes ask people "who are you" and we get pleasantries as answer, "OK, "Fine" etc. But this book takes under the surface of John Calvin and tell us the frustrations of a man just like us. It tells us his grief in the death of his wife and child. It describes the persecution from the people of Geneva and from the Popish Church. In a year when publishers went wild with books on John Calvin's 500th Birthday, I admit, I was leery of another book on John Calvin. But after hearing Godfrey describe his

book and the track he took to describe this man (the interview aired on the 'the White Horse Inn') I was intrigued to see a book that would tell me the formation of Calvin's theology in the midst of the pilgrim life led by John Calvin. I was not disappointed. The new book takes you to the familiar history of Calvin's plan for one night in Geneva and it makes sure that even the newest reader would grasp the life of John Calvin. But then comes the struggles, the depression, the fights with the City Council, the exile, the writings and revisions of texts and of course the five-fold revision of the two volumes that changed the map of Christian history--the Institutes. The details are all there, but the details are not just facts, it is so beautifully interwoven with the truth of real life in 16th century Europe. In addition, Godfrey adds some new materials to the personal life of Calvin that are rarely added by other authors. Calvin is too frequently viewed in many volumes as a scholar, writer, and theologian. But now we see the pilgrim, the pastor, the father, the exile, the shepherd (who was prevented from visiting his flock by his own elders during the great plague in order to save his life so shepherd more people.

There are not too many men whose five hundredth birthday is a cause for remembrance, not to mention celebration. Yet here we are, five hundred years after the birth of John Calvin, witnessing widespread celebration of his birth. This year we see many conferences dedicated to understanding Calvin's impact on the church and on society, even centuries later, and we see the publication of many books looking at the man and his theology. It strikes me as a strange oversight that we do not yet have a definitive biography of Calvin (as Marsden has done for Edwards, as Dallimore has done for Whitefield, as Murray has done for Lloyd-Jones, and so on) and I am hoping that this year will end the drought--that by year's end we will have that one biography that will stand for many years as the definitive life of Calvin. With several biographies set for release in 2009, one would think this ought to be the year. Into the fray steps Robert Godfrey with John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor. He begins by saying "Today for many people the name of John Calvin is known only in a vague sense and has become a label for attitudes that are negative, judgmental, and joyless. Historians, by contrast, know that John Calvin was one of the most remarkable men who lived in the last five hundred years and that his influence on the development of the modern western world has been immense." Indeed, Calvin's influence is felt in the rise of democracy, capitalism and even in modern science. "The life and work of John Calvin have always been controversial as well as influential. Some have loved him, and some have hated him. All would agree that he was a man with a brilliant mind and a powerful will who had a profound impact on the development of western civilization. But was the impact positive or negative?

John Calvin was a man whose heart beat for God, a true disciple of Jesus Christ. That is the impression with which you should leave this book, regardless of your opinions of his theology. This short biographical work, which covers essential elements of Calvin's theology, is a great way to be introduced to the Reformer. Godfrey introduces Calvin the humble. This was not a man who sought the ministry--he wanted to be a scholar, living in peace and quiet! Yet, twice he was accosted by fellow Christians who saw in him the gift of preaching and called him to pastoral office. At his death, by his own desire, no great tomb or mausoleum was erected for him, no edifice to say, "This was a great man!" Godfrey also shows us Calvin the tireless worker. He wrote numerous letters--and not only to statesmen (such as the preface to his famous "Institutes of the Christian Religion", addressed to the king of France), but to common parishioners in Geneva and elsewhere, letters of encouragement and exhortation. He preached, on a weekly basis, many more sermons--and original, distinct ones at that--than the average pastor today, I suspect. He was involved in the religious life of his congregation (indeed, his congregations plural, as he rotated through the churches in the city) at every level--including the catechesis, or teaching, of the children. Calvin was a busy man. We see, in this book, Calvin the product of his age. The account of Servetus, burned at the stake for heresy, seems to be a perennial favorite for those who dislike Calvin and the doctrines he taught.

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