In his insightful discussion of identity, the eminent sociologist Zygmunt Bauman refers to identity as a struggle issue. “Whenever you hear that word,” he suggests, “you can be sure that there is a battle going on. A battlefield is identity’s natural home. Identity comes to life only in the tumult of battle; it falls asleep and silent the moment the noise of the battle dies down.”¹ It “is a simultaneous struggle against dissolution and fragmentation; an intention to devour and at the same time a stout refusal to be eaten…”²

Historically, the Reformed tradition emerged through the dominant influence of John Calvin (1509–1564) during the sixteenth century Genevan Reformation at a time of religious unrest that was directed at attempts to reform the church.³ As J.D. Douglass points out, “Calvin was deeply shaped by participation during his student days in the Catholic humanist and biblical reforming movement represented by Erasmus and Lefèvre d’Etaples, as well as by the writings of Luther and Bucer, the chief reformer in Strasbourg.”⁴ During this time, the lines between the Roman Catholic Church and various reform movements hardened, with Calvin’s teaching becoming extremely influential for those in Geneva and abroad, which progressively led to the dividing

line becoming permanent. For the record, as L. Vischer makes clear, the formation of “separate Reformed churches occurred against the will and hope of the Reformers” since it was by no means their intention “to set up a new church.” On the contrary, what was aimed for was “a movement to renew the whole church according to God’s Word, but separate Reformed churches came into existence because the program of reform was rejected by the Roman church.”

The medieval church authorities resisted attempts at reform on the grounds that the authority of the church, as it was, was based on perpetuity or antiquity as enumerated by the opposing Cardinal Jacopo Sadoleto, i.e., that it was what it was because of general consent, longstanding beliefs, and beliefs enjoying universal reception. In direct

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7 Vischer, “Reformed Tradition,” 1. Vischer describes various stages in the history of the Reformed churches: The first stage involved “the struggle to introduce the new order of the Reformation: to give room to the demands of the Word of God; to replace the celebration of the mass with regular preaching and the common celebration of the Lord’s Supper; to simplify the spiritual life and the activities of the church, and so on” (8). This included, *inter alia*, the first Reformed confessions out of the need “to explain and to defend the Reformation both to the population and to the outside world, in particular to the authorities of the Empire,” in order to show “that the Reformation corresponded to the true Tradition over against the deviations in the medieval church” (8). Thereafter, another stage emerged in the mid-sixteenth-century in response to the need “to give a coherent account of the Christian faith as it was taught by the Reformed churches” (8). Several summaries of faith were penned to serve as both “the source and the criterion of the correct teaching of the church” (8). Hereafter, the rise of a Reformed Orthodoxy emerged, in the light of how Calvin’s teaching had developed a distinctive and systematic character in contrast to Luther and other Reformers, with Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536 as the obvious case in point. Following Calvin’s death, “Reformed doctrine took a more definite form” (9) as it was increasingly “organised into a coherent system” (9). Since then, numerous controversies and questions down the theological ages have enriched the original impulse of Reformed churches through new experiences, movements, horizons, and insights. In this regard, Dempsey describes Reformed churches as broadly as possible: “The Reformed family is not a single church but rather a family of Reformed churches that are historically and theologically related to the sixteenth-century Genevan reformation, whose principal teacher was the French theologian John Calvin.” See Jane Dempsey Douglass, “A Reformed Perspective,” 2. See also Cressey, “Reformed/Presbyterian Churches,” in Lossky et al (Eds), Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, 966–968.