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Article Title: JOHN CALVIN AND THE ENGLISH CATHOLICS, c. 1565–1640\*

Year of publication: 2010

Link to published article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X10000488>

Publisher statement: © Cambridge University Press 2010.

# JOHN CALVIN AND THE ENGLISH CATHOLICS, c. 1565–1640\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article examines the assessments of John Calvin's life, character, and influence to be found in the polemical writings of English Catholics in the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods. It demonstrates the centrality of Calvin to Catholic claims about the character and history of the established church, and the extent to which Catholic writings propagated a vibrant 'black legend' of Calvin's egotism and sexual depravity, drawing heavily not only on the writings of the French Calvinist-turned-Catholic Jerome Bolsec, but also on those of German Lutherans. The article also explores how, over time, Catholic writers increasingly identified some common ground with anti-puritans and anti-Calvinists within the English church, and how claims about the seditious character of Calvin, and by extension Calvinism, were used to articulate the contrasting 'loyalty' of Catholics and their right to occupy a place within the English polity.*

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The influence of Calvin on the development of English Protestantism in the immediate post-Reformation decades has been a lively and often contentious historical theme. Historians have debated whether the Elizabethan and Jacobean church was characterized by a 'Calvinist Consensus', which unravelled in the reign of Charles I due to the unexpected rise of English Arminianism, or whether the much-vaunted consensus was really more of a fragile hegemony, or no consensus at all.<sup>1</sup> Calvin's own symbolic, even iconic, status as a marker of Protestant identity is a longstanding theme of recognized importance.<sup>2</sup> The importance of Calvin for the formation of English Catholic attitudes and identity, by contrast,

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\* An earlier version of this article was delivered as a paper to the Calvin Colloquium at the University of Exeter in September 2009. I am grateful to the Revd Dr Paul Avis and other organizers and participants for insightful discussion on that occasion, and to Dr Tom Freeman, Professor Peter Lake, and Professor Anthony Milton for very helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> See, inter alia, P. Collinson, *The religion of Protestants: the Church in English society, 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1982); N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism c. 1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987); P. Lake, 'Calvinism and the English Church, 1570–1635', *Past and Present*, 114 (1987), pp. 32–76; P. White, *Predestination, policy and polemic: conflict and consensus in the English church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1992); A. Milton, *Catholic and reformed: the Roman and Protestant churches in English Protestant thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge, 1995); D. Shuger, 'A protesting Catholic Puritan in Elizabethan England', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), pp. 587–630.

<sup>2</sup> The key work here is Milton, *Catholic and reformed*.

has not attracted the attention of historians.<sup>3</sup> Yet Calvin's life, opinions, and influence were topics of intense, at times almost obsessive, interest to English Roman Catholics, particularly the clerical exiles, at a crucial stage of their history. Catholics regularly invoked the Genevan reformer's memory to assert the completeness of their separation from a contaminating heretical other, the English state church. Yet, paradoxically, Romanist constructions of 'Calvin' also increasingly helped Catholics to negotiate a position for themselves in a complex and fractured post-Reformation religious landscape. This article charts English Catholic perceptions and representations of Calvin, from the years immediately after his death in the mid-1560s to the crisis of Charles I's rule in 1640. It aims to demonstrate Calvin's importance for patterns of post-Reformation Catholic identity-formation, and in the process to align Catholic concerns more closely to mainstream religious and political developments in this period.

## I

Modern historians may have started to question Calvin's paramount importance for the Elizabethan church, but its contemporary Catholic critics had few doubts about the matter. From early in Elizabeth's reign, Calvin occupied an especially important place in the imagination of English Catholic heresiographers. Luther, of course, was the originator and first author of all the mischief. But Calvin was his principal heir and successor. In Thomas Stapleton's 1565 translation of the *Apologie* of the German Catholic convert, Friedrich Staphylus, Calvin is represented (after Luther and Melancthon) as 'the third chief Master of late heresies', but also as 'principall founder of wicked doctrine'. As 'Capitayn of the Sacramentary secte', he 'beareth nowe the name and the stroke of all that cursed secte, both bicause he hath written most thereof, and also hath done most harme of any other'. Stapleton appended to his translation a discourse upon the doctrine of the Protestants, 'which he trieth by the three first founders ... and especially Iohn Caluin'. Though some of the prelates and ministers of the Church of England were what Stapleton called 'ciuill Lutherans, gentle and courtly protestants', indifferent in many religious matters, the greater and most influential group were 'sacramentaries of Geneua ... To these men Luther is a papist, and Caluin is the right and vndoubted prophet.'<sup>4</sup> In a subsequent work, Stapleton mocked Calvin as the English Protestants' 'patriarch', 'apostle', and 'idol'.<sup>5</sup> His fellow Louvain exile, Thomas Dorman, joined in the fun, taunting his opponents with

<sup>3</sup> There is a short suggestive section on 'John Calvin and the Church of England between Feckenham and Sander', in S. Tutino, *Law and conscience: Catholicism in early modern England, 1570–1625* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 28–31.

<sup>4</sup> *The apologie of Fridericus Staphylus counsellor to the late Emperour Ferdinandus ... translated out of Latin in to English by Thomas Stapleton, student in diuinite. Also a discourse of the translatour vppon the doctrine of the Protestants which he trieth by the three first founders and fathers thereof* (Antwerp, 1565), fos. 147r–148r.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Stapleton, *A counterblast to M. Homes vayne blaste against M. Fekenham* (Louvain, 1567), fos. 22v, 57v, 402v, 508r.

‘their master’, ‘your late capitaine’, ‘your God’, John Calvin, and observing how his principal opponent, John Jewell, ‘will nedes daunce after his maister Caluin his pipe’.<sup>6</sup>

To William Allen, reflecting in 1565 on the controversy over the meaning of Christ’s descent into hell, ‘cursed Calvine’ was a horrible blasphemer for teaching that Christ himself suffered the pains of hell in his soul. Yet, shockingly, not only were his books ‘greedely redde’, the bishops endorsed them ‘and the very booke wherin this and all other detestable doctrine is uttered, especially be their authoritie [is] commendid to the simple curates study’.<sup>7</sup> This text, the *Institutes*, was according to Stapleton a book ‘so precious in the eyes off some pretended bishops, that it is by them commaunded to be read of such, as haue charge of soules’.<sup>8</sup> I have been unable to identify any extant episcopal order from the early 1560s requiring parish ministers to study the *Institutes*, though it seems unlikely that Allen and Stapleton were simply confused about this point.<sup>9</sup>

Whether or not the *Institutes* were prescribed reading for parish clergy in the 1560s, Calvin’s importance for the unwelcome drift of English affairs was soon underlined by the highest Roman authority. Uniquely among Protestant reformers, Calvin was specifically named in Pius V’s bull *Regnans in Excelsis* of February 1570, excommunicating Elizabeth as a ‘heretic and favourer of heretics’, and commanding her Catholic subjects not to obey her. Among Elizabeth’s crimes was that of commending to her subjects ‘the profane mysteries and institutions which she had received and observed from the decree of Calvin’.<sup>10</sup> The excommunication was preceded by a trial, for which the indictment accused her of allowing ‘sermons to be preached in the heretical and Calvinistic manner’. Twelve leading English Catholic exiles had been summoned as witnesses and testified to the truth of this and other charges.<sup>11</sup>

Small wonder, then, that Calvin increasingly assumed an emblematic status as personification of the errors and cruelty of the heretical Church of England. It is notable that, in Catholic sources, the communion service was regularly referred to as ‘the supper of Calvin’, while the established church was referred to as ‘Calvin’s congregation’ by the Jesuit Henry Garnet, and as *Eglwys Calfyn* in a

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Dorman, *A proufe of certeyne articles in religion, denied by M. Iuell* (Antwerp, 1564), fos. 19r, 35r, 88r, 113v. A Scots Catholic exile, John Fraser, later mocked the Protestant ministers with the idea that it was necessary ‘that your Calvin should, as an other saint Iohn the Baptist, *parare viam Domini*’: John Fraser, *A lerned epistle... to the ministers of Great Britanie* (Douai, 1605), p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> William Allen, *A defense and declaration of the Catholike Churchies [sic] doctrine, touching purgatory, and prayers for the soules departed* (Antwerp, 1565), fo. 38r.

<sup>8</sup> Stapleton, *Apologie*, fo. 230r. See also idem, *A fortress of the faith first planted amonge vs Englishmen* (Antwerp, 1565), fo. 24v.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Sander was more specific, identifying ‘institutiones Calvinii’ as one of several heretical books ordered to be placed in churches during the royal or episcopal visitations of 1559: *De origine ac progressu Schismatis Anglicani* (Cologne, 1585), fo. 167v.

<sup>10</sup> English translation in R. Miola, ed., *Early modern Catholicism: an anthology of primary sources* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 486–8.

<sup>11</sup> J. H. Pollen, *The English Catholics in the reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1920), pp. 147–8.

Welsh carol of 1580 by the poet and martyr Richard Gwyn.<sup>12</sup> Calvin was also the fount of scriptural errors, the annotations in the Rheims New Testament of 1581 losing few chances to condemn ‘the false and vain glosses of Calvin and his followers’ abounding in English Protestant translations.<sup>13</sup> Catholic narratives of conversion and redemption were often couched in terms of a conscious rejection of Calvin. Henry Garnet’s 1594 report on the martyr, Richard Williams, recorded that he had ‘abandoned the side of Calvin’ in order to join the Catholic Church.<sup>14</sup> Those entering the English College at Rome, and filling out the required autobiographical questionnaire, sometimes told a similar story. John Grosse related in 1603 how he had been born and brought up amongst heretics, but was now completely changed from his former self ‘and from the useless brand of Calvin become by grace of God ... a good and sincere Catholic’. William Alabaster confessed how he, likewise raised among heretics, had formerly been ‘inflamed by Calvin’ with hatred for the Catholic Church.<sup>15</sup> Humphrey Leech was another who was ‘called back from the thickest darkness of heresy and schism and made a Catholic’, confessing that before his conversion he had, ‘like Calvin, preached sermons wherein was neither light, nor flavour, nor unction, nor life’. In this previous life he had been a minor canon of Christ Church, Oxford, but was summoned before first the pro-vice-chancellor, and then the vice-chancellor, for preaching a sermon in 1608 in which he had denounced Calvin as a ‘blasphemous interpreter’. Leech appealed against his suspension to Archbishop Bancroft of Canterbury, perhaps expecting sympathy from a known hammer of puritans. But he received no support from one who had ‘sworn on the words of Calvin’, and soon afterwards withdrew to the continent, there reflecting on how at the English universities ‘yong Deuines are for the most part poysoned with the drugges and dregges of *Caluins doctrine*’.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Sander, *De origine*, fo. 161r; William Rainolds, *A treatise conteyning the true and apostolike faith of the holy sacrifice and sacrament* (Antwerp, 1593), pp. 100, 116; H. Foley, ed., *Records of the English province of the Society of Jesus* (7 vols., London, 1877–83), vii, p. 1015; Henry Garnet, *An apology against the defence of schism* (London, secret press, 1593), p. 92; J. H. Pollen, ed., *Unpublished documents relating to the English martyrs, 1: 1584–1603* (Catholic Record Society, 1908), p. 230.

<sup>13</sup> S. L. Greenslade, ‘English versions of the Bible, 1525–1611’, in idem, ed., *The Cambridge history of the bible*, iii: *The West from the Reformation to the present day* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> Pollen, *Martyrs*, p. 93 (‘quod Calvini partibus relictis’).

<sup>15</sup> A. Kenny, ed., *The responsa scholarum of the English College, Rome: part one, 1598–1621* (Catholic Record Society, 54, 1962), pp. 129–30; Foley, *Society of Jesus*, i, p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> Kenny, ed., *Responsa*, pp. 210–11; Foley, *Society of Jesus*, i, pp. 642–3; Peter Milward, ‘Leech, Humphrey (1571–1629)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn (accessed 17 Aug. 2010); Humphrey Leech, *Dutifull and respectiue considerations vpon foure seuerall heads of prooffe and triall in matters of religion* (Saint-Omer, 1609), ‘Epistle Dedicatory’. Calvin’s emblematic role was such that intra-Catholic dispute might even be disguised as polemic against Calvin. See Matthew Kellison, *A treatise of the hierarchie and diuers orders of the church against the anarchie of Calvin* (Douai, 1629) – in reality an assertion of the status of the secular clergy against the religious orders; a strategy identified by Nicholas Smyth [Matthew Wilson], *A modest briefe discussion of some points taught by M. Doctour Kellison* (Rouen, 1630), pp. 1–2.

Calvin's authoritative status was also back-projected in the Catholic historical consciousness. Historians do not now regard Calvin as especially influential for the directions taken by the church of Edward VI: if it had a continental lodestar, this was more likely Heinrich Bullinger.<sup>17</sup> But in Catholic eyes, Calvin's grip on English Protestantism was early and secure. In the most influential of all English Catholic histories of the Reformation, Nicholas Sander's *De origine ac progressu Schismatis Anglicani* of 1585, reformers of various kinds in the reign of Edward are routinely characterized as 'Calvinists'.<sup>18</sup>

There is no scope within the compass of this article to offer a detailed description of the Catholic critique of Calvin's theology, but a brief survey of what were regarded as his principal and distinctive errors is in order. Heading the list was Calvin's doctrine of predestination, which made God into a hypocrite, and the author of sin, as well as leading humans inevitably into antinomianism, fatalism, and despair.<sup>19</sup> Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity was also a principal focus of Catholic attacks. His suggestion that the name of God belonged in its full excellency to the Father and applied in a secondary respect to the Son and the Holy Ghost led to accusations that he was, in fact, a latter-day Arian.<sup>20</sup> A third prong of the attack related to Calvin's sacramental teachings, particularly his eucharistic doctrine. Calvin's English Catholic critics had little time or appreciation for the subtleties of his views on Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, something they tended to characterize as a bare memorialism. William Rainolds declared that despite all his 'high speeches & amplifications of his supper', Calvin's doctrine was really that of 'a mere Zwinglian'.<sup>21</sup> A similar conclusion was reached by the Jesuit, John Fisher, who admitted the Calvinists differed in some ways from Zwinglians, but insisted that 'their Real Presence is a fiction to no purpose'.<sup>22</sup>

## II

What, however, of Calvin the man? In 1565, Thomas Stapleton set out to expose 'that wolfe of Geneua Iohn Caluin', not, he said, 'as enemy to the man (whom

<sup>17</sup> D. MacCulloch, *Tudor Church militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (London, 1999), pp. 172–6.

<sup>18</sup> Reference here to the English translation: Nicholas Sander, *Rise and growth of the Anglican schism*, trans. D. Lewis (London, 1577), pp. 173, 182–3, 186, 191, 208. For a later reference to Hugh Latimer, 'the English Calviniste martyr', see Lawrence Anderton, *Luthers life... with a further shorte discourse touching Andreas Melancthon, Bucer, Ochine, Carolostadius, Sainglus, Calune and Beza* (Saint-Omer, 1624), p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> For example, William Rainolds, *Calvino-Turcismus* (Antwerp, 1597), pp. 673–700; John Percy [John Fisher], *A reply made unto Mr. Anthony Wotton and Mr. Iohn White* (Saint-Omer, 1612), pp. 151–63; idem, *A treatise of faith* (Saint-Omer, 1614), p. 136; Anderton, *Luthers life*, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> Again, representatively: Stapleton, *Apologie*, fos. 222r–224v; Edward Weston, *The triall of Christian truth* (Douai, 1614), pp. 20, 36; Anderton, *Luthers life*, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> Rainolds, *Apostolike faith*, p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> John Percy [John Fisher], *The answeere unto the nine points of controversy* (Saint-Omer, 1626), pp. 248–51. See also Stapleton, *Apologie*, fos. 189v ff.

thanked be God I neuer sawe nor heard', but on the basis of what he found in his writings.<sup>23</sup> Yet Stapleton's Staphylus translation attacked Calvin as a 'devil', an exemplar of 'pride and presumptuousnes'.<sup>24</sup> As professor of scripture at Louvain, Stapleton regarded his lectures as 'antidotes' to 'the poison of Calvin and Beza'. Stapleton's modern biographer talks about a 'preoccupation with Calvin' as the unifying thread of his thirty-five-year career of Catholic activism.<sup>25</sup> The English Catholic critique of Calvin was, from the outset, intensely personal. In 1566, the lay exile and printer John Fowler, translated, with the author's assistance, the Louvain scholar Peter Frarinus's *An oration against the unlawfull insurrections of the protestantes of our time*. The work contained a racy biography of Calvin, drawn principally from 'a frenche boke intituled Passauant Parisien', printed at Paris in 1559. Calvin had been banished from France for his wicked behaviour, and coming at last to Geneva, he had kept for five years a runnagate nun, maintaining her from the poor men's box, and marrying her off to an apostate canon at Lausanne when she became pregnant by him. It was further 'credibly reported' that Calvin had tried, and failed, to bring a corpse to life. Moreover, Frarinus claimed to have information about Calvin's student days in Orleans, reported to him by 'very earnest and substantiall men who were then Calvin's Schole fellowes in law'. As proctor of the Picard students, Calvin was entrusted with a chalice, cross, vestments, and church ornaments for their celebrations of mass on high feasts and meeting days. But, in a foretaste of greater sacrilege, he stole these items. In lieu of an index, the book concluded with a series of crude woodcut images. These illustrated the more memorable episodes in the lives of leading heretics, accompanied by pungent verse tags: 'Caluin in his chamber fieve yeres taught a Nonne/Tyll she was great with Gospell and swolne with a sonne'; 'Caluin beyng young, the Crosse and Chalice stale/Beinge olde he did put greater things in his male.'<sup>26</sup>

Hostile biographical notices began to proliferate in Catholic anti-heretical writings of the mid-sixteenth century, but the first full life of the reformer to be written by one of his enemies was that of Jerome Bolsec, published in French in Paris in 1577, and in Latin translation in 1580.<sup>27</sup> Bolsec, Calvin's erstwhile associate in Geneva, had fallen out with his mentor over the doctrine of predestination, and eventually returned to the Catholic faith. His treatise was a response to the hagiographical life of Calvin composed by Theodore Beza in 1564, and has been described as 'a sort of upside-down saint's life'.<sup>28</sup> It was, in fact, a master-class in calumny, purporting to rely on documentary and authentic testimony, but

<sup>23</sup> Stapleton, *Apologie*, fos. 188r–v.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 215r, 245v.

<sup>25</sup> M. O'Connell, *Thomas Stapleton and the Counter-Reformation* (New Haven, CT, 1964), pp. 54, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Petrus Frarinus, *An oration against the unlawfull insurrections of the protestantes of our time*, trans. John Fowler (Antwerp, 1566), sigs. B8v, D3v, D5v, G2r–v, Table.

<sup>27</sup> I. Backus, 'Roman Catholic lives of Calvin from Bolsec to Richelieu', in R. Zachman, ed., *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, 2008), pp. 25–32; I. Backus, *Life Writing in Reformation Europe* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 153–64.

<sup>28</sup> Backus, 'Catholic lives', p. 32.

instead weaving a web of hearsay and fabrication. In addition to denigrating Calvin's character as arrogant, proud, and rebellious, Bolsec produced a number of eye-opening allegations: that as a young clerk he had narrowly escaped burning for sodomy in his hometown of Noyon, being instead branded with a fleur-de-lis on his shoulder; that in Geneva he was guilty of multiple adulteries and fornications with women; that he had conspired with a man named Brule and his wife for the husband to feign death so that Calvin could restore him to life (God in fact struck Brule dead for his presumption); that he spectacularly failed to cast a devil out of a possessed man; that he was extraordinarily fussy and self-indulgent in his diet, and that he died a miserable and despairing death.<sup>29</sup>

From the moment of its publication, Bolsec's *Life of Calvin* was seized on with enthusiasm by English Catholics. In October 1578, the book was being read to the seminarians over dinner in the English college at Douai.<sup>30</sup> Not long afterwards, it was translated into English, though a planned printed edition was prevented when the manuscript fell into the hands of the bishop of London.<sup>31</sup> Bolsec's *Life* was published just three years before a seminal event in the history of English Catholicism, the Jesuit mission undertaken in 1580 by Fathers Edmund Campion and Robert Persons. The mission, and its literary fallout, focused considerable attention on the life and reputation of Calvin, bringing out sharply his contrasting symbolic significance for Protestants and Catholics. A principal objective of Campion's defiant statement, the *Rationes decem*, was to highlight Calvin's 'pestiferous doctrine and innovations'. Campion made much of his supposed Arianism, his blasphemous interpretation of Christ's descent into hell, and the 'idolatry' that some of his followers showed towards him. He also described him as 'stigmaticus perfuga', a branded fugitive, in reference to Calvin's putative youthful punishment for sodomy.<sup>32</sup> After Campion was arrested, he was subjected to 'conferences' with leading Protestant divines in the Tower, at which the dean of St Paul's, Alexander Nowell, repeatedly accused him of slandering Calvin.<sup>33</sup> In his confutation of the *Rationes decem*, William Whitaker was equally swift to insist that, with this appellation, Campion had defamed 'an excellent man and most

<sup>29</sup> Jerome Bolsec, *De Ioannis Calvini magni quondam Genevensium ministri vita* (Cologne, 1580), pp. 30–1, 61–4, 68–79, 113–18. The claim about the failed exorcism appears in Bolsec's life of Beza, as an omission from the former work: *De vita, moribus, doctrina et rebus gestis Theodori Bezae* (Ingolstadt, 1584), pp. 27–8.

<sup>30</sup> T. F. Knox, ed., *The first and second diaries of the English College, Douay* (London, 1878), p. 145.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Persons, *A brief censure vppon two bookes written in ansuere to M. Edmonde Campions offer of disputation* (Douai [i.e. Stonor Park], 1581), sigs. B2v–3r.

<sup>32</sup> Edmund Campion, *Campion Englished; or a translation of the ten reasons in which Edmund Campian (of the Societe of Iesus) priest, insisted in his challenge, to the Uniuersities of Oxford and Cambridge* (Rouen?, 1632), pp. 96, 128, 130, 132, 189, 67 ('stigmatical runagate'). For the original Latin phrase: idem, *Rationes decem quibus fretus, certamen aduersarijs obtulit in causa fidei* (Henley-on-Thames, 1581), p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Nowell, *A true report of the disputation or rather priuate conference had in the Tower of London, with Ed. Campion Iesuite* (London, 1583), sigs. G8v–H1r.

constant servant of the Lord'.<sup>34</sup> There was also an extended dismissal of this and other Catholic charges against Calvin in Laurence Humphrey's massive anti-Campion broadside of 1584. These were accusations incredible to all who knew Calvin's sanctity, moral purity, and severity of judgement, both towards himself and others (Humphrey had known Calvin as an exile in Geneva). He directed readers to Beza's life, where Calvin's life and death were 'diligently and faithfully described' by one who had known him intimately.<sup>35</sup>

If Campion had slandered Calvin, Protestants were soon to be in little doubt that his companion, Robert Persons, was an accomplished master of the arts of defamation. Persons publicized Bolsec's work in an attack on the two Protestant ministers who had written to refute the text known as 'Campion's Brag'.<sup>36</sup> This provoked one of them, William Chark, to respond with a spirited defence of Calvin's 'singular graces', and to suggest that 'it was no euill chaunce, but the Lords good will, that hitherto the translation of your libel against him should be suppressed'.<sup>37</sup> Persons countered Chark's 'long, large, and copiose commendation' of Calvin with an extensive spiced selection of incidents from Bolsec, an undertaking that went a long way towards remedying the demise of the planned English translation. Persons prefaced the material with Bolsec's own assurance 'before God and all the holie court of heauen ... that neyther angre, nor enuie, nor euell will, hath made me speake, or write any one thing against the truthe and my conscience'. He then framed the extracts to illustrate Calvin's 'tyrannie and crueltie', his 'intolerable pryde & vain-glorie', and his 'lasciuiose dealing'.<sup>38</sup> In the accustomed relentless manner of these controversies, there followed an anonymous refutation, whose author sought to vindicate the reputation of Calvin, 'the most singular and rare instrument, that God hath raised vp in our time'. Moreover, the work set out systematically to demolish the veracity of 'that wretch *Bolseeke*', 'a notorius roge and a runnagate', and supplied a highly derogatory account of Bolsec's life as mirror image to Persons's Bolsecian life of Calvin.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> William Whitaker, *Ad rationes decem Edmundi Campiani Iesuitae, quibus fretus certamen Anglicanae Ecclesiae ministris obtulit in causa fidei* (London, 1581), p. 62. Although insisting on Calvin's innocence, Whitaker made the unfortunate analogy that if Calvin was branded, so too was St Paul, allowing later Catholic commentators to allege he was, profanely and impiously, admitting the fact of Calvin's punishment. See B. C., *Puritanisme the mother, sinne the daughter* (Saint-Omer, 1633), p. 82; Anderton, *Luthers life*, p. 134; Backus, 'Catholic lives', p. 56. In submitting his text for Burghley's approval, Whitaker was eager to insist that 'he had defended as far as possible the proceedings of Luther, Calvin, Beza, and the other Reformers': R. Lemon, ed., *Calendar of state papers domestic (CSPD): Elizabeth, 1581-90* (London, 1865), p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Laurence Humphrey, *Iesuitismi pars secunda* (London, 1584), pp. 255-60 ('At credible non est ... nobis qui *Calvini* sanctimoniam, castimoniam & censoriam in se & in alios severitatem novimus': p. 257).

<sup>36</sup> Persons, *Brief censure*, sig. B2v.

<sup>37</sup> William Charke, *A replie to a censure written against the two answers to a Iesuites seditious pamphlet* (London, 1581), sigs. D8r-v, N2r-3r, quotes at sig. D8v.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Persons, *A defence of the censure, gyven vpon two bookes of William Charke and Meredith Hammer* (Rouen, 1582), pp. 77-86, quotes at pp. 77, 80, 82, 84.

<sup>39</sup> *An answeare for the time, vnto that foule, and wicked defence of the censure* (London, 1583), fos. 50r, 80v-96v, quotes at fos. 80v, 81r.

Bolsec's work was subsequently again attacked as a 'vile libel' in a second anonymous treatise, which may have been the work of William Fulke.<sup>40</sup> Yet Persons was scarcely abashed, referring to Calvin a few years later as 'a sear-backt priest for sodomie'.<sup>41</sup> Into the seventeenth century, Catholic writers habitually and approvingly cited Bolsec as the leading authority on the life of Calvin.<sup>42</sup> It remained for many of them an article of faith that Calvin's branding for sodomy could be demonstrated from extant public records in Noyon, Bishop Joseph Hall complaining in 1640 of 'how trivially common it is' for papists to claim 'that *Calvin* was stigmatiz'd for a buggerer'.<sup>43</sup>

That Calvin, figure-head of the second wave of iconoclastic Reformation, should attract Catholic abuse and hostility is hardly surprising. In the mid-1560s, Thomas Dorman looked back wistfully to a lost world of devotion, charity, simplicity, and warm social relations, all turned upside down since 'first Luther, and then Calvin had set their feete on Englishe grounde'.<sup>44</sup> Such feelings were amplified by the sufferings of the English martyrs, who, somewhat unfairly, since he had died more than a decade before the first of them was executed, could be portrayed as the victims of Calvin's malice. Their leading memorializer, the priest Richard Verstegan, wrote floridly that neither the Scythians, nor 'the savage empire of the Etruscan king ... bears such savagery in its barbaric breast, as your tyranny, Calvin'.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the situation in France, a country with whom many exiled English Catholics had close links, undoubtedly further fuelled the animus.<sup>46</sup> Some

<sup>40</sup> *A treatise against the defense of the censure... Hereunto are adjoynd two treatises, written by D. Fulke* (Cambridge, 1586), pp. 246–7, 253–4, quote at p. 246. Fulke's appended *Apologie of the professors of the Gospel in France against the railing declamation of Peter Frarine* attempted to discredit the charges against Calvin of the 1559 Paris pamphlet: (separate pagination), pp. 10–11, 26–8. For the suggestion that Staphylus and Bolsec were apostates 'who solde themselves to lie for the Popes aduantage', see Anthony Wotton, *A trial of the Romish clergies title to the church* (London, 1608), p. 355.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Persons, *A temperate ward-word, to the turbulent and seditious wach-word of Sir Francis Hastings knight* (Antwerp, 1599), p. 97.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Thomas Hill, *A quartron of reasons of Catholike religion* (Antwerp, 1600), p. 36; Percy [Fisher], *A treatise of faith*, p. 139; Weston, *Christian truth*, p. 35; *A shorte declaration of the lives and doctrine [sic] of the Protestants and puritans* (Rouen, 1615), sig. E1v; George Musket, *The bishop of London his legacy* (Saint-Omer, 1623), p. 67.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Hall, *Christian moderation in two books* (London, 1640), p. 88. See P. Arblaster, *Antwerp and the world: Richard Verstegan and the international culture of Catholic Reformation* (Leuven, 2004), p. 258; Rainolds, *Calvino-Turcismus*, pp. 258–9; Francis Walsingham, *A search made into matters of religion* (Saint-Omer, 1609), pp. 15–16; Lawrence Anderton, *The non-entity of Protestancy* (Saint-Omer, 1633), p. 153; B. C., *Puritanisme the mother*, pp. 81–2; *Mirrou of new reformation wherein reformers, by their owne acknowledgement, are represented ad vivum* (Rouen, 1634), p. 114, a charge 'unto which I yet see not any sound & cleere refutation made'.

<sup>44</sup> Dorman, *Proufe of certeyne articles*, fo. 138v.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in C. Highley, *Catholics writing the nation in early modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2008), p. 70. In Verstegan's martyrological prints, Calvin is represented symbolically by the presence of a dog: A. Dillon, *The construction of martyrdom in the English Catholic community, 1535–1603* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 138–9.

<sup>46</sup> J. Bossy, 'Elizabethan Catholicism: the link with France' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1961); C. M. Gibbons, *English Catholics and exile: Elizabethan Catholics in Paris* (London, forthcoming). The close personal and ideological affinity of English Catholics with the Guise and the Catholic League is a major theme of S. Carroll, *Martyrs and murderers: the Guise family and the making of Europe* (Oxford, 2009).

wrote as if Calvin should be held personally responsible for the growth of heresy there, and the subsequent horrors of civil war. An epigram composed by the imprisoned priest John Ingram in 1594 spoke of ‘the happy land of France, fouled by the horrid crime of wretched Calvin’.<sup>47</sup> A few years later, a French work in an English exile’s translation launched a virulent attack on Calvin and Beza as ‘apostas of nature’, sodomites flaunting their sins in the noon sun, an accusation accompanied by a lament for how their sectaries ‘have burned our churches, martyred cruellie our priests, destroyed our houses’.<sup>48</sup>

### III

The literary assaults on Calvin’s memory were not, however, simply gratuitous, spiteful, or vengeful. They had both a pragmatic and a theological rationale. In the first place, the broadcasting of Calvin’s notorious wickedness was a recognized weapon in the propaganda battle for minds, hearts, and souls. One of the recommendations of George Gilbert, Catholic convert and pensioner in the English College at Rome, in his 1583 memorandum *A way to deal with persons of all sorts so as to convert them and bring them back to a better way of life*, was that ‘pamphlets should be written – of small compass, otherwise they will not be read or bear fruit – pointing out the abuses brought about by the heretics and their evil lives, especially by Luther, Calvin, etc.’<sup>49</sup> Secondly, commentators almost invariably insisted that the evil life of Calvin, as of other leading heretics, was no mere contingency, but a patent vindication of his enemies’ positions. This is particularly clear in an anonymous pamphlet answering Gilbert’s description, published at Rouen in 1615, *A shorte declaration of the lives and doctrine [sic] of the Protestants and puritans wher by one of independent iudgment may know the holinesse of their religion*. The message was underlined by the title page epigraph from St Matthew – ‘As the good tree is knowen by the good fruits so the Evill tree by the Evill fruits’ – and was further reinforced by a narrative structure which took the reader directly from an exposure of Calvin’s immoral life into a description of his erroneous doctrine.<sup>50</sup> The Jacobean Jesuit and convert, Francis Walsingham, fully accepted the logic. After reading Persons’s *Defence of the censure* he began to reflect that if Luther and Calvin were as bad men as the evidence there suggested, ‘I cannot possibly perswade my selfe, that the religion can be good, which was framed or founded ... by them.’<sup>51</sup> The web of connections between life, doctrine and eternal destiny might even be woven from testimony solicited from the devil

<sup>47</sup> Pollen, *Martyrs*, p. 281.

<sup>48</sup> Jean de Caumont, *The firme foundation of Catholike religion against the bottomles pit of heresies*, trans. John Paunchfoot (Douai, 1607), pp. 72–4. On hostility to Calvin in France, see F. Pfeilschifter, *Das Calvinbild bei Bolsec und sein Fortwirken im französischen Katholizismus bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Augsburg, 1983).

<sup>49</sup> T. Cooper, ‘Gilbert, George (d. 1583)’, rev. T. H. Clancy, *ODNB*; P. Caraman, *The other face: Catholic life under Elizabeth I* (London, 1960), pp. 127–8.

<sup>50</sup> *Shorte declaration*, sigs. C4v–E3v.

<sup>51</sup> Walsingham, *Search*, p. 107.

himself. In the late summer of 1585, Nicholas Marwood, a servant of Anthony Babington, was dispossessed by the Jesuit exorcist, William Weston, at Lord Vaux's house in Hackney. While still under the sway of the devil he was asked what had become of Zwingli, Jerome of Prague, Luther, and Calvin, and answered 'with a full voice that they were all damned', whereas of Campion, Sherwyn, Throgmorton, and others, the devil confessed 'ragingly and repiningly that they were saints in heaven'.<sup>52</sup> A later demoniac questioned by Catholic priests, the 'boy of Bilson', William Perry, tore in fits at his clothes to illustrate the torments being suffered in hell by Luther, Calvin, and John Foxe.<sup>53</sup>

As these episodes suggest, Calvin was not uniquely the target of Catholic abuse in this period. Literary exposés of Calvin's immoral life were often, indeed most often, published alongside libels of other reformers, particularly Luther, Zwingli, and Beza. In the last case, the combination of some youthful poetic indiscretions, and the availability of a second scurrilous life by Bolsec, produced a particularly tempting target for Catholic polemicists.<sup>54</sup> It would be a long stretch to say that the abuse of Calvin was nothing personal, but it certainly fitted an existing typology, with the pattern of the reformer's life exemplifying wider truths. This was particularly true of the reformer's death. Bolsec had asserted that Calvin's body was at the last consumed by worms, and that he had died calling upon devils. One modern Calvin scholar calls this 'an obvious cheap shot'.<sup>55</sup> But it was a claim endowed with deep providential significance. Bolsec's allegations were recycled by the Jacobean convert Benjamin Carrier in a catalogue of 'the miserable ends of such as have impugned the catholike church', a bumper compendium of the grisly fates of persecutors and heretics, from Judas and Nero onwards.<sup>56</sup> Calvin's death was also seen as part of a pattern by a 1633 *Funerall discourse*, occasioned by the recent suicide of the vice-chancellor of Cambridge. It was no accident, thought the author, that many of the 'first brachers of protestancy' had come to 'most calamitous ends'.<sup>57</sup> A French work, translated and published at Douai by an English exile in 1607, even included 'the unhappie end of the archeheretikes' as one of the marks of the true church.<sup>58</sup> Calvin's death was thus prototypical and exemplary, but it was nonetheless not devoid of particular

<sup>52</sup> *CSPD 1581-90*, p. 57; F. Brownlow, *Shakespeare, Harsnett and the devils of Denham* (Newark, NJ, 1993), pp. 23-8.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Baddeley, *The boy of Bilson* (London, 1622), pp. 26-7.

<sup>54</sup> See A. Prescott, 'English writers and Beza's Latin epigrams: the uses and abuses of poetry', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 21 (1974), pp. 83-117.

<sup>55</sup> T. George, 'Introduction', in idem, ed., *John Calvin and the church: a prism of reform* (Louisville, KY, 1990), p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Benjamin Carrier, *A copy of a letter ... whereunto are added certain collections... of the miserable ends of such as have impugned the catholike church* (England: secret press, 1615), p. 29.

<sup>57</sup> Appended to B. C., *Puritanisme the mother*, pp. 144-6. In a work of consolation published in the wake of the 1623 Blackfriars tragedy, when dozens of Catholics attending an illicit sermon were killed by a collapsing floor, John Floyd contrasted the preacher's death, clothed with priestly ornaments and performing his Christian duty, with that of Calvin, cursing and invoking the devil: Foley, *Society of Jesus*, 1, pp. 89-90.

<sup>58</sup> Caumont, *Firme foundation*, pp. 84-5.

significance. One Caroline Catholic author believed that Calvin's despairing end showed how

it may wel be thought that Christ by way of special punishment (in withdrawing his grace from Calvin) did inflict this particular kind of death upon him, because Calvin taught, that Christ himself was for the time in despayre, and as being overwhelmed in desperation, gave over prayer. O monstrous (and never afore heard of) Blasphemy!<sup>59</sup>

Other episodes from Bolsec's anti-biography served similarly targeted propaganda ends. One, already publicized by Staphylus and Frarinus, was the tale of Monsieur Brule, a simple man whom Calvin had talked into pretending to be dead so that the reformer might spectacularly resurrect him, but who had turned out to be really dead when Calvin approached to perform the deed. This was not just an amusing, if ghoulish, illustration of Calvin's mendacity and shameless self-promotion, and of its providential reward. It spoke directly to a central theme of contemporary Reformation debate: the ability of the true church to perform miracles, and the absence of this mark of authenticity from false congregations. The polemic of English Protestants had frequently charged the papists with false and feigned miracles.<sup>60</sup> Here, their opponents sought to turn the tables, and use Calvin's ill-fated miracle-mongering as a monitory guide to where the marks of the true church were to be found. For Thomas Stapleton, the message was clear: 'in the planting of the papistes faith and religion, God hath wrought miracles. In the planting of the protestants doctrine, no miracles appear.'<sup>61</sup> Protestants, of course, denied the episode had ever happened, dismissing it as a lie 'devised by shamelesse and wicked Friars'.<sup>62</sup>

For English Protestants, as well as Catholics, more was at stake in these controversies than the vindication of Calvin's personal reputation. It is notable that the defence of Calvin in print, particularly in the wake of the twin assaults by Campion and Persons, was principally delegated to, or assumed by, men like Fulke, Nowell, Chark, Whitaker, and Humphrey – all figures who can be located somewhere on a spectrum of 'godliness' or evangelical Calvinism. Their assertions of the public character of the English church, at a moment of genuine Europe-wide interest in its affairs, inevitably served to identify it further with the person of John Calvin, and with the particular 'Calvinist' doctrines the Church of England's Catholic enemies had picked out for denigration. It may be beyond the remit of this article to suggest so, but in so far as a 'Calvinist consensus' did obtain

<sup>59</sup> B. C., *Puritanisme the mother*, p. 88.

<sup>60</sup> See P. Marshall, 'Forgery and miracles in the reign of Henry VIII', *Past and Present*, 178 (2003), pp. 39–73.

<sup>61</sup> Stapleton, *Fortresse*, fo. 99v. See also Frarinus, *Oration*, sig. D5v; Hill, *Quartrou*, p. 36; Percy [Fisher], *Treatise of faith*, p. 139; Musket, *Bishop of London*, pp. 67–8; Anderton, *Luthers life*, 131–2. See also A. Walsham, 'Miracles and the Counter-Reformation mission to England', *Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), pp. 779–815.

<sup>62</sup> *Answere unto that foule, and wicked defence*, fo. 92r. See also William Fulke, *A rejoinder to Martiall's reply*, ed. R. Gibbings (Cambridge, 1848), pp. 76–7; George Abbot, *The reasons which Doctour Hill hath brought for the vpholding of papistry* (London, 1604), p. 264; Wotton, *Trial*, p. 355.

within Elizabethan Protestantism, its Catholic enemies played a very considerable part in securing its acknowledgement and propagation.<sup>63</sup>

#### IV

The targeting of Calvin and other reformers for personal denigration provoked an interesting secondary debate, not just about the truthfulness of specific allegations, but about the legitimacy of fierce *ad hominem* attacks as a mode of religious discourse. Some Protestants chose to take their opponents' vehemence in this regard as a sign of the poverty of their arguments. William Chark riposted to Persons that 'you take the best way throughout all your Censures to bring the men ... into suspicion and hatred, because you can effect no more against the cause'.<sup>64</sup> William Fulke likewise censured John Martiall's treatment of Calvin, 'whom he railleth upon like a ruffian, and slandereth like a Devil'.<sup>65</sup> When the priest Thomas Hill recycled Persons's memorable epitome of Calvin as a 'seare-backt Priest for Sodomy', Edward Bulkely indignantly asked whether he was 'not ashamed to slaunder and belie such a man?' The Catholics' railing against Calvin, Bulkely suggested, might aptly be compared to the Arians' slandering of Athanasius as an adulterer.<sup>66</sup> Archbishop Abbot mocked the papists' reliance on Bolsec in these matters:

Such things as were never knowne at Geneva, to any that conversed with Calvin, are at Doway or at Rome as true as the Divels Gospel. Some one of you should giue out, that he attempted to fly, or some such other matter: and if one of you would once write it, and cast but a little colour vpon it, your Seminary students woulde swear it.<sup>67</sup>

'Lord', exclaimed Thomas Beard in 1616, 'how they raue and rage against the ashes of *Luther, Oecolampadius, Zwinglius, Caluin, Beza*, and other worthe champions of our Church.' The fact that Bolsec's lies against Calvin had been exposed, Beard suggested, meant Romish calumnies of the others were equally suspect, yet he was well aware of the force of an old proverb: 'though the wound of a mans good name be healed, yet a scarre will euer remaine'.<sup>68</sup> Preaching at Paul's Cross in November 1621, Henry King depicted Catholic libels as a kind of persecution,

<sup>63</sup> The extent to which, during the intensely 'public' Campion affair, the regime willingly harnessed the energies of puritan and even presbyterian authors is noted by Peter Lake and Michael Questier, 'Puritans, papists and the "public sphere" in England: the Edmund Campion affair in context', *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000), pp. 624–5. See also Lake's *Moderate puritans and the Elizabethan church* (Cambridge, 1982) for a wider discussion of the imperatives of anti-papal polemic in drawing puritans into the ecclesiastical mainstream.

<sup>64</sup> Charke, *Replie*, sig. D8r. The title page of *An answeare for the time* bore the biblical inscriptions: 'Thou shalt not beare false witness against thy neighbour' and 'Receiue not an accusation against an Elder, but vnder two or three witnesses'.  
<sup>65</sup> Fulke, *Rejoinder*, p. 194.

<sup>66</sup> Hill, *Quartron*, p. 30; Edward Bulkley, *An apologie for religion, or an answeare to an vnlearned and slanderous pamphlet* (London, 1602), p. 94.

<sup>67</sup> Abbot, *Reasons*, p. 265. For a similar charge, see Henri Estienne, *A world of wonders*, trans. Richard Carew? (London, 1607), 'Epistle to the reader'.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Beard, *A retractiue from the Romish religion* (London, 1616), pp. 446, 451.

a species of violence offered not to the body, 'but to the Good Name, by slanders and calumnies ... *Martyrium fama*, martyrdom of fame'. Bolsec's libelling was a case in point, as was Robert Persons's *Treatise of three conversions*, and William Rainolds's spirited polemic of 1597, the *Calvino-Turcismus*. Such authors were graduates in 'that eighth science which they beyond seas have added to the seven others, *Arte calumniandi*, the art of slander'. King had an intensely personal interest in the matter, as papists were putting it about that his father, the late bishop of London, had converted to Rome on his deathbed. In a later sermon, King characterized Thomas Stapleton as one avowedly 'willing to quarrel with the Truth if Calvin spake it'.<sup>69</sup> 'It hath been', wrote Thomas Fuller in 1639, 'the constant practice of the Romish writers, always to defame those that differ from them.'<sup>70</sup>

Some Catholic writers simply swatted such indictments aside, and went robustly on the counter-offensive. Protestants themselves were guilty of scurrilous personal attacks on Catholics, alleged Persons, and no wonder, for 'reade Iohn Caluine and you shall see that his ordinarie tearme against his aduersaries in euery chapter almost ... is to call them *Nebulones, knaues*'.<sup>71</sup> But others were conscious that there were issues here demanding attention. Irena Backus has shown that Bolsec himself was aware he might be reprimanded for speaking ill of the dead, and that he struggled to establish the generic conventions of a new form of counter-hagiography.<sup>72</sup> In a work of 1606, Richard Broughton was keen to refute any suggestion that Catholics 'deny to Protestants in Authority, or others, any civil or natural respect', though he admitted that the opinions of 'some private Catholikes' had been rather acerbic, such as the claims of Rainolds, Gifford, and Wright that Protestants held no article of faith, or that 'Calvinisme is Turcisme'.<sup>73</sup>

There is a similarly defensive tone in a 1633 work by the indefatigable controversialist, Lawrence Anderton. Having recited the usual stories about Calvin's sexual depravity, Anderton conceded that readers 'may perhaps censure part of this chapter as an *Apostrophe*, or digression', though he insisted it was a necessary inclusion, given how highly most Protestants prized Calvin.<sup>74</sup> In an earlier work, Anderton had given a full airing to Bolsec's juicier allegations, but he did so 'sparing to insist upon the probabilitie of so many alledged particulers'. He was not prepared definitively to affirm 'how truelie or untrulie' some of Bolsec's affirmations had been made.<sup>75</sup> The author of an evocatively titled work of 1633, *Puritanisme the mother, sinne the daughter*, was similarly guarded. He duly related

<sup>69</sup> Henry King, *Sermons*, ed. M. Hobbs (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 64–77, quotes at pp. 74, 77.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Fuller, *The historie of the holy warre* (Cambridge, 1639), p. 143.

<sup>71</sup> Persons, *Defence of the censure*, p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Backus, 'Catholic lives', pp. 28–32. For the cultural authority of the injunction to speak *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, see P. Marshall, *Beliefs and the dead in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 267–70.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Broughton, *A just and moderate answer to a most injurious and seditious pamphlet* (England: secret press, 1606), sig. E1r.

<sup>74</sup> Anderton, *Non-entitie of Protestancy*, pp. 158–9.

<sup>75</sup> Anderton, *Luthers life*, pp. 131, 132–3.

Bolsec's account of how Calvin was 'so curious and choyce in his diet, that when he went abroad to dyne, his owne wine was carried about with him in a silver Pot; and his bread was made of fine flower, wet in rose water'. The author thought such tales likely to be true, yet 'al this ... I forbear to insist'.<sup>76</sup>

This caution on the part of some seventeenth-century Catholic authors may have been a consequence of years of close Protestant scrutiny of Bolsec's allegations; it does not reflect any influence of the less lurid, and more nuanced and documented French Catholic biographies of Calvin by Jean-Papire Masson, Jacques Desmay, and Jacques le Vasseur, which do not seem to be cited in English sources.<sup>77</sup> Nor did it indicate a growing desire to be fair to Calvin's memory. Rather, it indicated that Catholic polemicists were by no means entirely reliant on Bolsec to make their case, and that they saw potential advantage in keeping him at arm's length. For in formulating their Calvin 'black legend' Catholics found unexpected allies. As Richard Broughton protested, the sharp reproofs were 'no more than other Protestants charge Calvine with'.<sup>78</sup> The author of *Puritanisme the mother* could afford to treat Bolsec's anecdotes lightly, 'for my method here undertaken is to charge Calvin and the rest with such cries, as are reported of them by ... Protestants, their brethren'. A similar approach was taken by Anderton, who claimed to have set down not even the tenth part of what was confessed, even by other Protestants, of the 'sensuality and most wicked carriage' of Calvin.<sup>79</sup> The Genevan reformer, claimed William Rainolds, was 'a wicked and proud heretike, condemned not only by Catholiks, but also by most of his fellow heretikes of this age ... If Protestants upon so good grounds abhorre Calvinisme, as a poison of Christian faith: can catholikes be blamed if they follow the conseil of Protestants?'<sup>80</sup>

These Protestant critics of Calvin were mainly continental, particularly German Lutherans; it was the Lutherans who seem to have been the first coiners of an insulting term which Catholic opponents of Calvin took up with alacrity: Calvinist.<sup>81</sup>

Not merely doctrinal opponents of Calvin, fiercely confessional Lutheran authors were also a fertile source of scurrilous and defamatory stories about him, which Catholic readers eagerly lapped up. One favourite was the tract *Calvinus Iudaizans* (1593) of the Wittenberg theologian Aegidius Hunnius, which according to the Jesuit William Wright, showed 'Calvin was rather a Iew, then a Christian'.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>76</sup> B. C., *Puritanisme the mother*, p. 83.

<sup>77</sup> On these works, see Backus, 'Catholic lives', pp. 32–54.

<sup>78</sup> Broughton, *Moderate answer*, sig. E1r.

<sup>79</sup> B. C., *Puritanisme the mother*, p. 83; Anderton, *Non-entity of Protestancy*, p. 158. See also Anderton's *Luthers life*, p. 133.

<sup>80</sup> Rainolds, *Apostolike faith*, pp. 133, 437.

<sup>81</sup> B. Cottret, *Calvin: a biography*, trans. M. McDonald (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 239, fathers the term on the Hamburg pastor Joachim Westphal (1552), and notes Calvin's vigorous repudiation of it in his 1563 commentary on Jeremiah.

<sup>82</sup> William Wright, *A treatise of the Church* (Saint-Omer, 1616), p. 50. See also Sylvester Norris, *An antidote or treatise of thirty controversies* (Saint-Omer, 1622), p. 30; Musket, *Bishop of London*, p. 135.

Another was the work of a still more obscure orthodox Lutheran, the Stralsund pastor, Konrad Schlüsselburg (1543–1619). Schlüsselburg's *Theologia Calvinistarum* of 1594 was regularly cited by English Catholic authors, who found there a racy account of Calvin's supposedly despairing and disgraceful death.<sup>83</sup> The widespread Catholic use of this material had an interesting incidental effect, striking an uncharacteristically ecumenical note. Calvin's Lutheran critics were treated with evident respect and courtesy: Schlüsselburg was invariably 'learned Schlüsselburge'; Hunnius, 'a most remarkable and learned Protestant'.<sup>84</sup> Anderton added in 1640 to the list of those accusing Calvin of Arianism, Christoph Pelargus, Francisco Stancarus, and Johannes Mathesius, 'all eminent Protestants'.<sup>85</sup>

Such accounts were reliable precisely because of their provenance: if Calvin's fellow Protestants, sworn enemies of the pope, were prepared publicly to say such things about him, then surely they must be true.<sup>86</sup> Of course, Calvinist–Lutheran divisions in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were particularly bitter and entrenched. But English Protestants often hesitated openly to admit this, as to do so was to play into the hands of another Catholic stereotype: that of the intrinsic fissiparousness of heresy. As a totemic figure of Protestant division, Calvin thus played a satisfying dual role in Catholic polemic: he was simultaneously the 'apostle' and 'god' of the Protestants, and also a cause of crippling dissension among them. The inability of heretics to agree among themselves about the freedom of the will, and the possibility of losing faith, was what avowedly drove one young convert, Charles Yelverton, to enter the English College in 1601. Revealingly, he declared he had read Calvin's *Institutes* in the hope of resolving the controversies, but it had given him little satisfaction.<sup>87</sup>

## V

Catholic writers had long made hay with the embarrassing circumstance that Calvin once condemned Henry VIII's royal supremacy as a

<sup>83</sup> Rainolds, *Calvino-Turcismus*, pp. 658–9, 668; Henry Fitzsimon, *A Catholike confutation of M. Iohn Riders clayme of antiquitie* (Douai, 1608), p. 16; Wright, *Treatise*, p. 50; Anderton, *Non-entirety of Protestantcy*, pp. 153–4; Anderton, *Luthers life*, p. 133; *Mirour of new reformation*, pp. 113–14. The scale and intensity of Lutheran attacks on Calvin was also noted by Leech, *Respective considerations*, pp. 62–4. On Schlüsselburg, see the entry by N. Heutger in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (30 vols., Herzberg, 1975–), ix, pp. 314–16. There appears to be nothing in English on what was undoubtedly a lively Lutheran 'black legend'. D. Steinmetz, 'Calvin and his Lutheran critics', in his *Calvin in context* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 172–86, focuses solely on controversies with Tileman Hesshusen over the doctrine of the eucharist.

<sup>84</sup> Wright, *Treatise*, p. 50; Musket, *Bishop of London*, pp. 135–6. See also Robert Persons, *A treatise tending to mitigation* (Saint-Omer, 1607), pp. 475–8; B. C., *Puritanisme the mother*, pp. 83, 85; Anderton, *Luthers life*, pp. 133–4, 165.

<sup>85</sup> Lawrence Anderton, *Miscellania or a treatise contayning two hundred controuersiall animaduersions, conducing to the study of English controuersies in fayth, and religion* (Saint-Omer, 1640), p. 238.

<sup>86</sup> For example, B. C., *Puritanisme the mother*, p. 87: 'Slussenburg, an earnest Protestant, and as great an Enemy to the Pope, as Calvin ever was, and therefore his testimony is to be reputed lesse partiall, and more indifferent'; Anderton, *Miscellania*, p. 273.

<sup>87</sup> Kenny, ed., *Responsa*, p. 101.

blasphemy.<sup>88</sup> But as the sixteenth century drew to a close, politically astute English Catholics were increasingly aware of Calvin's potential divisiveness within the world of English Protestantism.<sup>89</sup> If, as some historians have suggested, the 'Calvinist consensus' of the English church was starting to unravel around the turn of the seventeenth century, Catholic critics were anxious to do what they could to pick at the stitching, and to exploit for their own purposes the divisions between the two broad groupings they habitually termed, with almost Lyncian precision, 'the Protestants' and 'the Puritans'.<sup>90</sup> In April 1593, Richard Verstegan wrote excitedly from Antwerp to Robert Persons, to say that he had got hold of 'the late booke against the Puritanes sett forthe by the aucthority of the bishopes' – that is, Richard Bancroft's anti-presbyterian polemic, *A survey of the pretended holy discipline*. In it, Verstegan reported, 'Calvine and Beza are deciphered to be no better then seditious and rebellious spirities.' There was also another book by Matthew Sutcliffe (*An answer to a certaine libel supplicatorie*) which 'playeth upon Calvyn and Beza in the same sorte'. One of Bancroft's anecdotes in particular resonated with Verstegan: an account of a man in Geneva who always came to the sermons of Calvin, but never to those of Pierre Viret, who preached at the same time in another church. When challenged, the man declared that 'yf St Paule himself were alive and in Geneva, and did preach at the same howre that Monsieur Calvyn preached, I would leave St Paule and hear Monsieur Calvyn'.<sup>91</sup> This was precisely the kind of idol worship which English Catholics, and increasingly, perhaps, some conformist English Protestants, suspected Calvin of seeking out.<sup>92</sup>

Persons found the material every bit as helpful as Verstegan had hoped. In his 1603 treatise on the *Three conversions*, Persons moved straight from denouncing the 'notorious infamy' of Calvin's life to suggesting that he was the founder of 'the dangerous Plot of Puritanism', spreading from Geneva to England, Scotland, and France. This plot had, however, been exposed in 'the books of Dangerous positions, Survey of Disciplinary Doctrine, and such other treatises written by our English Protestants against the Puritans'. The authors of these works, 'albeit for

<sup>88</sup> In 1566, Alexander Nowell and Bishop Grindal of London were anxious for William Cecil to vet Nowell's reply to Thomas Dorman on this point: British Library, Lansdowne MSS, vol. 9, fo. 165. See also Stapleton, *Counterblast*, fo. 22v; Martin Becanus, *The English iarre*, trans. John Wilson (Saint-Omer, 1612), p. 9; Persons, *Temperate ward-word*, p. 6; Tutino, *Law and conscience*, p. 29. One Protestant author averred that Calvin's charge of blasphemy applied 'not as it was vnderstoode of the godlie at that time, but as it was applied by *Stephen Gardiner*': *Treatise against the defense of the censure*, p. 55.

<sup>89</sup> For Protestant attacks on Calvin, see Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp. 142, 145, 197; Milton *Catholic and reformed*, pp. 427, 431–2, 450, 452.

<sup>90</sup> On this terminology, see P. Marshall, 'The naming of Protestant England', *Past and Present* (forthcoming).

<sup>91</sup> A. G. Petti, ed., *The letters and despatches of Richard Verstegan* (Catholic Record Society, 52, 1959), pp. 134–5; Richard Bancroft, *A survey of the pretended holy discipline* (London, 1593), pp. 372–3.

<sup>92</sup> The episode was also related by Norris, *Antidote*, p. 170. John Fisher concluded that Calvinists must 'beare more reverence unto Iohn Calvin then unto Iesus Christ', since his eucharistic teaching was 'confessedly a doctrine most hard, difficil, incomprehensible and yet not the literall sense of God's word': *Nine points of controversy*, pp. 252–3.

civility's sake they give them the titles of master Calvin and Master Beza', nonetheless made clear their contempt for the Genevan reformers, considering them 'the most notablest deceivers and cogging companions that ever were, and very knaves indeed, and firebrands of hell'.<sup>93</sup> William Rainolds similarly cited Bancroft's book 'contra Puritanos (sectam Calvinisticam)', in which Calvin and Beza had been painted in their true colours as seditious.<sup>94</sup>

The idea that Calvin, in his life and in his ideas, was politically rebellious and socially disruptive was one to which Catholics had long adhered. Indeed, the insistent harking in Catholic sources on the 'intolerable pride' to be found in Calvin's character was not merely a routine inversion of the virtue of Christian humility: it was intended to signal how Calvin, and by extension Calvinists, were inherently, almost genetically difficult and disobedient subjects. By the early seventeenth century, however, it was increasingly common for Catholic writers to point out that English Protestants themselves, 'some of especial note and place', were turning against 'this revolted priest'.<sup>95</sup> Humphrey Leech suggested tentatively in 1609 that the division between Protestants and puritans was found 'in no state or Kingdome ... of Christendome, but only in England'. He added that 'although some Protestant writers for dissembling their owne diuisions, when they deale with Catholickes, will needes (forsooth) acknowledge them for brethren ... yet in all their other writings, eyther against them, or of them, they disclose playnly what they thinke of ech other, holding them both for Schismaticks and Hereticks'.<sup>96</sup> The convert Francis Walsingham was much persuaded towards Rome by the revelations about Calvin by Bolsec that he read in Persons's *Defence of the censure*. But he claimed to have been pre-disposed to this view by the way that he had found 'the lyvues, counsels, and actions of M. Calvin & Beza' set forth in the Protestant writings of Bancroft and Sutcliffe. He was also impressed by the attacks on Calvin, in support of Richard Hooker, in the writings of Dr William Covell.<sup>97</sup> In addition to Bancroft and Sutcliffe, Lawrence Anderton cited the bishop of Oxford, John Bridges, and the royal chaplain, William Wilkes, as examples of Protestants who had lately come round to seeing 'how seditious Calvine was'.<sup>98</sup>

## VI

Did Catholic attacks on the reputation of Calvin, and by extension on Calvinism itself, do much to widen the cracks within the Church of England in the decades

<sup>93</sup> Miola, ed., *Early modern Catholicism*, pp. 416–17.

<sup>94</sup> Rainolds, *Calvino-Turcismus*, p. 662.

<sup>95</sup> Weston, *Christian truth*, pp. 35–6. John Brerely [James Anderton], *Saincte Austines religion* (n.p., 1620), p. 12, observed 'the great revolt of late made by so many of the learnedst Calvinistes from Calvins former received, & so much applauded doctrines', citing, among others, Bancroft and Whitgift.

<sup>96</sup> Leech, *Respective considerations*, p. 64.

<sup>97</sup> Walsingham, *Search*, p. 17. These may have been pointedly polemical acknowledgements, for during his religious waverings Walsingham had debated the veracity of Bolsec with Bancroft, and the character of Calvin with Covell: *ibid.*, pp. 48–50, 104–12.

<sup>98</sup> Anderton, *Luthers life*, p. 165.

preceding the Civil War? It is certainly possible. Anthony Milton has observed that the onslaughts on Calvin's person and ideas, so widespread in Catholic controversial writings, were, at least for the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, 'a more obvious source of anti-Calvinist ideas in England than imported Lutheran or Arminian writings', and he finds hints in the writings of Richard Hooker of an anti-Calvinism that may have been indebted to Romanist attacks.<sup>99</sup>

That some Catholics themselves actively encouraged the denigration of Calvin and Calvinism in Protestant circles is beyond doubt. Already in 1581, the Scots exile, James Laing, had dedicated a Latin translation of Bolsec's life of Calvin to James VI.<sup>100</sup> James's known antipathy to puritanism made him an open door against which Catholics regularly pushed, before and after his accession to the English throne. The exiled priest John Wilson's rapid translations of works by the Dutch Jesuit, Martin Becanus, in 1612 made much of James's attested hostility to puritans, while stressing the latter's aversion (inherited from Calvin) to any royal or secular authority in ecclesiastical matters.<sup>101</sup> In a 1614 treatise justifying his conversion to Rome, and addressed to James, the former royal chaplain, Benjamin Carier, complained of Calvin's influence over the Church of England and portrayed his creed as unfit 'to keepe subiects in obedience to their soveraigns'.<sup>102</sup> The Franco-Scots poet and polemicist, John Barclay, was, despite his Catholicism, a firm favourite of James's, and he relentlessly flattered the king in his works. In 1621, Barclay published a Latin romance, *Argenis*, which attacked the factious character, 'troublesome to princes', of the Hyperphani, i.e. puritans, and of their eloquent but deceptive founder, Usimulca (Calvin). James commanded Ben Jonson to produce an English translation.<sup>103</sup>

A similar concern to portray puritans (in contrast to Catholics) as seditious and untrustworthy subjects motivated Matthew Pattenson's 1623 work, *The image of bothe churches*, a text which argued in favour of the rapidly unravelling Spanish

<sup>99</sup> Milton, *Catholic and reformed*, p. 425n.

<sup>100</sup> James Laing, ed. and trans., *De vita et moribus atque rebus gestis haereticorum nostri temporis* (Paris, 1581). See J. G. Fotheringham, 'Laing, James (c. 1530–1594)', rev. J. Durkan, *ODNB*.

<sup>101</sup> Martin Becanus, *The confutation of Tortura Torti: or, against the king of Englands chaplaine: for that he hath negligently defended his Kinges cause*, trans. John Wilson (Saint-Omer, 1610), pp. 7–8, 31–2; Becanus, *English iarre*, pp. 9, 16, 52, 56–7. Becanus's intervention in the controversy surrounding the Jacobean Oath of Allegiance (his contention was that Catholics could not reasonably be required to swear to recognize something – the royal supremacy – that puritans secretly disdained) followed an established track of arguing for the political subversiveness of Calvinism. His *Aphorismi Doctrinae Calvinistarum* (Mainz, 1608) aimed to exacerbate divisions between Lutherans and Calvinists in the empire, suggesting that the former should really find Catholics to be more congenial than the latter. His commentaries on the Oath drew parallels between English puritans and Calvinists in Germany, and presented testimony from non-puritan Protestants – a polemical strategy that seems learned from English Catholics, and which adds weight to the suggestion that cross-confessional and international borrowings were significant components in the construction and articulation of confessional and political identities across Europe in these years. I owe this point to this journal's anonymous reader. See P. Milward, *Religious controversies of the Jacobean age* (London, 1978), pp. 94–8.

<sup>102</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>103</sup> Miola, ed., *Early modern Catholicism*, pp. 468–75; Nicola Royan, 'Barclay, John (1582–1621)', *ODNB*.

Match and was dedicated to Prince Charles. Surveying the history of Protestantism, and specifically the roles of Calvin and Beza, Pattenson protested that he would not ‘medl with ther vertues and lives’, though he made a point of insisting on the veracity of Bolsec and other hostile biographers as reliable sources for Calvin’s ‘lyfe and conversation’. The doctrine of the Genevan reformers, however, ‘doth derogate from royaltie, and the sooveraine authoritie of kings and princes’, a contention supported by ‘grave and learned men of the Church of England’ (Sutcliffe and Bancroft), as well as by ‘learned Hooker’. Indeed, the puritans’ objections to the royal supremacy were much more disruptive than any Catholic ones, for their desire to have every minister be ‘a pope in his parish’ was exceptionally ‘preiudicial to princes’.<sup>104</sup> Once again, it was under the goad of Catholic attacks that Protestant authors stepped forward with systematic statements of the Church of England’s essentially Reformed identity. Carier’s accusations were the occasion for an official reply from Prince Charles’s chaplain, George Hakewell, asserting that the Church of England, and that of Calvin, were in all essentials the same.<sup>105</sup> But to anyone versed in the politico-religious culture of the early Stuart court, these claims were already ringing distinctly hollow.

Under James’s successor, Charles I, English Catholics remained to a great extent politically and socially marginalized. But recent scholarship has made clear the degree to which both Protestant anti-Calvinist ceremonialists and popish Catholics were aware of the possibility of common ground, which might either be crossed or occupied collectively against a common foe.<sup>106</sup> As Michael Questier has cogently argued, the issue may be less one of whether there was any substantive doctrinal or ceremonial convergence between Catholics and Laudians, than of the extent to which both groups shared a vested interest in the polemical construction and denigration of ‘puritans’ and ‘puritanism’.<sup>107</sup> Certainly, the title of a work like *Puritanisme the mother, sinne the daughter* seems calculated to appeal to the ascendant Laudians of the mid-1630s. Its author was careful to distinguish between the puritan and ‘the moderate and more learned Protestant’,

<sup>104</sup> Matthew Pattenson, *The image of bothe churches, Hierusalem and Babel* (Tournai, 1623), pp. 81–3, 110–11, 326. Hooker was also spoken of approvingly as a critic of Calvin’s in Musket, *Bishop of London*, pp. 135–6.

<sup>105</sup> George Hakewell, *An ansvere to a treatise written by Dr. Carier* (London, 1616). See Milton, *Catholic and reformed*, pp. 383–4.

<sup>106</sup> See Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 147; A. Walsham, ‘The parochial roots of Laudianism revisited: Catholics, anti-Calvinists and “parish Anglicans” in early Stuart England’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 49 (1998), pp. 620–51; M. Questier, *Catholicism and community in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 479–98; M. Questier, ‘Arminianism, Catholicism, and Puritanism in England during the 1630s’, *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), pp. 53–78.

<sup>107</sup> Questier, ‘Arminianism, Catholicism, and Puritanism’, pp. 61–2. Questier’s principal concern, however, is to demonstrate how Catholic perceptions of growing episcopal authority and enforced conformity within the Church of England chimed with the agenda of a ‘hierarchicalist’ grouping within English Catholicism, apt to identify their Jesuit opponents as ‘puritans’.

‘those temperate and sober Protestants’.<sup>108</sup> Even in less apparently conciliatory texts, like the Jesuit Lawrence Anderton’s catalogue of ‘two hundred controversial animadversions’ relating to disputes in religion, ‘vulgar and unlearned Protestants’ might be equated with ‘Calvinists & Puritans’.<sup>109</sup>

Romanist critiques of seditious puritanism, whether intended to shore up the morale of the Catholic community, reshape it in a more disciplined hierarchical form, or to ingratiate it with the Caroline regime, did not by the late 1630s invariably appeal to the moral turpitude, wrong-headedness, and egregious character flaws of John Calvin. But they supplied a deep and firmly laid foundation for the erection of polemical arguments. As a figure of sedition, whom Catholics had long recognized for what he was, Calvin had come to serve an important ecclesio-political agenda: the desire to demonstrate that Catholics might be more loyal and trustworthy subjects of the early Stuart monarchy than Calvin’s heirs, the puritans, ever could be. It was an argument the early Stuart monarchs found by no means completely unconvincing, and one whose articulation stoked the fears of the regime’s Protestant critics.

## VII

John Calvin was, in spite of himself, a central figure in the construction of a post-Reformation English Roman Catholic world-view, a highly significant symbol of Catholic identity. It was an old truism that all heresy is basically alike, and Calvin was often represented by Catholics as a link in a diabolical chain, or lumped in with lists of the usual suspects, ancient and modern. But at the same time, there was something uniquely embattled and extreme about the emotions which Calvin’s name evoked among Catholics. As Richard Verstegan put it in his *Theatrum crudelitatum haereticorum* of 1587, of all the heretics of the present age, ‘the worst and most hateful is that of Calvin’s sect’.<sup>110</sup> The very name, ‘Calvin’, was a kind of metonymy for the most terrible ills which had befallen the nation since the death of its last Catholic monarch in 1558. Yet Calvin was not some metaphysical force, a manifestation of the Antichrist, as good Elizabethan Protestants believed the papacy to be.<sup>111</sup> He was an intensely fallible, and at times comic and ridiculous human being, whose flailings and failings exposed the foundations of sand on which the Calvinist house was built. The compulsion to demonstrate this encouraged the formation of pragmatic alliances, with German Lutherans abroad and with an increasingly vocal band of anti-puritan and anti-Calvinist divines at

<sup>108</sup> B. C., *Puritanisme the mother*, ‘Epistle dedicatory’. For the Laudian trope that puritanism led inexorably to sin and antinomianism, see P. Lake, ‘Puritanism, Arminianism and a Shropshire axe-murder’, *Midland History*, 15 (1990), pp. 37–64.

<sup>109</sup> Anderton, *Miscellania*, p. 107.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Highley, *Writing the nation*, p. 70.

<sup>111</sup> Richard Verstegan, in satirical mode, did suggest that Calvinism (or England or Holland) made more persuasive candidates for the role of Antichrist than the papacy, noting that ‘Babilon’ was almost an anagram of ‘Albion’: Arblaster, *Antwerp*, pp. 200–1.

home. Though it suited their purposes sometimes to pretend otherwise, Catholic observers had long recognized that Calvin was not the sum and total of English Protestant divinity and churchmanship, and through him they played their part in advancing the process whereby a cracking edifice ultimately became a fragmented one.