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**AN OUTLINE OF JOHN CALVIN'S TEACHINGS  
ON THE CHURCH IN THE LIGHT OF  
*INSTITUTIO RELIGIONIS CHRISTIANAE* (1543)**

“It is evident especially these days that everyone, with no exceptions – regardless of their Church or sectarian affiliation – wishes to pass as a believer, [...] and yet, were not the staunchest and most self-assured among believers pharysees?”

Sebastian Franck, *Paradoxa* (1540)<sup>1</sup>

16<sup>th</sup>-century Europe is commonly acknowledged as an arena of one of the largest and most significant denominational shifts in Western Christianity. While the origins of those shifts date back to the Middle Ages, the Reformation as an unprecedented *novum* in the history of the Church did not come to fruition until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The ideas, pursuits, and actions of the German Augustian monk Martin Luther reverberated across the majority of the continent. This is not to deny the fact that the Wittenberg-based monk was preceded by the likes of Jan Hus, whose teachings did leave an imprint, in particular in Moravia. However, it was only with the publication of Luther's theses (which, to an extent, overlapped with those of his Moravian predecessor) that the Reformation gained significant traction and resilience that helped its ideas survive to this day. Unanimously attributed to Martin Luther, the reformation movement launched the process of great denominational transformations (along with the attendant changes in other fields).

The second great Protestant reformer was John Calvin of France. A lawyer by education, he became a theologian and thinker by vocation. Thoroughly educated and well versed in Bible studies and theology, Calvin's personality was worlds apart from Luther's, as were some of his views on the Universal Church. It is often said that while Luther reformed the Church, Calvin reformed Luther. Calvin's autonomy can be seen in his teachings on the

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<sup>1</sup> As cited in: A. Seguenny, *W poszukiwaniu prawdziwej wiary. Szkice z historii religii XVI wieku – humanizm, reformacja, spirytualizm*, Lublin 2009, p. 13, 64-66. Sebastian Franck was a German Catholic priest, who studied in Ingolstadt and the Dominican Studium Generale in Heidelberg. In 1524, Franck abandoned Roman Catholicism and became a Lutheran preacher. He quickly concluded that Luther's ideas on the redundancy of deeds and his critique of free will, inevitably lead to the deterioration of Christian life. Franck devoted himself entirely to writing, and his output is widely considered as a manifesto of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Christian spiritualism.

Church or the sacraments, which clearly separate him from the earlier positions represented by the German monk.

Much like Luther, Calvin was a very prolific reformer. His oeuvre spans minor pieces, such as *Psychopannychia* (1534) or *Treatise on Relics* (1543), as well as more comprehensive works, such as his *Commentaries* on the Bible or *Geneva Catechism* (1545). Calvin's opus magnum came with the publication of *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, translated into English as *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin himself redacted five consecutive editions of the work himself, in 1536, 1539, 1543, 1550, and 1559, respectively. Each edition, penned and redacted by Calvin, was subsequently published, resulting in the somewhat confusing references to the different editions of *Institutes...* in the source literature<sup>2</sup>. The Strasbourg edition of *Institutes...* (1543) includes a detailed book on the Church that, while redacted for the sake of the subsequent editions, undoubtedly continues to serve as the starting point for the discussions of the French reformer's ecclesiological output. Before moving on the proper subject of this study, it should be stressed that its framework as specified in the title is but an attempt to outline John Calvin's teachings and views on the Church as projected by the reformer. We should also add that, whenever quering the source literature, one is bound to find out that the majority of the authors<sup>3</sup> investigating Calvin's idea refer principally to his *Institutio...*, which continues to serve as a vantage point for the analyses of his thought, constituting its most comprehensive compendium.

When investigating *Institutes* with regard to Calvin's teachings on the Church, one cannot gloss over the issues related to one of the sacraments, i.e. the Lord's Supper, in particular given its interpretation and importance in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a point of reference in the confessionalization of the Reformed Churches. Standing in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, representatives of the Evangelical communities held intense discussions on the understanding and significance of the Lord's Supper in the Protestant Christian life<sup>4</sup>. It is in the idea, the essence, and the understanding of this sacrament that the comprehensiveness of Calvin's teachings can be apprehended. They concern the essence of the Church, its role as the distributor of the Lord's gifts to the faithful, as well as the place and capacity of the clergy, no longer seen as dispensers of the sacrifice but as preachers of the Scripture. Such an understanding of ecclesiological matters may also account for the special emphasis placed on the pulpit as the focal point of the church, from which the Scripture is taught, rather than the altar which is host to the offered Sacrifice. Looking back at the *communion of the altar* among several Evangelical Churches, one should note the historic discussion on the understanding of the Lord's Supper during the 1529 meeting of the Reformation leaders in Marburg, inspired by Philip I, of Hesse. Among those participating in the meeting were

<sup>2</sup> A detailed list of the consecutive editions of *Institutes...* published by 1600 can be found in A.E. McGrath's *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture*, Oxford 1993.

<sup>3</sup> See B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, London 1970; L. Boettner, *The reformed doctrine of predestination*, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1968; P. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, New York, 2006; B. Gordon, *Calvin*, Bodmin, Cornwall 2009. Some of the Polish publications on the subject include A. Tokarczyk, *Protestantyzm*, Warszawa 1980; S. Piwko, *Jan Kalwin. Życie i dzieło*, Warszawa 1995; *W nurcie myśli Jana Kalwina*, w: *Ekumenizm i Integracja*, eds. J. Budniak, P. Jaskóła, R. Porada, vol. 22, Opole 2009.

<sup>4</sup> On April 19, 1529, during the Diet of Speyer, the Catholic majority passed a bill prohibiting the dissemination of Reformed teachings. In the wake of the decision, the representatives of the Evangelical minority filed a *protest* with Emperor Charles V, and were henceforth referred to as the Protestants across the Holy Roman Empire.

Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli, each accompanied by their respective followers<sup>5</sup>. No settlement was reached with respect to the Lord's Supper, which – according to M. Uglorz – resulted from the unwavering convictions of the main debaters, as well as the differences of characters between Luther and Zwingli<sup>6</sup>. It did not change the fact, however, that the theological problems determining the future functioning of the Churches (and the religious life of their followers) were the bone of contention between the respective Protestant confessions.

Aside from the aforementioned problems, the section of *Institutes* devoted to the Church also contains Calvin's ruminations on other notions tied to broadly defined ecclesiology. The French reformer touched upon the nature of the Mass, which the Catholic Church saw as an offering, while also pondering over sacramental priesthood and the institutions of the Holy See and the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

### The Church and its Universality

At the onset of our ruminations, it should be noted that Calvin distinguishes between the visible and invisible Church. Studying Calvin's body of work and its impact on the Western civilization, A.E. McGrath aptly points out the fundamental differences between these two dimensions of the Church, writing that "in its invisible aspect, the church is the assembly of the elect, known only to God; in its visible aspect, it is the community of believers on earth. The former consists only of the elect; the latter includes both good and evil, elect and reprobate"<sup>7</sup>. Calvin refers to the Church as a mother that nurtures believers until they reach maturity as Christians. He sees the Church as indispensable to humans, who could not reach salvation outside of it. It is within the Church that humans learn God, or rather, that God permits himself to be learnt by humans. Above all, God reveals himself through the Scripture, enabling humans to deepen their faith through the intermediacy of the ministers appointed by God to preach his Word<sup>8</sup>. As aptly put by the English pastor and theologian, Professor Alan Sell, "To Calvin, the Church is a congregation of those whom Christ calls to be saints. We are not presented with the Gospel itself, to which we attach the Church. The Church represents the union with Christ as the Lord and Savior, and at the same time the union between all who partake of the Church. God gracefully allows His children to be raised in the bosom of their mother, the Church, which nurtures them since infancy, offering her care, concern, and wisdom. The Church guides believers until they mature and bear the final fruit of their faith [...]. Those who recognize God as their father, see the Church as their mother"<sup>9</sup>. Speaking of the Church, Calvin always refers to its universality and omnipresence. In the words of B. Cottret, to Calvin, "the "universal" church itself is composed of the sum of the local churches"<sup>10</sup>. Calvin also perceives this universality as the removal of the

<sup>5</sup> The Wittenberg delegation was represented by Martin Luther and Philip Melancton, while the Swiss party included Huldrych Zwingli and Johannes Oecolampadius. See G.R. Potter, *Zwingli*, 1976, pp. 316-342.

<sup>6</sup> M. Uglorz, *Marcin Luter – Ojciec Reformacji*, Bielsko-Biala 1995, p. 98.

<sup>7</sup> A.E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Oxford 2013, p. 176.

<sup>8</sup> "[...] he has appointed pastors and teachers, by whose lips he might edify his people", see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, book 4, chapter 1, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1979, p. 280.

<sup>9</sup> A.P.F. Sell, *Wyzwania Kalwina wobec Kościoła w XXI wieku*, in: "Rocznik Teologiczny Chat", 51/2009, vol. 1-2, pp. 181-208.

<sup>10</sup> B. Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, Grand Rapids 1995, p. 324.

administrative bonds of the Church. “Often too, by the name of Church is designated the whole body mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ, who baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord’s Supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity”<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, he argues that believers ought to respect the visible Church despite its shortcomings. This respect should be paid on account of the invisible dimension of the Church as the Body of Christ. Despite this duality, Calvin sees the Church as one, with Christ as its head<sup>12</sup>. “Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacrament administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence”<sup>13</sup>.

### **The Bishop of Rome as the Head of the Church(?)**

In *Institutes*, Calvin attempts to prove that the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are inconsistent with the doctrine of Christ. The French reformer is particularly critical of the Bishop of Rome, Catholic theology, and the Catholic Church religious practices. Calvin thinks the Catholic Church went astray by administering as many as seven sacraments. As we know, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Christian reformers eventually recognized two of them (baptism and eucharist/Lord’s Supper) as the ones instituted by Christ and corroborated by the Scripture. Calvin’s critique verges beyond the sacraments, as the Frenchman questions the papal primacy over the Church. “Hitherto we have reviewed those ecclesiastical orders which existed in the government of the primitive Church; but afterwards corrupted by time [...] now only retain the name in the Papal Church, and are, in fact, nothing but mere masks”<sup>14</sup>. Calvin continuously investigates into the grounds for the pope’s primacy over the entire Universal Church. The transfer of the keys from Christ to St. Peter, described in the Gospels along with the words, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church”, becomes a subject (or perhaps *the* subject) of the debate raging between the conflicted parties. Calvin sees St. Peter as a mere representative of the congregation, a symbol of the Church as a whole, and as such he cannot have received anything beyond the other Apostles. The gift bestowed on St. Peter was thus equally distributed among all believers. In contemplating this notion, Calvin refers to St. Augustine’s famous dictum, “one received for all, because there is unity in all”<sup>15</sup>, adding that “I willingly concede to Peter the honour of being placed among the first in the building of the Church [...] but I will not allow them to inter from this that he has a primacy over others”<sup>16</sup>. Continuing in this grain, Calvin professes it is not his intention to strip St. Peter of his virtues and his zeal in preaching the Christian doctrine, as his wisdom indubitably predestined him for leadership over others. At the same time, he adds, St. Peter’s papacy was preceded by that of St. Andrew’s, and it was, in fact, the latter who revealed Christ to the former. Calvin is adamant about distinguishing between rank and power. He also contends that the Scripture unambiguously depicts St. Peter as one of the twelve students of Christ, and as their equal rather than their master. The Frenchman further points to the activities performed by St. Peter,

<sup>11</sup> *Institutes...*, p. 288.

<sup>12</sup> A.E. McGrath, *Jan Kalwin – studium kształtowania kultury Zachodu*, Warszawa 2009, p. 245.

<sup>13</sup> *Institutes*, p. 289.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 353.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 356.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 357.

which in no way resemble those reserved for a sovereign. Calvin argues that, when writing to his fellow ministers, Peter did not act as an imperious supervisor, but a kind *advisor*, and upon being accused of communing with pagans, he defended himself and refuted the allegations. Calvin asserts that in entrusting St. Peter with various missions, his fellow Apostles likely did not think of him as their senior. Conversely, by acting on their recommendations, St. Peter to some extent confirmed he had no authority over them. They elected him as their leader and entrusted him with the role of their own volition, argues Calvin. Returning to the question of papacy in a subsequent section of *Institutes...*, the reformer concludes that “[...] an arragement which is effectual among a few must not be forthwith transferred to the whole world, which no one man is able to govern”<sup>17</sup>. The reformer uses the above example to illustrate the papal authority over the entire universal Church. Throughout much of his opus magnum, Calvin ponders over papal primacy, the role of Rome as the capital and metropolis of the Church, or papal succession, starting with St. Peter. These ruminations congeal into a thesis which the reformer apparently intended to disseminate, and which he staunchly defended, i.e. that the pope should not be recognized as the head of the visible universal Church, since no-one vested him with such power. Neither should Rome be considered the capital of Christianity, for upon close examination, it appears that St. Peter spent more time in Antioch than he did in the Eternal City. Thus, concludes Calvin, all clergymen within the Church – bishops, pastors, and deacons – should be deemed equal, and the primacy of one among them should be solely representative.

### **The Question of the Mass**

Calvin’s critique of the Catholic Church in *Institutes...* is not restricted to fundamental and general questions only. His defiance of the Church’s teachings and theology is strictly tied to the respective tenets of Catholicism. Another point of Calvin’s critique concerns the Eucharist understood as the sacrifice of Christ, reiterated at the altar during each Mass. Most of all, Calvin rejects the Catholic interpretation of the Mass as a sacrifice made to absolve the sins of humanity. He contends “[...] that the mass is a work by which the priest who offers Christ, and the others who in the oblation receive him, gain merit with God, or that it is an expiatory victim”<sup>18</sup>. Calvin vehemently rejects the possibility of interpreting the Mass as an absolution for the sins of the living and the dead. He argues that, while imposingly intricate, glittering, and magnificent in its form, the liturgy is nonetheless an insult to God. Calvin also ties the Mass to the role of priests in offering the Sacrifice, as well as their earthly substitution of Christ. Calvin contends that God appointed Christ as his priest and archpriest in perpetuity. He also noticed that priests in the Old Testament were appointed for a specific period of time on account of their mortality. Each new priest thus succeeded his predecessor. On the contrary, claims Calvin, Christ as an immortal entity needed no priest that would succeed him. Thus, if priests administer the Mass as the vicars of Christ, i.e. his successors, they rob Him of His due adoration and His privilege of eternal priesthood. It should be stressed here that Calvin does not negate the essence of priesthood per se, but rather demands that it be perceived and interpreted as a substitution of Christ in his eternal,

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 358.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, book 4, chapter 18, p. 607.

immortal priesthood, which will never cease to exist. Referring to the Bible, Calvin adds “[...] that the right and honour of the priesthood has ceased among mortal men, because Christ, who is immortal, is the one perpetual priest”<sup>19</sup>. To him, the altar on which Christ’s sacrifice is offered, nullifies and negates his original sacrifice, performed on the cross. The French reformer argues that the power and effectiveness of Christ’s crucifixion is always present and continues in perpetuity, i.e. it is eternal. Thus, if each Mass is a repetition of the sacrifice, it would imply the insufficient nature of Christ’s crucifixion, since it needs to be continuously repeated. “[...] otherwise, we should not think more honourably of Christ than of the oxen and calves which were sacrificed under the law, the offering of which is proved to have been weak and inefficacious because of ten repeated”<sup>20</sup>. Calvin did, indeed, thoroughly analyze the teachings of the Catholic Church on the matter. His commentaries on, or his far more frequent critiques of, the specific aspects of these teachings never seem offhanded – on the contrary, they always seem to follow an in-depth analysis of a given problem. A case in point can be found in Calvin’s exegesis of Malachi’s prophecy, which according to him served as a basis for the Catholic teachings on the meaning and interpretation of the Mass. The excerpt in question goes as follows: “For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the nations”<sup>21</sup>. Calvin deciphers Malachi’s prophecy as a spiritual incentive to worship God. To prove the spiritual nature of these words, Calvin references the words of Isaiah, who mentions three altars that were to be raised in Assyria, Egypt, and Judea. Seeing that none such altars have ever been erected, Calvin concludes that the prophecy of the omnipresent worship of God must have referred to the spiritual plane.

In his ruminations on the Mass, Calvin claims it to be a new and utterly different testament than the one bequeathed by Jesus Christ. According to Calvin, Christ’s testament promises the absolution of sins of all humans. Christ validated his testament with his death or, in other words, Christ’s death sealed his promise of the absolution of human sins. Calvin thus concluded that altering Christ’s testament in any extent negates His death (which validated the said testament). The French reformer poses the following question: “[...] now, that is the mass but a new and altogether different testament? What? Does not each mass promise a new forgiveness of sins, a new purchase of righteousness, so that now there are as many testaments as there masses?”<sup>22</sup> Using the aforementioned evidence as an example, Calvin strives to prove the thesis he puts forward at the onset of his ruminations on the Mass: “[...] said I not true, then, at out set, that the only true death of Christ is obliterated by the mass?”<sup>23</sup> Referencing St. Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, the reformer contends that he who makes a testament is bound to die. To Calvin, the root cause for the misguided perception of the Mass in the Catholic Church lies in its understanding as Christ’s testament, which consequently requires His death. Since each offering made should be slain and blessed, sacrificing Christ

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 608.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 609.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 610.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 610.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 611.

during each Mass hence requires his slaying in thousands of venues at the same time<sup>24</sup>. Calvin also notices that Catholics refer to the Mass as a bloodless offering, which he immediately rebukes, stating, "I will reply, that it depends not on the will of man to change the nature of sacrifice, for in this way the sacred and inviolable institution of God would fall"<sup>25</sup>. He then once more references St. Paul's Epistle to Hebrews, in which the Apostle states it is imperative that blood be spilled whenever sins are to be absolved<sup>26</sup>. Could one think, and be sure of being redeemed by Christ's original sacrifice if one sees this redemption play out time and again at the Mass? How can one be assured of the absolution of one's sins if one witnesses its countless repetitions at the Mass? Posing these questions, Calvin reproaches the Catholic teachings for the mistakes which Roman Catholics "defend by clamour, fire and sword"<sup>27</sup>.

### **The Lord's Supper: a sacrifice or a reminder?**

In a section of *Institutes* devoted to the Church, Calvin ponders at length on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which is indispensable to both the Catholic Mass and the Protestant sacramentology. It is not our goal within the bounds of this study to explicate its theological dimension as proposed by Calvin. It seems justified, however, to look into the very notion of administering the Lord's Supper in the Church, postulated by the Geneva reformer. According to Calvin, the Lord's Supper was utterly dismissed and completely destroyed by the Church upon establishment of the Holy Mass. It is so, argues Calvin, since the Lord's Supper is a God-bestowed gift, which ought to be gratefully accepted by humans. Conversely, given its sacrificial nature, the Mass reminds Calvin of atonement made to God. "[...] as widely as giving differs from receiving, does sacrifice differ from the sacrament of the Supper", contends the Frenchman<sup>28</sup>. God, continues Calvin, did not order the faithful to offer sacrifices but demanded that they heed His Word. How come, then, that the *doctors of the missal* believe in the power and importance of their sacrifice? According to Calvin, the sacrifice and its offering made sense in the Old Testament, when they were practiced by the priests, who made those offerings as foretokens of Christ's sacrifice. Such sacrifices were made on altars designated to aggrandize the offering made as atonement to God. Everything changed, contends Calvin, upon Christ's sacrifice, which was when God gave the faithful a festive table rather than a sacrificial altar. Consequently, adds the reformer, God did not consecrate priests to make offerings but called upon ministers to distribute the Supper among the believers. Calvin thus sees the sacrifice as a way to express gratitude to, or beseech God. At the same time, he distinguishes between propitiatory and thanksgiving offerings. The former are made as oblations for sins, and are intended to redeem human trespassing in the eyes of God. Conversely, the latter express gratitude to God for his grace. To Calvin, sacrifices (in particular propitiatory ones), were not sufficient to expiate for human trespassing before the Creator. The sole sacrifice to have sufficiently propitiated God, atoning for the sins of humanity, was the one made by Christ on the cross, once and for all. The Mass as an offering striving for the absolution of human sins and the propitiation of God was an

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 611.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 611.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 612.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 612.

offence and sacrilege as seen by Calvin. This short outline of his teachings on the Lord's Supper may conclude with what seems to be their quintessence: "Christ himself, when he seals our assurance of pardon in the Supper, does not bid his disciples stop short at that act, but sends them to the sacrifice of his death; intimating, that the Supper is the memento, or, as it is commonly expressed, the memorial from which they may learn that the expiatory victim by which God was to be appeased was to be offered only once"<sup>29</sup>.

Writing on the Church, Calvin did not fail to address the notion of Catholic priesthood, whose representatives he accused of excessive tendencies to serve in positions of power. Calvin claimed that the Scripture never once explicitly ascertains a special vocational dimension of priesthood. One may easily notice that the Frenchman's ruminations in this regard were informed not only by the Bible but also by the writings of the Church Fathers, and the history of early Christianity. In the light of these texts, Calvin saw Jesus Christ as the sole and perpetual priest and holder of all hieratical offices.

A lawyer by education, John Calvin is no doubt remembered as a man deeply concerned about the matters of the Church and religion. Although at times more radical in his views than Martin Luther, Calvin nonetheless laid the foundations for the structural organization of a new, non-Lutheran Christian denomination. The Frenchman provided the theological, organizational, and intellectual framework for Reformed Evangelicalism. His uncompromising stance on the matters of faith, which he manifested more than once in his lifetime, made Calvin the second most important reformer of Western Christianity other than Luther. The crystallization of his views, some of which are detailed in this study, paint a picture of a man determined to set them in motion. It is likely because of these qualities that Calvin has attracted a growing attention of historians and other scholars.

**The outline of John Calvin's teachings on the Church in the light of *Institutio Religionis Christianae* from 1543**  
**Summary**

One of the main postulates of the reformation movement, apart from the theological questions, was a proposal of the internal reform of the church institution. The Father of the Reformation, as Rev. Martin Luther is called in the source literature, raised the questions concerning the mission of the Church, its role in the magisterium, and, perhaps above all, its hierarchical structure and the role of the clergy in the process of eternal salvation. As a result of his reflections, observations, and personal experience, Luther successively undermined different dogmatic, theological questions, as well as those regarding the organization of the Roman Catholic Church. Slogans of renewal and reforms of the church structure spread very rapidly through the territory of German Reich, gaining numerous supporters among the European states. One of those for whom the Reformation ideas became the main field of activity was John Calvin of France. A well-rounded, well educated, and well-read lawyer, familiar with the main works of the German monk, Calvin's principal theses postulated changes in the functioning of the Church. Additionally, Calvin proposed to distinguish between two dimensions of the Church, i.e. the earthly (visible) and the heavenly (invisible) one, with Jesus Christ as the highest priest, bonding the Church together and guaranteeing its unity,

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 611.

permanence, and indivisibility. Calvin's opus magnum, *Institutio Religionis Christianae*, represents to the fullest his vision of the Christian Church as he thought it should be. An analysis of specific issues regarding the function of the clergymen, the role of the pope, the celebration of the sacraments, penance and conversion, as well as eternal salvation, gives an insight into the basic compendium of ecclesiological knowledge compiled by Calvin. His teachings about the Church, although in some points different from those of Rev. Martin Luther, nonetheless oscillate within the principal slogans of Reformation: *Sola Fides* – the man is saved solely by faith, *Sola Gratia* – God's grace is necessary for salvation, *Sola Scriptura* – the only source of faith is the Holy Bible. Calvin's own idea was that of *Solus Christus* – salvation can be reached solely through Christ as the centre of the Church. Calvin's Christ-centric attitude reveals itself to the fullest in his preaching and the ideological foundations he established for the reformed denomination.

**Keywords:** John Calvin, Reformed Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, *Institutio Religionis Christianae*, Protestantism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

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