

bislang ins Englische übersetzt (Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the Time of Calvin, hg. von M. Wallace McDonald, Grand Rapids 2000). Die Fortsetzung dieser Übersetzung wäre wünschenswert, damit diese wichtigen Quellen für eine breitere Leserschaft zugänglich werden. Denn ihre Erforschung, sei es aus theologischer Sicht besonders im Rahmen der reformierten Tradition, oder aus historischer Perspektive, v.a. im Rahmen der sogenannten »Social History«, steht genauso wie deren Edition noch in den Anfängen.

*Pierrick Hildebrand, Zürich*

*Jon Balsarak, John Calvin as Sixteenth-Century Prophet, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, XIII & 208 p. – ISBN 978-0-19-870325-9.*

The work here considered by Jon Balsarak is comprised of six chapters, a bibliography, and an index. The contents of the volume by chapter are 1. The “I” of Calvin; 2. Prophets and Prophecy up to Calvin; 3. Calvin, the Prophet; 4. Calvin, the Prophets, and the French (Holy) Wars; 5. War and Calvin’s Purpose in his Training Lectures; and 6. Reducing the World to Order.

The purpose of Balsarak’s volume is to “explore Calvin’s psychology and, specifically, his sense of prophetic vocation and authority” (p. 4). That may seem, on its face, to be something as easily done as said but as most know, delving into the sometimes cavernous recesses of Calvin’s inner world is perilous even in the best of times and under the clearest of circumstances. Calvin was an exceptionally complex man. Nonetheless, and understanding quite clearly the perils and dangers involved, Balsarak plunges in and does an exceptionally, no, an extraordinarily good job of achieving his purpose. Readers of this important work will know Calvin better at least in terms of his self understanding as a spokesman for God than they did before reading it, even if they are top level Calvin specialists. That is to say, our author teaches the teachers here.

In chapter one, then, we learn a great deal about Calvin’s self understanding and the groundwork is laid for our own understanding of his works and words as discussed in the following

chapters. The chief issue is whether Calvin saw himself as a modern day Prophet and the answer is, appropriately, ambiguous. On the one hand Calvin speaks as if prophecy still existed in his day (in his comments on Romans 12:6) and on the other in his 1543 Institutes “he seems simply not to know whether prophets exist in his own day or not” (p. 11). Chapter two takes us into the wider world of the Church and its understanding of and application of “prophecy” from the patristic era to the heady days of the Genevan Reformer. Chapters three, four, and five then apply what has been discovered in the first two chapters to Calvin’s self understanding. Accordingly “the portrait produced is of a Calvin who fits within a non-mystical, non-apocalyptic prophetic tradition which aligned itself with the Old Testament prophets, whom he saw as authoritative biblical interpreters” (p. 15). And therein lies the key, I believe, to understanding Calvin’s entire oeuvre. He saw himself as a proclaimer of the Divine Word and authorized as such just as had been the Prophets. For that reason what he said had the same sort of authority as their words because, at the end of the day, they were inspired words. Here we have, I think, Calvin’s very core and Balsarak is to be thanked for peeling away the various layers of the onion of Calvin’s mystique and exposing the inner workings of the great man.

Throughout, Balsarak demonstrates a deep and extensive knowledge of Calvin’s work in both Latin and French. His translations are exquisite. But he is not limited to mere specialization in Calvin. He has not been trapped in an examination of “the entrails of the gnat” but rather also demonstrates an utterly encyclopedic grasp of the Reformation’s chief representatives *in toto*. For instance, he writes: “Theologians like Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Musculus studied and worshiped in, and reacted to, an environment which they found to be profoundly corrupt. Their views on prophecy seem to be shaped by this experience” (p. 41). It is no exaggeration to suggest, then, that readers of Balsarak’s work are accessing one of today’s most gifted and learned Reformation scholars.

Nonetheless, there are a few issues which may have made the volume a bit stronger, but just a bit. That is, Balsarak is not convinced that Zwingli exercised very much influence on Calvin’s thought. I would have to disagree with this in spirit. There are

good reasons to assert that Calvin may well have had more to do with Zwingli than heretofore understood and the fact that Calvin seems to reject some of those ideas of Zwingli only lends credence to that supposition since it can scarcely be imagined that Calvin, a very thorough man, would have disagreed with Zwingli without thoroughly digesting his thought in the first place. In particular, Zwingli's own understanding of the Prophetic task in the contemporary Church seems to be nearly mirrored in the view of Calvin (but more on this in a forthcoming essay by the present reviewer).

On the whole, however, with those quibbles voiced, the volume at hand is purely astonishing in its scope and academic worth. I will conclude this brief review with a closing quotation from our author which, I hope, will be the kindling necessary to set ablaze the fire of interest in reading the book in the reader of the present piece: "Calvin believed himself to be a prophet – a finding which, I contend, must be taken more seriously by scholars interested in understanding Calvin and his thinking both about himself and about his times. [...] Calvin believed that he spoke for God. He was God's mouthpiece in Europe. He believed that he possessed an authority, therefore, that was unrivaled by king, pope, or fellow reformer. It allowed him to diminish the contributions of the greatest minds the church had produced up to his day, from Augustine to Zwingli (calling those contributions wood, hay, and stubble) while holding his own contribution to be sufficiently strong to urge his colleagues upon his death not to change anything in it" (pp. 179–180).

*Jim West, Petros, TN, USA*

*Calvinus clarissimus theologus: Papers of the Tenth International Congress on Calvin Research, hg. von Herman J. Selderhuis, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012 (Reformed Historical Theology 18), 374 S. – ISBN 978-3-525-56946-7.*

Vom 22. bis zum 27. August 2010 fand der zehnte Internationale Kongress für Calvinforschung in Bloemfontein, Südafrika, statt. In mehreren Hinsichten war es ein besonderer Kongress: 1) 1974 trafen sich zum ersten Mal ungefähr vierzig europäische Calvinfor-