Geneva's Use of Lies, Deceit, and Simulation in Their Efforts to Reform France, 1536–1563*

Jon Balserak
University of Bristol; email: J.Balserak@bristol.ac.uk

Abstract

The Genevan Reformation was subjected to a trenchant ethical critique during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anabaptists, and Radicals who identified both Calvin and Beza as unscrupulous, dishonest, and immoral. By contrast, modern scholars have paid little attention to such matters. They have either stated explicitly that both men were upright and honest in their lives and ministries or implied it. A handful of scholars have, however, alluded to dishonest conduct on their parts. The present article takes up this topic in detail, looking particularly at Geneva's ministry to France. It contends that duplicity characterized Calvin and Beza's French ministry between 1536 and 1563. It commences by examining their understanding of mendacity, which provides the standard for our analysis of their ministry. After outlining what Calvin and Beza did to support and strengthen Calvinist churches in France, the article sets forth and explains the system Calvin devised to hide their ministry from the French Catholic government and probably from the Nicodemites as well. This system depended on lies, deceit, and simulation.

Key Words:

Geneva, deception, ministry, Calvinism, France

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Introduction

In his 22 January 1561 letter to Ambroise Blaurer, Theodore Beza speaks of Reformed churches, which he calls "colonies," being born in France by the Lord's work.[1] To be sure, Geneva's ministry to France was, from the 1540s into the 1560s, remarkably fecund. A census found 2,150 Reformed churches in France at the beginning of 1562.[2] Given the opposition Geneva and Calvinism faced from the country's Catholic government during this period, one might wonder how such impressive growth was achieved. This article explores this basic question.[3] A number of answers might be suggested. I will propose that one likely factor was Geneva's use of lies and subterfuge to hide their ministerial activities from the French authorities and that, whether this was a cause of growth or not, this deception was integral to their ministry to the country.

Accusations of Geneva, Beza, and especially Calvin being unscrupulous, dishonest, immoral—the so-called Black Legend of Calvin—are a well-known part of sixteenth-and-seventeenth-century polemics against the Reformed faith.[4] Yet modern scholars have generally failed to consider the possibility of Geneva's employment of ethically-dubious strategies such as lying. "Calvin constantly promoted an uncompromising standard of honesty among the Reformed faithful and held himself up as a model,"[5] Kirk Summers recently wrote in his excellent study of Beza's ethics. Numerous researchers treating Calvin and Beza have likewise depicted both as profoundly honest.[6]

[1] Theodore Beza, *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze* (ed. Hippolyte Aubert et al.; 42 vols.; Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance; Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1960–) 3:80–81. Also, Beza to Jean Wolf, 25 March 1561 (Beza, *Correspondance*, 3:94); Beza to Bullinger, 24 May 1561 (Beza, *Correspondance*, 3:101–2). Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

[2] Beza's *Histoire Ecclesiastique des Églises Réformées au Royaume de France* (ed. Guillaume Baum and Edouard Cunitz; 3 vols.; Paris: Fishbacher, 1883–89) (hereafter, *Hist Eccl*) relates Catherine de'Medici's request for the census. See the recent re-assessment, Philip Benedict and Nicolas Fornerod, "Les 2,150 'églises' réformées de France de 1561–1562," *Revue historique* 311 (2009) 529–60. A smaller number, 1500, is mentioned in a 15 July 1561 letter from Beza to Grataroli (Beza, *Correspondance*, 3:282).

[3] Jonathan Reid, "French Evangelical Networks Before 1555: Proto-Churches?" in *La réforme en France et en Italie: Contacts, Comparisons et Contrastes* (ed. Philip Benedict et al.; Rome: École française de Rome, 2007) 105–24 engagingly addresses, from a different vantage-point, this same question.

[4] Peter Marshall, "John Calvin and the English Catholics, c. 1565–1640," *The Historical Journal* 53 (2010) 849–70; William Monter, "Witchcraft in Geneva, 1537–1662," *Journal of Modern History* 43 (1971) 179–204.

[5] Kirk Summers, *Morality After Calvin: Theodore Beza's Christian Censor and Reformed Ethics* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) 123.

[6] For example, John L. Thompson, "The Immoralities of the Patriarchs in the History of Exegesis: A Reappraisal of Calvin's Position," *CTJ* 26 (1991) 9–46; idem, "Patriarchs, Polygamy, and Private Resistance: John Calvin and Others on Breaking God's Rules," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994) 3–27. *Sensu lato*, Wilhelm Kolfhaus, *Vom christlichen Leben nach Johannes Calvin* (Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1949); Guenther Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Carlisle, PA: Paternoster Press, 1997).

This is not to say modern scholars have been unwilling to criticize the Genevans. G. R. Elton wrote, with a strong nod towards Nazi Germany: "Calvin's Geneva should not be disbelieved or despised; it should be treated seriously, as an awful warning."[7] Others have raised ideas closer to dishonesty. Raymond Blacketer queried "how consistent Calvin was in following through with his strict standards of veracity."[8] Pierre Imbart de la Tour, Vittorio de Caprariis, and Robert Kingdon have alluded to dishonest conduct (pragmatism, equivocation, subterfuge) on the part of Calvin and Beza.[9]

The argument I will set out fills a gap in scholarship by exploring in more detail the ideas pointed to by these authors and, specifically, by elucidating the stratagem devised by Calvin for hiding Geneva's French ministry. This article focuses on Calvin and Beza. Clearly, a more thorough treatment would also examine the involvement of Nicolas Des Gallars, Charles de Jonvilliers, Laurent de Normandy, Galeazzo Caracciolo, Nicolas Colladon, the Budé brothers (Jean, Louis, and François), François Hotman, Denis Raguenier, and other ministers, secretaries, and various assistants.[10] But such ambitious aims are beyond the scope of this

[7] G. R. Elton, *Reformation Europe 1517–1559* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) 163.

[8] Raymond Blacketer, "No Escape by Deception: Calvin's Exegesis of Lies and Liars in the Old Testament," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 10 (2008) 267–89, esp. 284; also, idem, "The Moribund Moralist: Ethical Lessons in Calvin's Commentary on Joshua," *Dutch Review of Church History* 85 (2005) 149–68.

[9] Pierre Imbart de la Tour, *Les Origines de la Réforme* (4 vols.; Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1905–1935) 4:185–93; Vittorio de Caprariis, "La politica calvinista e gli inizi della polemica ugonotta," in *Propaganda e pensiero politico in Francia durante le Guerre di Religione* (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1959) 1–69, esp. 39; Robert Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555–1563* (Geneva: Droz, 1956) 110–12; Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965) 23, 39, 59; Philip Benedict, "The Dynamics of Protestant Militancy: France, 1555–1563," in *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555–1585* (ed. Philip Benedict et al.; Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen Verhandlingen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, deel 176; Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1999) 35–50, esp. 39–40; Denis Crouzet, "Calvinism and the Uses of the Political and the Religious (France, ca. 1560–ca. 1572)," in *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War* (ed. Benedict et al.) 99–114, esp. 99–100; Scott Manetsch, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France: 1572–1598* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 79; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 19–20; Paul-Alexis Mellet, *Les Traités monarchomaques. Confusion des temps, résistance armée et monarchie parfaite (1560–1600)* (Geneva: Droz, 2007) 62–63; Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 167, 321–22. Related are: William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin; A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 116, 141; and Sara Beam, "Rites of Torture in Reformation Geneva," in *Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davis and Early Modern France* (ed. Graeme Murdock, Penny Roberts, and Andrew Spicer; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 197–219.

[10] Jeannine Olson, "The Mission to France: Nicolas Des Gallars' Interaction with John Calvin, Gaspard de Coligny, and Edmund Grindal, Bishop of London," in *Calvinus clarissimus theologus: Papers of the Tenth International Congress on Calvin Research* (ed. Herman Selderhuis; Reformed Historical Theology; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012) 344–57; eadem, "The Quest for Anonymity: Laurent de Normandie, His Colporteurs, and the Expansion of Reformed Communities through Worship," in *Semper Reformanda: John Calvin, Worship, and Reformed Traditions* (ed. Barbara Pitkin; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018) 33–56. On some of these figures, see

short article. Our terminus a quo is mid-1536, when Calvin arrived in Geneva; the terminus ad quem is March 1563, the date of the Edict of Amboise. We will meander outside of these boundaries on occasion, but only briefly.

In what follows, I begin by examining Calvin and Beza's understanding of mendacity. By doing so, their own thinking on the topic will provide the standard for our subsequent analysis of their conduct. Next, I outline that conduct, namely, what Calvin and Beza did to spread the gospel and support Calvinist churches and conventicles in France. Finally, I demonstrate their premeditated use of lies, deception, and especially simulation (feigning or dissembling) to hide their ministry to France.

Before commencing, I need to introduce early French evangelicalism.[11] Scholars have traditionally understood the growth of Calvinism in sixteenth-century France in terms of Geneva creating order out of the amorphous collection of movements associated with the French Renaissance.[12] More recent work, however, has questioned this narrative. Jonathan Reid has persuasively shown that the evangelical scene in France prior to the commencement of Calvin and Beza's labors was quite organized. Marguerite of Navarre had successfully established an evangelical network of theologians and preachers—Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, Guillaume Briçonnet, Jean Du Bellay, and others—many of whom she managed to have appointed as bishops, in which capacity they worked for reform within the Catholic church.[13] Taking this seriously, it casts the growth of Calvinism in France in a different light. It suggests a complex relationship between Beza's "colonies" and Marguerite's evangelical community, many of whom self-identified as Nicodemites.[14] We know that Geneva saw itself as engaged in a struggle against

Émile Doumergue, *Jean Calvin: les Hommes et les Choses de son Temps* (7 vols.; Lausanne: Bridel, 1844–1937) 3:594–647.

[11] See Denis Crouzet, *La genèse de la Réforme française 1520–1562* (Paris: SEDES, 1996); *Society and Culture in the Huguenot World, 1559–1685* (ed. Raymond Mentzer and Andrew Spicer; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[12] Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols; The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 271; Donald Kelley, *The Beginning of Ideology: Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 89–128.

[13] Jonathan Reid, *King's Sister—Queen of Dissent: Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549) and her Evangelical Network* (2 vols.; Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 139; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 1:13.

[14] Carlo Ginzburg, *Il Nicodemismo, Simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell'Europa del '500* (Turin: Guilio Einaudi, 1970); Eugénie Droz, *Chemins de l'hérésie: Textes et documents* (4 vols.; Geneva: Slatkine, 1970–1976) 1:131–71; Carlos Eire, "Calvin and Nicodemism: A Reappraisal," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 10 (1979) 44–69; Francis Higman, "The Question of Nicodemism," in *Calvinus Ecclesiae Genevensis Custos; Die Referate des Congrès International des Recherches Calviniennes . . . September 1982 in Genf* (ed. Wilhelm Niesel; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984) 165–70; Olivier Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique de la parole: Etude de rhétorique réformée* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1992) 480–504; Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) 63–82; Jon R. Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe* (Los Angeles:

Nicodemism. Evidence for this is replete, including a 1556 lecture by Calvin on Hosea 4:15: "Yet our fight is not only with the papists but also with those wicked scoundrels who arrogantly call themselves Nicodemites."[15]

Thus, in addition to the French government, it seems the Genevans also saw the Nicodemites as an opposing force with which they had to deal—a fact which, I suggest, made it even more likely that Geneva might choose to engage in deception in order to hide its ministerial work in France.

Mendacity and Geneva's Judgement of the Nicodemites

Calvin and Beza discussed mendacity in various writings and in their attacks on Nicodemism, which elicited from them frequent and robust examinations of various forms of lying and deception.

Marguerite of Navarre and her evangelical network had been working for two decades to reform the church when Calvin, in the late 1530s, began ministering to France. Beza would join him in the 1550s. One way Calvin pursued this work was through a calculated assault on Nicodemism through tracts like *Petit traicté*, *Traicté des reliques*, *Excuse à Messieurs les Nicodémites*, *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertins*, and other pieces[16] in which he excoriated the movement and called their faith illusory.

Calvin and Beza attacked the Nicodemites for participating in the "idolatrous" mass and for their rationale behind this participation, namely, ministry. Nicodemites like Gérard Roussel, Nicolas Duchemin, Jean Du Bellay, and Marguerite herself, chose to practice their faith and work for reform within the structures of the French Catholic church. Though some of Calvin and Beza's fellow-reformers approved of this approach, including Wolfgang Capito and Martin Bucer,[17] to the Genevans it was profoundly misguided. Calvin explained in a sermon on Acts preached in 1550:

> It is like those Nicodemites who say, "It is good to assume some cover (*couverture*); when I go to mass every day, they will think I am very devout, and eventually they will find some little crack and enter into discussion and

University of California Press, 2012); *Dissimulation and Deceit in Early Modern Europe* (ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon and Tamar Herzig; New York: Palgrave, 2015); Kenneth Woo, "The House of God in Exile: Reassessing John Calvin's Approach to Nicodemism in Quatre Sermons (1552)," *Church History and Religious Culture* 95 (2015) 222–44.

[15] *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia* (ed. Guillaume Baum, Edouard Cunitz, and Edouard Reuss; 59 vols.; Brunsvigae: Apud C. A. Schwetschke et filium, 1863–1900) (hereafter *CO*) 42:290.

[16] See footnote 78.

[17] "In *Consilium theologicum*, Bucer would assure a Nicodemite *vir quidam* that, through diligent study of the fathers, the rites and ceremonies of the papal church could be adapted to a more wholesome interpretation" (Nick Thompson, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and Patristic Tradition in the Theology of Martin Bucer, 1534–1546* [Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 119; Leiden: Brill: 2005] 141). Thompson indicates that Pierre Fraenkel (*Martini Buceri Opera Omnia, series II: Opera Latina* [ed. F. Wendel et al.; 4 vols.; Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 42; Leiden: Brill, 1955] 4:xv–xxix) dates the work to the winter of 1540–1541 and believes that the last part is intended to answer the anti-Nicodemite arguments of Calvin's *Epistolae duae*.

> respond in such a way that the mass will be abolished." This is the pretext behind which these evil people want to hide as they counterfeit being Christians today. . . . the people who employ such tactics say, "It seems to us that the gospel will be better advanced in this way" . . . [but ultimately we find that] . . . they simply want to flee from the cross and persecution.[18]

Particularly noteworthy here is the fact that Calvin accused the Nicodemites of sinful simulation and dissimulation about which we will say more momentarily.

But we should first consider Calvin and Beza's treatment of lying more generally. When we do, we find that they were loyal Augustinians.[19] Augustine defined a liar in his *De Mendacio* as someone "who has one thing in his mind and speaks another with words or with signs of any kind."[20]

Augustine's definition raised an immediate question related to its application. He applied it rigorously. But Christianity developed two distinct traditions here, with figures like Clement of Alexandria (in *Stromateis*) and John Chrysostom (in *De Sacerdotio*) endorsing the idea of the pious or officious lie (*mendacium officiosum*).[21] These theologians insisted on the importance of intent in their expositions. Chrysostom mentioned Paul's circumcising of Timothy (Acts 16:3; 1 Cor 9:20) as well as the common examples of army generals, parents, and physicians—all of whom deceive in their work as a matter of practical necessity, but are excused because they do so with good intent.[22] Jerome took a similar approach.[23] Other biblical examples include the lies told by Rahab (Josh 2) and the Hebrew midwives (Exod 1), who told officious lies that were adjudged to be pious because of their intentions.[24]

[18] *Supplementa Calviniana; Sermons inédits* (ed. Erwin Mulhaupt et al.; 11 vols.; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1936–) (hereafter *SC*) 8:225.

[19] Regarding the extent of Calvin's dependence on Augustine on this topic, I am indebted to Blacketer, "No Escape," 274–82.

[20] *De Mendacio* 3 (CSEL 41:415).

[21] See O. Lipmann and P. Plaut, ed., *Die Lüge in psychologischer, philosophischer, juristischer, pädagogischer, historischer, soziologischer, sprach- und literaturwissenschaftlicher und entwicklungsgeschichlicher Betrachtung* (Leipzig: Barth, 1927); Boniface Ramsey, O.P., "Two Traditions on Lying and Deception in the Ancient Church," *The Thomist* 48 (1985) 515–31; Johann Somerville, "The 'new art of lying': equivocation, mental reservation, and casuistry," in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe* (ed. Edmund Leites; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 159–89. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.8.50–7.9.53; John Chrysostom, *De Sacerdotio* 1.8–9.

[22] Chrysostom also mentioned the need to assess human intention in assessing a range of moral actions, lest one condemn Abraham (Gen 22:3), Phinehas's slaying of idolaters (Num 25:7–8), and Elijah's killing of 100 soldiers (2 Kgs 1:9–12), *PG* 48:628–32.

[23] Jerome argued Paul and Peter feigned their argument; Jerome's Galatians commentary (*PL* 26:363–67) and Augustine's *De Mendacio* 8 (CSEL 41:422–24) and their dispute over the issue, CSEL 54:496–503, 666–74; 55:367–93.

[24] Others, from John Cassian to Martin Luther, supported the officious lie (e.g., *Dr. M. Luthers Samtliche Werke* [67 vols.; Erlangen: Heyder, 1826–1886] 35:18); see, Hartmann Grisar, S.J., *Luther* (trans. E.M. Lamond; 6 vols.; St. Louis: Herder, 1917) 6:513–15. By contrast see, Calvin, *Mosis Libri V, . . . harmoniae digesti* (*CO* 24:18–19).

Augustine disagreed. For him, intent was focused on the question of whether one knowingly and deliberately spoke *contra mentem*. Doing so always amounts to lying. One who utters an untruth that she thinks is true does not lie; however, if she knows it to be false, then she is guilty of sinfully lying. Key to his understanding was the eliding of truth with God, as Boniface Ramsey has rightly argued.[25] Augustine did, it should be noted, concede that joking should not be considered lying. He also allowed for deception (i.e., ambushes) to occur in war without sin.[26] But apart from these allowances, he was extraordinarily uncompromising in his assessment of what constitutes mendacity. In the same way, Calvin and Beza linked God and truth. Beza, for instance, commented on John 8:44 that Satan could not remain in the father's presence, "for the simple fact that he lied; God only receives unto himself what is true."[27] The same can be seen in Beza's poem "In Mendaces" in his *Cato Censorius Christianus*.[28] Calvin argued those who espouse the officious lie "do not sufficiently consider how precious truth is in the sight of God." Whatever is "contrary to God's nature" cannot be right. Although the aim of the believer is good, "it can never be lawful to lie." For "God is truth."[29]

Exploring mendacity further, Augustine, Aquinas, Erasmus, Calvin, Beza, and a myriad of others examined concealment. They distinguished between two forms: *simulatio* and *dissimulatio*. Though similar, the two exhibit a noteworthy difference. To dissimulate, Calvin explained in his *Petit traicté*, "is merely to hide what one has in one's heart, while to simulate, to feign, goes beyond that, and is the moral equivalent of lying."[30] Thus, all simulation is sinful, but not all dissimulation.

While dissimulation can represent a misleading silence, it can also amount simply to the withholding of information. Calvin noted Jesus dissimulated when speaking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.[31] He also said God was dissimulating in portions of the Old Testament such as 1 Samuel 16:2 where God's prophet Samuel appears to deceive Saul about a trip he is making to anoint David in Bethlehem.[32] Dissimulation could, however, also be sinful and, in the case of the Nicodemites,

[25] Ramsey, "Two Traditions," 511.

[26] See Augustine's *QQ. in Hept. qu. x super Jos.* as cited by Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II Q40 a3 s.c.

[27] Beza, *Iesu Christi Domini nostri Novum Testamentum, sive Novum Foedus, . . . Th. Bezae Annotationes* (2 vols.; Geneva: Vignon, 1598) 2:397 as cited in Summers, *Morality After Calvin*, 126–27. For Calvin, *Inst* 2.8.47 (*CO* 2:300). He also explains: "Whatever is opposed to the nature of God is sinful" (*Joannis Calvini in librum Josue . . . et obitu* [*CO* 25:440–3]).

[28] *Cato Censorius Christianus* (Geneva: Ioannem Tornaesium, 1591). Beza's "In Mendaces" can be found in Summers, *Morality After Calvin*, 128–29.

[29] *CO* 25:440–43. Their line of argument resembles Augustine's in *Contra Mendacium*.

[30] Calvin, *Petit traicté* (*CO* 6:546). See Johannes Trapman, "Erasmus on Lying and Simulation," in *On the Edge of Truth and Honesty: Principles and Strategies of Fraud and Deceit in the Early Modern Period* (ed. Toon van Houdt et al.; Intersections 2; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 33–46.

[31] Calvin insisted "Christum sine mendacio peraeque simulasse" (*CO* 45:803–8).

[32] *CO* 30:147–58. Ably discussed in Zagorin, *Ways of Lying*, 100–130; Blacketer, "No Escape," 280–82.

Calvin and Beza believed it was. When the Nicodemite chose to conceal her Reformed beliefs from the local authorities and many of her friends, the Genevans insisted that she was acting directly against the gospel directive to confess her faith (Romans 10:9–10). This, then, was sinful dissimulation.

Simulation, of which the Nicodemites were also guilty, was always sinful. "In short, what lying is in words simulation is in deeds," as Calvin explained.[33] It amounted to pretending or falsifying. Fundamental to Nicodemism was the idea that one must feign that she is a loyal Catholic, though she is not. She actually believes the major Protestant doctrines, such as justification by faith alone. She also often, as was the case with Roussel and Marguerite, believes the Pope to be the Anti-Christ and the Roman church the synagogue of Satan. Yet, she sits in Catholic mass, feigning to pray to the saints, to believe the Eucharist becomes the body and blood of Christ, and such like.[34]

For these reasons, Calvin and Beza were swift to excoriate the Nicodemites. They knew many had clear reasons supporting their choice. "We dissemble," Calvin said, explaining the rationale of the Nicodemite as he understood it, "in order to win our neighbors and produce a new seed day by day."[35] Nonetheless, the Genevans upbraided the likes of Roussel, Duchemin, and Antoine Fumée for adopting ministerial tactics which were patently dishonest. They accused the Nicodemites of merely toying with God, and saw behind Nicodemism a fundamental opposition to the gospel.

> There is an excuse which all of them make, both great and small, lay and cleric. It is even less deserving of a hearing. "What!" they say, "Shall we all depart and run away to an unknown place? Or, indeed, shall we risk our lives?" If we reduce . . . [their argument to its essence] . . . it is as if they were to say, "What! Can we not serve God, and follow his word, without suffering persecution?" If they wish to be good Christians on that condition, they must devise an entirely new Jesus Christ.[36]

Similarly harsh condemnations of the Nicodemites by the Genevans could be multiplied.

It is, then, apparent that Calvin and Beza set down inflexible opposition to lying. Before proceeding to the next section, it is important to insist clearly that there were arenas within which they both were profoundly honest and demanded honesty of others. We might, here, point to the establishing by Calvin in the 1540s of the Consistory, which vigorously enforced morality within the city and took

[33] *CO* 6:546.

[34] See Calvin's accusing of Roussel in *CO* 5:279–312.

[35] *CO* 6:548.

[36] *CO* 6:603. On his harshness, David F. Wright, "Why was Calvin so severe a critic of Nicodemism?," in *Calvinus Evangelii Propugnator: Calvin Champion of the Gospel; Papers Presented at the International Congress on Calvin Research, Seoul, 1998* (ed. David F. Wright, A. N. S. Lane, and Jon Balserak; Grand Rapids, MI: CRC, 2006) 66–90.

prevarication extremely seriously. But, nevertheless, this article will demonstrate that in ministering to France they behaved with far less honesty.

Calvin and Beza's Ministry to France

Calvin fled Paris following Nicholas Cop's November 1533 rectorial address at the University of Paris,[37] which Calvin himself may have penned. (The juxtaposition between his fleeing and his censuring the Nicodemites for seeking to avoid persecution is perhaps noteworthy, though our attention in what follows is focused elsewhere.)[38] He was, by 1533, part of the evangelical community. He knew Marguerite and was associated with her network. He knew Cop, Duchemin, Roussel, Etienne de la Forge, and other prominent evangelicals. After his flight, he wandered, living for a while in the outskirts of Paris, Claix, Basel, Ferrara, and settling in Geneva in 1536.

While in Claix and Basel, Calvin wrote his *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, on which I will say more later. He made his way to Geneva in July of 1536 from where he continued to support those in France who adhered to the evangelical faith. The flow of letters was uninterrupted as Calvin wrote to comfort, encourage, and warn believers that "those who belong to Antichrist rage."[39] He began literary campaigns against the "papists" and the Nicodemites. The next few decades witnessed a build up of ministerial activities in France originating from Geneva that would be vehemently opposed by a succession of French kings through measures such as the Chambre Ardente and the Edict of Châteaubriant, both passed by King Henry II (1547–1559). (This opposition was in full-force in 1558, when Beza joined Calvin in Geneva.)[40] While in Strasbourg, Calvin produced *Aulcuns pseaumes et cantiques mys en chant*, together with Clément Marot, which would eventually be developed by Beza into the enormously-influential 1562 *Genevan Psalter*.[41] Upon

[37] *CO* 10b:30–36. Jean Rott, Marijn de Kroon, Marc Lienhard, *Investigationes historicae. Eglises et société au XVIe siècle* (2 vols.; Publications de la Société savante d'Alsace et des régions de l'Est. Collection Grandes publications 31–32; Strasbourg: Grandes Publications, 1986) 2:266–87.

[38] Calvin defends himself in *Excuse*, *CO* 6:607.

[39] Inter alia, *CO* 10:428–29; 12:47, 342; 16:629–33; 17:570–74, 671–87. He also praised their death, calling them martyrs, e.g., *CO* 13:348–49.

[40] Beza discusses his flight in a 1560 letter to Wolmar, Beza, *Correspondance* 3:47. He also explains that persecution was intensifying around this time, *Hist Eccl* 1:133–36. He went first to Lausanne and a decade later to Geneva. While in Lausanne, Beza worked to strengthen French evangelical churches and drafted a defence of Calvin against Sebastian Castellio, see *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis libellus* (Geneva: Robert Stephanus, 1554); for more, Karin Maag, "Recteur, pasteur, et professeur: Theodore de Beze et l'education à Genève," in *Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605): Actes du colloque de Genève* (ed. Irena Backus; Geneva: Droz, 2007) 29–39.

[41] Beza took over translating the Psalms into French, following Marot's 1544 death, publishing the *Octante-trois psaumes* in 1553. *Les psaumes en vers françois, retouchez sur l'ancienne version de Cl. Marot & Th. de Beze* (Paris: Antoine Cellier, 1579). See, Julien Gœury, "Les Pasteurs Poètes De Langue Française Des Origines De La Réforme à La Révocation De L'édit De Nantes," *Bulletin De La Société de L'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 156 (2010) 129–46.

Calvin's return from Strasbourg to Geneva in 1541, he replaced Geneva's ministers with Frenchmen whom he knew and could trust. The *Vénérable Compagnie des Pasteurs* became a body Calvin could direct with little resistance.[42] Calvin continued his literary campaign against Nicodemism, as well as providing French Calvinists with a French catechism and *La Forme des prières et chanz ecclésiastiques*.[43] As an important center for printing, Geneva produced many books and pamphlets that were smuggled into France. In fact, Geneva was "second only to Paris in the volume of religious works printed in French."[44] Following the removal from Geneva of the Perrinists in the summer of 1555, the Genevan pastors began to train and send ministers into France—work that nicely hints at the evolution of Geneva's means of influence within France from texts in the 1540s to personnel in the 1550s and 1560s. They had sent a few ministers before that time. Beza had done the same from Lausanne.[45] The *Livre des Habitants de Genève* shows how many French refugees entered the city during the 1550s and 1560s.[46] Many of them were trained and sent back as pastors. Calvin and Beza also sought political influence in France.[47] The conversion of French nobles was a desideratum from early on. Antoine of Navarre and his brother, Louis of Condé, both Princes of the Blood, François d'Andelot de Coligny and his brother, Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France,[48] were all called upon. For instance, following King Henry II's sudden death in 1559, Calvin and Beza pleaded with Antoine of Navarre to insert himself into the resulting power struggle, as the new King Francis II's youth (he was fifteen) meant a regency council was authorized to administer the government until he reached the age of twenty-

[42] William Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003) 144–66. Studies by Robert Kingdon, Ray Mentzer, and Philip Benedict also demonstrate Calvin's clear authority over these men.

[43] His continued campaign enraged evangelicals including Marguerite herself. Calvin writes her (28 April 1545) regarding his attacks on the Libertines and Nicodemites, which had been interpreted by some, and apparently her, as attacks by Calvin on her, *CO* 12:65–68.

[44] Gordon, *Calvin*, 360 n.18 notes the work of Andrew Pettegree and the French Book Project (St. Andrews University) to support this assertion.

[45] Manetsch, *Theodore Beza*, 15; see Beza to Farel, 16 March 1556 (Beza, *Correspondance*, 2:35); Beza to Bullinger, 27 March 1557 (Beza, *Correspondance*, 2:57).

[46] *Le Livre des Habitants de Genève, Tome I, 1555–1572* (ed. Paul-F. Giesendorf; 2 vols.; Travaux d'humanisme et renaissance; Geneva: Droz, 1957–1963) 1:54–218; Peter Wilcox, "The Lectures of John Calvin and the Nature of his Audience," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 87 (1996) 136–48.

[47] See, Kingdon, "PART II: Political Activity," in *Geneva*, 54–126.

[48] Calvin to Antoine of Navarre, December 1557 (*CO* 16:730–34) and June 1558 (*CO* 17:196–98); see, Francis DeCrue, *L'action politique de Calvin hors de Genève: d'après sa correspondence* (Geneva: Librairie Georg, 1909) 42–59. Gaspard de Coligny is addressed by Beza in his dedicatory letter to *Ioannis Calvini in Viginti prima Ezechielis Propheta capita praelectiones* (Geneva: Francisci Perrini, 1565) iir–viiiv; see also *CO* 17:318–19; and, Junko Shimizu, *Conflict of Loyalties: Politics and Religion in the Career of Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France, 1519–1572* (Geneva: Droz, 1970) 28–30.

five[49] (Antoine was not interested).[50] Calvin and Beza also employed more radical means. As the late 1550s witnessed the increase in plots designed to save the king from the powerful House of Guise, Beza and Calvin planned their own. Rejecting the ill-fated Conspiracy of Amboise of 17 March 1560,[51] they planned in September of 1560 to give troops and money to Antoine of Navarre to use in order "aggressively to assert his right to lead a regency government and then promote Reformed rights of worship."[52] The plot never materialized. Beza attended the Colloquy of Poissy in September of 1561, which was, by most reckonings, a disaster.[53] With the war commencing in the spring of 1562, Calvin and Beza supported it vigorously. Notable here is Calvin's seeking of financial support for the hiring of mercenaries.

Deception in Support of Clandestine Ministerial Efforts

A. Calvin's Duplicitous Letter to Francis I

As mentioned earlier, Calvin fled Paris and eventually France following Cop's 1533 rectorial address. During his subsequent wanderings, he wrote the *Institutio*. He tells us that he wrote it in response to the events that transpired following the

[49] This council would be made up of the Estates General and the Princes of the Blood, and could take the decision to resist Francis II's government, if it felt such action were necessary. However, see *Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion, 1559–1598* (ed. Arlette Jouanna; Paris: Laffont, 1998) 52–53, 1067.

[50] Calvin complains about Antoine, *CO* 17:594–95; 18:229–31, 231–32, 254–56, 267–69, 97–100, esp. 98. Beza and Calvin continued their efforts with Antoine, *CO* 18:608–10, 621. King Francis II's death on 5 December 1560 brought relief to the Reformed. Beza described his reign with Jesus's words: "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matt 24:22 NIV) (*Hist Eccl* 1:133–34); see also *CO* 18:270. The new monarch, Charles IX, was only nine when he took the throne and was under the regency of Catherine, *Hist Eccl* 1:459–566.

[51] On which, Beza's *Hist Eccl* 1:164–74; *Histoire et Dictionnaire* (ed. Jouanna) 52–69; Kingdon, *Geneva*, 68–78; and further discussion below.

[52] Alain Dufour, "L'affaire de Maligny (Lyon, 4–5 septembre 1560) vue à travers la correspondance de Calvin et de Bèze," in *Cahiers d'Histoire* 8 (1963) 269–80. Philip Benedict, "Prophets in Arms? Ministers in War, Ministers on War: France 1562–1574," in *Ritual and Violence* (ed. Murdock, Roberts, and Spicer) 163–96, esp. 171 n. 21. See *CO* 18:176–80. This plot "had Calvin's approval (since the first prince of the blood was directing it). Calvin took charge even of collecting funds borrowed left and right, up to 50,000 pounds" (Alain Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze, poète et théologien* [Geneva: Droz, 2006] 74); also, idem, "L'affaire de Maligny," 269–80; Beza, *Correspondance* 3:63–70.

[53] Beza, *Correspondance*, 3:132–33. On 1 November 1560, Calvin wrote to Bullinger that "war in France is inevitable" (*CO* 18:230). See, inter alia, Lucien Romier, *Les origines politiques des guerres de religion* (2 vols.; Paris: Perrin et Cie, Libraires-Editeurs, 1913–1914); Jon Balserak, *John Calvin as Sixteenth-century Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). There were still highpoints for the Reformed. For instance, on 16 January 1561, Calvin wrote to Admiral Coligny (*CO* 18:316–17) who, in the wake of Francis II's death, was ready to work for the Reformed cause and *eodem die* wrote Antoine (*CO* 18:311–12). Yet, by the time of the Poissy Colloquy in September, Calvin would warn Coligny, who was present at it, of Antoine's unreliability (*CO* 18:732–34) and, by December, Calvin and Beza would write a denunciatory missive to the king of Navarre (*CO* 19:198–202).

1534 *Affaire des Placards*,[54] specifically, the French authorities' execution of eighteen evangelicals believed to have been behind the event and, thus, deemed agitators against King Francis I's government. Calvin wrote the work to defend the faith of those who were put to death by Francis I's government and to explain that evangelicals represent no danger to king or country. Calvin works out this purpose in at least two ways.

First, Calvin used the preface to the *Institutio*,[55] which takes the form of a dedicatory letter to Francis I dated 10 September 1535, to set out an *apologia* for the executed evangelicals (apparently, a part of Marguerite's evangelical network), with whom Calvin identified. Calvin protested, "we are wrongly charged with intentions of a sort as we have never even given the slightest suspicion. We [so it is claimed by those who have the king's ear] are contriving the overthrow of kingdoms," yet this is not so. Continuing his train of thought, he exclaimed: "We from whom not one seditious word was ever heard and whose life, while passed under your reign, is known to have always been quiet and simple; and we now also, though exiled from our home, do not cease to pray for all prosperity for yourself and your kingdom."[56] Insisting to the French king that he and his co-religionists were not politically-disruptive agitators, he sought to convince the monarch that their faith required them to honor and obey Francis and his government. This preface was reprinted in every Latin *Institutio* (1536, 1539, 1543, 1550, 1559) and French *Institution* (1541, 1545, 1551, 1560).

Calvin was not, we might briefly note, haranguing the French king in this prefatory letter. His language was not vituperative but respectful, almost obsequious. He addressed the king with a form of what appears to have been the standard greeting: "TO THE MOST POWERFUL AND ILLUSTRIOUS MONARCH, FRANCIS, MOST CHRISTIAN KING OF THE FRENCH."[57] By comparison, Ulrich Zwingli's greeting to Francis I in his 1525 *De vera et falsa religione* reads: "To the most Christian king of France, Francis, the first of that name." Likewise, the Senates of Strasbourg and of Zurich both adopt essentially the same greeting in their missives to the French king.[58]

Second, Calvin set out the character of the obedience owed to the king in the body of the *Institutio*. He said authority over the civil realm is God-given (Romans 13) and, thus, compels obedience to the civil ruler. "One cannot resist

[54] For subsequent developments, see William Monter, *Judging the French Reformation: Heresy Trials by Sixteenth-Century Parlements* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[55] *CO* 1:9–30.

[56] *CO* 1:25.

[57] "POTENTISSIMO, ILLUSTRISSIMOQUE MONARCHAE, FRANCISCO, FRANCORUM REGI CHRISTIANISSIMO" (*CO* 1:10–11).

[58] Ulrich Zwingli, *De vera et falsa religione, Huldrychi Zvinglij commentarius* (Zurich: Froschower, 1525) n.p. *CO* 10b:57–62. The Genevan Senate's greeting to the Zurich senate is less effusive, *CO* 10b:221–23.

the magistrate without simultaneously resisting God."[59] Calvin acknowledged that God had ordained an office of government, namely the popular magistrate who had been given a duty, having "been appointed to curb the tyranny of kings." But Calvin insisted that that duty belonged solely to the holder of that office and private individuals must not engage in such activity or in any forms of active disobedience.[60] The one occasion when individual Christians can (indeed, must) disobey a ruler's command is when it requires them to violate God's law. On such occasions, Calvin insisted active resistance was forbidden. The individual's disobedience must be passive, taking the form of prayer, petition to the ruler, suffering persecution, or flight.[61]

What are we to make of all this? Consider that after his flight from Paris in 1533, Calvin continued writing to encourage evangelicals in the country. Consider too that within a very short time—less than a year after signing the prefatory letter in September 1535—he was writing to Nicolas Duchemin and Gérard Roussel demanding in vehement language that they separate from the French Catholic church (in *Duae Epistolae*).[62] And consider that in October 1536 he was telling François Daniel that he was busy translating the *Institutio* into French[63] (presumably to smuggle into France). When we consider these things, we begin to see that Calvin wanted to present himself and his city as France's obedient neighbor and to set up a system that allowed him to hide behind that presentation. This impression is only strengthened when we remember other works Calvin was soon engaged in, such as preparing *Aulcuns pseaumes et cantiques mys en chant*, aimed (one can only assume) at supporting separate evangelical communities in France. I will go on to outline this system in a moment, but should comment first on a matter arising here.

An obvious question that arises at this point concerns timing. Earlier, I outlined the character of Calvin and Beza's ministry to France; a ministry that involved them in what can only be described as active disobedience; it went beyond prayer, petition, persecution, or flight. I have also shown that Calvin insisted to Francis I

[59] *CO* 1:243.

[60] Ibid., 1:244–46.

[61] Ibid., 1:246–48. For a good summary, John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights; Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 49–54. Most acknowledge Calvin's later position on resistance changed somewhat but retained the restriction against active resistance; however, for a different view, see also Willem Nijenhuis, "The Limits of Civil Disobedience in Calvin's Last-Known Sermons: Development of his Ideas on the Right of Civil Resistance," in *Ecclesia Reformata: Studies on the Reformation* (2 vols.; Kerkhistorische Bijdragen 16; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 2:73–94.

[62] *CO* 5:233–312. See, Cornelius Augustijn, Christoph Burger, and Frans Pieter van Stam, "Calvin in the Light of the Early Letters," in *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae. Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research, Princeton, August 20–24, 2002* (ed. Herman Selderhuis; Geneva: Droz, 2004) 139–57.

[63] *CO* 10b:62–64; Calvin to François Daniel, 3 October 1536, in *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les pays de langue française* (ed. A. L. Herminjard; 9 vols.; Geneva: H. Georg, 1864–1897) 4:86–91.

in September 1535 that he and his fellow evangelicals were committed to never engaging in active forms of disobedience. But we may wonder here about timing. Am I suggesting that all the activities that Calvin, and later Beza, involved themselves in from 1536 until 1563 were actually being planned by Calvin when he was writing his 1535 preface? That would likely be impossible to demonstrate, and is (in fact) not what I have in mind. Yet, the short amount of time between his 1535 preface and his *Duae Epistolae*, which he likely began writing from Ferrara in the first-half of 1536 (though not publish until early 1537)[64] suggests the possibility that he may have had some ministerial plans for France in his head when writing his preface to Francis I in September 1535. But whether he did or not, he would proceed quickly to engage in active forms of disobedience once he had settled in Geneva. Stam contends Calvin's views changed following the Lausanne Disputation (October 1536), and he may well be right.[65] Whatever the case, the change was rapid. Let us now turn to examine the system Calvin designed and he and Beza implemented to hide Geneva's clandestine French ministerial activities.

B. Geneva's System for Hiding Its French Ministry

Calvin designed a system aimed at hiding Geneva's French ministry. It sought to establish invisible (inconspicuous) communities, invisible communications, and invisible movement of people.

i. Invisible (Inconspicuous) Communities

Geneva sought to cloak the presence of Reformed conventicles in France, particularly in areas of high tension. One may legitimately assume that neither Calvin nor Beza wanted Calvinist communities to be completely invisible. Not only would that have been impossible, but it would also have been undesirable. They wanted true Christianity to spread in the cities, towns, and villages of France and this would necessitate contact with and ministry towards the local populations.[66] Thus, they wanted not complete invisibility but French Calvinist communities to be unobtrusive, inconspicuous.

Still, Calvin counselled some, apparently many, Calvinist conventicles to meet secretly in private homes.[67] He spoke of the need to congregate, but warned

[64] That Calvin began writing *Duae Epistolae* in Ferrara is persuasively argued by Paul Wernle, *Calvin und Basel bis zum Tode des Myconius, 1535–1552* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1909) 8; see Alexandre Ganoczy, *Le Jeune Calvin; genèse et évolution de sa vocation réformatrice* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1966) 311–14.

[65] Frans Pieter van Stam, "The Group of Meaux as First Target of Farel and Calvin's Anti-Nicodemism," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 68 (2006) 253–75.

[66] Reid discusses the factors that contributed to the forming and strengthening of evangelicalism and perceptively notes the detrimental role of Calvin's leadership for the growth of Reformed churches in France, Reid, "French Evangelical Networks Before 1555," 105–24.

[67] See Kingdon, *Geneva*, 57; Henry Heller, *The Conquest of Poverty: The Calvinist Revolt in Sixteenth Century France* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 35; Leiden: Brill, 1986)

vigorously against doing so openly. Of course, as it grew, the Reformed church became bolder. For instance, it petitioned the crown for the right to assemble. One such petition was made in response to the crown's 16 March 1560 declaration of the king's willingness to listen to one or several obedient subjects who brought their request to him (a declaration which effectively, according to Romier, granted permission to assemble, whether that was its intention or not).[68] Nevertheless, as late as 1560, Geneva was encouraging Reformed bodies to meet in secret.[69] The extent of this secrecy is difficult to assess, though it would seem to have been widespread. Calvin reported in 1558 that the number of the faithful in France was increasing "and in many places (plurimis in locis) secret meetings are held."[70]

The surprise here, of course—and one of the things that intimates that Calvin's actions and decisions were being governed by a deliberate and crafted plan rather than a principled conviction—is that he lambasted the Nicodemites for doing precisely what he was instructing French Calvinist communities to do, namely, hide. "Our Lord is not content," he wrote to the Nicodemites, "if we acknowledge him secretly and in our hearts, but he strictly requires us to confess him publicly by an external profession that we are his."[71] Meanwhile his word to the Reformed church in Montélimart was that he and Beza had learned: "that you are considering establishing the public preaching of the word. We ask you to put away that idea and not to think about it until God provide you with a better opportunity. . . . When you hold your meetings peaceably in private homes, the rage of the wicked will not be easily enflamed."[72] To the faithful at Poitiers: "I wrote to you a while ago pointing out the means I approve of for defeating the malice of your enemies: it is that in order not to expose yourselves needlessly you should plan not to gather the whole congregation together, but instead assemble in small groups, now in one place and now in another."[73] Continuing, he urged the believers in Poitiers to

27–69; Herman Speelman, *Calvin and the Independence of the Church* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014) 143–208. Tensions within France predate Calvinism; see Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu. La violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525–vers 1610* (2 vols.; Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1990) 1:103–236; 2:330–60, 428–64, 464–539. On clandestine Huguenot worship, Natalie Davis, "Printing and the People," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975) 201–203 as cited in Olson, "The Quest for Anonymity," 35–36.

[68] Lucien Romier, *La Conjuration d'Amboise* (Paris: Perrin, 1923) 167 as cited in Philip Benedict, "*Qui étaient les députés*? An Unknown Group of Protestant Leaders on the Eve of the First War of Religion," in *Social Relations, Politics, and Power in Early Modern France: Robert Descimon and the Historian's Craft* (ed. Barbara Diefendorf; Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2016) 158–83, esp. 161.

[69] *CO* 18:64–66. Also letters to churches in Poitou (*CO* 15:222–24 [3 September 1554]), Angers (*CO* 15:756–58 [9 September 1555]), Loudun (*CO* 15:758–60 [9 September 1555]). Calvin complains to Bullinger (*CO* 18:175–77 [6 September 1560]) that French churches were not following Geneva's instructions in this regard. See also, Beza, *Hist Eccl* 1:66–7.

[70] *CO* 17:311–12.

[71] *CO* 6:544.

[72] *CO* 18:66.

[73] *CO* 15:754–56.

make their homes available for this purpose. Such instructions provide a glimpse into Calvin's mind and ministerial machinations.

This desire for a kind of invisibility for the French Calvinist conventicles also seems, I would contend, to have been part of what was behind Calvin and Beza's dissuading of them from engaging in iconoclasm, rioting, and vandalism. The fact that *Les Eglises réformées en France* were involved in such behavior could only have been viewed by Geneva as frustrating and problematic. Here I concur with Kingdon's comments on Calvin's "political shrewdness" in relation to Geneva's constant decrying of riotous activity. Kingdon asserted that "here we see again . . . that Calvin's scruples had a practical base." In other words, Calvin and Beza's disapprobation of such practices was founded on the fact that such practices "may inflame public opinion without profitable result."[74] To be sure, Calvin and Beza may have also considered such behavior ungodly. Yet when their encouragement to meet secretly is considered along with their word against rioting, we begin to see more clearly that they earnestly desired the Calvinist communities in France to keep a low profile, flying (as it were) below the government's radar.

ii. Invisible Communications

Taking up the subject of communication, we find a division of labor at work. Beza visited France, but did not write French Reformed communities.[75] Calvin wrote them, but did not visit. Communications were, it seems very likely, orchestrated by Calvin. Beza and others were sent as emissaries from Geneva and did not visit French churches of their own accord.

When communicating with an array of individuals associated with the French Reformed conventicles (both members of the nobility and private citizens), Geneva put in place measures designed to minimize risk by cloaking identities and other sensitive pieces of information. Regarding communications through books, this cloaking took a particular form. Calvin helped establish a book smuggling venture, which he supported without being involved on a day-to-day basis.[76] He was friends with Laurent de Normandy, one of the most important men in French publishing through whom Calvin influenced significant portions of the French market. Geneva funded Normandy's publishing, illegal trade, and use of colporteurs through the *Bourse française*, a fund established around 1550 to cover a wide array of expenses

[74] Kingdon, *Geneva*, 111–12. For example, to the church of Paris (*CO* 18:376–78 [26 February 1561]); the consistory of Sauve (*CO* 18: 580–81 [July 1561]); Beza (*CO* 19:120–22 [19 November 1561]). Eire, *War against the Idols*; Olivier Christin, *Une revolution symbolique. L'iconoclasme Huguenot et la reconstruction catholique* (Paris: Minuit, 1991).

[75] Between 1558 and 1563, Beza wrote a myriad of individuals including French noblemen and women. He also wrote from France back to Calvin. But he did not write to *Églises réformées*.

[76] On the European publishing industry, Jean-François Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2005) 275–76; Andrew Pettegree, "Books, Pamphlets, and Polemic," in *The Reformation World* (ed. Andrew Pettegree; London: Routledge, 2000) 120–21.

related to the poor.[77] Through this mechanism, Geneva provided French Calvinist communities with treatises, tracts, scriptural commentaries, and other pamphlets without detection by the authorities.[78]

The Genevans used emissaries to convey messages to members of the French nobility sympathetic to the Reformed cause. In writing to Sulzer in October of 1560 to say that the King of Navarre remained silent, Calvin added "our Beza is with him."[79] A letter of Calvin to Sturm, written in November 1560, explains that François Hotman had gone to visit the King of Navarre to urge him to do more for the gospel in France.[80] Beza, moreover, travelled to Nérac in the summer of 1560, staying three months and preaching and counselling Antoine and his younger brother, Louis of Condé. Beza journeyed to Paris in 1561 to appear before the young Charles IX and Catherine. Beza also, as already mentioned, attended the Colloquy of Poissy. Beza's travels during these years resulted in his becoming acquainted with important noblemen and women, including the young Henry, prince of Navarre, who would become King Henry IV, and also Henry's mother, Jeanne d'Albret, the wife of Antoine. Beza exchanged letters with her for years.[81] Given the nature of personal contact, this communication could be accomplished without leaving dangerous paper-trails behind, thus preserving the secrecy of the ministry.

Epistolary correspondence with French churches belonged to Calvin. He employed trusted messengers for delivery. His missives are punctuated with remarks about distrusting a messenger or awaiting a trustworthy one.[82] Of course, the letters could have proven extremely damaging and dangerous to their addressees if they fell into the wrong hands. To provide just one example: Calvin wrote to the King of Navarre on 16 January 1561, urging him to use his influence to sway the regent, Catherine de'Medici.[83] Thus, safe delivery was essential.

In correspondences, Calvin employed code words, nicknames, and innuendo. Early nicknames used include "Megaera" (Roussel) and "Pylades" (unknown).[84]

[77] Henri Grandjean, "La bourse française de Genève (1550–1849)," in *Etrennes Genevoises* (Geneva: Atar, 1927) 46–60; Jeannine Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse française* (Cranbury, NJ: Susquehanna University Press, 1989) 70–91, 168–82; eadem, "The Mission to France," 344–57; eadem, "The Quest for Anonymity," 33–56. It is mentioned in letters, *CO* 13:149–52 and *CO* 14:723–24.

[78] For example, *Duae Epistolae* (*CO* 5:239–312), *Petit traicté* (*CO* 6:537–88), *Traicté des reliques*, (*CO* 6:405–52), *Articuli a facultate sacrae theologiae Parisiensi . . . Cum antidoto* (*CO* 7:1–44), *Excuse à Messieurs les Nicodémites* (*CO* 6:589–614), and *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertins* (*CO* 7:145–248). On the circulation of literature, *Lire et découvrir: la circulation des idées au temps de la Réforme* (ed. Francis Higman; Geneva: Droz, 1998) 131–54. See, for example, Calvin writing about a French translation of his *De Scandalis* being produced (*CO* 13:654–57).

[79] *CO* 18:202–204, esp. 204.

[80] *CO* 18:231–32. See also *CO* 17:576–78.

[81] Beza, *Correspondance* 4:91, 243; 6:313; 7:281; 8:32, 34, 218; 10:72; see Manetsch, *Theodore Beza*, 20.

[82] For example, *CO* 14:27–28; 17:652–53.

[83] *CO* 18:311–12.

[84] *CO* 10b:27, Calvin to François Daniel, 31 October 1533 (Herminjard, *Correspondance*

This practice can be seen in greater detail, for instance, in relation to the Amboise Conspiracy of 17 March 1560 proposed by La Renaudie. Both Calvin and Beza showed interest in it.[85] Calvin wrote Bullinger about it in a letter dated 5 October 1559, speaking about Beza having gone to Strasbourg on a work "of great significance" that concerns us and "is being undertaken by certain persons."[86] In another example, when speaking of their September 1560 plot involving Antoine of Navarre, Calvin and Beza spoke of Antoine as "Fervidus."[87] In a third example, during 1561 and into 1562, the Reformed churches experienced enormous growth which Calvin mentions in several letters to inter alios Georgio Tammero and Bullinger.[88] In these letters, Calvin is still complaining about Antoine of Navarre, whom he and Beza are now referring to as "Julian"—a reference to Julian the Apostate.[89]

In addition to these measures, Calvin employed many pseudonyms[90] throughout his life. Here, I am not thinking of the time Calvin had a 1545 work entitled *Pro Farrello et collegis eius adversus Petri Caroli calumnias defensio Nicolai Galasii* published under the name of Nicolas Des Gallars[91]—something which he explains in letters to Pierre Viret that he did in order to produce the impression of greater objectivity, so that it would appear Des Gallars was defending Calvin and Farel in their ongoing dispute with Caroli.[92] Rather, I am thinking of the many times Calvin signed a contrived name to one of his letters. Beza, incidentally, would employ pseudonyms occasionally in the 1570s: "Wolfgang Prisbach" for *Responsio ad orationem habitam super in concilio Helvetiorum* and "Nathanael Nesekius" in his

3:106–11, esp. 107), see the explanatory note in John Sturm's mid-October 1533 letter to Martin Bucer, Herminjard, *Correspondance* 3:93–95, esp. 94 n. 7. *CO* 12:295, Calvin to François Daniel, 27 June 1531 (Herminjard, *Correspondance* 2:346–48, esp. 347 n. 5). Plyades may be a family name.

[85] Calvin's opposition appeared quite late, see May 1560 letter to Bullinger, *CO* 18:83–85; see also, *CO* 18:425–31. Henri Naef, *La Conjuration d'Amboise et Genève* (Geneva: Jullien, 1922) 462–63; Kingdon, *Geneva*, 68–78; idem, "Calvin and Calvinists on Resistance to Government," in *Calvinus Evangelii Propugnator*, 54–65. See also, a letter dated 16 April 1561 from Calvin to Admiral de Coligny, in which Calvin, speaking of the Amboise Conspiracy, says that "if the Princes of the Blood wished to be maintained in their rights for the common good and if the Parliament joined them in their fight, then it would be lawful for all good subjects to support their efforts (*prêter main forte*, given the context likely means something like "give them armed support")" (*CO* 18:426). DeCrue interprets Calvin too cautiously; see DeCrue, *L'action politique de Calvin*, 47–52. *Sensu lato*, Beza, *Hist Eccl* 1:164–74; *Histoire et Dictionnaire* (ed. Jouanna) 52–69.

[86] *CO* 17:654–56.

[87] *CO* 18:177–80, a letter to Beza of 10 September 1560; see also *CO* 18:176–78 and Beza, *Correspondance* 3:63–70.

[88] *CO* 19:325–26 and *CO* 19:326–29, respectively.

[89] *CO* 19:297–302; letter of 26 February 1562 from Beza to Calvin.

[90] James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England; Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practice of Letter-Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and *Visual Cultures of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe* (ed. Timothy McCall et al.; Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2013).

[91] *CO* 7:289–340.

[92] *CO* 12:100–101, 107–8.

work *Adversus sacramentariorum errorem pro vera Christi praesentia in coena Domini homiliae duae*.[93] Calvin, however, employed them for most of his life.

Some of Calvin's pseudonyms were Charles D'Espeville (with variations on the spelling of the surname), Martinus Lucanius, Carolus Passelius, Alcuinus, Lucanius, Deperçan, and Bonneville. A fine discussion of this is found in Doumergue.[94] He employed a pseudonym when writing to those in France far more often than to those living elsewhere. In fact, when sending letters into France, pseudonym-usage was a fairly-consistent pattern for him. The frequency with which he employed them is too great to demonstrate here. He seems to have preferred Charles D'Espeville over other names. He also received letters addressed to his pseudonyms. For instance, during his travels, Beza wrote back to Geneva on 31 March 1563 to Monsieur Desperville.[95] The earliest appearance I have found of one of Calvin's pseudonyms is in a letter from Wolfgang Capito to Martianus Lucanius (i.e., Calvin) which Herminjard reckons was written towards the end of 1534.[96] He published some versions of the 1536 *Institutio* anonymously and the 1539 Latin *Institutio* under the pseudonym Alcuinus, but overwhelmingly the focus of his use of pseudonyms was France.

What is particularly impressive here—and what carries us some way further towards seeing the deliberate craft and planning behind his ministry model—is the fact that the contents of many of Calvin's pseudonym-signed letters reveal no clear reason why he should wish to withhold his name from them. Quite frequently these missives simply discussed spiritual matters. He wrote to encourage some, warn others, and to counsel and direct. He did not, in many of these letters, discuss provocative things. But he withheld his name, nonetheless. Calvin used false names not only when writing to the Queen of Navarre, the Duchess of Ferrara, or French Calvinist ministers, but also when addressing Madame de Cany or Madame de Pons—individual believers with whom he was friends.[97]

[93] See Beza, *Correspondance*, 14:88, 95. I am grateful to Scott Manetsch for this information. For more see, Manetsch, *Theodore Beza*, 57–58.

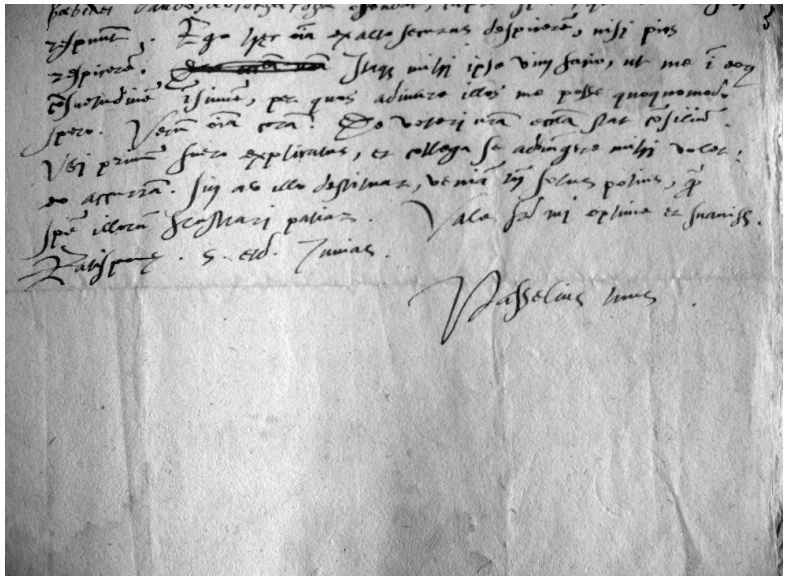
[94] Doumergue, "Pseudonymie de Calvin," *Jean Calvin*, Appendice VIII, 1:558–73. See also Christian Sigismund Liebe, *Diatribe de pseudonymia Jo. Calvini* (Amsterdam: Apud Wetstenios, 1723); Blacketer, "No Escape," 284–85; Kate Tunstall, "'You're Either Anonymous or You're Not!': Variations on Anonymity in Modern and Early Modern Culture," *Modern Language Notes* 126 (2011) 671–88 and the literature cited therein.

[95] Beza, *Correspondance*, 4:132–33.

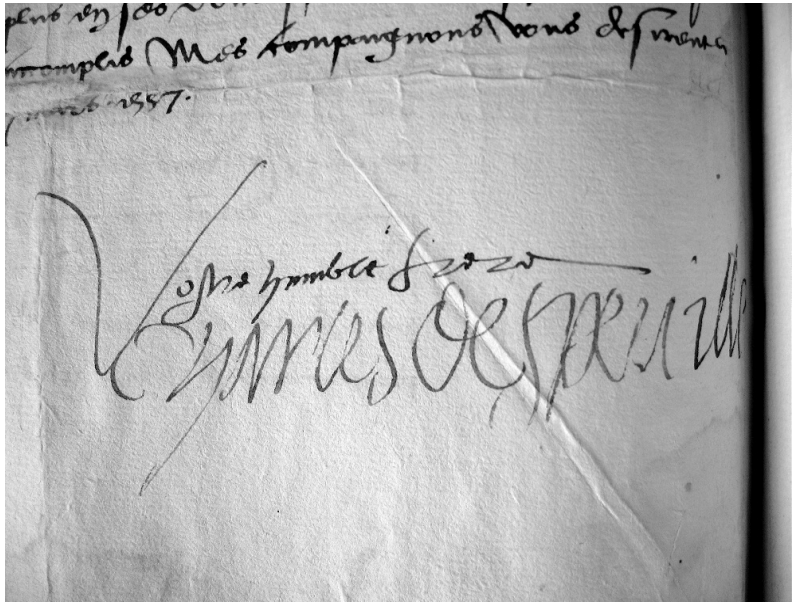
[96] *CO* 10b:45–46 (Herminjard, *Correspondance,* 3:242–45).

[97] For example, *CO* 15:144–47, 193–95. See Charmarie Jenkins Blaisdell, "Calvin's Letters to Women: The Courting of Ladies in High Places," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13 (1982) 67–84.

Calvin's Use of Pseudonyms Briefly Illustrated[98]



Carolus Passelius



Charles D'Espeville

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When these cloaking measures did not work, as was apparently the case with some of Calvin's letters on which he had signed his actual name rather than a pseudonym, the letters would need to be culled. Beza was forced into doing this after Calvin's death, with the aim of removing potentially compromising details that could be seen by others if the letters in question were published. The precise character of the material—whether it was legal, moral, or political matters—that Beza wanted to hide, we do not know. But Beza sought, after Calvin's demise, to remove compromising letters from the public domain. He wrote to Bullinger in 1565 requesting that he send back missives which Calvin had written to the Zurich minister. He then wrote again on 16 March 1568 offering to send someone to go collect these letters from the Zuricher. Then, in a letter from 5 April 1568, Bullinger wrote to Beza explaining that he had dispatched the letters of Calvin which Beza had requested.[99] The effort was perhaps an exercise in reputation-protection or perhaps something more. Whatever the case, it reveals to some degree the level of secrecy they felt their work required.

iii. Invisible Movement of People

Calvin and Beza employed various measures in order to send the preachers they trained into France in a way that would ensure their safety and minimize the likelihood of detection and capture. They sent them into France under assumed names, carrying false identities, forged papers, clandestine meetings. They took obscure mountain passages in order to avoid the authorities along the border. Kingdon describes those who could still identify the network of paths for pastors coming into France used more recently during World War II. An alternative to using these paths was to attempt to pass oneself off as a merchant through the use of fake documents when confronted by the authorities. Estimates of the number dispatched between the years 1556 and 1562 vary between eighty-eight and more than two hundred.[100]

So, then, Calvin and later Beza established a system that sought to cloak the presence of Calvinist communities in France, mask communications between them

[99] Beza, *Correspondance*, 6:142; 9:57. On the incident, Benedict, "The Dynamics of Protestant Militancy," 39–40.

[100] Kingdon, *Geneva*, 5, 33, 38–40, appendices 1–3; Didier Boisson and Hugues Daussy, *Les protestants dans la France moderne* (Paris: Belin, 2006) 61; Jon Balserak, *Establishing the Remnant Church in France; Calvin's Lectures on the Minor Prophets, 1556–1559* (Brill's Series in Church History 50; Leiden: Brill, 2011). See the excellent summary in Ray Mentzer, "Calvin and France," in *Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2009) 78–87. This was discussed in letters, e.g., *CO* 18:467; 19:224–26. On the question of whether Geneva kept a list of French churches needing pastors, see Peter Wilcox, "L'envoi des pasteurs aux Eglises de France: trois listes établies par Colladon (1561–1562)," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 139 (1993) 347–74; also, Karin Maag, "Recruiting and Training Pastors: The Genevan Model and Alternative Approaches," in *Revisiting Geneva: Robert Kingdon and the Coming of the French Wars of Religion* (ed. S. K. Barker; St. Andrews Studies in French History and Culture; St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews, 2012) 10–22. On dangers these ministers encountered, *CO* 42:296; 44:226.

and Geneva, and hide the movement of people between France and Geneva. They did this to conceal their ministry to France behind the crafted image of Geneva as France's obedient neighbor. In fact, during the 1540s, 1550s, and 1560s, Geneva was becoming less and less obedient. It was, in addition to what we have been considering, growing increasingly critical of French kings. One finds Calvin (for instance) declaiming, in his lectures, that they are "gross and stupid."[101] They "think they are exempt from the law."[102] They are self-indulgent,[103] "inhuman tyrants," and "madmen."[104] They "despise everything divine" and wish to be worshipped in God's place.[105] They "rage against the church."[106] "We know that wherever there is cunning in the world, it reigns especially in the palaces of princes."[107] These are all quotations from Calvin's *praelectiones* about which J. T. McNeill has rightly noted, "we may sometimes discern an allegory of French affairs of the times."[108] Thus, the depiction of obsequious deference and obedience on the part of Geneva towards France was, in reality, a façade.

C. Lying as a Fail-Safe

But sometimes the smokescreen did not manage to hide all it intended. Though the Genevan system hid much of its ministry to France, there was at least one occasion when more desperate measures needed to be taken.

On 27 January 1561, a special courier of the new king of France, Charles IX, was sent to Geneva to deliver a letter from the young king.[109] It aimed to inquire about two matters: first, the fact that preachers had been entering France having been sent by Geneva; and, second, the problem of dissension and sedition that had been troubling France recently—a concern related specifically to plots like the Amboise Conspiracy. The king wanted all preachers to be recalled and no more to be sent. He also wanted an end to the dissension. He requested a reply to his demands. Calvin penned Geneva's reply, speaking for the Genevan government and ministers.

The letter notes the "smallness of our state" and speaks of the devotedness which Geneva has "always and for a long time displayed" to the king and to "your predecessors." It speaks of their persistence in working for "the tranquillity and prosperity of your kingdom." The Genevan's letter then, somewhat self-consciously,

[101] *CO* 41:3.

[102] *CO* 44:16.

[103] *CO* 38:385.

[104] *CO* 38:7.

[105] *CO* 41:7.

[106] *CO* 44:151.

[107] *CO* 40:540.

[108] John T. McNeill, "Editor's Introduction," in *Calvin; On God and Political Duty* (New York: Macmillan, 1950) xx. Also see Max Engammare ("Calvin monarchomaque? Du soupçon à l'argument," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 89 [1998] 207–26) and Balserak (*John Calvin as Sixteenth-century Prophet*, 152–65) on Geneva's harshness towards French kings.

[109] For the king's letter, *CO* 18:337–39.

asserts: "But in case it should seem, sire, that under this general expression of our sentiments we wish to conceal anything, we protest"[110] after which the letter goes on to answer the two concerns.

On the first count, Calvin protested "in truth before God" that Geneva has "never attempted to send persons into your kingdom."[111] Explaining matters further, the letter declared: "that never with our knowledge and permission has someone gone from here to preach except one individual who was requested from us for the city of London."[112]

At this point, the missive becomes somewhat opaque. Adopting much more deliberately the voice of the Syndics and Council of Geneva, the letter explains that some of the language in the king's communication was slightly ambiguous but may have been referring to "our ministers and pastors." Therefore, the Genevan letter continues, these ministers were summoned and asked about the charges. The letter then reports that they

> do not deny that some persons have made application to them, and that on their part, when they have found that those who had recourse to them were persons possessing instruction and piety, they have exhorted them to exercise their gifts wherever they should go for the advancement of the gospel.[113]

So then, the Genevan ministers say they encouraged some people to exercise their gifts everywhere. There is, however, the clear implication that was all they did. The explanation would appear to wish to persuade the king that what he has heard of as Geneva sending ministers into his kingdom is actually a simple case of free preachers and godly men wandering of their own free will into the king's territory. One presumes that Calvin inserted this into the letter because it both offers a more believable explanation for the presence of preachers in France (more believable than if Calvin had simply said Geneva had no idea what the king was talking about) and also exonerates the Genevan ministers of wrongdoing.

On the second count, the letter explained that the Genevans "protest against having ever entertained any such intention" to stir up dissension and sedition. They "have never given advice to make any innovations or attempted anything criminal with respect to the established order of the state." Further, they insisted, "we have given orders and forbidden on pain of rigorous punishments any of our citizens from taking one step in such proceedings."[114]

The answers to both concerns are, according to Calvin and Beza's own Augustinian understanding of lying, plainly speech *contra mentem*. They did send preachers into France and they were involved in dissensions of precisely the kind about which the king was asking.

[110] *CO* 18:343.
[111] *CO* 18:343–45, esp. 343; also note Kingdon, *Geneva*, 35.
[112] *CO* 18:344. The man was Nicolas Des Gallars.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

Their lying is less egregious but still discernible in another portion of the missive. In one part of it, a specific note is struck about Geneva's work of spreading the gospel and also about the boundaries within which Geneva believes it must confine itself. After indicating that the Genevans, of course, wish and hope for the gospel to be spread everywhere, the letter states: "But we know well also what is within our compass, and we do not presume even to wish to reform extensive kingdoms."[115]

The accent on desire ("we do not presume even to wish") appears throughout this letter and was seen in Calvin's *Institutio* preface as well. What is fascinating here is the apparent renouncing, on the part of the Genevans, of any connection to the evangelical movement within France or anywhere else. They would seem to wish for the king to believe that Geneva stays resolutely and quietly within its own geographical border and does not meddle in the work of reforming other parts of Europe, let alone France.

In all of this, Geneva kept up a near-constant state of deception in regards to the French king and his government. In some ways, Charles IX's query appears all the more intriguing because it was raised so late (1561) relative to the amount of time during which Geneva had been ministering in France—a fact which would seem to give credence to the idea that Geneva was extremely effective at feigning obedience to French kings.

Conclusion

In Beza's letter of 22 January 1561 to Ambroise Blaurer, he spoke about the Lord's blessing in the growth of *Les Eglises réformées en France*. Without wishing to challenge his asseveration, this article has explored other ostensible sources of that growth. It has discovered that one such source may well have been calculated trickery. It has argued that Calvin designed Geneva's ministry to France in such a way that it systematically employed falsehood and dissembling to hide what they were doing from the French authorities and probably from the Nicodemites as well. Indeed, their ministry was, by their own standards of honesty, as mendacious as that of the Nicodemites.

Why would they do this? It is very tempting, at this point, to speculate that part of their willingness was related to the presence of Nicodemism in France. Being in the country, the Nicodemites were at a distinct advantage compared with Calvin and Beza. They had a level of contact with the French population of which Beza and Calvin could only dream. The Genevans, therefore, employed subterfuge as a way of getting their gospel past the French authorities and into France. Had they not, they would potentially have had to watch from the outside as the Nicodemites gained greater control over the French evangelical church. This reading of the matter also helps explain the harshness of Geneva's treatment of the Nicodemites. They wanted to make sure Christians in France did not see Nicodemism as a viable

[115] Ibid.

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Christian option. But, because they were not in the country, they felt compelled to raise their voice and speak with unmistakable vehemence and intensity about the unacceptability of the Nicodemite gospel—this would likely have only been accentuated by the relative kindness shown the Genevans by the Nicodemites.[116] Thus, Calvin and Beza pursued morally-opprobrious methods because they felt they had no other option if they were to overcome the obstacles to evangelizing France. These are, I must reiterate, speculative reflections and require more attention if they are to be confirmed. What we can say with a stronger degree of certainty is that Geneva established a system designed to hide their ministry and that, thus, Geneva's impact on France and the French Reformation was founded, in no small measure, on deception during the period from 1536 to 1563.

Can one comment on other reasons? Given their Augustinian views on mendacity, it still stands as something of a mystery why Calvin and Beza would ever employ deception. Musing, we might, for instance, consider whether their use of deception was motivated by a belief that the French government was illegitimate (and therefore could be lied to with impunity).[117] Taking a different approach, we might wonder to what extent their motivations are explained by lines from Bertolt Brecht's *A Measure Taken*.

> What meanness would you not commit, to
> Stamp out meanness?
> If, at last, you could change the world, what
> Would you think yourself too good for?[118]

The sentiment expressed in these words cannot, to be sure, be applied to this situation without caveat, and yet I wonder if there is not something we can glean from it. Might it have possibly been that Calvin and Beza were driven by a sub-conscious or semi-conscious conviction that their gospel was simply too true to be allowed to remain outside of their homeland? This intense conviction, if that is what it was, could have moved them insensibly to ignore moral norms, preparing the way for their use of deception.

Whatever the case, Geneva's systematic employment of falsehood and dissembling in their ministry to France must be recognized and acknowledged (having been overlooked or only touched on heretofore), particularly if our aim is to uncover the true character of the French Reformation and of the profoundly-human individuals who contributed so significantly to it.

[116] Nicodemites expressed hurt and frustration at Geneva's harshness but generally exhibited a desire for cooperation; Reid, *King's Sister—Queen of Dissent*, 1:30; 2:563.

[117] See inter alia Balserak, *John Calvin as Sixteenth-century Prophet*, 152–65.

[118] Cited from Zagorin, *Ways of Lying*, vi.