

Foreword by W. Robert Godfrey

*The*  
**NECESSITY**  
*of*  
**REFORMING**  
*the*  
**CHURCH**

*with A Reply to Cardinal Sadoletto*

JOHN CALVIN

Translated by Casey Carmichael

“Every generation has the responsibility to pass on the evangelical heritage of the Reformation to the next generation. At the core of this heritage is the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. However, no less central to the Reformation are the divine authority of Scripture alone and worship to the glory of God alone. Even in this day of resurgent Calvinism, many Christians might be surprised to learn that Calvin placed worship according to God’s commandment alongside the gospel as the two chief doctrines by which Christianity maintains its vital force—the very soul that animates the church. At a time when many evangelical Christians relegate the methods of the church to the pragmatism of ‘whatever works,’ Calvin’s treatise is a silver trumpet sounding a clarion call to return to simple obedience to God’s Word.”

—DR. JOEL R. BEEKE  
President and professor of systematic  
theology and homiletics  
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

“Among Calvin’s many treatises and letters, these two are outstanding and deserve your close attention. They were written at a turning period in his ministry and at a crucial point in the history of the Reformation. They reveal his gifts as a humanist scholar, as a defender of the Reformation, and as a pastor who cared for the spiritual well-being of the flock. He knew that the Reformation had recovered the gospel and that Rome sought to persuade evangelicals to sell their birthright for a pottage of salvation by grace and works. These are truths we need to hear and learn again.”

—DR. R. SCOTT CLARK  
Professor of church history and historical theology  
Westminster Seminary California  
Escondido, Calif.

“For those who wrestle with the place of the church in the midst of change and challenges, this new translation of *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* will be a welcome guide. Though it was written in a time so different from ours, its pastoral and practical teachings on the Word of God and the church remain relevant as it offers clarity and priority, qualities we often lack in the present-day church.”

—REV. JOEL E. KIM  
President  
Westminster Seminary California  
Escondido, Calif.

“I am delighted that these tracts by Calvin are now available in convenient form and fresh translation. Both his *A Reply to Sadoletto* and *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* direct us to the heart of Calvin’s pursuit of reformation: the worship, doctrine, discipline, and sacraments of the church. Here we do not find the eloquent prose of the *Institutes*, honed through several decades in five editions, but the passionate rhetoric that is reminiscent of Luther’s 1520 tracts. Calvin’s question must be pondered by today’s officers of Christ’s church: ‘since God . . . openly hates what we support for worshipping Him beyond His command, what do we profit by doing anything to the contrary?’ Now as then, the ‘infinite forest’ of corruptions in worship and polity entails ‘monstrosities of idolatry’ and exercises ‘harsh and especially harmful tyranny over souls.’ This is essential reading for understanding Calvin’s faithfulness in serving Christ’s church.”

—JOHN R. MUETHER  
Dean of libraries and professor of church history  
Reformed Theological Seminary  
Orlando, Fla.

“Written in the mid-sixteenth century, these two works by John Calvin are as relevant today as they were in those days. The twenty-first century church must hear Calvin’s arguments about the need for reformation according to the Word of God. Unfortunately, many churches in the Protestant tradition have fallen back into the theological deviations and errors of the Roman Catholic Church during the medieval period. Not a few have swerved from the simplicity of worship that God revealed in the Scriptures and introduced other gospels, such as the theology of prosperity, the movement of signs and wonders, and the modern apostolic movement with its Judaizing teaching. On the other hand, churches that were once Reformed have adopted theological liberalism and let themselves be seduced by modern culture, accepting immoral behaviors clearly condemned in the Scriptures. Let us heed Calvin’s call for a reformation in our day.”

—DR. AUGUSTUS NICODEMUS LOPES  
Vice president of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil  
Assistant pastor of First Presbyterian Church  
of Recife, Brazil

“What a great treasure Reformation Trust has opened to us with this wonderful new translation by Casey Carmichael of two of Calvin’s most important works. Here speaks the well-trained lawyer pleading for the case of Christ’s church in his impressive letter to Sadoleto and his formidable exposition on what the church of Christ needs to be alive and dynamic. These words were written down long ago, but every reader will see that they are as relevant for today’s church as never before. Calvin wanted to serve God and His people, and he still does, as this work shows. So, let’s start using this rich, scriptural material for the well-being of the church and for the glory of God.”

—DR. HERMAN SELDERHUIS  
President, Theological University Apeldoorn  
Director, Refo500

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*

© 2020 by Ligonier Ministries

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Published by Ligonier Ministries

421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771

Ligonier.org

Printed in York, Pennsylvania

Maple Press

0001124

First edition, second printing

ISBN 978-1-64289-287-1 (Hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-64289-288-8 (ePub)

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Cover design: Ligonier Creative

Interior design and typeset: Katherine Lloyd, The DESK

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the Reformation Trust edition as follows:

Names: Calvin, Jean, 1509-1564, author. | Carmichael, Casey, translator.

Title: The necessity of reforming the church / by John Calvin ; translated by Casey Carmichael ; foreword by W. Robert Godfrey.

Description: Orlando, FL : Reformation Trust Publishing, a division of Ligonier Ministries, 2020. | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020010353 (print) | LCCN 2020010354 (ebook) | ISBN 9781642892871 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781642892888 (epub) | ISBN 9781642892895 (kindle edition)

Subjects: LCSH: Reformation. | Church reform. | Church--Authority. | Calvin, Jean, 1509-1564--Correspondence. | Sadoletto, Jacopo, 1477-1547.

Classification: LCC BR301 .C2813 2020 (print) | LCC BR301 (ebook) | DDC 262.001/7--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020010353>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020010354>

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**THE NECESSITY  
OF REFORMING  
THE CHURCH  
(1544)**

A Supplication

to the most invincible Caesar, Charles V,  
the most illustrious princes, and other ranking officials,  
now holding an assembly of the empire at Speyer,  
to determine sincerely to address the concern  
of reforming the church

Published in the name of all who want  
Christ to reign

By John Calvin  
1544

A Supplication

to the most invincible Caesar, Charles V,<sup>1</sup>  
the illustrious princes, and other ranking officials:

This assembly was ordered by you, O Caesar Augustus. In it we are all deciding on the present condition of the church, which is most wretched and nearly regarded as lost. To correct it for the better, may you at last enter and settle on a method with the very distinguished princes of the empire and the other noblemen. Therefore, because you are now sitting down in a public assembly for this deliberation, on my knees I ask and beg of you first, O Caesar, and at the same time of you, O distinguished princes and noblemen, to read and weigh carefully what I am publishing in your midst, so that you may not feel troubled. It is the size and weight of the cause that should stir you up with eagerness to listen. But

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1 Charles V (1500–1558) served as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire from 1519 to 1556. Calvin addresses him as “Caesar” throughout, harking back to the early Roman emperors. Only in the first sentence does Calvin call Charles “Caesar Augustus,” after the first Roman emperor, who ruled from 27 BC to AD 14.

## THE NECESSITY OF REFORMING THE CHURCH

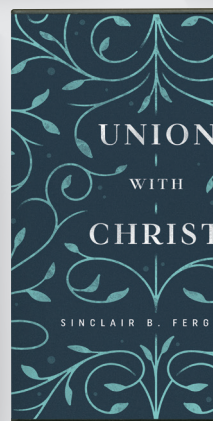
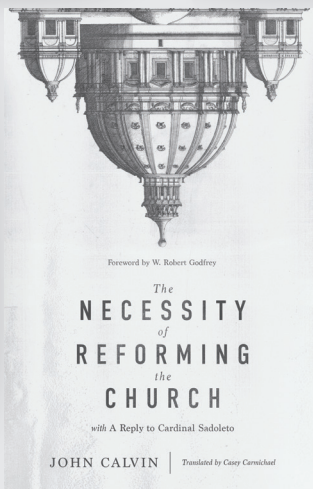
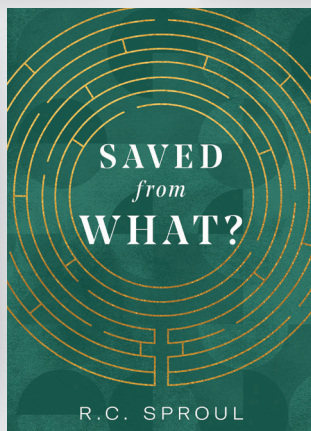
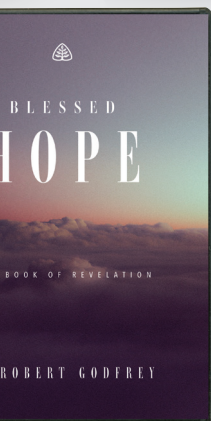
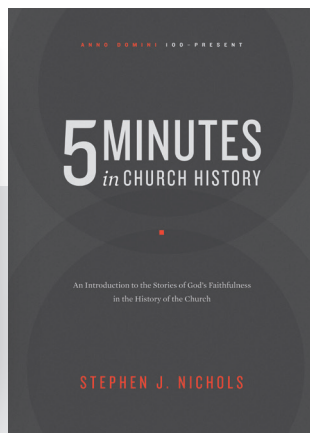
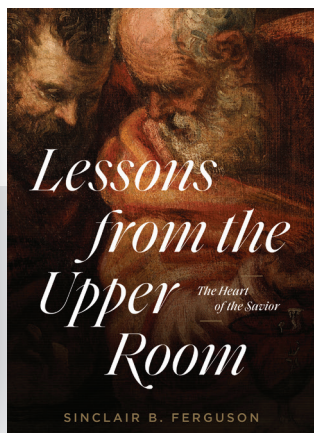
I am bringing the matter before your eyes, so that you may be able to determine easily what your part is. Whoever I may be, I profess that I am here supporting the protection of holy doctrine and the church. In this name I seem to deserve at least this one thing: that you do not deny me an audience, until it is apparent that either I falsely make use of such a title or faithfully display it and show in the matter itself that I bring before me. Moreover, although I know that I am by no means a match for such a burden, I nevertheless have no fear that, when the reason for my attendance has been heard by you, I will be accused of negligence or rashness because I have been bold to come to the aid of this magistracy. There are two matters about which people usually take action to commend or indeed to defend something. For we regard both what is done with sincere and godly devotion worthy of praise and what is expressed by public necessity as at least worthy of justification. Because both of these factors apply to me, I have no doubt, given your fairness, that I can easily defend this counsel of mine to you. For where better or more sincerely, where even at this time, is it allowed for me to devote myself in a matter more necessary than if I try to be present with my strength to the church of Christ, to which it is lawful to deny nothing at all and which is now struggling greatly and in extreme danger? Nevertheless, there is no reason to say much about myself in advance. Therefore, receive what I am saying as if one voice of all those who have already taken care to reform the church or who desire that it be restored to true order were shouting. There are several princes of the highest rank and many state officials present in this cause. I speak for all these in such a way that they all speak at the same time with one voice more truly through me. Add to these the infinite multitude of godly people who, scattered throughout various parts of the Christian world, nevertheless with common consent back me in this action. Finally, consider this the shared pleading of all who so seriously grieve over the present corruption of the church that they are no longer able to endure it and will not give up until they see some change. I know that we have been marked for infamy by hateful names. But by whatever name it may please you to call us at last, hear our cause in the meantime and then afterward judge in what place we should be regarded.

## THE NECESSITY OF REFORMING THE CHURCH (1544)

First of all, there is no question that the church struggles with many very terrible diseases. All people agree about this, even those who judge moderately. But the question is whether the diseases are the sort that attention to them may not bear longer delay, so that it is neither useful nor permitted to wait for remedies that are too slow. We are accused of rashness and wicked innovation because we have dared to move anything at all in the church from its former condition. What? Even if it was done reasonably and rightly? There are those—so I hear—who do not hesitate to condemn us even in this because they think that we should have desired correction but were not allowed to attempt it. From those people I desire to ask nothing else now except that they suspend judgment for a while until I show from the matter itself that we did not rush before the time was right, did nothing rashly, did nothing outside our duty, and did nothing unless we were driven by utmost necessity. In order to prove this, I will articulate the matters about which we contend.

When in the beginning God stirred up Luther and others who carried the torch before us to find the way of salvation, by whose ministry our churches were founded and established, we affirm that those heads of doctrine, in which the truth of our religion, the pure and lawful worship of God, and human salvation are contained, had been very nearly abolished. We affirm, moreover, that at that time the use of the sacraments had been marred and corrupted, and the government of the church had been turned into a form of ugly, unbearable tyranny. Perhaps these issues are not yet sufficiently prevalent to arouse certain people until they are expressed better. Therefore, I will do not so much what the subject requires as what my ability will allow. It is not my plan, however, to recount and examine every controversy. For that would require a long disputation for which there is now no place. I only want to set before you how righteous and necessary the causes were that compelled us to this change, which is being attributed to us as vice. This cannot be accomplished, however, unless I undertake three things at the same time. First, I must briefly mention the vices that urged us to seek remedies. Second, I must discuss how suitable and salutary were the very remedies that our people applied. Third, I must make clear how it was

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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