

## Adapting Calvin's Political Ethics to Indonesian Pluralism: Enhancing Democracy and Governance

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**ABSTRACT:** John Calvin, a 16th-century Reformation theologian, provides relevant political ideas to address Indonesia's democratic issues, particularly concerning transparency, accountability, and social justice. This study analyzes Calvin's theocratic values, such as justice, moral responsibility, and leadership ethics, within the context of Indonesia's multicultural politics. To investigate the relationship between Calvin's thought and Indonesia's socio-political situation, this study employs a qualitative descriptive literature review. Specifically, this study focuses on issues such as corruption, discrimination, and public dissatisfaction with democracy's implementation. Research shows that Calvin's principles can be applied to improve the quality of democracy in Indonesia without disregarding religious pluralism, such as divine justice, the leader's responsibility to God and the people, and separating church and state functions. Calvin's values can support fair public policies, protect human rights, and strengthen the relationship between the government and society. Therefore, this study offers practical suggestions for policymakers to help create a more inclusive, fair, and honest government while increasing public trust in state institutions.

**KEYWORDS:** John Calvin, Theocracy, Political ethics, Indonesian democracy, Religious pluralism

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The political thought developed by the French theologian and reformer, John Calvin, has had a significant influence on the development of contemporary political thought (Balserak 2020). Calvin emphasized the importance of the relationship between faith and deeds, as well as how religious teachings can shape social and political order (Elungan and Tamaweol 2024a). Calvin's perspective becomes relevant to analyze in the context of modern politics in Indonesia, a country with a Muslim majority but also a high degree of religious diversity (Firdaus et al. 2024). One of the concepts put forward by Calvin is "theocracy," namely the idea that government should be based on the principles contained in the Bible (Tuininga 2017). Calvin's thoughts on the ethics of leadership and just governance remain relevant, especially in the context of developing countries such as Indonesia. The Calvinist ethic, which emphasizes morality and justice in government, can provide valuable insights for countries that frequently face challenges such as corruption, nepotism, and social injustice (Joustra and Joustra 2022). Thus, Calvin's thought can serve as one of the normative foundations for developing politics with integrity in Indonesia.

In the Indonesian context, data from a survey conducted by Indikator Politik Indonesia reveals a rather high level of dissatisfaction with the implementation of democracy. Although 47.6% of respondents expressed satisfaction with democracy, as many as 44.1% admitted they were less satisfied or even not satisfied at all. This high level of dissatisfaction, especially related to the lack of effective law enforcement and insufficient transparency in government administration (Lavinda 2021). Law enforcement that has not been optimally implemented can be seen in the selective prosecution of corruption offenders from among officials—such as law enforcers themselves—who often receive light sentences based on inconsistent mitigating or affecting considerations. This sets a precedent that officials can be "above the law," while ordinary citizens are severely punished for similar violations (Apriyanto, Pratiwi, and Sinaga 2023). This phenomenon shows that Indonesian society is not yet satisfied with the implementation of democracy. Although democracy has been carried out, there are still many unresolved issues, particularly in terms of law enforcement, transparency, and government accountability (Lavinda 2021). This study analyzes John Calvin's concept of political ethics and moral responsibility to seek solutions for improving the quality of democracy in Indonesia. Calvin's ideas emphasize the importance of ethical values in governance, and are considered relevant for combating social injustice as well as strengthening transparency and accountability in government management. This research is expected to contribute policy recommendations to promote a fairer, more transparent, and accountable system of governance in Indonesia. Previous research has discussed the concept of Calvinist politics. For example, Ronald VanderMolen in his work "Politics Calvinism" explores how the principles of Calvinism, such as the sovereignty of God, human responsibility, and God's justice, shape political views in Western societies

(VanderMolen 1969). VanderMolen points out that Calvinism has made significant contributions to ideas such as democracy, transparency, accountability, and the limitation of government power. However, this research is often limited to the more homogeneous Western context and overlooks the dynamics of countries with much greater pluralism, such as Indonesia. In the article "The Relevance of Calvin's Ethics for 21st Century Indonesia," Yahya Wijaya discusses how Calvin's ethics can serve as a foundation for fair and honest business practices, as well as the importance of social welfare in economic activities (Tampenawas 2020). The emphasis on honesty and justice is highly relevant in Indonesia's pluralistic society, where interactions among groups of different religions and cultures require a strong ethical foundation to prevent conflict and promote cooperation. However, the research only focuses on the application of Calvinist ethics in social and economic contexts, with little emphasis on the political aspect. This journal does not explicitly discuss Calvin's political views within the framework of Indonesian politics. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how Calvin's ideas can be used to enhance the quality of Indonesian democracy, particularly in terms of transparency, accountability, and social justice.

Alfons Renaldo Tampenawas, in his writing, "Calvin's Ecclesiological Perspective on Practical Politics in Church Ministry," discusses Calvin's ecclesiological view on practical politics within church ministry, highlighting the roles of church and state in worldly life as well as the relationship between the two (Tampenawas 2020). However, this study does not specifically link Calvin's political views with the dynamics of modern Indonesian politics. The article "John Calvin's Views on the Relationship between Church and Politics" discusses Calvin's perspective on the relationship between the church and politics, including the separation between the two and their respective roles in society. This study employs a historical-critical approach by analyzing Calvin's works and historical context (Elungan and Tamaweol 2024b). However, this study does not address the practical implementation of Calvin's views in the context of modern politics, especially in Indonesia.

The novelty of this research lies in its effort to integrate Calvin's concepts of ethics and morality in politics with the realities of modern Indonesian politics. This study not only examines Calvin's theories but also connects them to current issues, such as arbitrary arrests and dissatisfaction with the practice of democracy. The research hopes to offer a new perspective on how Calvin's moral and ethical values can improve the relationship between the state and its citizens by analyzing data on public dissatisfaction with these practices. In addition, this study will provide policy recommendations based on Calvinist ethical principles to build a more transparent and accountable system of governance. Considering the religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia, interfaith dialogue becomes an important aspect in this context. It is hoped that this research will enhance our understanding of the complex social and political dynamics in Indonesia and improve the quality of the relationship between religion and politics in this multicultural country. The main objective of this research is to examine how John Calvin's political thought can be applied in Indonesia, with a particular emphasis on issues of democracy and law enforcement. This study also explores the ethical values contained in Calvin's ideas and offers policy recommendations that could enhance democracy and the protection of human rights in Indonesia. It is hoped that this research will not only increase academic knowledge about Calvin's political thought, but also provide practical guidance for activists and policymakers in Indonesia to create a better and more just political environment and to strengthen public trust in government institutions.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative methodology. The aim is to examine the political thought of John Calvin. By using this technique, the researcher can focus on the meaning and interpretation of the data collected, which allows the researcher to learn more about social and political phenomena (Creswell and Creswell 2017). Creswell states that the purpose of descriptive qualitative research is to provide an in-depth understanding of an event so that researchers can comprehend its context and dynamics (Creswell and Creswell 2017). In situations like this, Calvin's ideas will be viewed from the perspective of contemporary Indonesian society and politics. Data collection was carried out by studying relevant literature on Calvin's political thought, as well as previous studies on the application of ethical values in a political context. Books, journal articles, and other documents are an essential part of this literature review to examine Calvin's political thought and its implications for politics in Indonesia. Moleong states that literature review is an important component of qualitative research because it provides a strong theoretical foundation and helps researchers understand the broader context of the topic they are studying (Moleong 2018). This research is also expected to help in understanding the relationship between religion and politics by using a descriptive qualitative method. In addition, this technique allows researchers to identify the main themes that emerge from data analysis and provide deeper insights into how Calvin's philosophy can be applied to address the challenges faced by the practice of democracy in Indonesia.

### **III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

In this section, the author will discuss John Calvin's political thought, as well as how the ethical and moral values he taught can help address issues within Indonesia's democratic system. The author will specifically examine how Calvin's principles can be applied to Indonesian politics and how they can help create a government system that is more transparent, accountable, and just.

**1. Understanding the Concept of Calvinist Theocracy and Its Relevance to Indonesia :** John Calvin had the concept of "theocracy," which argued that biblical principles should be the foundation of government (John Calvin 1960). Calvin's thoughts on social justice and the moral responsibility of leaders can be applied in countries facing political and social challenges, including Indonesia, even though he lived in the 16th century. His principles can be implemented in Indonesia's plural society and are needed so that the government can act with integrity, respect justice, and uphold the law based on mutually agreed moral values. According to John Calvin, the concept of theocracy is based on the belief that God is the supreme ruler over all aspects of life, including matters of the state (John Calvin 1960). Calvin states in the Institutes of the Christian Religion that worldly government should be based on the will of God, and that every leader must govern in accordance with the principles of God's law and justice (John Calvin 1960). Calvin believes that the state and the church should support each other to ensure that society lives a moral and ethical life in accordance with Christian teachings, even though the two operate separately (John Calvin 1960). Through Calvinist theocracy, the government is not run entirely by priests or church leaders. Instead, Christian values must serve as the foundation of political actions and laws (Balserak 2020).

According to Calvin, the state must support and protect the church, while the church upholds the morality and ethics of society (John Calvin 1960). Calvin believed that the law of God as stated in the Bible can serve as a legitimate standard for societal life, and he emphasized the importance of state leaders acting as servants of God who are accountable before Him (John Calvin 1960). Calvin believed that violating divine law is not only an individual mistake but also threatens the common welfare of society. Therefore, Calvin stated that a good national leader must pay attention to both the spiritual and physical well-being of the people (John Calvin 1960).

Calvin's theocracy was truly implemented in Geneva, where he made significant changes to social and religious life. Calvin worked with the government of Geneva to carry out moral reforms, such as controlling public behavior and restricting things considered contrary to Christian beliefs (Watt 2020). This city became a model for other Christian nations to implement civil laws based on biblical principles, such as the prohibition of gambling, restrictions on alcohol, and the obligation to attend worship services (Watt 2020). The officials of Geneva, including the courts and the consistory (church body), worked together to maintain high moral standards. Calvin used this example to demonstrate that a society governed by God's law can produce harmonious and just public life (Magyar 2022).

Calvin did not advocate for a complete merger between church authority and the state. He understood that there still needed to be a separation of functions so that the church would not dominate state affairs, or vice versa. (Littlejohn 2017). Calvin believes that although the two institutions have different roles, they can work together for the good of society (VanDrunen 2020). In his writing, Calvin states that civil government has the right to uphold God's law, but should not interfere in the doctrinal or spiritual matters of the church. Thus, these two institutions can continue to operate independently while still strengthening each other. (Calvin 1960). Although John Calvin's theocracy emerged in the European context during the 16th century, this concept can still provide important contributions to state life in Indonesia. Calvin's principle, which emphasizes that the government is accountable to God and that civil law must be in harmony with religious moral values, aligns with Pancasila, particularly the first principle, "Belief in the One and Only God." In this regard, religious values can serve as a moral foundation for shaping public policies that prioritize justice, welfare, and social harmony without making Indonesia a religious state (Fogg 2016).

The author observes that one of the issues that needs to be considered in applying Calvinist thought in Indonesia is religious pluralism and the secular system within modern democracy. John Rawls in Political Liberalism reminds us that in a pluralistic society, the principles of justice must be based on mutual agreement, not on the values of any particular religion. If Calvin's political principles are applied explicitly, it will lead to public unrest as policies will tend to favor only a certain religion, which may ultimately result in injustice for other groups (Rawls 1993). Calvin emphasizes that leaders with morality who act as servants of God are essential for upholding justice and the welfare of society. Corruption, social injustice, and moral disintegration in government are current issues in Indonesia. Calvin advocates for leadership rooted in religious principles to build a cleaner

and more responsive system of governance that addresses the needs of the people (Lee 2023). This is in line with the aims of Pancasila, which emphasizes ethics in governing the country (Setyawan 2023). Calvin's principles regarding the complementary relationship between the state and the church, in which the state supports religious values without interfering in doctrine, are also relevant to the context of religious pluralism in Indonesia. This approach can be applied to formulate public policies that protect religious freedom and respect diversity in multicultural countries like Indonesia. Therefore, religious teachings can shape the nation's character without sacrificing interfaith tolerance (Anto, Rahmawati, and Martiarini 2023).

However, not all thinkers agree; among them, Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* acknowledges that Calvinist ethics can play a role in the development of modern politics, but he also criticizes that the doctrine of predestination in Calvinism can lead to political fatalism, where society tends to accept injustice as part of God's will (Weber 2002). Therefore, it is necessary to maintain a balance between the concept of ethics and Calvin's doctrine of predestination when applying Calvin's political principles, especially the part that emphasizes the sovereignty of God, so as to avoid negative impacts—namely, the risk of low public political participation, as people may become passive in the face of unjust policies. In addition, Calvin's belief that civil law should reflect the justice and truth of God is another aspect of Calvin's theocracy (Pangaribuan 2023). This can be achieved in Indonesia through law enforcement based on moral values to combat social inequality and human rights violations (Hakim and Kurniawan 2021). For example, Calvin's principles regarding divine justice can contribute to laws that support social justice and protection for vulnerable groups. (Stephens 1992). Nevertheless, the implementation of Calvinist theocracy in Indonesia must be adapted to the condition of Indonesian society, which is pluralistic and composed of various religions. It is impossible to directly adopt the system established by Calvin in Geneva, where religion and culture were homogeneous. However, Calvin's spirit of making religious values the moral foundation of the state remains relevant for building Indonesia as a just, dignified, and prosperous nation while respecting religious pluralism.

Thus, Calvin emphasized a theocracy that did not place the power of the church above the state, but rather a collaboration based on Biblical values. Calvin's theocracy had long-term implications for political thought in the West, particularly in the development of the concept of the Christian state, which influenced Reformed political theology (García-Alonso 2021). Later Reformed thinkers, such as Abraham Kuyper, developed the concept of sphere sovereignty, in which each area of life has its own authority recognized by God (Wood Jr. 2015). In other words, Calvin's concept of theocracy paved the way for the development of political theory that acknowledges God's role in all aspects of human life, while also providing a strong moral foundation for the state's role in building a just and moral society (García-Alonso 2021).

**2. Ethical Values in Calvin's Thought: Application to Political Practice in Indonesia :** John Calvin placed ethics as the foundation for every person and society, including politics. Calvin argued that God's sovereignty encompasses all aspects of life, including government. Political leaders must carry out their duties with a fear of God, integrity, and a high moral responsibility, according to this principle. Justice, order, and the welfare of society are the goals of government, according to Calvin (Calvin 1960). In the Indonesian context, these values are related to the principle of "Belief in One Supreme God" contained in Pancasila, which places religion as the moral foundation of society. Calvin's ethics on justice emphasize the importance of treating all citizens equally. Calvin opposed any form of oppression or discrimination, which he referred to as violations of God's law. This relates to issues in Indonesia such as corruption, nepotism, and social inequality. By implementing political practices that uphold justice according to Calvin's values, it is possible to build a government structure that is clean and focused on the welfare of the people. A practical example is the implementation of policies that protect the rights of marginalized communities and minority groups (Hopfl 1994). Calvin also emphasized the importance of honesty and transparency as essential aspects of leadership. He believed that leaders are representatives of God on earth, and they must behave properly and avoid abusing their power. These values can be applied in Indonesian political practices, particularly in managing the state budget, procuring goods and services, and other public policies. Public trust in the government will increase with honesty in political decision-making; this is in line with the principles of Pancasila democracy (B Gordon 2009).

Another value of Calvinist theology related to political practices in Indonesia is social responsibility. Calvin believed that the government should protect the poor, orphans, and those in need. In Indonesia, this idea can be implemented through programs focused on poverty alleviation, inclusive access to education, and equitable healthcare. These efforts not only enhance the well-being of society but also strengthen national unity within the context of diversity (Steinmetz 1988). Calvin also emphasized that leaders must be accountable before God and the people. He believed that political leaders should realize that their power comes from God and must be used



to help others, not for their own personal interests (Turnbull 2022). To apply these values in Indonesia, the government can strengthen accountability mechanisms such as independent audits, eradicating corruption, and implementing a transparent electoral system. Therefore, political practices that adopt Calvinist principles will contribute to forming a more moral and efficient government. To apply Calvin's ethical values in Indonesian political practice, the differences in religion and culture present in Indonesia must be taken into account. Calvin's concepts differ from those of Indonesia's multicultural society, but universal principles such as justice, honesty, responsibility, and protection of vulnerable groups can be incorporated into the Indonesian political system. By formulating public policy based on ethics, Indonesia can build a more moral and just political order without undermining pluralism.

**3. The Role of Calvin's Thought in Enhancing Government Transparency and Accountability :** John Calvin emphasized that the government is an institution established by God to uphold justice and serve society (Calvin 1960). This idea shows that leaders must be accountable to God and the people by carrying out their duties honestly and fairly. Calvin believed that leaders are not absolute rulers. Instead, they are servants of God who must act with honesty and justice. These principles are relevant in Indonesia to encourage a government that is open to public oversight and carries out its functions without conflicts of interest.

To realize government transparency in accordance with Calvinist values, a system can be used that allows Indonesian citizens to openly access information related to the management of public resources and the decision-making process. This includes implementing policies that are morally accountable, open procurement processes, and clear financial reports. From Calvin's perspective on the sovereignty of God, every political decision must reflect God's justice, so that leaders are accountable not only to their people but also to God, who is the ultimate source of authority (Van Wyk 2018). This method encourages the government to involve the community as partners in policymaking in a more proactive manner. Calvinism also believes in accountability, which means that political leaders must be responsible for their actions both to society and to God on a horizontal level. Institutions such as the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK) and the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) can be strengthened to implement these principles in Indonesia. Gordon (2011) emphasizes that Calvin's philosophy highlights the importance of control mechanisms to prevent the unauthorized use of power. Indonesia can strengthen more efficient governance focused on the people's welfare by implementing accountability principles based on Calvinist values (Bruce Gordon 2009).

**4. The Challenges of Indonesian Pluralism and the Implementation of Calvin's Thought in a Multicultural Context :** Due to the diversity of religions, cultures, and ethnicities in Indonesia, multiculturalism presents a significant challenge in maintaining social justice and harmony. John Calvin's thoughts on the relationship between church and state are highly relevant in this context. Calvin argued that the state should support religious principles, but must not dominate or interfere with specific theological doctrines. This concept allows for the creation of a public space that accepts and respects various religious beliefs without dictating a particular religious system. Calvin's ideas can be applied in the Indonesian context, where Pancasila establishes unity in diversity and ensures that laws and policies respect plurality and promote justice for all social groups (Bruce Gordon 2009).

Calvin's thoughts on divine justice emphasize that everyone must be treated fairly before the law, regardless of their beliefs (Calvin 1960). This is important for Indonesia, where discrimination is often experienced by religious and ethnic minority groups. Calvin also emphasized the importance of protecting the weak and marginalized; this can be applied as a policy in Indonesia that supports equality of rights and opportunities. For example, the implementation of Calvin's doctrine can help shape policies that protect the rights of the majority group while providing opportunities for minorities to live and worship independently (McGrath 1990). However, the biggest challenge in applying Calvin's thought in a multicultural context is adapting his principles while taking into account the existing differences in Indonesia. Compared to Indonesia's multicultural society, Calvin lived in a more culturally and religiously homogeneous community. Therefore, principles such as justice, responsibility, and respect for God's authority must be applied contextually and flexibly. For example, Calvin's principles can be implemented in governance to encourage more inclusive interfaith dialogue and to formulate policies based on universal values that can be accepted by all segments of society (Steinmetz 1988).

### **5. Policy Recommendations Based on Calvinist Ethics to Strengthen Democracy and Law Enforcement**

According to Calvin's thoughts, here are some policy suggestions that can be implemented to improve democracy and law enforcement in Indonesia:

- ✚ Implementation of transparency in decision-making. Policies that require transparency in every political decision, especially those related to the management of state resources and budgets.
- ✚ Increasing the accountability of leaders, by involving civil society in the oversight process, so that government officials can be held responsible for the policies they make.
- ✚ Ensuring that law enforcement is carried out fairly without discrimination based on social status, religion, or ethnicity.
- ✚ Providing ethics education to prospective political leaders, emphasizing the importance of making wise decisions for the good of the people.

**6. Limitations and the Need for Further Study :** The author has attempted to investigate the relevance of John Calvin's political thought in the context of Indonesian politics; however, there are several limitations. First, this study relies on a descriptive qualitative method based on literature, so the findings cannot be widely generalized. In addition, the historical and cultural gap between 16th-century European nations and 21st-century Indonesia poses a significant obstacle for the author in implementing Calvin's views and principles in contemporary Indonesian politics. Considering that Indonesia is a pluralistic country with diverse religions, applying Calvin's principles requires dynamic adjustments, especially in terms of respecting religious and cultural pluralism. Therefore, this study has not yet been able to fully explore the application of Calvin's more specific principles in practical mechanisms within Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious political system. Therefore, this research requires further studies to deepen the understanding of how Calvin's principles can be adapted to Indonesia's plural context. Empirical studies, such as surveys or interviews with political actors and civil society, could provide deeper insights into the application of Calvinist values in daily political practice. In addition, further research could also compare Calvin's thought with other political theories relevant to Indonesia, such as Islamic political theory or liberal democracy, in order to create a more comprehensive normative framework. Thus, subsequent studies are expected to offer more concrete and contextual policy recommendations for Indonesia.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Although John Calvin's political thought was rooted in the 16th-century European context, his ideas remain relevant for addressing social and political issues in Indonesia today. Calvin emphasized that governments must uphold justice, transparency, and moral responsibility as a reflection of God's sovereignty. In Indonesia, Calvin's principles can serve as inspiration for building a more ethical and accountable government. This perspective is important for improving governmental structures and strengthening the relationship between the government and society on the basis of integrity and trust. The normative framework provided by Calvin's concept of theocracy allows the government to stand on universal moral values without imposing any particular religious belief. In this respect, Calvin's teachings align with the principles contained in Pancasila, especially the first principle, "Belief in the One and Only God," which emphasizes the importance of religion as a moral foundation for national life. Calvin firmly distinguished the roles of church and state, yet he still emphasized cooperation to ensure an ethical society. This approach can be used to formulate policies in Indonesia that respect religious diversity and support inclusive social justice.

There is a strong basis for increasing government transparency and accountability through Calvinist ethical principles, such as justice, honesty, and protection of vulnerable groups. It is possible to apply these principles in real life by strengthening anti-corruption institutions, reforming bureaucracy, and implementing clearer public oversight systems. Calvin also emphasized that leaders are servants of God and are responsible for serving the people, not for pursuing their own personal interests. This is highly relevant to issues in Indonesia such as nepotism and abuse of power. This approach allows the government to build clean governance, which in turn increases public trust in the government. However, to apply Calvin's principles in Indonesia, we need to take the context into account. Unlike Geneva in the 16th century, Calvin's ideas cannot be implemented directly in Indonesia due to its multicultural and religious society. To ensure that universal values such as justice and honesty can be accepted by everyone, without disregarding differences, a wise adaptation is required. Indonesia has the ability to build a more moral political system that respects religious and cultural pluralism by incorporating Calvin's ethical values into public policy. On the other hand, some criticisms of the application of Calvin's thought in Indonesian politics also need to be considered. Calvin's theocratic approach emphasizes the involvement of religion in government, which, in the context of modern democracy, can pose challenges in maintaining pluralism and the neutrality of the state. Thinkers such as John Rawls and John Locke emphasize that politics based on a single religious system can potentially restrict individual freedoms and create inequality in the treatment of other religious groups.

Therefore, although Calvin's ethical principles can contribute to Indonesian politics, their application must be carried out with a more adaptive and flexible approach in order to remain in line with the principles of democracy and pluralism. In the end, John Calvin's political theory offers an important perspective on the development of Indonesian politics. Indonesia has the ability to improve governance, enhance the quality of democracy, and reduce social injustice by incorporating Calvin's ethical and moral values. This study shows that, although Calvin's principles are rooted in sixteenth-century theology, they remain relevant and can be adapted to address the challenges that arise in the present era. As a result, the application of Calvin's political ethics not only helps increase public trust in the government, but also contributes to building a more just, transparent, and accountable government.

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