

Date sent: 31 May 1555

Date received:

Writer: John Calvin

Recipient: Richard Cox et al.

Location of origin: Geneva

Destination: Frankfurt

Original language: Latin

Ref: Denbighshire Record Office, Plas Power MSS, DD/PP/839 47-48

Transcript of Later copy/English translation of copy

Other Versions: *Corpus Reformatorum* 15 628-629; *Troubles* li-liii

[47] To the most distinguished men and brethren esteemed by me in the Lord, Dominus Richard Cox¹ and the other Englishmen who now dwell in Frankfort.²

Greetings. I reply to your letter,³ excellent men and brethren truly revered by me, more tardily perhaps than your hope and belief required. But when you know that the roads were for some time blockaded by highwaymen, this delay will find ready excuse with you. Concerning that strife which was quite unhappily stirred up among you, I set forth freely to our most excellent brother Thomas Sampson⁴ what

I had learned from certain people's letters. For certain friends lamented in my presence the fact that you [*plural*] so categorically press the Anglican ceremonies that it is quite clear that you are more in thrall⁵ to your homeland than is appropriate. I did indeed hear, I admit, that arguments were publicly adduced by you which would not permit a departure from the received form. But their refutation was easy and ready to hand. But, just as I urged my people⁶

¹ Richard Cox = Garrett no. 112.

² This letter is also printed – but not from a surviving MS – as Calvin, *Ep* 2213 = *Corpus Reformatorum* 15.628-629. There is an English version in *A Brieff discours off the troubles begonne at Franckford in Germany Anno Domini 1554* (1574 [reprinted in facsimile Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1972]), pp. LI-LIII. I have recorded variants – at tedious length -- in my notes to the Latin text.

³ As noted at *C.R.* 15. 628, this is *Ep* 2178 = *C.R.* 15.551-554.

⁴ Thomas Sampson = Garrett no. 362.

⁵ Or, in a non-pejorative sense, 'dedicated', 'devoted'.

⁶ *Ep* 2213 (= E) has 'those' instead of 'my people', but the reading of the Goodman notebook (= G) is confirmed by *Troubles* (= T).

to adapt some things in moderation, if⁷ they could be, so was I displeased that nothing was in turn conceded or relaxed by your group. But since no accusation against anyone had been made to me,⁸ I did not dare to interfere, lest my confidence incur the stigma of rashness. Now I rejoice that in that dispute you have been more humane and amenable and that the whole business has been peacefully settled. Certainly

I think that no one endowed with sound judgement will deny that lamps, crosses,⁹ and nonsense of that sort flowed from superstition. And so I determine that those who keep these things as a matter of free choice drink too eagerly from the dregs. I do not see what is the point of burdening the Church with silly and useless ceremonies – or, to call them by their proper name, noxious acts – when it will be possible to obtain the liberty of a pure and simple order. But I hold myself in check, lest

I seem to arouse fresh strife about a matter which has, as I hear from you, been well settled. That the pastor and the other ministers have been elected by common suffrage all good people will readily approve, lest others complain that a portion of the church has been snatched cunningly and by devious actions. For you know, in keeping with your prudence, that the greater the praise of which the fairness of the senate is worthy, the greater the ill-will with which you are burdened, if you abuse the obliging nature of those

who have such feelings toward your nation. Yet neither would I like this to be taken as a first judgement, but I prefer to report frankly what is being said than to foster an unfavourable estimate by keeping silent.¹⁰ Indeed, this I do not hide – that in my judgement Knox was dealt with in a manner neither pious nor brotherly, if accusation was brought against him at the secret instigation of certain persons. For it would be better to remain at home than

to bring the firebrand of unjust ferocity to distant shores, which would unwillingly be inflamed as well.¹¹ But since it is irksome to touch even lightly on faults the memory of which I wish to be buried in perpetual oblivion, I only exhort you, venerable brethren, that, if you perceive that the feelings of certain people have justifiably been rubbed raw, you take care to assuage their vexation.¹² When

⁷ G is again supported by T against E, which reads the reflexive pronoun *se* in place of *si*. But the construction in G is odd, while that in E is impossible. I rather suspect that the original was *se si*, which would give the sense ‘just as I urged my people to bend in restraint if they were in any way able to do so’.

⁸ Literally, ‘the name of no one had been recorded for me’. T takes the phrase essentially as I have, reading ‘there was no man named unto me’.

⁹ G and E read *cruces*, which I have translated simply as ‘crosses’ to leave open the ambiguity as to whether it refers to the thing or the gesture, but T renders ‘crossings’.

¹⁰ ‘That the pastor and the other ministers ... by keeping silent’ is omitted by E, but is found in T.

¹¹ In the notes to the translation I have given reasons for thinking this should be ‘to bring to distant shores the firebrand of unjust ferocity, which would inflame them – against their will – as well’.

¹² In T this has become even stronger and more anti-Cox, as it were, than in the Latin: ‘to make them amendes for the faulte committed’.

[48] I heard that a certain group wanted to move from there, I gave a diligent warning – as was right – that, if it was not advantageous for all to dwell in the same place,¹³ spatial separation should not dissipate brotherly agreement. For I was afraid that some hidden animosity might remain from your former quarrel. And nothing will be more pleasing to me than to be set free from this fear. For if some by chance were to withdraw to us, I would find sad even the mere suspicion of hidden

dissent among you. Therefore I greatly desire that what you write about the restoration of favour is fixed and stable, so that if it should happen that a portion moves elsewhere, you might nonetheless cherish holy friendship though scattered spatially. There has now been more than enough sin that the discord should creep no further.¹⁴ Yet it will be the task of your wisdom and fairness – in order that goodwill might be maintained – assiduously to clear away whatever remainder of aversion there will be.

Farewell, brethren worthy of esteem. May the Lord look upon you with his protection, may he direct you with his Spirit, may he present you with his blessing, and may he assuage the sadness of exile. In Geneva. 31 May¹⁵ 1555. My colleges greet you lovingly.

Your John Calvin¹⁶

¹³ T is less even-handed, reading ‘iff they could not well remaine there’.

¹⁴ T takes *discordia* as ablative: ‘although through discorde it [‘the fault already committed’] creepe no further’.

¹⁵ G, which says literally ‘the day before June’, agrees with T (‘this last off maie’), whereas E gives the date as 12 June – that is, the day before the Ides of June. The classical form of the date given by both G and T would be *pridie Kal(endas) Iunias* (not *Iunii*). The agreement between G and T strongly suggests that 31 May is right; perhaps a transcriber (E is not edited from the autograph) was troubled by the absence of one of the peg days (Calends, Nones, Ides) and simply supplied one.

¹⁶ How do the versions relate to each other? On the whole G and E are quite close together, which encourages the belief that the transmission of the text of the documents in the notebook is essentially sound. E has obviously been processed: it has, for example, been topped and tailed (no initial greeting, no signature) and Knox’s name has been replaced with ‘N[omen]’. Some of the variants are purely transcriptional; this is true, for example, of *praescriptum* / *perscriptum* (my note 9 to the Latin text), *leniter* / *leviter* (my note 29), and probably of *meos* / *eos* (following the *m* of *autem*; my note 7). But others – such as *novas lites* / *novum certamen* (note 18) or *excitare* / *movere* (note 19) – are the sort of changes that could conceivably have been introduced – either way – in a revision between, say, draft and final copy.