The Appeal of Calvinism

There is a certain logic to predestination; if one believes in an omnipotent God, then certainly God is aware of one's unalterable future and one's past.

There is also the sense of an intense personal relationship with God that perhaps was lacking for many Catholics. With the emphasis on communal celebrations and ceremonies, Catholicism as practiced in the 17th century seems very much a social religion, whereas Calvinism seems quite personal. Think of the fact that Protestant/Puritan translations of the Bible refer to God as "Thee" and "Thou"—normally informal terms of address reserved for family members ("you" being used when referring to a group of people, a social superior, or a stranger).

Finally, communities of Calvinists, often tested by adversity (think of the pilgrims) seem to have formed intense social bonds in their generally isolated islands of "the Godly" among the hordes of the ungodly.

Calvinism appealed to the growing merchant class because it offered ideas that suited them. The concept of predestination holds the idea of God's blessing on hard-working, civic minded people—it was more of an urban religion. Calvin said that all vocations have merit with God—thus being involved in making money was not sinful nor did it displease God. However, a person has the responsibility to use their wealth for the betterment of the community. Showing off of wealth is considered sinful. Calvinism also carries the concept of correcting injustices—in an age where the middle class especially is seeking political and economic power, this religion demands that people take action against injustice—even injustice of a monarch—thus one sees the Calvinist influence in the Puritans who will cut off King Charles I's head.

Calvinism has been seen as a major influence in capitalism (Weber Thesis) and in the growth of democracy. Lutheranism, maybe due to Luther's stand with the nobles, is more of an acceptance of the status quo where Calvinism is based more on taking action where action is needed.
Calvinism Today

As straight Calvinists who regard John Calvin as the direct founder, there is probably not such a specific group today. However, on the Protestant side, both Baptists and Presbyterians derive straight from the Calvinist tradition, retaining many of the doctrines and features of the Calvinists.

For example, the Baptist doctrine of "once saved, always saved" derives directly from the Calvinist doctrine of the elect and "the persistence of the saints," the idea that if God has chosen us for salvation, he surely would not then send us to hell, and the Baptist emphasis on the necessity of a personal, emotional conversion, hopefully before the age of 12, derives directly from the Calvinist belief in the conversion experience as the culminating sign that God had chosen one to be among the elect.

The Presbyterian organization of authority vested in councils or synods of elders or presbyters derives from Calvinist church organization and the Presbyterian doctrine that God has foreknowledge of who will be saved and who will not is their modern adaptation of predestination. Plus the emphasis of both the Baptists and the Presbyterians that the Eucharist is not a sacerdotal event; it is not a supernatural spiritual experience, but simply a memorial service called the Lord's Supper, is straight from Zwingli and Calvin.

And, as we know, the Jansenists were the Roman Catholic version of Calvinism, but instead of claiming John Calvin as their inspiration, they looked to the predestination theology of St. Augustine.