



Calvin's views on church governance

C.J. Smit
School of Ecclesiastical Studies
Potchefstroom Campus
North-West University
POTCHEFSTROOM
E-mail: neelssmit@lantic.net

Abstract

Calvin's views on church governance

This article investigates whether the church was seen by Calvin as a mere human community based on laws, an association functioning on the basis of a constitution, or as a dynamic domain of the governance of Jesus Christ which functions on the basis of the Word through his Spirit.

According to Calvin the church is a new order ordained by Christ in which He never delegated his authority to his officers. He Himself, as the Head, remains the sole bearer of authority. Nevertheless, they receive full power, as representatives of Christ, to minister his Word and to administer the sacraments in his church. As such the church received the power to teach ("potestas docenda"), to govern ("potestas gubernatio") and to make laws ("potestas regiminis"). This competence ("potestas") is, however, exercised particularly as a ministry ("ministerium") because it rests on God's Word and is only ministered in conjunction with it. In the procedure of church governance Calvin considered faith and love as two key concepts.

In order to give a practical foundation to a spiritual mode of governance in the church as God's new order in the world, a church order is needed which is founded in the Word. This church order must aim at the protection of the governance of the Spirit in the church.

For Calvin church government is, therefore, primarily a process of governing the heart – the hearts of those among whom God's new order in the world exists.

Opsomming

Calvyn se beskouing van kerkregering

In hierdie artikel word nagegaan of Calvyn die kerk bloot as 'n menslike regsgemeenskap gesien het, 'n samekoms wat op 'n konstitusie gegrondves is, óf as die dinamiese regeringsdomein van Jesus Christus wat op die grondslag van sy Woord deur sy Gees funksioneer.

Dit is vasgestel dat Calvyn die kerk as 'n nuwe orde gesien het wat deur Christus verordineer is, waarin Hy nooit sy gesag aan sy dienaars gedelegeer het nie. Hyself, as die Hoof, bly die enigste heerskappyvoerder. Tog het sy dienaars volle gesag as sy verteenwoordigers ontvang om sy Woord en die sakramente in die kerk te bedien. As sodanig het die kerk die gesag ontvang om te onderrig ("potestas docenda"), om te regeer ("potestas gubernatio") en om bepalings te maak ("potestas regiminis"). Hierdie bevoegdheid ("potestas"), word egter as 'n bediening uitgevoer ("ministerium"), omdat dit in God se Woord rus en slegs in ooreenstemming daarmee bedien word. In die proses van kerkregering ag Calvyn geloof en liefde as sleutelbegrippe.

Om 'n praktiese fundering vir 'n geestelike wyse van regering in die kerk as God se nuwe orde in die wêreld te gee, is 'n kerkorde nodig wat op die Woord gebaseer is. Hierdie kerkorde moet die doel hê om die regering van die Gees in die kerk te beskerm. Daarom is kerkregering vir Calvyn primêr 'n proses van hartsregering – 'n regering oor die harte van dié uit wie God se nuwe orde in die wêreld bestaan.

1. Introduction

The key question explored in this article is whether Calvin interpreted the church as being a rigid structure for which ecclesiastical laws and regulations should be designed. Did his concept of the governance of the church correspond with that of a rigid juridical structure like an earthly empire? Or did he perhaps interpret the church as being a dynamic, historical organism?

In answering these questions, Calvin's concept of the church as well as his viewpoint on the authority in the church and his opinion of a church order will be investigated. Logically the core concepts of *faith* and *love*, which are so dominant in Calvin's theology, will also be attended to.

2. Calvin sees the church as a dynamic domain of governance

Calvin's vision of the church rests wholly on election from which perspective the involvement of the church towards God should be understood (Van 't Spijker, 1990a:145 ff.). This total involvement towards God is sealed by the metaphor of the church as the body of which Christ is the Head (cf. Col. 1:18, 24; Eph. 1:22; 5:23), through which an intrinsic control from the top down is conveyed.

Because the church as a living body has so many facets, the totality of the church could easily be relayed to one of its many facets. Calvin, however, does not reduce the body in terms of one of its members or organs, and therefore the essence of the church is rendered by him as a new order in which the domain of the governance of Jesus Christ is embodied.

The core concept of the *meeting of the Lord* (*qahal* in the Old Testament and *ekklésia* in the New Testament) is activated in terms of the full range of its New Testament meaning by means of concepts such as *kletói* (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 1:6) and *eklektoí* (cf. Col. 3:12). In the sense of the meaning of *election, being called and dispensation of God* Calvin clearly recognises the dimension of the church's total dependence on God (cf. Schmidt, 1979:527; Ridderbos, 1971:371, 419, 426, 430; Snyman, 1977:35, 36; Groenewald, 1962:392).

Because of Christ's total and complete control of his church, which He exerts organically, Calvin, with remarkable insight in Scripture, interpreted the church as being a dynamic, historical organism. For that reason his concept of the church does not culminate in a stark, juridical structure like that of an empire, the Roman Empire for that matter. To him the church is not a mere human community of law or an association functioning on the basis of a constitution, but the dynamic governance domain of Jesus Christ which functions on the basis of the Word through his Spirit. Seen in this way, the church is God's new order in the world through which the kingdom of the heavens shines in the dark (cf. *Inst.* 4.1.6, 9; 4.2.4; Bohatec, 1961: 267, 271; Milner, 1970:44, 164 ff.; Fröhlich, 1930:19 ff., 46, 52, 53; Richel, 1942:74 ff.; Kampschulte, 1972:385, 396; Ganoczy, 1968: 356).

For Calvin, the church of the Lord centres on the offices. The *corpus Christi* is embodied through the work of the officers as servants of the church, under the guidance of his Spirit. This is essentially en-

compassed in the ministry of the Word, the administering of the Sacraments and the application of church discipline (*Inst.* 4.3.1; 4.1.9; 4.12.1). For that reason, Calvin does not, in his well-known *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques*, begin with the assemblies of the church, but with the offices in which the *Christ-ministerium* comes to expression: *pasteurs, docteurs, anciens* and *diacres* (*Inst.* 4.1.5, 6; 4.14.17; CO 51,174-176; Doumergue, 1931:79; Richel, 1942:64; Weerda, 1964:142 ff.; Milner, 1970:106-110, 190 ff.; Balke, 1973:98 ff.; cf. Schmidt, 1979:101 ff.; Van 't Spijker, 1990b:332).

Following Calvin's tracks the reformed confessions also do not represent the church as an objectified structure existing outside the purview of its members, but as a gathering of believers existing organically in community with each other and in committed involvement with Jesus Christ (BC, 1970: art. 27; HC, 1970: Lord's Day 21, Question 54, 55), a community with the vision "That this true Church must be governed by that spiritual polity which our Lord has taught us in his Word ..." (BC, 1970: art. 30).

3. A governance model of undelegated authority

Jesus Christ is seen by Calvin as the only and actual Governor of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 11.3; Col. 2:10; Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 1:20-22). He governs his church through his Spirit which emanates from Him and the Father (cf. John 15:26; 16:7). The Holy Spirit actively exerts Christ's power of governance through his Word (cf. John 16:13-15; 14:26). This He does through his officers whom He endows with special gifts for church governance (*charismata*: cf. Rom. 12:6), so that they can fulfil the special offices in the church for which He calls them (*diakonia*: cf. Rom. 13:7; Eph. 4:12; Col. 4:17; BC, 1970: art. 30; cf. Sillevis Smitt, 1910:119; Ridderbos, 1971:497).

The calling is confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the election and confirmation of the officers (*diakonoi*) in their special offices. The officers have to execute their calling as *douloi* (slaves) (cf. John 13:14-16; Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). On the grounds of the referred parts from the Scripture Calvin confirms that like a slave, the *diakonoi* have no personal authority – what they do, they do in terms of the command of the Lord and the derived authority from the Lord. The *diakonoi* are like the waiters at table who serve nothing of themselves, but only of the Master (Van 't Spijker, 1972:12).

The authority in the church is therefore an authority derived from Christ (Van 't Spijker, 1986:134). As the entire lives of the believers, whom they are and what they do, are captured dynamically in the

Pauline refrain: “we in Christ” and “Christ in us” (Eph. 1:4, 6, 7, 11, 13; 2:6, 10; Gal. 2:17; Col. 1:14; Phil. 1:1), all authority of the church exists in Christ and is perfected in Him (cf. Floor, 1982:69, 71). Where Calvin, with regard to the authority of the officers of the church uses the word *substitutory*, it is evident from his explication that he intends it to mean *representative* (*Inst.* 4.3.1). Christ never delegated his authority to his officers. He Himself, as the Head, remains the sole bearer of authority. The officers never receive independent, personal authority in a substitutory sense. Their command, or calling, is, however, a power to act. They receive full power, as representatives of Christ, to minister his Word in his church (2 Cor. 5:18; *Inst.* 4.3.1; BC, 1970: Art. 30; Ridderbos, 1971:528).

From Calvin’s Scripturally-founded concept of the church he was insistent that no authority had any competency in the church from outside the Word. In fact, it was only when the Word came to the fore in the words of the officers that the assembly could be considered to be speaking with authority (*Inst.* 4.3.1, 4; cf. Ganoczy, 1968:291 ff.; Calvin’s exegesis of Col. 1:18: CO 52,86 ff.). All human authority in the church is summarily dismissed by Calvin. He points out that it is wholly and fully God’s own work to govern his church. In fact, should we not want to acknowledge that God Himself governs his church through his officers, it would amount to our maiming of the body of the Lord by leaving it without a head (Calvin’s exegesis of Acts 13:1-3: CO 48-281; cf. also Calvin’s exegesis of Eph. 1:22 ff.: CO 51,159 ff.; and Eph. 5:23: CO 51,222).

Calvin’s radical rejection of mere human exercise of authority in the church is strikingly encompassed in his exegesis of Ephesians 4:5: “What an ugly hump (*gibbus*) is the papacy then, through which the whole symmetry of the congregation is disfigured, because one man is setting himself up against the Head ...” (CO 51,202). Yet Calvin did not, in over-reaction against Rome, wholly reject the tradition heritage of the church. The tradition, however, did not have authority as tradition, but really and only should a faithful echo of the Holy Scripture be heard in it and Christ’s voice be recognisable in it (*Inst.* 4.9.1, 8).

By bowing before the Lord, the believers come directly under His authority (*Inst.* 4.1.3; 4.12.2, 7; cf. Calvin’s exegesis of Eph. 1:22 ff.: CO 51,159 ff.; and Eph. 4:6: CO 51,192). The specific offices that He instituted, for which He equips specific people and have them appointed by the congregation, is a specific focus of the calling of all believers to serve his authority. The officers do not receive in themselves a special authority. They receive the command, how-

ever, to officially minister Christ's authority which is situated in the Word in a non-transferable sense. In actual fact, no authority is vested in people.

When they are called to the office, then they are simultaneously instructed not to make any personal announcements, but to speak from the mouth of the Lord ... should the priest therefore want to be heard, he should prove himself to be a messenger from God ... (*Inst.* 4.8.2).

The reformed confessions maintain Calvin's views on authority in the church. The Belgic Confession (1970), in article 32, explicitly determines "... that they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted". It is also further declared: "And therefore we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever" (BC, 1970: art. 32). Apropos of the real church it is characteristic that it "ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ" (BC, 1970: art. 29).

4. A governance model of ministerial focused authority

Because the church assemblies have no inherent authority, Calvin judges that Christ should in fact be chairman of the assembly, and this He can only be when the assembly is led in its decisions in accordance with the Word through the Spirit (*Inst.* 4.9.1). The church did, however, receive the power to teach (*potestas docenda*), the power to govern (*potestas gubernatio*) and the power to make laws (*potestas regiminis*). But this "power" should be understood in the sense of a competency (*potestas*) which is exercised as a ministry (*ministerium*), because it is based on the Word and is only ministered in conjunction with the Word (*Inst.* 4.8.1, 2, 4, 5, 8; CO 45,474-477 and 515 ff.; *Inst.* 4.11.1: ... *nec tam potestatem esse quam ministerium ...*;¹ *Inst.* 4.10.30; 4.6.9; see Calvin's exegesis of 1 Cor. 14:40: CO 49,536).

The *potestas* to teach, is the competence which the Word lends to the church to determine dogma. This the churches do in conjunction at synods. The authority of the synodial decisions or judgments is determined exclusively by whether the doctrine which is being laid

1 "That it is not so much power as ministry ...".

down or being exegetised accords with the Word of God (*Inst.* 4.8.1, 2, 4, 5, 8; Bohatec, 1961:516-563).

The *potestas* to govern, or to make juridical judgments, is nothing other than the command which Christ Himself in his Word gives to the church (Calvin's exegesis of Matt. 16:19; 18:18: CO 45,474-477, 515 ff.). The *potestas* to govern is therefore the practice of Christ's authority in order to execute the spiritual government for which his officers are employed.

The *potestas* to make laws also does not indicate an independent human authority: such laws have to be based only on the Word (*Inst.* 4.10.30; 4.6.9). The permission for and the limitation of the "*potestas* to make laws" is founded by Calvin in 1 Corinthians 14:40. On the strength of the statement that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" the church has to make rulings of order in conjunction with the Word, as if "these came from the mouth of Christ Himself" (Calvin's exegesis of 1 Cor. 14:40: CO 49,536).

Apart from the competence which Christ gave to his church to make laws, to teach and to govern, Christ's direct governance also takes place within the heart of each believer, also through his Word and Spirit. Where the Word is heard, that is, where the workings of the Spirit correlate with the Word, belief comes into being. Where there is faith, the governance of Christ in the heart of the believer finds expression. Together the believers form the new order where one bows before the authority of the Word and the Spirit (Milner, 1970:4; Ganoczy, 1968:195-206).

Because the authority of the church is directed at the building of the body of Christ (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10), and Christ is the real builder of his church, the only exercise of authority in the church should be the ministry of Christ's undelegated authority through his Word (cf. Polman, s.a.:4:53).

5. A model of governance based on faith and love

The spiritual polity in the church means that any measure of judiciary coercion should be excluded. The church is not governed in any way as an earthly monarchy, or an autocracy, or even a democracy. Church governance occurs through dissemination of the Word and persuasion (Smit, 1985:286 ff.; 1992:510). Christ's government is primarily effected through the working of the Holy Spirit in people's hearts, thus through the ministry of the Word. Church governance can therefore be typified as governance by the Word. It

is governance which does not rest on any coercion, but rather on an inner agreement. This governance, therefore, can be considered an aristocratic system, rather than a democratic system.

Because the directedness of church governance is for Calvin of more profundity than juridical enforceability, it is not in the first place a governance of law, but of the heart. Church governance is directed by faith and love (*Inst.* 4.10.30).

Faith in the Word as revelation of God is the foundation of church governance: faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour and Governor of his church, faith in the Holy Spirit as the builder and completer of the church, faith in the Father as the sanctuary of the church. Without this faith, and the conviction that the Word of God is the foundation on which the church has to be governed, the governance by Christ in the church would be seriously impeded, for then the church would be devalued into being just another social club, or an extra-parliamentary forum from whence influence can be exerted on the community.

Love is the norm of church government.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second, being equal, love your neighbour as yourself. (Matt. 22:37-39, NIV.)

The love which is of concern in church government presupposes at the most profound level the restored relationship of the saved with God through Jesus Christ – a relationship through which reciprocal community has to be ordered in the church order. Without love church government becomes a rigid, legalistic act posited merely on the maintenance of structures and procedures. The crucial testing question with which all acts pertaining to church law or church order should accord is the question about the norm of love. Is it the will of God which is being ministered, testable against the Word, which is ministered out of love for the brothers and sisters? (Smit, 1985:292-298). For that reason Calvin posits that love can best judge about what is damaging and what is edifying, and if we allow love to govern all will be well (*Inst.* 4.10.30).

Church governance should at all times keep in mind to insure the faith of the saved. Without faith and without love this is not possible. At the same time church governance is the way in which the community of the faithful can be subordinated in an orderly manner to the government of Jesus Christ.

From Calvin's view it emerges clearly that church government is therefore embedded in the ministry of the Word – in love (and faith) – and the acceptance of faith (and love). Where government is complied within faith, it governs the heart, but where it is accepted as mere duty it only governs the actions of man (Smit, 1985:289, 293, 295).

Both the foundation and the norm of church government emanate from the act of restitution of God through Jesus Christ. Based on faith and love church government, therefore, has everything to do with the restitution, the normalisation of the relationship of the faithful with God and with one another (Smit, 1985:298).

6. The practical embodiment: a church order

In order to give a practical foundation to a spiritual mode of governance in the church, a church order which is founded in the Word is needed. In this regard Calvin made a huge paradigm shift. One should consider his major contribution to the governance of the church from the starting point of this paradigm shift. Against the existing canonical law Calvin chose for a church order. The consequences of this development can barely be overestimated. Here Calvin moved from a juridical, one may say a mere human way of church management, to the much wider vision of a scriptural view on church government. Thereby he proposed a new vision for the church and in the same time implemented a church order in order to secure the church as God's new order in the world (*verus ordo*).

Calvin's view on a church order liberated the church from the domination of church officials, who were now clearly limited in their discretion. The hierarchy of the church was declined. This new order in the world, secured by a church order, freed the church from a rigid juridical system in which the vivid life of the church was frozen for centuries. Thereby Calvin urged respect for liberty within the church. Christian believers were to be free to enter and to leave the church, free to partake in the church's offices and services without fear of bodily coercion and persecution, free to assemble, worship, pray, and partake in the sacraments without fear of political reprisal, free to elect their ministers, elders, deacons, and teachers, free to debate and deliberate matters of faith and discipline, free to pursue discretionary matters of faith, the adiaphora, without undue laws and structures. However, this principle, too, was an ideal that Calvin and his followers compromised, particularly in his co-actions towards Servetus and in his undue empowerment of the consistory courts in his later years. Yet this principle helped to guarantee constant ac-

tion, adherence, and agitation for reform by individual members of the church (Witte, 2007:79-80). The church was thereby also protected from the intrusions of state law and the sinful vicissitudes of their members. Calvin urged respect for the rule of the Scripture within the church. By means of the church order the church's doctrines and disciplinary standards, the duties and the rights of their officers and parishioners, the procedures for legislation and adjudication were clearly defined (cf. Witte, 2007:79). Calvin, in a letter to Farel (16 Sept. 1541) wrote that the church cannot exist without such a *regimen* (cf. Van 't Spijker, 1990b:328).

It has been pointed out by several scholars that mere human decisions, through which the consciences of the believers are bound, do not have any place in Calvin's view of a church order (Bouwman, 1970:327; Jansen, 1923:2; Monsma, 1967:19 ff.; Spoelstra, 1989: 23; Van der Linde, 1983:8; Smit, 1984a:75 ff.; 1983:27-32). Thereby Calvin clearly distinguished between divine law and church law (*ius divinum* and *ius humanum*) as expressed in church order: divine law is the foundation of church order; divine law should be reflected by church order; and church order must conform to divine law. Church order in conflict with divine law may be invalid (Doe, 2008:283). Calvin also accepts, however, that apart from the constitutive basis of the church order also an institutive element is essential. This aspect of the church order (*circumstantiae*) makes provision for the practical foundation of the basis of principle drawn from the Word. This should only contain the most essential of what should be formulated and only to the extent that it is permissible on the basis of the Word (1 Cor. 14:40; *Inst.* 4.10.32; 4.10.30). Thus the church order should reflect God's order for his church and be the direction-giver according to which church governance is essentially none other than ministry of the Word (Smit, 1984a:57 ff.; cf. Plomp, 1967:14 ff., 12, 9).

From the foregoing it also emerges that Calvin does not acknowledge any transfer of authority from the Word to a written church order. Such a church order should only serve the authority of the Word by recapitulating the Lord's ordinations and decisions for his church, such as emanate from the Word. Therefore the following may be concluded from Calvin (Smit, 1987:24):

- The church order does not create the services of the church, but reflects them.
- The church order does not constitute the assemblies of the church, but gives them an orderly shape.

- The church order does not create the ministry of the Word and the administering of the sacraments, but secures and maintains them.
- The church order does not command church discipline, but systematises this scriptural command into a church procedure.
- The church order does not create the institution of the church, but maintains the scriptural principles for it and reflects it.

In the application of the church order one may not create a separate set of rules apart from Holy Scripture. Where the church order wishes to say more than *ko amar Jahwe*² its right to existence is lost. The own glory of the church order is to be a servant of the church as God's new order in the world, and this glory lies in a total secondary function, namely in its sole capability of service to the church (Smit, 1984a:58-98; 1984b:42-44; Coertzen, 1991:178,180; cf. *Inst.* 4.10.27).

According to Calvin (*Inst.* 4.10.30) the application of the church order as governance by the Word can, therefore, never be seen in isolation from the working of the Holy Spirit.

The Church (order) must always be understood, as existing in the movement from the believer to the Word which occurs in the leading of the Spirit through ordained means. (Milner, 1970:192.)

7. A church order aimed at the protection of the governance of the Spirit

Calvin (*Inst.* 4.10.30) taught that church government by way of a scripturally-bound church order is the work of the Spirit of God. The legal validity of that too does not rest in determinations of human authority, but in the Word of God, through which the Spirit binds people's consciences. For that reason the concern is in principle, in the enactment of law by the church, not with contravention of the church order, or a specific article from it, as the concern would be in civil jurisprudence with a contravention of a specific law. When the scripturally-bound church order is contravened, the contravention of scriptural principles important to the continued existence of the church becomes the issue (Smit, 1992:516 ff.). Because the church order, according to Calvin, should on an ongoing basis return the

2 "Thus speaks the Lord."

church to Scripture for purposes of a spiritual polity it should be in a position to protect church government against detaching the Spirit wilfully from the Word and thus to rule over the Spirit (the essential error which recurs in church history) (Noordmans, 1980:390).

The spiritual polity of the church, or the ruling of the Spirit of God in the church, comes to expression through the church bowing in obedience before the Word. In this way the church order is an essential aid through which the recreated mankind can answer to its vocation within an ordered society (*Inst.* 4.10.30). In reality the church order is a reflection of one biblical order expressed in various articles. Through the church order the church government should contribute to God's being edified in the legal-orderly and pastoral life of the church, so that the kingdom of Jesus can be promoted, and so that his church, legal-orderly and pastoral, can be strengthened and purified of all disorder and malpractices, and that the church can then blossom into its full pleroma (Smit, 1992:517; cf. 1985:347).

The best scripturally-founded church order, however, is no guarantee of a spiritually fulfilled church life. The application of the church order in the active church government, according to Calvin, determines whether the church order will be able to serve the church through a spiritual mode of government towards true *aedificatio*. In the way in which church government is practised, it should become clear whether the church order is merely fulfilling a juridical function without the Spirit of God, and whether it is fulfilling a function rooted in faith, born out of love. Rigid and unbending application of the church order, as if it were merely a set of statutes detached from the Word of God, will totally smother a spiritual mode of governance in the church. In this way the heartbeat of Christ will become inaudible in the church, and the inner illumination of the Spirit will diminish, because it will have to make way for the hammer of human law through which the church begins to govern the Spirit (Smit, 1992: 517).

It is only through applying a scripturally-bound church order in the spirit of the Word that the church government can ensure that it is Christ Himself who is governing his church through his Spirit. The church order should pave the way so that the scriptural injunction becomes clear in every act of church governance. In this way the primary function of the church order then emerges, viz. ensuring the government of the Word and, therefore, the Spirit's governance, a government over the heart of the church of the Lord (*Inst.* 4.2.4; 4.3.1, 2, 7, 8, 14; 4.7.23; 4.8.1-4, 7, 8; cf. Smit, 1992:517).

This spiritual mode of government does not prevent the church from participating in the processes of jurisprudence within the sphere of state laws. The church does not do this by way of being a statutory determined body within the state set-up, that is, by way of the grace of the state authority, but rather as the unique body of Christ within its own legal competence (cf. Smit, 2005:197 ff.; Smit, 2001:68-71; cf. Haijtema, 1951:13 ff.). The legal competence of the church therefore is not dependent on or subordinated to the state authority (cf. Witte, 2008:23). However, the church disposes of its own legal competence (*sui generis*), and then in terms of its ordering as the body of Christ (cf. Smit, 2005:161, 191 ff.; 2002:16, 25; Pienaar, 1982:271 ff.). “De kerk heeft een eigen recht dat niet door de aardsche macht kan worden vervreemd.” (Hoedemaker, 1904:13; cf. 8.) The unique mode of government of the church should, therefore, be fully acknowledged by the state law as an internal law of relation (Smit, 2006:643-644).

8. Conclusion

The highest aim and purpose of church government is situated in the edification of God’s church as his new order in this world. This premise, the *aedificatio ecclesiae*, never seduced Calvin into building out the church like an *imperium*. The building of the church for him never consisted in outward structures, but rather in faith and love: emanating from obedience to the Word. In this article it is clearly determined that the church was seen by Calvin, not as a mere human community based on laws, an association functioning on the basis of a constitution, but as a dynamic domain of the governance of Jesus Christ which functions on the basis of the Word through his Spirit.

Therefore, human authority in the church is summarily abolished by Calvin. He points out that it is wholly and fully God’s own work to govern his church. It emerges clearly that church government is embedded in the ministry of the Word in faith and love. Based on faith and love church government has everything to do with the restitution, the normalisation of the relationship of the faithful with God and with each other.

In order to give a practical foundation to a spiritual mode of governance in the church, Calvin implemented a new vision for the church by means of his choice for a church order against the existing canonical law. One should consider his major contribution to the governance of the church from this starting point. The consequences of this paradigm shift can barely be overestimated. Thereby

Calvin lead the church from a mere juridical way of church management to a scriptural-founded church government in order to secure the church as God's new order in the world.

For Calvin church government is, therefore, primarily a process of governing the heart, the hearts of those among whom God's new order in the world exists. Where the Word through the Spirit appeals to the heart, one bows before the Lord – and there the church, as his body, God's new order in the world, becomes visible.

List of references

- BALKE, W. 1973. *Calvijn en de doperse radikalen*. Amsterdam: Holland.
BC
 see BELGIC CONFESSIO
- BELGIC CONFESSIO. 1970. *The Belgic Confession. (In Doctrinal Standards of the Dutch Reformed Church. Johannesburg: Andrew Murray Congregation. p. 3-21.)*
- BOHATEC, J. 1961. *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche: mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Organismusgedankens*. 2. Ausg. Aalen: Scientia.
- BOUWMAN, H. 1970. *Gereformeerde kerkrecht*. Part 1. Kampen: Kok.
- CALVIN, J. 1864-1897. *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*. 58 parts. Eds: G. Baum, E. Cunitz & E. Reuss. Brunsvigae: Schwetschke.
- CALVIN, J. 1964-1966. [1559]. *Institutes of the Christian religion*. 2 Vols. Trans. by H. Beveridge. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- CO
 see CALVIN, J. 1864-1897
- COERTZEN, P. 1991. *Gepas en ordelik*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- DOE, N. 2008. *Modern church law. (In Witte, J. jr. & Alexander, F.S., eds. Christianity and law: an introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 271-291.)*
- DOUMERGUE, E. 1931. *Calvijn als mensch en hervormer*. Vert. uit de Frans door H.C. Pos. Amsterdam: Ten Have.
- FLOOR, L. 1982. *Perspektiewe op die prediking van Paulus*. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel.
- FRÖHLICH, K. 1930. *Gottesreich Welt und Kirche bei Calvin: ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Reichgottesglauben Calvins*. München: Ernst Reinhardt.
- GANOCZY, A. 1968. *Ecclesia ministrans: dienende Kirche und kirchlicher Dienst bei Calvin*. Freiburg: Herder.
- GROENEWALD, E.P. 1962. *Die ekklesia in die Nuwe Testament. Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif*, 3(3):389-402, Jun.
- HAITJEMA, Th. L. 1951. *Nederlands Hervormd kerkrecht*. Nijkerk: Callenbach.
HC
 see HEIDELBERG CATECHISM
- HEIDELBERG CATECHISM. 1970. *The Heidelberg Catechism. (In Doctrinal Standards of the Dutch Reformed Church. Johannesburg: Andrew Murray Congregation. p.3-21.)*
- HOEDEMAEKER, Ph. J. 1904. *De kerk en het moderne staatsrecht*. Amsterdam: HAUM.

INST.

- see CALVIN, J. 1964-1966 [1559]
- JANSEN, J. 1923. Korte verklaring van de kerkenordering. Kampen: Kok.
- KAMPSCHULTE, F.W. 1972. Johann Calvin: seine Kirche und sein Staat in Genf. Geneve: Slatkine Reprints.
- MILNER, B.C. 1970. Calvin's doctrine of the church. Leiden: Brill.
- MONSMA, M. 1967. The new revised church order commentary: a brief explanation of the church order of the Christian Reformed Church. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- NOORDMANS, O. 1980. Verzamelde werken. Part 8: Meditaties. Kampen: Kok.
- PIENAAR, G. 1982. Die gemeenregtelike regspersoon in die Suid-Afrikaanse Privaatreg. Potchefstroom: PU vir CHO. (LL.D.-proefskrif.)
- PLOMP, J. 1967. Beginnselen van reformatories kerkrecht. Kampen: Kok. (Kamper Cahiers, no. 4.)
- POLMAN, A.D.R. s.a. Onze Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis: verklaard uit het verleden geconfronteerd met het heden. Deel 4. Franeker: Wever.
- RICHEL, P.J. 1942. Het kerkbegrip van Calvijn. Franeker: Wever.
- RIDDERBOS, H. 1971. Paulus: ontwerp van zijn theologie. 2e dr. Kampen: Kok.
- SCHMIDT, K.L. 1979. Ekklesia. (In Kittel, G., ed. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. p. 501-536.)
- SILLEVIS SMITT, P.A.E. 1910. De organisatie van de Christelijke kerk in den apostolischen tijd. Rotterdam: De Vries.
- SMIT, C.J. 1983. Beskik die kerkorde oor selfstandige gesag? *In die Skriflig*, 17(68):27-33.
- SMIT, C.J. 1984a. God se orde vir sy kerk: 'n beskouing oor kerkorde. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel.
- SMIT, C.J. 1984b. Tot lof van die kerkorde ... in sy dienskneggewaad, 1. *In die Skriflig*, 18(71):37-44.
- SMIT, C.J. 1985. Kerkreg en kerkorde in die lig van God se reg en orde vir sy kerk. Potchefstroom: PU vir CHO. (Th.D.-proefskrif.)
- SMIT, C.J. 1987. Kerkreg en kerkorde in diens van die kerkregering: oorsig oor 'n beskouing. *In die Skriflig*, 21(82):17-27.
- SMIT, C.J. 1992. Kerkregering as 'n geestelike regeringswyse. *In die Skriflig*, 26(4): 503-521.
- SMIT, J. 2001. 'n Gereformeerde-kerkregtelike beoordeling van die predikant se verbintenis aan die plaaslike kerk. Potchefstroom: PU vir CHO. (Th.M.-verhandeling.)
- SMIT, J. 2002. Kerkreg en staatsreg – is daar 'n verskil? *Die Kerkblad*, 105(3143):16, 25.
- SMIT, J. 2005. Die regsposisie van die gereformeerde predikant in die godsdiensneutrale staat van Suid-Afrika: 'n gereformeerde-kerkregtelike studie. Potchefstroom: NWU. (Ph.D.-proefskrif.)
- SMIT, J. 2006. Die kerk se regsposisie in Suid-Afrika in die lig van godsdiensvryheid: gereformeerde-kerkregtelik gesien. *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif*, 47(3 & 4):633-651.
- SNYMAN, W.J. 1977. Nuwe en ou dinge: "uit die skat van die koninkryk". Potchefstroom: Pro Rege. (RGN. Publikasieëreks, nr. 56.)
- SPOELSTRA, B. 1989. Gereformeerde kerkreg en kerkregering: handboek by die kerkorde. Pretoria: HTS.
- VAN DER LINDE, G.P.L. 1883. Die kerkorde: 'n verklaring van die gereformeerde kerkorde. Pretoria: Van Wyk.

- VAN 'T SPIJKER, W. 1972. *Goddelijk recht en kerkelijke orde bij Martin Bucer*. Kampen: Kok. (Apeldoornse Studies, no. 3.)
- VAN 'T SPIJKER, W. 1986. *Bijbelse motieven in Bucers opvatting van het kerkrecht*. (In Smit, C.J. red. *In gehoorsaamheid: opgedra aan prof. G.P.L. van der Linde*. Pretoria: Potchefstroomse Teologiese Publikasies. p. 125-141.)
- VAN 'T SPIJKER, W. 1990a. *De kerk bij Calvijn*. (In Van 't Spijker, W., Balke, W., Exalto, K. & Van Driel, L., eds. *De kerk: wezen, weg en werk van de kerk naar reformatorische opvatting*. Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan. p. 143-162.)
- VAN 'T SPIJKER, W. 1990b. *Het presbyteriale-synodale stelsel*. (In Van 't Spijker, W., Balke, W., Exalto, K. & Van Driel, L., eds. *De Kerk: wezen, weg en werk van de kerk naar reformatorische opvatting*. Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan. p. 326-338.)
- WEERDA, J.R. 1964. *Nach Gottes Wort reformierte Kirche: Beiträge zur ihrer Geschichte und ihrem Recht*. München: Kaiser.
- WITTE, J. jr. 2007. *The reformation of rights – law, religion, and human rights in early modern Calvinism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WITTE, J. jr. 2008. *Introduction*. (In Witte, J. jr. & Alexander, F.S., eds. *Christianity and law: an introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1-32.)

Key concepts:

church
church authority
church governance
church officers
church order
new order

Kernbegrippe:

kerk
kerkdienaars
kerkgesag
kerkorde
kerkregering
nuwe orde