

## 2.2 Second International Calvin Congress

(Free University Amsterdam, 25-28 September 1978) A report by dr B J van der Walt, PU for CHE, Potchefstroom)

Strictly speaking this was the first International Congress on Calvin. The Congress held at the Free University from 16-19 September 1974 was a European Congress.\* The second occasion not only drew more researchers (approximately 80 as against 40 on the first occasion) but also more countries (16) were represented – even distant countries like the USA, Canada, Japan, Korea and South Africa. Countries from behind the iron curtain like the Deutsche Demokratische Republik, Hungary and Rumania were also represented.

It is worth noting that the interest shown in Calvin research was not limited to Calvinists. Apart from the fact that many delegates belonged to churches which one would not really describe as Calvinistic, the Lutherans were represented (in the person of prof. M. Seils, representative of the Executive Committee of the International Luther Research Congress) as well as a number of Roman Catholic Calvin researchers.

Roman Catholic scholars appear to be more interested in Calvin at the present time than in any of the other sixteenth century reformers. (The first congress was also attended by quite a number of Roman Catholics.) The study of Calvin has become an ecumenical matter!

One could easily argue about the comparative importance of the sixteenth century reformers. Fortunately this did not happen – although prof. Büsser from Zurich could not refrain from pointing out that the rôle played by Bullinger was as important as that of Calvin! In his welcoming address prof. Schenkeveld (Rector Magnificus of the Free University) humorously told how, in his youth, he was taught that all *-isms* were of the devil except, Calvinism. In his youth there was little criticism of Calvin, and when criticism did occur, it was well neutralised with appreciation! The purpose of the Congress certainly was neither to crush nor to canonise Calvin. Prof Locher rightly encouraged the delegates in his closing address to study Calvin seriously, but still more seriously the Word of God.

\* Papers delivered on this occasion were published by W H Neuser (ed.) entitled: *Calvinus Theologus*. Neukirchen, Neukirchener Verlag, 1976, (157 pages).

### A. Theme and Objectives

The theme was *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor* (Calvin, teacher of the church). Therefore, we were again concerned with his Theology (the theme of the previous congress was *Calvinus Theologus*) but this time we also considered the influence of his theology. The application of modern linguistic methods (cf. papers of Vincent and Pin) were also on the programme.

In his opening address the secretary, Prof. W H Neuser, set the following three objectives for the congress:

- \* To identify the most important areas of present-day Calvin research, and to determine where the gaps are.
- \* To advise one another of national or local gatherings, important research projects, publications, etc. It is very important internationally that such information should be passed on to prevent isolation and promote coordination in Calvin research.
- \* To exchange ideas and stimulate one another at personal level as well as formally (through lectures and discussions).

### B Speakers and Lectures

Titles of lectures are given in English. (The title in the language in which it was originally delivered is given in brackets, if the lecture was not delivered in English).

#### Monday, 25 September

- \* Prof. Dr W H Neuser (Münster, Germany):  
Opening address
- \* Dr W Balke (Den Ham, the Netherlands):  
"The Word of God and *experientia* according to Calvin".

#### Tuesday, 26 September

- \* Prof Dr Schützeichel (Trier, Germany): "Calvin and the discussions of penance at the 1551 sessions of the Council of Trent" ("Calvin in den Trienter Beratungen über die Busse im Jahre 1551").
- \* Prof. Dr R Stauffer (Paris, France): "Some unfamiliar aspects of the Theology of the first head of doctrine in the preaching of Calvin" ("Quelques aspects insolites de la théologie du premier article dans la predication de Calvin").
- \* Prof. Dr J B Torrance (Aberdeen, Scotland): "The vicarious humanity and priesthood of Christ in the Theology of John Calvin".

Wednesday, 27 September

\* Dr T H L Parker (Durham, England): "Commentary on Romans: Calvin the exegete – change and development".

\* Thursday, 28 September

\* Prof. Dr F L Battles (Grand Rapids, USA) "Calculus Fidei. Some rumination on the structure of Calvin's Theology".

\* Prof. G Vincent (Strasbourg, France): "Calvin's theology of the sacrament in the light of the linguistic theory of performatives" ("La Théologie Calvinienne du sacrament a la lumière de la linguistique")

\* Dr J Pin (Toulouse, France): "A textual analysis of theological discourse in the Catechism (1542) of John Calvin" ("Analyse textuelle du discours Théologique du Catechisme (1542) de Jean Calvin")

\* Prof. Dr M Bucsay (Budapest, Hungary): "The presence of Calvin in Hungary during the Reformation era, 1512 - 1608" ("Calvins Präzens in Ungarn").

\* Prof. Dr A Fatio (Geneva, Switzerland): "Calvin's presence in Reformed Orthodoxy" ("La présence de Calvin dans L'Orthodoxie Reformée").

### C Standard of lectures and discussions

There were no language problems to hamper the proceedings. Although the lectures were given in the language of the speaker (or in one of the three official languages in which he was most fluent), all the lectures were obtainable in three languages (English, French and German). This was a very special service rendered by the secretary, considering the cost and labour of translation. The discussions were also conducted in these three languages – although justice was not always done to translation into English because speakers spoke too fast.

Allowing for the fact that each individual has his own particular interest, and would therefore naturally have a preference for certain lectures, all the papers were of a high standard. Also the discussions were informative. They often consisted of contributions giving more information about a definite aspect. It is not possible here to relate in what respect each paper contributed to a personal enrichment of one's knowledge. It is only regrettable that the papers were not available before the conference, but were only distributed during the conference when the speaker was about to deliver his paper. For this reason all the papers had to be read in full, mostly taking from 1 to 1 1/4 hours! Had this not been necessary much more time would have been available for discussion.

All the lectures will be published (by the secretary) in the original language in which it was delivered, in a volume entitled: *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor*.

### D Business meeting

Apart from a report on the activities of the Organising Committee during the past four years and the state of the finances, the following also came up for discussion:

\* The possibility of a special magazine for Calvin research.

\* Natural or local conferences between international congresses were encouraged. In this connection it was mentioned that a congress had already been held in South Africa (10-11 August 1977 at Pretoria) and that another is being planned. Also two Calvin Colloquia have already been arranged at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, USA.

#### \* Bibliographical research

Dr P de Klerk (Librarian of Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids) gave particulars of the Calvin Bibliography which has appeared in the *Calvin Theological Journal* annually since 1971. He intends to publish an edition in the near future containing a summary of the seven bibliographies. He has also been collecting information since 1960 (W Niesel's bibliography ended in 1959) and plans to publish a comprehensive bibliography by 1988 (i.e. 30 years after Niesel's bibliography).

Prof. R Peter (Strasbourg) also gave some information about his own bibliographical research (especially old manuscripts).

There was also a report from the institute for the Advancement of Calvinism, Potchefstroom, South Africa, inter alia on D Kempff's "A Bibliography of Calviniana 1959 - 1974".

\* *Supplementa Calviniana* (Comprising the sermons of Calvin).

The delay in the publication of this series seems to be mainly financial: Several manuscripts are ready for the press but there is no money. Hopefully another volume will appear in 1979.

#### \* Calvin research in different countries

*USA:* A Second Calvin Colloquium on 16, 17 November 1978 at Calvin College.

*Japan:* A brief account of what has been translated into Japanese from Calvin.

*Korea:* A comprehensive report by Prof. J S Rhee (Seoul) on the history of the Church in Japan and interest in Calvin, with a complete list of works by and about Calvin and Calvinism obtainable in Korean.

*Zürich:* An announcement by Prof. F Büsser of a new project which will make

Bullinger's work available on microfiche.

\* *Next Congress*

With the addition of E D Dowey (Princeton) the existing organising committee, namely M Bucsay (Budapest) G W Locher (Bern) T H L Parker (Durham) R Peter (Strasbourg) W van 't Spijker (Apeldoorn) and W H Neuser, Secretary (Münster), will be planning the next congress which will take place in Geneva in 1982. (Plans are also already being made to meet in Hungary four years later in 1986).

Delegates have suggested various themes for consideration by the organising committee. Also the possibility of meeting, not only in plenary sessions, but in sessions following various directions of interest during the next congress, will be considered. An effort will also be made to make the lectures available before the congress.

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2.3 Calvin studies society formed at second Calvin Colloquium\*

What is the status of Calvin studies today? Are they taken more seriously now than in the past? From the Calvin literature we learn that ever since John Calvin's writings were published, friend and foe alike have analyzed, praised and criticized the thoughts of Calvin throughout the centuries. Conferences specifically dealing with Calvin and Calvinism have also been held. At a recent conference, the SECOND COLLOQUIUM ON CALVIN AND CALVIN STUDIES, a "Calvin Studies Society" was formed. The Society chose as its officers Dr Ford Lewis Battles of Calvin Theological Seminary as President; Dr John H. Leith of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia as Vice-President; Peter de Klerk of Calvin Theological Seminary as Secretary/Treasurer; and three members-at-large, Dr I. John Hesselink of Western Theological Seminary, Dr Jill Raitt of Duke University and Dr Joseph N Tylenda of THEOLOGICAL STUDIES.

Leading Calvin scholars from North America and from as far away as Japan,

the Netherlands and Scotland attended the SECOND COLLOQUIUM ON CALVIN AND CALVIN STUDIES held at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan on November 16 and 17, 1978. The theme of this well-attended colloquium centered around "Calvin and the Reformed View of the Christian Life in a European Perspective". Aspects of the Christian life were developed in papers on "Perseverance in Augustine and Calvin" by Walter F. Bense; "Bucer's idea of the Relation Between Philosophy and Theology and Its Relevance for His Spirituality" by Willem van 't Spijker (paper read by James M. Kittelson); "The Ethics of John Calvin" by Sumner B. Twiss, Jr.; "Calvin's Understanding of the Christian Life According to His Commentary on the Psalms" by John R. Walchenbach; "Beza, Guide for the Faithful Life" by Jill Raitt; and "The 'Substance' of Calvin's Eucharistic Piety" by E. David Willis.

Biennial Calvin colloquiums will give impetus to the furtherance of Calvin studies. A third Calvin colloquium is being planned for 1980.

Dr Peter De Klerk

2.4 Witness-Day: "The Gospel against the Lawlessness"

This meeting, held on September 23, 1978, at Arnhem, Holland was attended by four thousand evangelically-minded people from the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. Apart from worship services, the following people delivered messages: J J Rippen, Dr W Aalders, Rev R Bäumer, J Kets, Prof. G Hunte-mann, Prof. W H Velema and Ds. J Heider. A brochure containing the text of all the speeches is available.

2.5 Congress on the meaning of history

The University of South Africa (Pretoria, South Africa) was the host from March 28-30 1979 of a congress on *The Meaning and interpretation of history especially in connection with South African history*.

"How ought we to understand the events of South African history and perhaps an event like the Battle of Blood River? Can that event be attributed to the covenant between the trekkers and God, something that created an enduring Afrikaner tradition? *The Oxford History of South Africa* concludes: "Blood River ... was a classic example of the devastating superiority of controlled fire by resolute men from a defensive position, over Africans armed with assegais and spears, however numerous and however brave ... Thus the Zulu Kingdom which Shaka had created was overwhelmed by circumstances more strange and more formidable than Shaka had ever encountered." Herbert Butterfield, writing more generally, tries to do justice to all interpretations by simply concluding, "God is in all the motions of the planets - just as He is

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