

Letter to Luther (January 21, 1545)

John Calvin (1509-1564)

Calvin submits to Luther several of his writings, of which he desires to obtain his approbation.

TO the very excellent pastor of the Christian Church, Dr. M. Luther, my much respected father,

When I saw that my French fellow-countrymen, as many of them as had been brought out from the darkness of the Papacy to soundness of the faith, had altered nothing as to their public profession, and that they continued to defile themselves with the sacrilegious worship of the Papists, as if they had never tasted the savour of true doctrine, I was altogether unable to restrain myself from reproving so great sloth and negligence, in the way that I thought it deserved. How, indeed, can this faith, which lies buried in the heart within, do otherwise than break forth in the confession of faith? What kind of religion can that be, which lies submerged under seeming idolatry? I do not undertake, however, to handle the argument here, because I have done so at large already in two little tractates, wherein, if it shall not be troublesome to you to glance over them, you will more clearly perceive both what I think, and the reasons which have compelled me to form that opinion. By the reading of them, indeed, some of our people, while hitherto they were fast asleep in a false security, having been awakened, have begun to consider what they ought to do. But because it is difficult either casting aside all consideration of self, to expose their lives to danger, or having roused the displeasure of mankind, to encounter the hatred of the world, or having abandoned their prospects at home in their native land, to enter upon a life of voluntary exile, they are withheld or kept back by these difficulties from coming to a settled determination. They put forth other reasons, however, and those somewhat specious, whereby one may perceive that they only seek to find some sort of pretext or other. In these circumstances, because they hang somehow in suspense, they are desirous to hear your opinion, which as they do

A peculiar interest attaches to this letter, the only one which the French Reformer had written to the German Reformer. Inspired by the deep conviction of the unity of the Reformed churches, written with as much moderation as respect, the message of conciliation was not even listened to. Soured by the quarrel about the sacraments, in which he took too great a share during the latter years of his life, Luther evinced daily more and more irritation against the theologians of Switzerland, and Melancthon did not even venture to present the letter of Calvin, to whom he wrote in sadness: "I have not shewn your letter to Dr. Martin, for he takes up many things suspiciously, and does not like his replies to questions of the kind you have proposed to him, to be carried round and handed from one to another. At present I am looking forward to exile and other sorrows. Farewell. On the day upon which, 3846 years ago, Noah entered into the ark, by which God gave testimony of his purpose never to forsake his Church even when she quivers under the shock of the great sea billows."—Melancthon to Calvin, *MSS. of Geneva*, vol. 106.

deservedly hold in reverence, so it shall serve greatly to confirm them. They have therefore requested me, that I would undertake to send a trusty messenger to you, who might report your answer to us upon this question. And because I thought it was of very great consequence for them to have the benefit of your authority, that they might not fluctuate thus continually, and I myself stood besides in need of it, I was unwilling to refuse what they required. Now, therefore, much respected father in the Lord, I beseech you by Christ, that you will not grudge to take the trouble for their sake and mine, first, that you would peruse the epistle written in their name, and my little books, cursorily and at leisure hours, or that you would request some one to take the trouble of reading, and report the substance of them to you. Lastly, that you would write back your opinion in a few words. Indeed, I am unwilling to give you this trouble in the midst of so many weighty and various employments; but such is your sense of justice, that you cannot suppose me to have done this unless compelled by the necessity of the case; I therefore trust that you will pardon me. Would that I could fly to you, that I might even for a few hours enjoy the happiness of your society; for I would prefer, and it would be far better, not only upon this question, but also about others, to converse personally with yourself; but seeing that it is not granted to us on earth, I hope that shortly it will come to pass in the kingdom of God. Adieu, most renowned sir, most distinguished minister of Christ, and my ever-honoured father. The Lord himself rule and direct you by his own Spirit, that you may persevere even unto the end, for the common benefit and good of his own Church.—Yours, JOHN CALVIN.

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