

DEFINED BY THE WORD:

CALVIN'S REPLY TO SADOLET

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the *Reply by John Calvin to Letter by Cardinal Sadolet to the Senate and People of Geneva*.¹ Calvin wrote the *Reply* in 1539 while living in Strasbourg, where he served as pastor to French-speaking exiles. If his own estimate was correct, the work took him less than a week to complete.² Yet despite occupying only a tiny portion of his life's attention, the *Reply* stands as one of the most-enduring productions of Calvin's pen. Parker lauds it as "one of that brilliant set of writings which emerged from his stay in Strasbourg and which, purely as literature, he never surpassed... a masterpiece of the lawyer's art, a defence which is an indictment of the prosecution."³

Although timeless in its application, Calvin did not write the *Reply* as a work of general theology. Rather, it is a specific piece of theological polemic written to a specific individual in a specific historical context. Who was this individual? What was this context? In order to analyze properly the contents of the *Reply*, one must first answer these contextual questions.

It is the opinion of the present writer that an analysis of the *Reply* may prove to be most useful in contemporary dialogue between members of Roman Catholic and Protestant communions. God created language for the sake of revelation and communication, yet too often his image-bearers use language in order to obscure issues rather than to communicate clearly. This is evident in the history of Roman Catholic-Protestant polemics. In 1539, the bishop of Carpentras wrote a letter in which he addressed a council of Protestant magistrates as "very dear brethren in Christ."⁴ In 1546, bishops in council at the city of Trent pronounced an anathema

¹ John Calvin, "Reply by John Calvin to Letter by Cardinal Sadolet to the Senate and People of Geneva," in *Tracts, Part I*, vol. 1 of *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 25-68.

² John Calvin, "XXIX – To Farel," in *Letters, Part I, 1528-1545*, vol. 4 of *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Jules Bonnet, trans. David Constable (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858; reprint Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 150-151.

³ T.H.L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 78-79.

⁴ James Sadolet, "Sadolet's Letter to the Senate and People of Geneva," in *Tracts, Part I*, vol. 1 of *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 4.

upon Protestants – “whosoever shall say that the wicked is justified by faith alone.”⁵ Yet in the wake of the Second Vatican Council nearly five centuries later, one again finds the Roman Church referring to Protestants as “separated brethren.”⁶

This linguistic vacillation raises a fundamental question: are Protestants and Roman Catholics “separated brethren,” or is there something in the constitution of these two bodies which makes them mutually exclusive? In other words, how does each define the Church of Jesus Christ? The present author believes that an analysis of Calvin’s *Reply* may offer an answer to this question.

A SCHOLAR AND A GENTLEMAN

By profession, Cardinal James Sadolet⁷ was the Roman Catholic bishop of Carpentras and therefore a committed opponent of the Protestant Reformation. Born in 1477, he began his humanist education at Ferrara and completed it at Rome. Upon ordination, he began his ecclesiastical career as a Vatican wordsmith – “appointed apostolic secretary by Leo X to change the style of the papal briefs from barbarous Latinity to Ciceronian elegance.”⁸ In 1517 Leo appointed him bishop of Carpentras, and in 1536 Pope Paul III handed him a cardinal’s hat – though he later declined Paul’s offer to preside as papal legate over the Council of Trent.⁹ Sadolet died in Rome in 1547.

Cardinal Sadolet was a man of impeccable integrity. “He had a high reputation as a scholar, a poet, and a gentleman of irreproachable character and devout piety. He best represents the Italian renaissance in its leaning towards a moderate semi-evangelical reform within the Catholic Church.”¹⁰ This sterling character, combined with a conciliatory temperament, brought Sadolet to the fore as an ecclesiastical diplomat. “He was frequently employed in diplomatic peace negotiations between the

⁵ John Calvin, “Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, with the Antidote,” in *Tracts, Part 3*, vol. 3 of *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 104.

⁶ The Roman Catholic Church, “Decree on Ecumenism,” http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html (accessed November 13, 2009).

⁷ The correct Italian form of the name is “Jacopo Sadoletto.” Yet in order to harmonize with the English translation of the *Reply*, the present paper will adopt the Anglicized form of the name.

⁸ K. Benrath, “Sadoletto, Jacopo” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1911), 168.

⁹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 9 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 400.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

pope, the king of France, and the emperor of Germany.”¹¹ These same qualities eventually led to his selection as literary envoy to Geneva. The present paper now turns to these events.

A CORDIAL INVITATION

The Magistracy of Geneva exiled John Calvin and William Farel in 1538. In that year the Magistracy concluded diplomatic arrangements with the city of Bern – arrangements with definite liturgical implications for the Genevan church. Incensed that the magistrates had acted without consulting the ministers, the reformers of Geneva refused to comply. When this intransigence rose to the level of refusal to administer the Lord’s Supper on Easter Sunday, the Magistracy responded without quarter. “Extreme measures were then applied... Calvin, Farel, and another minister were deprived of their functions and ordered to leave the town within three days.”¹² By September, the providence of God and the prodding of his friends had brought Calvin to Strasbourg.¹³

Pierre de la Baume, the erstwhile bishop of Geneva, saw in Calvin’s exile an opportunity to reclaim the canton for Rome. In order to sweeten the bait, the pope made la Baume a cardinal. La Baume then convened a council of bishops at Lyons, asking of them “the recovery of his diocese.”¹⁴ The president of this council was the cardinal of Tournon and archbishop of Lyons, a “notorious persecutor of the Vaudois, and the introducer of the Jesuits into France... The affair might perhaps have had a violent ending, but that a man was there present of a different stamp from the archbishop. This was Cardinal Sadoletto.”¹⁵ Historians on both sides agree that Sadolet was the ideal choice to address the Genevans. “His mild and gentle character, shunning all extremes, and his profound learning fitted him for the difficult task of conciliating the Protestants.”¹⁶ “A better choice could not have been made.”¹⁷

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Francois Wendell, *Calvin: Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2002), 55-56.

¹³ Ibid., 56-59.

¹⁴ J.H. Merle D’Aubigne, *Scotland, Switzerland, Geneva*, vol. 6 of *The History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1880), 479.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Thomas Scannell, “Jacopo Sadoletto” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13324a.htm> (accessed November 4, 2009).

¹⁷ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 399.

The Genevan Council received Sadolet's letter on March 26, 1539. In the days and weeks that followed, turmoil erupted in Geneva: a group of citizens asked to renounce the city's Reformed confession, and Catholic authorities executed two other citizens in the surrounding regions.¹⁸ "The Romanists took courage. No one could be found in Geneva who was able to answer the cardinal's letter, and silence might be construed into consent."¹⁹

Sadolet's letter may be divided into several sections. In the preamble, he expresses his affection for Geneva and her citizens, and states his reason for writing: "certain crafty men, enemies of Christian unity and peace... had turned the faithful people of Christ aside from the way of their fathers and ancestors, and from the perpetual sentiments of the Catholic Church."²⁰ In the second section, he appeals to the Genevans to focus on what matters most – namely, their own salvation: "We all, therefore (as I said,) believe in Christ in order that we may find salvation for our souls, i.e., life for ourselves: than this there can be nothing more earnestly to be desired, no blessing more internal, more close and familiar to us."²¹

In the third section, Sadolet describes how man is to find salvation and thereby fulfill his chief end: "Moreover, we obtain this blessing of complete and perpetual salvation by faith alone in God and in Jesus Christ."²² This language sounds suspiciously Protestant, and so Sadolet immediately clarifies: "faith is a term of full and ample signification, and not only includes in it credulity and confidence, but also the hope and desire of obeying God, together with love, the head and mistress of all the virtues."²³ Sadolet thus shows both his willingness to use Protestant language *and* his refusal to cede Roman doctrine: "When we say, then, that we can be saved by faith alone in God and Jesus Christ, we hold that in this very faith love is essentially comprehended as the chief and primary cause of our salvation."²⁴ For those who tremble at their failure to love God, Sadolet points to the medicine provided by the sacramental system of the Roman Church: "these methods of expiation and satisfaction we have recourse to and employ – trusting, when we do so, to find a place of mercy and pardon with God."²⁵

¹⁸ D'Aubigne, *Scotland, Switzerland, & Geneva*, 484-487.

¹⁹ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 402.

²⁰ Sadolet, "Letter," 4-5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²² *Ibid.*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

Having laid out the Roman understanding of salvation, and having warned the Genevans against neglecting it, in the fourth section Sadolet raises what he contends to be the outstanding point of dispute between Rome and Geneva:

The point in dispute is, Whether it is more expedient for your salvation, and whether you think you will do what is more pleasing to God, by believing and following what the Catholic Church throughout the whole world, now for more than fifteen hundred years, or (if we require clear and certain recorded notice of the facts) for more than thirteen hundred years, approves with general consent; or innovations introduced within these twenty-five years, by crafty, or, as they think themselves, acute men; but men certainly who are not themselves the Catholic Church?²⁶

In order to demonstrate this point, Sadolet constructs a scenario in which both a Roman Catholic layperson and leader of the Reformation stand before the divine tribunal. Using a classical literary device known as *prosopopoeia*,²⁷ Sadolet provides a first-person account for each character. The Romanist pleads that he has simply “adhere[d] firmly to that which had been delivered to me by my parents, and observed from antiquity, with the consent of the most holy and most learned Fathers.”²⁸ The reformer must plea frustrated ecclesiastical ambition leading to insurrection and schism, “for there is no room to lie before that heavenly Judge.”²⁹ Following these pleas, Sadolet does not hesitate to describe how God will render judgment:

Is it not certain, that he who followed the Catholic Church will not be judged guilty of any error in this respect? First, Because the Church errs not, and even cannot err, since the Holy Spirit constantly guides her public and universal decrees and Councils. Secondly, Even if she did err, or could have erred, (this, however, it is impious to say or believe,) no such error would be condemned in him who should, with a mind sincere and humble towards God, have followed the faith and authority of his ancestors. But the other, trusting to his own head, having none among the ancient Fathers, and not even general assemblies of the whole Bishops, whom he deems worthy of honor, and to whom he can bring his mind to yield and submit, arrogating all things to himself, more prepared to slander than to speak or teach, after revolting from the common Church, to what does he look as the haven of his fortunes? in what bulwark does he confide?³⁰

²⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷ Robert W. Godfrey, *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 15.

²⁸ Sadolet, “Letter,” 16-17.

²⁹ Ibid., 18.

³⁰ Ibid., 18-19.

Heaven awaits the Roman Catholic faithful, but for the rapacious reformer there is only perdition. “But if all other things might in some way be tolerated and overlooked, how will this be borne... that they attempted to tear the spouse of Christ in pieces?”³¹ Schism is the unpardonable sin, and the proliferation of “sects” proves the reformers guilty thereof.

Yet Sadolet concludes his letter on a conciliatory note. He does not wish the reformers’ destruction; on the contrary, his prayer is that God would bring them to repentance. Likewise, his appeal to the Genevans is not imperious, but imploring: “And I beg and exhort you, my Genevese brethren... yield faithful homage to the Church, our mother, and worship God with us in one spirit.”³²

A RELUCTANT REPLY

Just over a month after its delivery to Geneva, Sulzer – a pastor in Bern – sent a copy of Sadolet’s letter to Calvin in Strasbourg.³³ As was the case more than once in his life, it was not until his friends compelled him that Calvin agreed to take up the work of a reply. Yet as was also the case more than once, once Calvin set to the task, he strove manfully and produced a masterpiece. “This letter, we may say, was the mighty voice which led back Geneva to the true Gospel.”³⁴

Calvin begins the *Reply* by lauding Sadolet’s learning and promising a tempered response. He even credits Sadolet “for having written to the Genevese with the purest intention as becomes one of your learning, prudence, and gravity, and for having, in good faith, advised them to the course which you believed conducive to their interest and safety.”³⁵ Yet he is ready to answer Sadolet on two points:

When the Genevese, instructed by our preaching, escaped from the gulf of error in which they were immersed, and betook themselves to a purer teaching of the gospel, you call it defection from the truth of God; when they threw off the tyranny of the Roman Pontiff, in order that they might establish among themselves a better form of Church, you call it a desertion from the Church. Come, then, and let us discuss both points in their order.³⁶

³¹ Ibid., 19.

³² Ibid., 21.

³³ D’Aubigne, *Scotland, Switzerland, & Geneva*, 486.

³⁴ Ibid., 487.

³⁵ Calvin, “Reply,” 29.

³⁶ Ibid., 33.

Calvin refuses to deny Sadolet's learning or impugn his motives. Yet he cannot allow Sadolet's indictment of the Reformation to go unmolested. Does defection from Rome amount to defection from the gospel? Is it schism of the church? At these two points Calvin dresses himself for battle. "The Reformer follows the cardinal's letter step by step, and defeats him at every point."³⁷

Calvin opens his counteroffensive by challenging the central tenet of Sadolet's anthropology. Man's chief end is *not* his own salvation, but God's glory: "it is not very sound theology to confine a man's thoughts so much to himself, and not to set before him, as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God, and not for ourselves."³⁸ He admits that God's glory involves man's salvation, yet he considers as "insipid" that "zeal which keeps a man entirely devoted to himself, and does not, even by one expression, arouse him to sanctify the name of God."³⁹ A self-centered profession of Christ is a profession of self, not Christ.

With this God-centered view of life in the forefront of his thoughts, Calvin is ready to agree with Sadolet that "there is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a preposterous and perverse worship of God."⁴⁰ Yet he warns the bishop that this concord will be the latter's undoing: "Therefore, Sadolet, when you uttered this voluntary confession, you laid the foundation of my defence." How so? "For if you admit it to be a fearful destruction to the soul, when, by false opinions, divine truth is turned into a lie, it now only remains for us to inquire as to which of the two parties retains the worship of God which is alone legitimate."⁴¹ Calvin is not introducing here a third point of contest in addition to the two (the gospel and the church) that he raised earlier. Rather, he is affirming that the worship of God is the *context* in which one understands both the gospel and the church. God's glory is the great end toward which all things are directed.

According to Calvin, the aim of the Reformation is not the *abandonment* of the worship of the ancient church, but rather its recovery: "You are mistaken in supposing that we desire to lead away the people from that method of worshipping God which the Catholic Church always observed."⁴² The whole dispute centers on

³⁷ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 404.

³⁸ Calvin, "Reply," 33.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 35.

what it means to be the “Catholic Church.” It is at this point that Calvin launches his primary counter-indictment:

When you describe [the Catholic Church] as that which in all parts, as well as at the present time, in every region of the earth, being united and consenting in Christ, has been always and every where directed by the one Spirit of Christ, what comes of the Word of the Lord, that clearest of all marks, and which the Lord himself, in pointing out the Church, so often recommends to us? For seeing how dangerous it would be to boast of the Spirit without the Word, he declared that the Church is indeed governed by the Holy Spirit, but in order that that government might not be vague and unstable, he annexed it to the Word.⁴³

Sadolet’s great error is *not* that he appeals to a universal church governed by the Holy Spirit. Rome’s signature sin is not her plea for unity in the Spirit. Rather, it is her separation of the Spirit from the Word. In condoning this separation, Sadolet has not only offended the Spirit; he has made the pope no better than an Anabaptist:

For what similitude is there in appearance between the Pope and the Anabaptists? And yet, that you may see that Satan never transforms himself so cunningly, as not in some measure to betray himself, the principal weapon with which they both assail us is the same. For when they boast extravagantly of the Spirit, the tendency certainly is to sink and bury the Word of God, that they may make room for their own falsehoods. And you, Sadolet, by stumbling on the very threshold, have paid the penalty of that affront which you offered to the Holy Spirit, when you separated him from the Word.⁴⁴

The Spirit governs the church through Scripture. To speak of either the Word or the Spirit apart from the other is to pay insult to both: “it is no less unreasonable to boast of the Spirit without the Word, than it would be absurd to bring forward the Word itself without the Spirit.”⁴⁵ Scripture is the church’s “Lydian Stone, by which she tests all doctrine.”⁴⁶ With this indissoluble unity of Spirit and Scripture in mind, Calvin offers Sadolet a “truer definition of the Church”:

it is the society of all the saints, a society which, spread over the whole world, and existing in all ages, yet bound together by the one doctrine, and the one Spirit of Christ, cultivates and observes unity of faith and brotherly concord. With this

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Church we deny that we have any disagreement. Nay, rather, as we revere her as our mother, so we desire to remain in her bosom.⁴⁷

Thus Calvin asserts that the Reformation's separation from Rome is not a rejection of the Catholic Church. Rather, it is an attempt to recover her by rejoining what Rome has separated: the voice of the Holy Spirit and the words of Holy Scripture.

Calvin vehemently denies that the Reformation has abandoned the approved practices of fifteen hundred years: "all we have attempted has been to renew that ancient form of the Church, which, at first sullied and distorted by illiterate men of indifferent character, was afterwards flagitiously mangled and almost destroyed by Roman Pontiff and his faction."⁴⁸ If Sadolet will not admit the testimony of Scripture, Calvin invites him to compare the contemporary Roman Church to the church described in the writings of Chrysostom, Basil, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine. Will Sadolet "give the name of an enemy of antiquity" to those who call the church thither?⁴⁹

The neglect of Scripture has brought ruin not only upon the practice of the Roman Church, but also upon her understanding of the gospel. Scholastic theology is "mere sophistry, and sophistry so twisted, involved, tortuous, and puzzling, that [it] might well be described as a species of secret magic."⁵⁰ The evidence of its deleterious effects is Sadolet's own misunderstanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone and its relation to the role of good works in the life of a Christian. Scripture teaches that good works are necessary in the Christian life, but as an *implication* of faith rather than a *contribution* thereto: "Wherever, therefore, that righteousness of faith, which we maintain to be gratuitous, is, there too Christ is, and where Christ is, there too is the Spirit of holiness, who regenerates the soul to newness of life."⁵¹ Yet Sadolet claimed just the opposite: "love is essentially comprehended as the chief and primary cause of our salvation."⁵² Calvin responds to this claim with a mixture of amazement, exasperation, and lamentation:

O, Sadolet, who could ever have expected such a saying from you? Undoubtedly the very blind, while in darkness, feel the mercy of God too surely to dare to claim for

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁵¹ Ibid., 43.

⁵² Sadolet, "Letter," 10.

their love the first cause of their salvation, while those who have merely one spark of divine light feel that their salvation consists in nothing else than their being adopted by God. For eternal salvation is the inheritance of the heavenly Father, and has been prepared solely for his children. Moreover, who can assign any other cause of our adoption than that which is uniformly announced in Scripture, viz., that we did not first love him, but were spontaneously received by him into favor and affection?⁵³

Failure to understand the exclusively gracious nature of salvation has led Sadolet and his Roman masters to augment the truth with a host of errors. Calvin treats several of these in turn: penance, transubstantiation, prayers for the dead, and purgatory.⁵⁴ He heaps especial condemnation upon the latter: “You yourself know what a hydra of errors thence emerged... you know how great a detriment it has done to piety.”⁵⁵

Apart from Scripture, the church loses her authority and opens herself to corruptions. This, Calvin asserts, is precisely what has happened with Rome. “We accuse you of overthrowing the ministry, of which the empty name remains with you, without the reality.”⁵⁶ The Roman Church has turned the Lord’s Supper into a blasphemous sacrifice, of which she will permit the faithful to partake only half. She has embraced the veneration of images and trafficked in indulgences. “The fact is now too notorious for you gain anything by denying it, viz., that in all these points, the ancient Church is clearly on our side, and opposes you, no less than we ourselves do.”⁵⁷ Yet the necessity of separating from Rome arose not from these corruptions, but from what lay behind them. “That necessity was, that the light of divine truth had been extinguished, the word of God buried, the virtue of Christ left in profound oblivion, and the pastoral office subverted.”⁵⁸

Having answered Sadolet on the two main points of the church and the gospel, Calvin spends the rest of the *Reply* answering Sadolet’s insinuations against the reformers’ character. To the charge of licentiousness, he asserts that he is more than ready to compare the discipline of the Reformed churches and the conduct of Reformation civil life to that which transpires in “Rome, that famous abode of sanctity.”⁵⁹ In response to Sadolet’s imagined scenario where a reformer before God’s tribunal pleads frustrated ambition, Calvin offers a robust defense:

⁵³ Calvin, “Reply,” 44.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-48.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

As to the charge of forsaking the Church which they were wont to bring against me there is nothing of which my conscience accuses me, unless, indeed, he is to be considered a deserter, who seeing the soldiers routed and scattered, and abandoning the ranks, raises the leader's standard, and recalls them to their posts.⁶⁰

Why should I have hesitated to separate myself from persons whom they forewarned me to hold as enemies? I had before my eyes the examples of thy prophets, who I saw had a similar contest with the priests and prophets of their day, though these were undoubtedly the rulers of the Church among the Israelitish people.⁶¹

The reformer will plead nothing of himself on the Day of Judgment. His ministry will stand or fall as far as it was faithful to Scripture, the "leader's standard." His soul will plead nothing of his own performance, but cast itself entirely on God's "wondrous goodness."⁶² At this latter point Calvin denounces Sadolet's own proposed defense of the Roman Catholic layman:

Now, Sadolet, if you please, compare this pleading with that which you have put into the mouth of your plebeian. It will be strange if you hesitate which of the two you ought to prefer. For the safety of that man hangs by a thread whose defense turns wholly on this — that he has constantly adhered to the religion handed down to him from his forefathers. At this rate, Jews, and Turks, and Saracens, would escape the judgment of God.⁶³

Pleading adherence to tradition is the fifteenth century equivalent of a "Nuremburg defense." Calvin sees in it nothing short of a total betrayal of the exclusivity of the gospel. Yet of all the charges leveled against the Reformation, Calvin takes most umbrage at the accusation that the reformers have "attempted to tear the spouse of Christ in pieces."⁶⁴ His response is consternated and cutting:

I will not admit the charge, unless you can make out that the Spouse of Christ is dismembered by those who desire to present her as a chaste virgin to Christ, — who are animated by a degree of holy zeal to preserve her spotless for Christ, — who seeing her polluted by base seducers, recall her to conjugal fidelity, — who unhesitatingly wage war against all the adulterers whom they detect laying snares for

⁶⁰ Ibid., 58-59.

⁶¹ Ibid., 60.

⁶² Ibid., 64.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Sadolet, "Letter," 19.

her chastity. And what but this have we done? Had not your faction of a Church attempted, nay, violated her chastity, by strange doctrines? Had she not been violently prostituted by your numberless superstitions? Had she not been defiled by that vilest species of adultery, the worship of images? And because, forsooth, we did not suffer you so to insult the sacred chamber of Christ, we are said to have lacerated his Spouse!⁶⁵

Despite his obvious anger at what he believes to be a baseless and scurrilous slander, Calvin closes his letter with a prayer that God would open the eyes of Sadolet and all Roman Catholics to see that true ecumenicity is found only through Christ's "one Word and Spirit."⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

The introduction to this paper asserted that an analysis of Calvin's *Reply* would offer an answer to the question of how both Roman Catholics and Protestants defined the church of Jesus Christ. Having come to the conclusion of this analysis, the present author believes that, in spite of Sadolet's conciliatory language, an unbridgeable gulf existed between Carpentras and Geneva in this matter. Moreover, the present author believes and asserts that, in spite of contemporary conciliatory language, that gulf remains just as great and fixed today as it did in the days of Calvin.

Stebbing identifies this gulf as a difference of definitions which "consists in the reference to the Word of God."⁶⁷ Both sides believe that the Word of God comes from the Holy Spirit. But wherein speaks the Spirit? For Sadolet and Rome, the Spirit speaks through the traditions of the Roman Church as defined by the perpetual, papal Magisterium. For Calvin and the Reformation, the Spirit speaks only through Scripture.

Both sides claim to be defined by the Word, but they differ – now and then – on the standard by which this is measured. The brilliance of Calvin's *Reply* consisted in bringing this to the fore. Contemporary Protestants and Roman Catholics aiming for mutual understanding would do well to keep it there. Fuzzy language only creates confusion. Clear definitions serve better – both for God's glory and man's salvation.

⁶⁵ Calvin, "Reply," 66-67.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁷ Henry Stebbing, *The Life and Times of John Calvin*, trans. Paul Henry (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1851), 150.