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The 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth in 2009 witnessed an extraordinary flowering of books and articles on the sixteenth-century reformer. Scholarly journals produced special issues commemorating Calvin.1 Fine biographies such as Bruce Gordon's John Calvin (YUP) and Herman Selderhuis' John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life (IVP) were released. Selderhuis' The Calvin Handbook (Eerdmans) and Elise McKee's monumental English translation of the 1541 French Institutes (Eerdmans) were welcomed by students and Calvin scholars from around the world. The eight-volume Calvin 500 Series published by P&R Publishing under the general editorship of David W. Hall has attracted considerable interest, and monographs and numerous collections of essays on Calvin's legacy, particularly by Korean scholars, all provide a clear indication of the breadth and depth of Calvin's influence.2

In Australia the enthusiasm was no less subdued despite Calvin's somewhat severe reputation and Selderhuis' omission in his Handbook of any discussion of Calvin's influence and reception in Australasia. Two major studies were published in the Calvin quincentenary year. The first was Roland Boer's Political Grace (Westminster John Knox), an expansion of an earlier article 'John Calvin and the Paradox of Grace' published in Colloquium.3 While avoiding the error of painting Calvin as a progressive, Boer, Professor of Theology at the University of Newcastle in New South Wales, argues that that there is a 'radical edge' to Calvin's political and theological thought. As Calvin struggled with the radical and reactionary elements in the Bible, Boer concludes, he 'let the radical political cat peek out of the theological bag only to try his hardest to push it back in and tie the bag up again'.4 Boer seems to regret that Calvin's radical potential was restrained by his 'innate conservatism'. The second work is a collection of essays prepared for the 2009 Moore College School of Theology in Sydney, to mark the Calvin 500th celebrations. The book, titled Engaging with Calvin (Apollos),5 has contributions from Australian and international scholars and is edited by Mark Thompson, Academic Dean and Lecturer in Theology and Church History at Moore College. There is no unifying theme running through Engaging with Calvin, though there are many essays within it that will be of interest to the general reader, particularly the essays written by Peter Adam on Calvin's 'engaged expository preaching' and Archbishop Peter Jensen's discussion of the

1See, for example, Theology Today, Vol. 66, July 2009. The lead article is by John Dompey Douglass, 'Calvin and the Church Today: Ecclesiology as Received, Changed, and Adapted.
4Boer, Political Grace, p. xv.
5Mark D. Thompson, ed., Engaging with Calvin: Aspects of the Reformer's legacy for today, Nottingham, Apollos, 2009.
'shaping' influence of Calvin's *Institutes* upon generations of students at Moore College. Although the essays are by nature 'explorations' this rather large book has much to commend it.

Besides the Moore College conference there were several other conferences and public lectures in Australia celebrating the 500th anniversary. For example, the three Presbyterian theological training colleges in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria joined together for the first time to stage a three-day conference in April at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Burwood, Sydney, titled *Discendi Studio—Zeal to Learn*. This conference explored the interaction of contemporary scholarship and ministry with Calvin's thought. Its proceedings do not appear to have issued in a major publication but some contributions have been published elsewhere. For example, Roland Ward's 'Aspects of the Revival of Calvinism in Australia, 1938–1978' was published in *Church Heritage*, a historical journal of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Indeed, *Church Heritage*, under the vigorous editorship of Professor Malcolm Prentis, was most active in commissioning articles on the significance of Calvin for today. He gave over two issues, the March and the September 2009 issues of the journal to articles on Calvin. Similarly, Robert Renton, editor of the *Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society Synod of Victoria and Tasmania* devoted the December 2009 issue of that journal to Calvin with the publication of five lectures that were given to the Historical Society to mark Calvin's anniversary.

Mention of these two denominational journals *Church Heritage* and the *Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society* is just one indicator that Calvin scholarship is alive and well in the Uniting Church in Australia. For whatever reason, this fact has been overlooked in surveys on Calvinism in Australia. Neither of the two articles that have been written on this topic has made reference to Calvin's influence on the Uniting Church. Perhaps it is understandable that Alexander Barkley's 'The Impact of Calvinism on Australasia' in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World* (Zondervan) might ignore Calvin's influence on the Uniting Church as it was published only five years after Church Union between the Congregational, Methodists and Presbyterian Churches in 1977. More puzzling, however, is Colin Bale's omission of the Uniting Church in his survey of 'Calvinism in Australia 1788–2009' in *Engaging with Calvin* mentioned earlier. Bale does a fine work of tracing Calvinist influences in Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, and amongst Baptists, Calvinistic Methodists and Dutch Reformed Churches but he ignores its impact on the Uniting Church. This criticism is not mere sour grapes, it is a serious mistake in Australian religious history to ignore the influence of Calvinism on Australia's third largest church. The Uniting Church has deep roots in the Geneva Reformation and...
the teachings of John Calvin. It is a member church of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Its founding document, the Basis of Union is saturated with Reformed theology—Calvin’s fingerprints are all over it. The Rev. Professor Davis McCaughey, first President of the Uniting Church, never ceased to reiterate the Reformed and Evangelical traditions flowing into the Uniting Church, especially Calvin’s high view of the pastoral ministry. Similarly, the Rev. Professor Rollie Busch, Moderator of the Queensland Synod and later third President of the Uniting Church, laid down the gauntlet to the Belke-Petersen Government during the Arakun and Mornington Island controversy of the late 1970s in Queensland, when he defiantly said: ‘We who are nourished in the brilliant insight of the Bible, who are [in]heritors of Calvin, Knox, Cromwell and Wesley, need no political parties, socialist or otherwise, to form our minds on the proper liberties of Christian subjects.”

Two further conferences celebrating Calvin’s quincentenary further underline the vitality of the Reformed tradition in the Uniting Church. The first was held in August 2009 at the Uniting Church in Australia Centre for Theology and Ministry, Parkville, Victoria. Guest speaker at that conference was the distinguished Calvin scholar, Elsie McKee, Archibald Alexander Professor of Reformation Studies and the History of Worship at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey. McKee gave the J. B. Northey Lectures which was published in the journal Pacifica under the title ‘Calvin’s Sermons: Treasure and Surprise’. Two other presentations from that conference were also published in the same issue of Pacifica. Both complemented McKee’s work on the Psalms: Dr Gregory Goswell explored Jewish influences behind the Reformer’s exegesis and Professor Howard Wallace examined how the Preface to Calvin’s commentary on Psalms sheds light on Calvin’s principles of interpretation operating within that book.

The other Uniting Church conference celebrating Calvin Year 2009 also took place in August. It was held at the Centre for Ministry, North Parramatta, in Sydney. The conference was sponsored by the Public and Contextual Theology (PACT) Strategic Research Centre at Charles Sturt University and was hosted by United Theological College. The title of the conference was ‘Calvin500: Calvin Goes Public’ and its theme focussed on Calvin as a public theologian. The keynote speaker was the distinguished Calvin scholar, Professor Randall Zachman from Notre Dame University, Indiana, supported by notable Reformation scholars Professor Ian Brewster, Professor Peter Matheson, Professor Samuel Cheon from Hannam University, Korea, writer and theologian Dr Val Webb, Faculty and postgraduate students at United Theological College. The papers delivered at that three-day conference form the basis of this special issue.

All ten contributors to this issue were encouraged to focus on public aspects of Calvin’s life and work that impinge on contemporary society, mindful that the translation task will be most challenging. Clive Pearson’s chapter ‘The Framing of John Calvin as a Public Theologian’ cautiously builds a case for framing Calvin’s public theology credentials, drawing upon the current lively debate among William Storrar,

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Charles Matthewes, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda and others as to what properly constitutes public theology. Ian Breward’s ‘Calvin in the Public Square’ identifies eleven helpful ‘resources’ or guidelines that Calvin offers Christians today as they seek to engage in public issues in contemporary multicultural Australia. Randall Zachman’s “Astronomy is the Alphabet of Theology”: Calvin and the Natural Sciences’ opens up for the reader the importance of science, especially astronomy, to Calvin. Not far below the surface in Zachman’s chapter is the controversy, especially in the United States, over the teaching of evolution in schools. It may come as a surprise to some opponents of evolution that Calvin considered astronomy to be closely related to theology and godliness. Benjamin Myers’ chapter on ‘Rights, Resistance and the Common God: Calvin’s Political Theology’ assuredly guides the reader through the conflicting accounts of Calvin’s place in the history of western politics. Myers challenges the reader to take up Calvin’s vision of politics, not as something that arises from the need to preserve individual rights, but as an order which establishes the basic conditions within which a community of virtue can flourish. Whether it is debates over carbon pollution, public transport, or water allocation in the Murray–Darling Basin in Australia or along the Euphrates in the Middle East, Myers reminds us and governments that the fundamental political question is not what are my rights? But rather, what is right? Val Webb’s chapter on ‘Calvin, Ferrara and the Women in the Wings’ might seem at first sight to sit at odds with the notion of the ‘public Calvin’, but Webb deftly argues that women’s private domain in the sixteenth century was their ‘public’ space. Webb both highlights Calvin’s efforts in enlisting noble women to the Protestant cause and challenges the reader to rethink the private–public distinction as far as women’s involvement in public theology is concerned. It is well known that Calvin studied law at university before turning to theology, what is less well known is Calvin’s abiding interest in ‘secular authors’. In ‘Learning from “eminent pagans”’ Damian Palmer argues that Calvin’s relatively positive assessment of secular authors could open the door for an enriched Christian discipleship. William Emelyn’s chapter on ‘Calvin on Islam’ seeks to understand Calvin’s somewhat harsh statements on Islam within their context and argues the case, (not unlike Boer’s cat-in-the-bag analogy) that there are possibilities in Calvin for a more ironic approach to Islam today. Samuel Cheon’s paper on the various transmissions of Calvin’s biblical interpretation in the Korean context helps to explain the contemporary fragmentation and the different social and political responses of the Korean church at home and abroad. Finally, Graham Hughes takes a broad approach to Calvin’s legacy. Hughes’ concern is that the inheritors of the Calvinist tradition today suffer from a particular type of Christianity that is diminished in its understanding of sacramentality and is in danger of being engulfed by today’s post-Christian and post-modern societies.

The idea of framing Calvin as a public theologian is relatively new. Calvin is more commonly thought of as a systematic, biblical, or pastoral theologian. Yet, Calvin would have agreed with many of the principles undergirding good public theology. Certainly, he would have been the first to insist that theology needs to interact with the great public issues of the day. He thought deeply on the important public and social issues of his times. He engaged with the big issues of his political world. He contributed to the public debates of his time. He wrote theology, as he explains in a prefatory note to the full edition of the Institutes, ‘for the public good’. He found solutions to urgent problems that demanded attention and he sought to work for a better world. Calvin was not always the most modest of persons, nor was it his wont to compromise, but there were few theologians in the Christian tradition who were as relentless as he was in engaging with the academy, the church and society. Calvin contributed to collective policy-
making in the economic, political, religious and social realms. His rhetorical gifts, his sharp analytical mind and his theological acumen helped him grasp and communicate public and political matters better than most. He spoke the truth with power, drawing inspiration from the prophetic tradition in the Bible. Calvin never ceased to witness to God’s reign over all life.

This special issue is indebted to several people. I would like to thank Professor James Haite, Director of PACT for his cooperation and support in holding the ‘Calvin500: Calvin Goes Public’ conference, the authors for their essays, the members of the conference planning committee, Michael Earl, Xavier Lakshmanan, and Associate Professor Clive Pearson, for their enthusiastic support and good humour, to Carolyn Craig-Emilsen, Joanne Stokes, and David Roper for overseeing the conference’s smooth running, and to Shirley Maddox for proof-reading this special Calvin Quincenenary issue, to Bruce Mansfield, Mehmet Ozalp and two anonymous readers for United Academic Press in Melbourne for their helpful comments on some or all of the articles.