



# The Resurrection of Christ in Calvin's theology and its implications to the Church in Africa

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## Abstract

Between the death of Christ and his Ascension into heaven, is the important event of his glorious Resurrection. The Resurrection of Christ, a central doctrine of Christianity, is based on the belief that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on the third day after his Crucifixion and that through his conquering of death all believers will subsequently share in his victory over sin, death, and the devil. This paper underscores the advantages, benefits, implications and significance of the resurrection of Christ in John Calvin's theology. The article stresses that it is the message of the Resurrection of Christ that we can hope on, so that Christians in Africa will not despair, when faced with suffering, persecution, troubles, and deaths. There is hope, because Christ lives, we will also live. The paper further relates the Resurrection of Christ in Calvin's theology to African Christianity. The methodology used in this study was the historical research method in which various relevant sources in literature were interrogated.

**Keywords:** Calvin, theology, Resurrection, Christ, African Church.

## Introduction

Christian theology has tended to focus on the Cross and has not emphasized the Resurrection and its significance. Scholars have dwelt on proving the Resurrection which is an important aspect, but this article takes the Resurrection of Christ as a given for evidence abounds everywhere, so we dwell on what it achieved for us and its significance. In agreement with this notion is what John A. Fowler states: "A call for resurrection theology is founded on the fact that, Christian theology has tended to focus on the birth and the death of Jesus and in so doing has defaulted in explaining the significance of the resurrection."<sup>1</sup> This paper on the Resurrection of Christ in Calvin's theology and its implications to the church in Africa will state the problem, the methodology, the centrality of the doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ, why the researcher has chosen Calvin's theology of the Cross and his commentaries as objects of study. The articles will further state the advantages, benefits, implications and significance of the Resurrection by Calvin. The significance of the article is considered and basic conclusions are drawn.

## Statement of the Problem

Several circumstances and diverse situations in life come to bring despair and doom to humanity. On the global scene, the whole world is going down the proverbial drain, as wickedness, sophisticated crimes, murder, ethnic clashes, territorial wars, and a range of religious and health

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Fowler, *A call for Resurrection*, 2001. [www.christianyou.net/pages/restheoul.html](http://www.christianyou.net/pages/restheoul.html). Accessed 13/08/2018.



crises are on the increase by the day. Epidemics such as Coronavirus 19 claim so many lives without any foreseeable remedy. Governments of the nations' all seem helpless in tackling the complex web the world has got entangled into. In the midst of enormous problems confronting the Church in Africa there are epidemics, floods, wars, Coronavirus 19, AIDS, Ebola, general suffering, killings, death, persecution, and recently Boko Haram attacks on Christians and churches on the Northern part of Nigeria, and with thousands of Christians massacred and many churches destroyed, many Christians that escape have relocated to other parts of the country. The church is seriously under ordeal and suffering trauma, and all attempts to solve the problem have defied solutions. In such circumstances: What can the church hope on? What message can be helpful to us at these times?

It is the message of the Resurrection of Christ that we can hope on, so that we will not despair, when we face suffering, persecution, troubles of health and suchlike and death. There is hope, because Christ lives, we will also live. Collins attest to this assertion that the Resurrection of Christ is the central message when he states that "Christians today have no message more central or more important to give to mankind: He lives, and you shall live."<sup>2</sup> That we would be able to go beyond suffering to life and be able to mock all the hardships of this life, Origen wrote as quoted by Collins "He rose from the dead and so utterly convinced his disciples of the truth of his resurrection that they show to all men through their sufferings that their attention is focused on life everlasting and on the resurrection which has been exemplified to them in word and deed. And so they can mock at all the hardships of this life."<sup>3</sup>

## Methodology

This research is based chiefly on material sourced from a distinct body of literature found in libraries within the reach of the writer. The method used in this study was the simple historical research method. Fieldwork, questionnaire or interviews are not necessary, because we are dealing with the theology of the Resurrection of Christ according to Calvin who lived during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Calvin Institute of the Christian Religion, Calvin's Commentaries, Calvin's Sermons, Calvin's Letters, Theological treaties, and Calvin's Lectures, all contain his theology and exegesis, which will be considered by the writer. What other scholars have written on his theology of Resurrection will be considered. Works by the early church fathers and contemporary scholars on the Resurrection will also be explored. Books written by African theologians will be used for some evaluation, analysis and discussion so as to have a correlation of Calvin's ideas to the present African situation.

## The Centrality of the Doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ

Between the death of Christ and his Ascension into heaven, is the important event of his Resurrection. John Calvin in his interpretation of John 20: 1 points out the centrality of the doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ, and what the outcome would have been has it not transpired. He wrote: "the resurrection of Christ is the chief article of our faith, and without it the hope of eternal life fails."<sup>4</sup> W. David Beck in the preface of the book, Did Jesus Christ rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate, stated categorically that: "The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas P. Collins, *The Risen Christ in the Fathers of the Church*, 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Collins, *The Risen Christ in the Fathers of the Church*, 51.

<sup>4</sup> *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: The Gospel According to St John 11- 21 and the First Epistle of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Com., 1994), 191.



significant topic of our day.<sup>5</sup> He continues, “of course Christians since Paul have made that claim, because they have been convinced that it proved Jesus deity and the efficacy of his death for our sins. The development of the post- Kantian view of religion, however, which now dominates the twentieth century, makes the Resurrection critical in an entirely new way.”<sup>6</sup> G. R. Habermas states, “That Jesus died and afterward rose from the dead is both the central doctrine of Christian theology and the major fact in a defense of its teachings. This was true in the earliest church and remains so today.”<sup>7</sup> It is to this fact of the centrality of the Resurrection that W. H. Griffith Thomas also wrote: “the theology of the Resurrection of Christ is very important and calls for special attention.”<sup>8</sup> At the same time he writes:

It is now admitted on all hands that the Church of Christ came into existence as the result of a belief in the resurrection of Christ. When we consider its commencement as recorded in the Book of Acts of the Apostles, we see two simple and incontrovertible facts: 1) the Christian society was gathered together by preaching; 2) the substance of the preaching was the resurrection of Jesus Christ ... The apostolic church is thus a result of a belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

George Eldon Ladd in, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*, has again emphasized the centrality of the Resurrection and summarizes it this way:

The survey has made it clear that the resurrection of Jesus is no incidental or peripheral matter. It is not merely a question of the integrity and the historical trustworthiness of a few resurrection stories. The entire New Testament was written from the perspective of the resurrection. Indeed, the resurrection may be called the major premise of the early Christian faith. The early Christians believed that Jesus foresaw both his death and his resurrection. The Gospels were written not to record the words and deeds of a great teacher. They were written because their authors believed that the Jesus whom they had known could not be conquered by death but was still alive. They believed that the real mission of Jesus could only be understood only when viewed through the eyes of the resurrection faith. According to Acts, the resurrection was the primary message of the earliest Christians. It is the basic presupposition of the New Testament epistles. The cornerstone of the entire New Testament is the resurrection.<sup>10</sup>

The Resurrection of Christ, a central doctrine of Christianity, is based on the belief that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on the third day after his Crucifixion and that through his conquering of death all believers will subsequently share in his victory over “sin, death, and the devil.” The celebration of this event, called Easter/Pascha , or the Festival of the Resurrection, is the major feast day of the worlds churches. The accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus are found in the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—and various theological expressions of the early church's universal conviction and consensus that Christ rose from the dead are found throughout the rest of the New Testament, especially in the letters of the Apostle Paul (e.g., 1

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<sup>5</sup> Gary R. Hebermas & Anthony G. N. Flew, *Did Jesus rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), ix.

<sup>6</sup> Gary R. Hebermas, *Did Jesus rise from the Dead?*, ix.

<sup>7</sup> G. R. Habermas, “Resurrection of Christ,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed, Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), 1014.

<sup>8</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, “Resurrection of Christ,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol IV, ed. James Orr Naarah- socho,( Chicago: The Howard- Severance Company, 1930), 2569.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 2567.

<sup>10</sup> Ladd, George Eldon, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*. Michael Green Series Editor (London: Holder and Stoughton, 1975), 42-43.



Corinthians 15).<sup>11</sup> This is attested to by Collins when he agrees that, “the Resurrection of Christ from the dead is either stated or implied in every book of the New Testament, beginning with Acts and the letters of Paul. From the Resurrection event directly spring, in their uniqueness, Christian faith, Christian preaching, Christian theology, Christian worship and Christian ethics.”<sup>12</sup>

“The Apostle Paul considered the Resurrection to be the cornerstone of the Christian faith, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, the whole structure, Christianity, collapses, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15: 14- 17.”<sup>13</sup> The Christian faith and its claim to be truth- exist only if Jesus rose from the dead. The heart of Christianity is a living Christ. Walter Kunnen alludes to the above statement and asserts: “...it is in the Risen One that the whole life of mankind ultimately comes to a decision. The ultimate decision, however, is that between life and death. The Word of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the assault of life upon a dying world”<sup>14</sup>

“The resurrection of Christ is the pivotal movement for Christianity. Without it our faith is foolishness and our merit is pity (1 Corinthians 15: 19), but because of it, our hope of final redemption and victory is sealed.”<sup>15</sup> The importance of this belief cannot be overstated, Lewis Peter said:

The doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ after his death at Calvary is not an option for Christians. It is not an appendix to the gospel. It lies at the core of Christianity. Without it Christianity would have been still-born, for a living faith cannot survive a dead Savior. Hence, against certain heretics in the early church who appear to have somehow “spiritualized” the resurrection, Paul insisted that “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14).<sup>16</sup>

In short, the whole theology of the New Testament stands or falls by this resurrection event. The entire New Testament writes Carl Henry “was written within and from the perspective of Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead.”<sup>17</sup> Without it, says Murray J. Harris, “the New Testament loses its soul and the Christian faith its central pillar.”<sup>18</sup> C. F. Evans writing on the Resurrection says, “To a greater extent than it is anything else, Christianity- at least the Christianity of the New Testament- is a religion of resurrection.”<sup>19</sup>

Augustine, an African and the bishop of Hippo, the greatest of the Latin fathers and probably the most influential teacher for good and for ill in the entire history of Christian theology, affirms the centrality of the Resurrection of Christ when he states:

It is faith in the resurrection that alone sets apart and distinguishes Christians from all other men. For even the pagans now believe that he died and was buried, and the Jews witnessed (these things). But that he rose from the dead on the third day, neither

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<sup>11</sup> “Resurrection.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas P. Collins, *The Risen Christ in the Fathers of the Church* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1967), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Gary R. Hebermas, *Did Jesus rise from the Dead?* x.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Kunnen, *The Theology of Resurrection* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1965), 295.

<sup>15</sup> Justified by the Resurrection of Christ: Justification and Resurrection in 1Tim. 3:16 and Romans 4:25. [www.renewingthoughts.wordpress.com/2011/01/061](http://www.renewingthoughts.wordpress.com/2011/01/061). Accessed 23/09/2012.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 339.

<sup>17</sup> Carl F. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979), 147.

<sup>18</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1983), 5.

<sup>19</sup> C. F. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament* (Naperville: Allenson, 1920), 1



the pagan nor the Jew admits. Therefore, believe in resurrection of the dead is what distinguished the life of our faith from the deadly state of unbelievers. As the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "Be mindful that the Lord Jesus Christ is risen again from the dead" 2 Timothy 2: 8. Therefore, brethren, let us believe and let us hope that what happened to Christ will also happen to us. For God who makes a promise does not deceive.<sup>20</sup>

### Why Calvin's Theology of the Resurrection and His Commentaries

First, the work seeks to look at the benefits of the Resurrection of Christ as expressed in Calvin's theology. But why the study of the Resurrection of Christ in Calvin's Theology? The German sociologist of religion Ernst Troeltsch gives us a reason, as quoted by Alister E. McGrath that:

It has been at two points only that Christianity has been able to decisively transform human culture and civilization: during the Middle Ages, through the scholastic synthesis of Thomas Aquinas, and in the early modern period, through Calvinism. To engage with Calvin and his legacy is thus to wrestle with one of the fare moments in modern history when Christianity molded, rather than accommodated itself to society.<sup>21</sup>

It is this great theologian's theology of the Resurrection we intend to study, which is central to Christianity and our faith, so that we can mold believers in this trying time of great persecution, not to despair, but to have hope in God. McGrath continues that, "John Calvin was by far the greatest of the Reformers with respect to the talents he possessed, and influence he exerted, and the services he rendered in the establishment and diffusion of important truth."<sup>22</sup> After all that Luther, Melanchthon, and Zwingli had done, there was still someone needed of elevated and comprehensive mind, who should be able to rise above the distraction and confusion of existing contentions, to survey the wide field of scriptural truth in all its departments, to combine and arrange its various parts, and to present them, as a harmonious whole, to the contemplation of men. This was the special work for which God qualified Calvin, by bestowing upon him both intellectual and the spiritual gifts necessary for the task, and this He enabled him to accomplish. Calvin had received from God mental powers of the highest order and used them well. Led by God's grace early and decidedly to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and to devote himself to the service of Christ, he was also led, under the same guidance, to abandon the Church of Rome, and to devote himself to preaching of the Gospel, the exposition of the revealed truth of God, and the organization of churches in accordance with the sacred Scriptures and the practice of the apostles. In all these departments of useful labor his efforts were honored with an extraordinary measure of success. Calvin did what the rest of the Reformers did, and, in addition, he did what none of them either did or could affect.<sup>23</sup>

The systematizing of divine truth, and the full organization of the Christian church according to the Word of God, are the great peculiar achievements of Calvin. The two leading departments of theological science are the exegetical and the systematic. The two most important functions of the theologian are first, to bring out accurately the meaning of the individual statements of God's word, the particular truths which are taught there; and second, to classify and arrange these truths

<sup>20</sup> Collins, *The Risen Christ in the Fathers of the Church*, 98.

<sup>21</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), xii.

<sup>22</sup> William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1862), 292.

<sup>23</sup> William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, 293.



in such a way as to bring out most fully and correctly the whole scheme of doctrine which is there unfolded, and to illustrate the bearing and application of the scheme as a whole, and of its different parts. And it is important to notice, that in both these departments, Calvin stands out pre-eminent, having manifested in both of them the highest excellence and attained the greatest success.<sup>24</sup>

Calvin's commentaries and Institutes remain relevant and contemporary. The book, *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institute: Essays and Analysis*, edited by David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, celebrates the five hundredth anniversary of John Calvin's birth and is the work of a team of scholars to whom different sections of the Institutes were parceled out.<sup>25</sup> John Calvin devoted two sections of the Institutes of the Christian Religion to the resurrection of Jesus- Book II: XVI: 13&14. A whole chapter is given to the resurrection of the body, Book III: XXV. But many standard Reformed Systematic Theologies pay little attention to the meaning and significance of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. Emphasis seems to be laid on the Cross to the detriment or neglect of the Resurrection. It is for this reason that we will explore the Resurrection.

Secondly, to be fully convicted that even when we are imprisoned, flogged, persecuted, maimed, killed, we would not deny that "on the third day he rose from the grave," as the early Church did. It is succinctly stated by Ladd as follows: "He rose from the tomb, and triumphed over death. This was the belief that turned heartbroken followers of a crucified rabbi into the courageous witnesses and martyrs of the early church. This was the one belief that separated the followers of Jesus from the Jews and turned them into the community of the resurrection. You could imprison them, flog them, kill them, but you could not make them deny their conviction that "on the third he rose again." The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the very cornerstone of Christianity.

The third purpose is to relate the theology of the Resurrection of Christ to African Christianity. What do Africans believe about life after death? Is it the immortality of the soul or the resurrection of the body? For seeing that in the cross, death, and burial of Christ nothing but weakness appears, faith must go beyond all these, in order that it may be provided with full strength. Hence, although in his death we have an effectual completion of salvation, because by it we are reconciled to God, satisfaction is given to his justice, the curse is removed, and the penalty paid; still it is not death, but by his Resurrection, that we are said to be begotten again to a living hope (1Peter 1: 3), because, as he, by rising again, became victorious over death, so the victory of our faith consists only in his Resurrection.

Commenting on 1 Peter 1: 3, Calvin asserts that, "for this purpose the knowledge of God's benefits is of great help, for, when we appreciate their value, all other things will become worthless, and especially, when we consider what Christ and his blessings are, everything without him will be garbage. It is for this reason that he highly extols the wonderful grace of God in Christ, so that we may not think it hard to give up the world in order to enjoy the priceless treasure of future life; and also so that we may not be broken by our present troubles, but patiently endure them, being

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<sup>24</sup> William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, 297.

<sup>25</sup> Twenty leading Calvin scholars exhibit a firm understanding of and passion for Calvin's work, covering each part of the Institutes and providing essential background information on the Institutes as well as bibliography of Calvin resources. Contributors include: David B. Calhoun; William Edger; Richard B. Gaffin Jr.; Michael S. Horton; Robert L. Reymond. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, eds., *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis. The Calvin 500 Series* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2008), xiii.



satisfied with eternal happiness.”<sup>26</sup> Further, when he gives thanks to God, he invites the faithful to spiritual joy, which swallows up all contrary feelings of the flesh.

Commenting on Philippians 3: 10, Calvin says:

For after introducing along with this the power of his resurrection, Christ crucified is set before us, that we may follow him through tribulations and distresses; and hence the resurrection of the dead is expressly made mention of, that we may know that we must die before we live. This is a continued subject of meditation to believers as long as the sojourn in this world. This, however, is a choice consolation, that in all our miseries we are partakers of Christ’s Cross, if we are his members; so that through afflictions the way is opened up for us to everlasting blessedness, as we read elsewhere, “if we die with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.” 2 Timothy 2: 11.<sup>27</sup>

Commenting on 1 Peter 1: 21, Calvin says, “...as, then, our salvation depends on the resurrection of Christ and his supreme power, faith and hope find here what can support them. For, except he had by rising again triumphed over death, and held now the highest sovereignty, to protect us by his power, what would become of us, exposed to so great a power as that of our enemies, and to such violent attacks? Let us, therefore, learn to what mark we ought to direct our aim, so that we may really believe in God.”<sup>28</sup>

Commenting on Romans 8: 34, Calvin has this to say, “... it then follows, that when any one seeks to condemn us, he not only seeks to render void the death of Christ, but also contend with the unequalled power with which the Father has honored him, and who with that power conferred on him supreme authority. This so great an assistance; which dares to triumph over the devil, death, sin, and the gates of hell, ought to lodge deep in the hearts of all the godly; for our faith is nothing, except we feel assured that Christ is ours, and that the father is in him propitious to us”.

On 1 Peter 3:21, Calvin comments, “moreover, by referring to the resurrection, he has regard to the doctrine which he had taught before, that Christ was vivified by the Spirit; for the resurrection was victory over death and the completion of our salvation. We then cannot otherwise derive benefit from baptism, than by having all our thoughts fixed on the death and resurrection of Christ.”<sup>29</sup>

On 1 Cor. 15: 58, Calvin comments, wherefore, my brethren. Having satisfied himself that he had sufficiently proved the doctrine of the Resurrection, he now closes his discussion with an exhortation, and this has much more force, than if he had made use of a simple conclusion with an affirmation. Since your labor, says he, is not in vain in the Lord, be steadfast, and about in good works. Now he says their labor is not in vain, for the reason, that there is a reward laid up

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<sup>26</sup> *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews and 1 & 2 Peter*. Edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Translated by William B. Johnson. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 231.

<sup>27</sup> *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, Volume 11: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians (Vol 11)* by John Calvin. Translated by T. h. L. Parker.

<sup>28</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries of the Catholic Epistles, PC Study Bible*. Translated and Edited by John Owen.

<sup>29</sup> *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews and 1 & 2 Peter*. Edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Translated by William B. Johnson. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994),



for them with God. This is that exclusive hope which, in the first instance, encourages believers, and afterwards sustains them, so that they do not stop short in the race. Hence he exhorts them to remain steadfast, because they rest on a firm foundation, as they know that a better life is prepared for them in heaven. He adds - abounding in the work of the Lord; for the hope of Resurrection makes us not to be weary in well doing, as he teaches in Colossians 1:10. For amidst so many occasions of offense as constantly presenting themselves to us, who is there that would not be despondent, or turn aside from the right way, were it not that, by thinking of a better life, he is by this means kept in the fear of God? Now on the other hand, he intimates, that if the hope of a Resurrection is taken away, then, the foundation (as it were) is being rooted up, the whole structure of piety falls to the ground. Unquestionably, if the hope of reward is taken away and extinguished, alacrity in running will not merely grow cold, but will be altogether destroyed.

Calvin commenting on John 11: 25, says on "I am the resurrection and the life" that Christ first proclaims that He is the Resurrection and the life. Then he explains each clause of the statement separately and distinctively. First, He calls Himself the Resurrection; thus restoration from death to life precedes the state of life. But the whole human race is plunged into death. Therefore, no man will possess life unless he is first raised from the dead. Hence Christ teaches that He is the beginning of life. Afterwards he adds that the continuity of life is also the work of His grace.

### **The Benefits, Implications and Significance of the Resurrection by John Calvin**

Three advantages, benefits, implications and the significances of the Resurrection of Christ are enumerated in John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book II, Chapter 16, section 13, as follows:

- 1) Our righteousness in the sight of God is renewed and restored.
- 2) His life is the very basis of our life and hope, also the efficacious cause of new life in us.
- 3) The pledge of our future Resurrection is in place.

That the benefits of the Resurrection life will not only be a future reality but that we will experience it now as pointed out by Mathew Michael: "The resurrected life of Jesus Christ is expected to characterize the life of the believer now, which by the power of God's Spirit gives him a foretaste of the victorious resurrected life now, and the future hope also for a bodily resurrection after death."<sup>30</sup>

Ford Lewis Battles, in his book, Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin, on the Resurrection of Christ states in Chapter II. Section 13 that:

- "On the third day He rose again from the dead" [three benefits of Christ's death for us]
- a) It is in Christ's Resurrection alone, not his death, that the victory of our faith over death lies
    - (1) From Scripture, division of our salvation between death and Resurrection of Christ is as follows:
      - (a) Through death- sin and death are wiped out.
      - (b) Through Resurrection- righteousness is restored and life raised up.
      - (c) Thus, through the Resurrection the power of His death manifested in us.
    - (2) In handling the relevant scriptural passages, we are by synecdoche to understand "death" to include "resurrection and vice versa.
  - b) Also, just as the mortification of our flesh rests in our participation in His cross, so we are inheritors of His Resurrection.

<sup>30</sup> Mathew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions* (Kaduna: Yutu Graphics, 2001), 339.



c) His Resurrection guarantees our own resurrection.

Conclusion: He suffered the same death that other men naturally die; and received immortality in the same flesh that, in the mortal state, He had taken upon Himself.<sup>31</sup>

Calvin has stated that “by his (Christ’s) death sin was taken away, by his Resurrection righteousness was renewed and restored.” Our salvation may be thus divided between the death and Resurrection of Christ since by the former, sin was abolished and death annihilated; by the latter righteousness was restored and life revived the power and efficacy of the former being still bestowed upon us by the means of the latter.

### The Significance of the Article

The hope of this basic study is that Christians will not lose hope and give in to defeat and discouragement. “Instead of looking at the mighty resurrection power of the Lord Jesus, people go back to looking at themselves- and that’s why they lose hope and give in so easily to defeat and discouragement.”<sup>32</sup> Another significance of this paper has been well put forth by Murray J. Harris and: “what more exciting topic is there in Christian theology than the Resurrection of Christ and its many consequences? Reflection on this lofty theme- or rather this exalted Person- thrills the mind and elevates the Spirit. It broadens our spiritual horizons, prompts our devotion to God, and strengthens our motivation for Christian living.”<sup>33</sup> The Resurrection does not simply mean that Jesus is alive, but that he is alive in a certain way, a way that has particular implications for us all. He is alive not in Spirit only, but in his glorified body; alive in the fullness of his humanity. His bodily Resurrection meant the end of a long era during which death reigned over all, the reversal of a process which had been in exorable since the fall. Christ’s Resurrection signifies now and for all time the redemption of a man in the body, for sickness, pain and death.<sup>34</sup>

A further significance of the study is so that we do not ignore the reality of pain but rather confront it with the message of the Resurrection as Roland Chai puts it very well in his book, *Hope for the World: The Christian Vision*, thus, “Christian hope does not ignore the reality of pain and suffering, but confronts them in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is through the paschal mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ that Christian hope understands pain, suffering and death.”<sup>35</sup> The Old Testament ‘people of God’ trusted in the coming Messiah, whereas the New Testament ‘people of God’ put their trust in the Saviour who has come to free us from spiritual bondage through His Glorious Resurrection (Nicolaides, 2010)

Michael Green in the editor’s preface to the book, *I Believe in the Resurrection*, has stated that: “He rose from the tomb, and triumphed over death- This was the belief that turned heartbroken followers of a crucified rabbi into the courageous witnesses and martyrs of the early Church. This was the one belief that separated the followers of Jesus from the Jews and turned them into the

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<sup>31</sup> Ford Lewis Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1980), 160-161.

<sup>32</sup> R. Mabel Francis, *Filled with the Spirit ... Then What?* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, INC., 2001), 68.

<sup>33</sup> Murray J. Harris, *From Grave to Glory: Resurrection in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids. Michigan: Academie Books, 1990), xxviii.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ*, 339.

<sup>35</sup> Roland Chai, *Hope for the World: The Christian Vision* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2006), 27.



community of the Resurrection. You could imprison them, flog them, kill them, but you could not make them deny their conviction that “on the third day he rose again.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally that we will realize as Jurgen Moltmann puts it in his book *Theology of Hope*, that “it is only in following the Christ who was raised from suffering, from a god-forsaken death and from the grave that it gains an open prospect in which there is nothing more to oppress us, a view of the realm of freedom and joy. Where the bounds that mark the end of all human hopes, are broken through in the raising of the crucified one, there, faith can and must expand into hope.”<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has stressed the importance and centrality of the doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ in general and particularly from John Calvin’s theological stance. Without the Resurrection of Christ our faith and hope would all have been in vain. In the midst of challenges confronting the African church, we can hope on the Resurrection of Christ, in that because He lives so also shall we live. Through the crucifixion of Jesus on Golgotha, sin was wiped out and death smothered; through his Resurrection, virtue was restored and life raised up, to facilitate God’s power and effectiveness in us. Thus through the death and Resurrection of Christ, we find our flawless salvation. God is unquestionably self-determining and has no need for anyone and he cannot be controlled by any outside influences. God is in total control and His “created order remains within His power to do with as He pleases.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ladd, George Eldon, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*. Michael Green Series Editor (London: Holder and Stoughton, 1975), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the ground of the implications of Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>38</sup> Smit, L. (2005). “Salvation in Christ: A Calvinist Perspective,” in *Salvation in Christ: Comparative Christian Views*, ed. Roger R. Keller and Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 327–344.



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