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WAS JOHN CALVIN A TCK? APPLYING MODERN SOCIO-SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON HIGHLY MOBILE POPULATIONS TO HISTORICAL STUDIES

TCK STUDIES

The term "TCK" (Third Culture Kid) first arose out of the pioneering sociological work of Ruth Useem in an attempt to define highly mobile families who live across cultures as having distinct socio-cultural characteristics that distinguish them from others in the places where they currently reside (Useem and Useem, 1955). Useem's research was paralleled by Norma McCaig and others who explored the same population using the definition "global nomads" (McCaig, 1994: 32–41).

Terms such as TCK or global nomad bring together previous and ongoing studies of specific highly mobile populations (MKs, BRATs, diplomats, multinational corporate families, refugees, other migrant groups). As research on these populations has spread to fields beyond traditional sociology, it has gained an identification as a distinct interdisciplinary field of study. The six year old "TCK Research Network," for instance, boasts over 130 members, working in disciplines such as religious studies, geography, education, and psychology, while studies of TCKs or global nomads appear in a variety of international publications.

According to the late David Pollock, one of the leaders in this emerging field, a Third Culture Kid (TCK) "is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK develops relationships to all the cultures while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar experience" (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999: 19).

THE ENIGMA OF JOHN CALVIN

The sixteenth century Protestant Reformer John Calvin presents a unique challenge to potential biographers. Perhaps never has an individual left as large a body of work and a biography by a close associate, yet remained personally so enigmatic. The challenge is particularly great for historians with respect to Calvin's youth, about which surprisingly little is known.

In the early 1520s (the exact date is uncertain) the young native of Picardy, probably not yet a teenager, left his home to begin his studies in Paris.[1] When the scholar's father decided to shift his son's career from theology to law, Calvin dutifully transferred to Orleans, and also spent a year studying in Bourges. While a few details about colleges, tutors, textbooks, and friends could be added, this summary is not far from reporting all the facts known about Calvin's formative years. Yet despite the dearth of information, a number of historians have concluded that these early years are vital for an understanding of John Calvin.[2]

This perception that Calvin's youth was somehow particularly important for historians is supported by a modern consensus among those who study Calvin's theology. It is generally agreed that there is very little theological development between Calvin's early writings (particularly the first edition of the *Institutes*) and his later works. Whatever it was that shaped Calvin's thinking occurred before he was thirty. It does indeed seem credible that Calvin's youth, spent as a foreigner in a diverse foreign culture, may have been one of the most important aspects of those thirty years.

Is it possible to use modern research on TCKs to illumine important experiences of John Calvin? Erik Erikson's groundbreaking *Young Man Luther* illustrates both the possibilities and the challenges of applying modern socio-scientific analysis to historical figures (Erickson, 1962). The benefit of possible insights must be balanced particularly against the twin dangers of anachronistic attribution and the drawing of conclusions from insufficient data. Yet at least in the case of Calvin, the advantages of applying modern socio-scientific analysis seem to outweigh the risks.[3] So little is known about his early life that any

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[1] Calvin, a native of Noyon, Picardy, was born in 1509 (Beza, 1836: 1); Traditionally, Calvin's move to Paris has been dated as 1523, making him fourteen at the very oldest. Alister McGrath argues that 1521 is more likely (1990: 22).

[2] Denis Crouzet's emphasis on mobility will be discussed below; one historian who stressed the importance of his youth for understanding Calvin is Abel LeFranc (1888: ix).

[3] One biographer writes, "Historians have wellnigh exhausted their wisdom and ingenuity in trying to reconstitute the succession of events that marked the earliest years of Calvin. All in all, what we know today is as much as it is possible to know, but for a few details, unless or until new documents are discovered" (Wendel, 1987: 15).

foothold is worth trying. And to guard against some of the inherent dangers in this sort of historiography, this project is purposely modest in nature. Its goal is to determine if it is possible to identify TCK characteristics in a sixteenth-century individual whose life models high cultural and geographic mobility, and, if such an identification is possible, to suggest some ways in which TCK research might fruitfully be applied to ongoing scholarship.

Project Description

After a brief introduction to TCK research, this paper will attempt identify John Calvin as a TCK by showing that Calvin meets the surface criteria for such a classification and that Calvin exhibited typical TCK attributes. Having demonstrated that Calvin might legitimately be considered a TCK, this paper will continue by suggesting ways the insights of TCK research might help Calvin scholars. It will conclude with a reflection on the usefulness of TCK research for historical inquiry.

GEOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL MOBILITY IN CALVIN'S EXPERIENCE

Modern scholars sometimes forget that international mobility in academic circles is not a new phenomenon. By the late Middle Ages, Europe's universities drew both faculty and students from across the continent. This flow of individuals across political, cultural, and linguistic boundaries mirrored similar movements in the fields of commerce, the military, and the institutional Church (Powell, 2008). It was in such a highly international and highly mobile university community that John Calvin would be exposed to people, ideas, and practices foreign to his earlier upbringing.

The University of Paris in Calvin's day was a remarkably diverse environment. University students, numbering perhaps 5,000 in a city of 300,000 people, were traditionally divided into four "nations," or administrative groups: France, Picardy, Normandy, and Germany. Each division could be further subdivided – "France," for instance, the largest of the groups, consisted of identifiably different populations from Bourges, Paris, Reims, Sens, and Tours (McGrath, 1990: 32–33). Yet the divisions would always be somewhat artificial, for of course the university hosted professors and students from England, Greece, Italy, Scotland, Spain and other places not honored within the administrative division of nation. To be a student at the University of Paris was to be exposed to many different cultures; to be a Picard student at the University of Paris was to experience most of those cultures as a foreigner.

Simply to chart Calvin's few known friends and professors from that time in his life is to reflect on a larger map of Europe. Theodore Beza, Calvin's friend, successor, and biographer, recorded the influence of a "Spanish tutor" on the future reformer. Leaving aside this unnamed pedagogue, whom one modern historian has dismissed as a textbook instead of a professor, Calvin was certainly exposed to individuals from different cultures across Europe. His most prominent law professor, for instance, was the Italian legist and humanist Andrea Alciati. Another professor was (probably) the Scot John Mair. Mathurin Cordier, a teacher with whom Calvin formed a life-long friendship, was from Normandy. He was associated with the Swiss Cop family. And one of Calvin's closet friends from among his fellow students was Melchior Wolmar, a German (Beza, 1836: 2, 5; McGrath, 1990: 36–37; Selderhuis, 2009: 13; Wendel, 1987: 18–19).

During the time from when he was around ten to almost twenty, Calvin moved from his native region of Picardy to a second distinct cultural enclave (Paris/Orleans/Bourges), an enclave in which he was exposed to individuals from multiple other cultures and geographical regions.[4] In addition, during this time, Calvin also made occasional trips to preach in yet a third distinct cultural and geographical area, at Ligniers in the ancient province of Berry (Beza, 1836: 5). In short, Calvin's youth was characterized by high geographic and cultural mobility.

JOHN CALVIN'S SELF-PERCEPTION AND TCK CHARACTERISTICS

It is easy, of course, to demonstrate Calvin's transient lifestyle and exposure to other cultures. Is it possible, though, to prove that this made a difference to Calvin? In fact, it can be demonstrated that Calvin's repeated relocations within cultures different from his own left him with a profound sense of his own "foreignness." The historian Bernard Cottret notes that as an adult, Calvin always referred to Noyon, the city which he had left permanently before he was a teenager, as his "*patria*" (Cottret, 1995: 8). Theodore Beza used the same term to describe Calvin's home: "The intelligence of the sudden death of his father recalled Calvin from Bourges to his native country" (Beza, 1836: 5). Considering both his experience and his own self-expression, one cannot help but agree with French historian Denis Crouzet who charges that mobility, both geographical and intellectual, shaped Calvin (Crouzet, 2000: 33).

More importantly, Calvin's experience not only created in him a sense of not belonging, it also left him with recognizable TCK traits. For instance, Cottret

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[4] One biographer entitled his chapter on Calvin's late teenage years as "The Years of Wandering" (McGrath, 1990: 51) .

notes that Calvin himself identified an important aspect of his character as timidity and fearfulness, speaking of his own "modesty, softness, and mildness," and also of being "timid, soft and cowardly by nature" (Cottret, 1995: xi). Biographers have concurred with Calvin's self-assessment. On modern writer describes Calvin as a "shy person who was not at ease in company," one who was "lonely" and "much less confident in himself." He preferred isolation, had a strong sense of shame, was sensitive to criticism, and at times fearful (Selderhuis, 2009: 23, 24, 29, 32, 33). Yet another modern biographer speaks of Calvin as "cold and detached," "timid and withdrawn, " "a remarkably private individual" (McGrath, 1990: 17–18). Shyness and introversion are typical perceived personality traits of TCKs, part of a natural adaptive strategy to avoid a sense of loss after too many past relationships have been destroyed by mobility. Social introversion or lack of confidence is increased through a continuing sense of alienation from peers or in social settings (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999: 138–143).

Yet while Calvin was unquestionably reserved and self-effacing with respect to himself, he could also exhibit very different traits. The same biographer who described Calvin as shy and lacking confidence also wrote of him as "confident and assertive" in other settings, and as someone who struggled with his temper (Selderhuis, 2005: 29). Another biographer puts the case even more strongly, saying Calvin exhibited a "courage bordering on intransigence [and] a refusal to compromise," and that he was "prone to launch into abusive personal attacks on those with whom he disagreed." In all these instances, Calvin's boldness was displayed in writing against theological/intellectual opponents. Calvin might passively accept personal slights but was aggressive in attacking those who questioned his theology. This too fits within the normal spectrum of TCK behavior. Arrogance, both real and perceived, is a common TCK characteristic. The experience of being able to "view a situation from multiple perspectives can also make TCKs impatient or arrogant" and lead to an attitude of "judgmentalism" (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999: 103). Although the two sides of Calvin's personality seem to conflict, they are in fact both typical of TCKs.

Writing of the death of Calvin's wife, a biographer notes that "it seems that Calvin had many supporters but few friends" (McGrath: 1990: 107). Although Calvin's personal reserve and shyness may have severely limited his circle of friendship, Calvin's social situation is more broadly typical of TCKs. Even naturally outgoing TCKs often unconsciously limit relationships because of the dynamic of loss. Typically, TCKs "develop a wide range of relationships" but do not often enter into close friendships (Pollock and Van Reken, 1990: 131–138). In this sense, Calvin fits the pattern. As a pastor and preacher he was in contact with many people, and he had a wide circle of correspondents. But very few among his adult contemporaries could be described as close friends.

A final TCK characteristic worth noting is Calvin's sense of his own unimportance. The conviction that "the individual is nothing in himself" is perhaps the chief reason that Calvin never bothered to pass on the personal details that would be of such interest to historians (Wendel, 1987: 15). It was typical of Calvin that he arranged to be buried in a public cemetery without any marker. In his death as well as in his life he believed he should be pointing to God instead of to himself (George, 1999). Many TCKs are extremely self-deprecating. They may have a sense that they are personally unimportant, and may instead draw their sense of identity not from individual personhood but from the "system" in which they find themselves. While some TCKs chafe within their native system, others find the dynamic congenial. The system provides structure, organization, and meaning (Pollock and Van Reken, 1990: 159–160).

JOHN CALVIN AS TCK: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOLARSHIP

Ultimately, it may be impossible to demonstrate categorically that Calvin was a TCK. The burden of proof is somewhat higher in the case of Calvin than it might be with some other historical figures because Calvin lived his adult life as an immigrant or refugee, so that the obvious impact of cultural and geographic mobility in his writings might equally be attributed to adult experience. Nevertheless, it is entirely plausible to argue that Calvin was indeed a TCK. He certainly meets the criteria using Pollack's classic definition: he "spent a significant part of the developmental years in a culture outside of [his] parent's," and he developed] a sense of "relationship to all . . . cultures while not having full ownership in any." In addition, Calvin exhibited a number of typical TCK characteristics.

Assuming here that Calvin was a TCK, how might the insights of TCK research be applied to Calvin scholarship? There are at least three possible avenues in which scholars might apply modern socio-scientific understandings of highly mobile populations to Calvin. These are studies of his person/character, his theology, and his scriptural interpretation.

TCK RESEARCH AND CALVIN'S PERSONALITY

The Dutch scholar Herman Selderhuis makes much of Calvin's international experience in a biography bearing the subtitle "*A Pilgrim's Life*." Selderhuis also notes something fascinating about the adult Calvin's social relationships. "Throughout [Calvin's] entire life, he smoothly and carefully maintained

relationships with people of high standing. He remained aware of class distinction . . . [he was] someone who associated with people from the upper crust but did not belong there himself" (Selderhuis, 2009: 14). Later, again emphasizing social class, the author has Calvin's early career as a desperate attempt to "jump from one social class to another, and in the process ended up between the two." And Selderhuis adds "Calvin was also a participant in this little circle, but once again his problem was that he did not easily fit the profile of either of the circles' two main constituencies. He did not really belong wholly [to either of the two main parties] and yet there were ways in which he actually belonged to both." To the biographer, this repeated experience of belonging while not belonging is critical to understanding Calvin: "Here is a tension that can be seen in all of Calvin's life and thought," that he always seemed to be stuck in two worlds at once (Selderhuis, 2009: 24–26).

The portrait Selderhuis paints is typical of many TCKs, someone who develops a "relationship to all . . . cultures while not having full ownership in any" and for whom "elements from each culture are assimilated into . . . life experience, [but] the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar experience." Selderhuis himself relates the issues entirely to class, arguing that Calvin's fame and position won him entrée to the top tier of society but that he never really fit comfortably in this new environment. TCK research provides a valuable analytical tool for exploring Selderhuis' insight. What if, instead of social class, the real difficulty for Calvin was in relating to people who did not share his experience of cultural and geographic mobility during developmental years? Most of his close friends and associates were defined not by similar economic or social backgrounds but by having come of age as students in international university environments. It is easy to assume that Calvin related to them because they were all academics, but it is just as plausible that their shared life experience created the bond.[5]

Selderhuis provides an outstanding example of a scholar who recognizes some of the issues caused by cultural mobility but who lacks the analytical tools to develop those insights. In this instance, TCK scholarship would provide an ideal complement to previous research on John Calvin.

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[5] Although it is not known if she was a TCK, one immigrant/refugee who had an important relationship with Calvin was considered his wife, Idelette de Bure. One Calvin biographer details how picky Calvin, a reluctant groom, had been about making a suitable match (Parker, 1975:71–72); Calvin's subsequent appreciation of his wife obviously suggests she was someone with whom he was comfortable. Alistair McGrath describes him as "desolated" by her death (McGrath, 1990: 107).

TCK RESEARCH AND CALVIN'S THEOLOGY

Like Selderhuis, church historian Timothy George is a scholar who identifies TCK-like traits in Calvin without drawing on TCK research. George makes a compelling case that Calvin's experience of geographic mobility had a direct influence on his theology.

George begins by noting that that Calvin was a refugee ("always looked with longing to his native France") ministering to refugees ("thousands of 'immigrants' flocked there from persecution") in a city uniquely located on the borders of three distinct political/cultural enclaves (France, the Swiss cantons, the Duchy of Savoy). From this observation, George makes two specific notes about its practical influence on Calvin's ministry. First, "his role as an outsider on the inside gave him a special appeal to the 'company of strangers,'" the religious refugees who fled to Geneva in part because of Calvin's presence. In addition, George charges that "A sense of displacement, homelessness underlay [Calvin's] difficult dealings with local authorities in the city." So, for George, Calvin's refugee experience shaped his ministry in concrete ways.

But George takes his analysis further. Being a refugee himself did not simply create a sense of empathy for other immigrants or make it difficult for Calvin to work with local government. It also shaped Calvin's larger ministry and thought. Drawing on a phrase used by the theologian Paul Tillich, George concludes that Calvin's status of standing between worlds without belonging completely to either is central to understanding his work: "Calvin's ministry was thus developed 'on the boundary.'"

To George, the basis for a growing interest in Calvin's theology in contemporary Christian and intellectual circles is precisely Calvin's own experience of living between worlds. George argues that "postmodernity has placed us all 'on the boundary'– on the border between the fading certainties of modernism and new ways of understanding the world and its promises and perils. Calvin, a displaced refugee, speaks directly to the homeless mind of many contemporaries looking for a place to stand. 'We are always on the road,' Calvin wrote. Like Augustine, Calvin reminds us that our true homeland, our ultimate *patria*, is that city with foundations God is preparing for all who know and love him. In the meantime, believers are 'just sojourners on this earth so that with hope and patience they strive toward a better life'".

George notices something else of interest about Calvin's theology – Calvinism tended to set people in motion. He quotes the great historian Heiko Oberman to the effect that Calvinism is a religion for "trekkers not for settlers." Its adherents were strongly "international" in outlook and quite likely to travel beyond familiar geographical boundaries in response to the demands of their faith. "Calvin's

followers forsook the religious ideal of *stabilitas* for an aggressive *mobilitas*,” taking their ideas and values into distant parts of the world.

George does not explicitly link this last facet of Calvinism with Calvin's own experience of high geographic mobility, but anyone versed in TCK research is likely to see a connection. Mobility "is [one of the] major factor[s] in the lives of TCKs," so common it can be described as "nearly universal." The transition experience so shapes those who spend their developmental years outside their own culture that the rest of life is often a working out of those issues. Some TCKs respond by never moving as adults, others by moving constantly, but all have mobility as something underlying basic values and orientation (Pollock and Van Reken, 1990: 61–72). It is certainly no wonder that Calvin, a TCK, a refugee, a man who never really wanted to spend his adult life where he did, created a theological movement that sent people out instead of keeping people at home.

Timothy George is an insightful scholar. Even without a TCK-research background, he is able to discern some influence of Calvin's experience of cultural and geographical mobility on Calvin's life and thought. How much more powerful would his interpretation be if he were able to draw on work done by TCK researchers?.

George is not alone, however, in finding a link between Calvin's experience of geographic mobility and his theology. As already mentioned, Herman Selderhuis believed that Calvin's youthful experience of living apart from his home shaped Calvin's character. But Selderhuis also claims that the same experience shaped his theology as well. Calvin's youth, summarized as "his constant experience of being a stranger, of being on the road, of continually having to let go" had a direct effect on Calvin's theology, giving him a strong sense of life as transitory, and creating a longing for "clarity and simplicity in religion" (Selderhuis, 2009: 21). In this interpretation, Calvin's sense of "life on the road," based in large part on his own experience of mobility, forms the vital background for understanding Calvin's doctrine of predestination and providence. Ultimately, the author claims Calvin championed the position that true home is not geographical, but found where the true Church is free – home is where God's Word is preached, and as such is both heaven and paradise (Selderhuis, 2009: 38–43).[6]

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[6] In his analysis, the author emphasizes the influence of Calvin's experience as a young-adult refugee, but notes that even prior to this experience, Calvin "had already been somewhat lost in the world (Selderhuis, 2009: 39).

TCK RESEARCH AND CALVIN'S SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION

If Calvin's experience of cultural and geographic mobility shaped his theology, it had an even more obvious impact on Calvin's reading of scripture. In his commentary on Genesis, for instance, Calvin reflects on the experience of Abraham who has been told by God in the first verse of chapter 12 to "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you" (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001: Genesis 12.1). Calvin is all too aware how difficult such a command must have been to Abraham, not only because "exile is in itself sorrowful, and the sweetness of their native soil holds nearly all men bound to itself," but because Abraham "had been, up to that time, settled in his nest, having his affairs underanged, and living quietly and tranquilly among his relatives, without any change in his mode of life." It is easy to recognize the empathy of a commentator who believes he too was forced to abandon his home for the sake of God's calling. Calvin even extends his sympathetic interpretation to Abraham's father Terah, saying of him, "It was difficult for the old man, already broken and failing in health, to tear himself away from his own country" (Calvin, 1847: 342–343).[7]

CONCLUSION

So, is it possible to apply modern socio-scientific studies of highly mobile populations to the study of historical figures such as John Calvin? Calvin was arguably a TCK, certainly an adult immigrant and refugee. Numerous scholars have documented the influence of geographic mobility on Calvin, and many of these have gone on to connect this influence with strands of Calvin's thought, theology, or scriptural interpretation. Clearly, in at least the case of John Calvin, recent studies of highly mobile populations would provide useful analytical tools for researchers. Access to the understanding supplied by these modern studies would certainly provide valuable insight for Calvin scholars.

How might these studies be applied to ongoing Calvin scholarship? One obvious direction would be a careful examination of Calvin's many commentaries on scripture. A thorough understanding of TCK experience and characteristics is likely to illumine Calvin's treatment of passages on such topics as exile, pilgrimage, wandering, or home. How, for instance, does Calvin treat Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, four famous biblical TCKs? What about

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[7] This sympathy is notable as traditional commentaries often condemned Terah as a "manufacturer of idols" (Rosenberg, 1985: 1035).

the promise of a land to Abraham, or to the Children of Israel wandering in the wilderness? Does Calvin's experience of geographic mobility inform the ways in which he understands the expulsion from the Garden of Eden? Does Calvin read Jeremiah's exilic writings differently than his own contemporaries writing from their homes? These are all questions that someone well-versed in both Calvin scholarship and TCK studies might fruitfully address.

Another avenue for a TCK scholar to explore would be Calvin's theology. Did Calvin's experience influence the way he understood community, or heaven, or the Christian life? What about his pastoral advice to refugees – how much of his counsel resembles the same advice from contemporaries, and how much is obviously shaped by his own experience? The possibilities are endless.

To touch on a wider theme, considering his unique experience, John Calvin is obviously a strong candidate for consideration at this conference. But could modern research on highly mobile populations be applied to others? I certainly believe so. For instance, consider some of the following prominent historical figures who could be studied as TCKs: Marco Polo, Thomas Cromwell, Mary Queen of Scots, Katherine the Great, Joseph Conrad. Did Katherine reign, or Conrad write, differently because of experiencing geographic or cultural mobility during adolescence? It would be a fascinating project to study any of their lives through the lens of TCK research.

Modern research on highly mobile populations would not just apply to a scattering of individuals such as those cited above. Immigrant and exile communities have existed throughout history. Take two examples from my own field of research. Between 1553–1558, the Catholic religious policy of the English Queen Mary I caused several hundred Englishmen and women to flee to the continent. They settled in cities such as Frankfurt on the Main and Geneva and spent their time as exiles do, working for a living, quarreling with one another, plotting against enemies back home, and dreaming of returning some day to their native land. These Protestant groups are well documented, they have been studied by academics writing in English, French, German, and Latin, many first-hand accounts of their experience are easily accessible, and they would be an ideal subject for someone who has studied refugee or immigrant communities in the modern world. And before these English Protestants left, and after they returned, during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth I, other Englishmen and women, this time Catholics, fled England for the continent, settling in cities such as Rome and Louvain. These exiles also are well documented; they left their own paper trail and have been studied over the years by scholars in various languages, including Spanish and Italian. These English Catholic exiles would also be an ideal topics for someone already well-versed in modern refugee or immigrant scholarship. Although both groups are much studied, no one has ever

analyzed them before using modern insights into exile communities. How were their values or choices or interactions shaped by the exile/immigrant experience? Historians are waiting for social scientists such as TCK researchers to help point the way.

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