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SCRIPTURE AS WORD OF GOD IN THE TEACHING OF
JOHN CALVIN

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to investigate the relationship, as Calvin saw it, between the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ, and the written Word of the Scriptures. The central thrust of the argument is that, for Calvin, the concept Word of God is constant in both these instances. Scripture is seen to be, from beginning to end, a witness to the creative and redemptive work of God in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true and substantial Word of God. Scripture is the vehicle by means of which Our Lord has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind.

In the first three chapters of the thesis I trace God's dealings with mankind from the Creation until after the Fall, examining why it is that man fails to find God in His works, and showing how it is that man is totally culpable for his actions. There follow four chapters on Calvin's doctrine of Scripture, showing the necessity of the Scriptures in the salvation of mankind, and how as a source of indisputable truth they are never called in question by Calvin. In chapter eight I examine Calvin's concept of Scripture as God's Word, viewing the issue in terms of the general concept of God's dealings with men. Apart from the conclusion, the final three chapters are concerned with the Person and work of Jesus Christ and the relationship of the Scriptures to Him.

It is my contention that when Calvin speaks of God's Word, he does not differentiate it from the canonical Scriptures. Yet if asked to say what it is, he would not simply point to the words written on the page. It is "the everlasting Wisdom, residing with God, from which both all oracles and all prophecies go forth." By "the everlasting Wisdom" in this context, he means Jesus Christ, by whose

Spirit, he says, the ancient prophets spoke. Thus Christ, the Word, by whom all things were created (John 1:1), is the Author of the written Word, by which the eternal Word is known.

ABBREVIATIONS

- C.R. Corpus Reformationum. This refers to Calvini Opera Omnia, ed. W. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, Brunswick, 1863 ff.
- C.T.S. Calvin Translation Society, Edinburgh, 1843 ff.
- L.C.C. Library of Christian Classics. This refers to volumes XX and XXI, being the English translation of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, edited by John T. McNeill, Philadelphia, 1973.
- O.S. Opera Selecta. This refers to Calvini Opera Selecta, ed. Barth and Niesel, Munich, 1926 ff.
- S.J.T. Scottish Journal of Theology.
- W.A. D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe Weimar, 1883 ff.

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CHAPTER 1

THE REVELATION OF THE CREATOR

Man's self-knowledge can never be isolated from his knowledge of God.

This is the basic meaning of the opening sentence of each edition of the Institutio Christianae religionis, John Calvin's major theological treatise.

The first publication of 1536 had begun with the words: "Well-nigh the whole of sacred doctrine (sacra doctrina) consists in these two parts, the knowledge of God and of ourselves", (O.S.I. p.37). Three years later the revised edition carries a significant change; sacra doctrina is omitted in favour of sapientia nostra, and the sentence is expanded:

"Well-nigh the whole sum of that of our wisdom which is worth calling genuine and substantial wisdom, consists in these two parts, the knowledge of God and of ourselves", (C.R.I. 279).

Why the substitution of sapientia nostra for sacra doctrina ? To begin with, sapientia nostra is a personal term. In the first edition, Calvin's aim was to instruct in the elementary principles of the faith those who, although hungering and thirsting after Christ, had no genuine knowledge of him. "The Institutio does not wish to deal with theology in any abstract manner but as the learning that will teach Christians intellectually and practically what it means to be a believer".⁽¹⁾ Furthermore, if well-nigh the whole of sacra doctrina consists in these two parts, the knowledge of God and of ourselves, it might well be asked: Is there then a profana doctrina which can demand a place alongside sacra doctrina ? Is sacra doctrina only one branch of doctrina ?

(1) T.H.L.Parker, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God", p.15.

During the sixteenth century Christian theology, sacra doctrina, no longer held what had been virtually a monopoly. Platonism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism, Stoicism were all revived and competed with sacra doctrina. The assumption, for many, was that Christian theology was either unnecessary, or that it was merely one philosophy among others, a partial system that needed to be augmented from another source. Many of the ancient forms were synthesised with Christianity. Calvin therefore changes the term to the comprehensive sapientia.

Wisdom has two parts, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. Thus wisdom is knowledge. Yet not any sort of knowledge, but only that whose objects are God and the knower himself. "Man cannot truly know himself if he ignores the light of God's revelation, which falls over his life, and which unveils the true nature of man, of actual, concrete man", says Dr. Berkouwer.⁽¹⁾ And, indeed, this is the starting-point of Calvin's theology, that "all men are born and live to the end that they may know God", (Institutio I.iii 3).

In the definitive edition of the Institutio, which is the 1559 edition, Calvin re-arranged his work. The concept of the knowledge of God predominates. Divided into four books, the first two deal with the knowledge of God under the titles De cognitione Dei creatoris and De cognitione Dei redemptoris. In the following discussion we are concerned with De cognitione Dei creatoris.

(1) G.C. Berkouwer, "Man: the image of God", p.21.

Wisdom consists in the knowledge of God and of ourselves. This means, first, that there exists a God to know and that the knowledge of him is relevant and possible. Again, if it is not possible to know one's self without knowing God, the knowledge of God must be relevant to man. It is not until we know God that we have a standard other than human to measure ourselves by; when we know God we understand what we should be and how far short we fall.

"God", says Calvin, "cannot be comprehended by us except as far as he accommodates (attemperat) himself to our standard".⁽¹⁾ Such a statement points to a gap between God and man which can only be bridged by God descending in some way to meet the limitations of human nature.⁽²⁾ Man will never be able to bridge the gap by himself. Our thoughts of God fall short, and must always fall short, of what God is. There is a necessary distinction, then, in Calvin's thought, between what God is in the human mind, i.e. how the human mind conceives him, and what he is in himself.

(1) Comm. Ex. 9: 3,4. "For since he is in himself incomprehensible, he assumes, when he wishes to manifest himself to men, those marks by which he may be known", Comm. Gen. 3:8. "God in his greatness can by no means be fully comprehended by our minds..... there are certain limits within which men ought to confine themselves, in as much as God accommodates (attemperat) to our measure what he testifies of himself", Comm. Rom. 1:19. "He accommodates (attemperat) himself to our capacity in addressing us", Comm. 1 Cor. 2:7.

(2) "It was necessary that he should assume a visible form, that he might be seen by Moses not as he was in his essence but as the infirmity of the human mind could comprehend. For thus we believe that God, as often as he appeared of old to the holy patriarchs, descended in some way (descendisse quodammodo) from his loftiness, that he might reveal himself as far as was useful and as far as their comprehension would admit", Comm. Ex. 3:2.

What Calvin says about our inability to conceive God (i.e. to form a concept of him which is clear, distinct, and constitutive) may seem odd when one thinks of the appeal to our concept of God which is made by those who use the ontological argument for his existence. For that argument seems to rest upon our supposed ability to conceive God clearly and distinctly. In fact, however, Calvin could have claimed some support from Anselm. For Anselm says that, as well as thinking of God as that than which a greater cannot be thought, it is also possible to think of him as that which is greater than can be thought⁽¹⁾. We can in a sense think that there is that which is ineffable and inconceivable even though we cannot say what it is⁽²⁾. Thus Anselm distinguishes God in so far as we are able to think him from God as surpassing thought, in a way not unlike Calvin, who distinguishes God in his essence (of whom we must believe that he is infinite, personal, etc., without being able to conceive how he can be these things) from God as he is in the mind, represented by a complex and imperfect body of imagery⁽³⁾. The difference is that Anselm thinks that the various elements of the concept of God in the mind are coherent, and therefore, for him, the concept is constitutive.

(1) Proslogion, xv; ED. M.J. Charlesworth, p.136.

(2) Reply to Gaunilo, ix; Charlesworth, pp. 187-9.

(3) INST. I.V 12: "For each man's mind is like a labyrinth, so that it is no wonder that individual nations were drawn aside into various falsehoods; and not only this - but individual men, almost, had their own gods."

The essence of God is unknown and inaccessible to us. Here lies the chief error of the schoolmen and of the philosophers, who discuss the being of God apart from the revelation of his will. "Those, therefore, who in considering this question propose to inquire what the essence of God is (quid sit Deus) only trifle with frigid speculations - it being much more important for us to know what kind of being (qualis sit) God is, and what things are agreeable to his nature".⁽¹⁾

It is the work, power, activity, or will of God rather than his being or essence that we know, and then only in so far as it is directed toward us:

"For God, otherwise invisible (as we have already said), clothes himself, so to speak, in the image of the world (mundi imaginem quodammodo induit), in which he presents himself to our observation..... Therefore as soon as the name of God sounds in our ears or a thought of him suggests itself, let us clothe him with this most beautiful attire; finally, let the world be our school, if we desire rightly to know God," (Comm. Gen. "Argument").

"Whence we conclude this to be the right way and the best method of seeking God: not with presumptuous curiosity to attempt an examination of his essence, which is rather to be adored than too minutely investigated; but to contemplate him in his works, in which he approaches and familiarises, and in some measure communicate^s himself to us," (INST. I v. 9).

(1) INST. I.ii.2. "God appeared under a visible form to his servant: could Ezekiel on that account do as scholastic theologians do - philosophise with subtlety concerning God's essence and know no end or moderation in their dispute! By no means, but he restrained himself within fixed bounds," Comm. Ezek. 1: 25, 26.
In a letter sent "familiariter inter nos" to Bullinger, January, 1552, he finds Zwingli at fault for his "knotted paradoxes" in the work De Providentia (C. B. XIV. 253).

"His essence is indeed incomprehensible, so that his divinity is not to be perceived by the human senses, but on each of his works he has inscribed his glory in characters so clear, unequivocal, and striking that the most illiterate and stupid cannot exculpate themselves by the plea of ignorance", (INST. I v. 1).

"Although he is himself invisible, in a manner he becomes visible to us in his works", (Comm. Heb. 11:3).

The knowledge of God the Creator corresponds to the self-revelation of the Creator in his creation. God reveals himself in order that men may reach the goal of the Christian life, the knowledge of himself. Without his self-revelation, knowledge of him is impossible. "Nec enim arbitrato hominum fingendus est Deus," says Calvin, commenting on Isaiah 52 : 6, "sed ita comprehendendus ut sese nobis declarat." -"God is not to be fabricated by the determination of men, but is to be comprehended as he declares himself to us."

What, then, does God reveal of himself to us in his self-revelation ? In the Institutio of 1536 Calvin teaches, in one paragraph only, what should be known of God : "He is infinite wisdom, justice, goodness, mercy, truth, virtue and life : so that there is in no sense any other wisdom, justice, goodness, mercy, truth, virtue and life (Baruch 3: 12-14; James 1:17). And wherever a particle of these perfections appears it proceeds from God (Proverbs 16 : 4). Second, all things which are in heaven and earth were created for his glory (Psalm 14-8: 1-14; Daniel 3:59-63). And so it is rightly due to him, that every one according to the law of his nature should serve him,

consider his dominion, submit to his majesty, and, by obeying him, recognize him as Lord and King (Romans 1:20). In the third place, he himself is a just judge, and will execute stern vengeance upon those who depart from his precepts, who fail to submit in all things to do his will, and who think, say or do other things than those which pertain to his glory (Psalm 7: 9-11; Romans 2: 1-16). In the fourth place, he is compassionate and gentle and ready to receive with kindness the poor and wretched who seek refuge in his benignity, and who place themselves in his trust. He is ready to spare and forgive, if any ask pardon from him; he will succour and aid, those who implore his assistance; he will save those who put and make fast their trust in him (Psalm 103: 3-4, 8-11; Isaiah 55: 6; Psalm 25 : 6-11 and 85: 5-7, 10)," transl. W.G. Hards from his "A Critical Translation and Evaluation of the 1536 edition of Calvin's Institutes," 1955.

From the 1539 edition we further discover that: To know God is to know, not only that there is one God, to be worshipped and honoured by all, but also to know that he is the spring of all truth, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy, power, and holiness, so that we must pray to him for these gifts and recognise and praise him as the Giver, (C.R.I, pp. 279-82).

The stress is on faith. It is a duty to believe⁽¹⁾ that the representations

(1) "All right knowledge of God is born of obedience," says Calvin at Inst. I.vi.2.

of God which he has vouchsafed to us are not inadequate. We ought not only to think of God as Creator⁽¹⁾, but to live, to pray, and to feel, as if God were our Creator. The practical adequacy of our analogical language about God is, and can only be, an affirmation of practical faith.

If God is inconceivable, how can we believe in him? Calvin would reply that we can believe that something is the case without being able to conceive how it can be the case. And this is precisely the situation in which faith finds itself. Calvin stands for continuity between things human and things divine. God mercifully attaches us to himself by engaging our human thoughts and affections. We must remain content with the belief that we have that knowledge of God which is best adapted to our wants and training. How far that knowledge represents God as he is, we know not, and we have no need to know.

Immediately following the paragraph concerning what should be known of God (1536 Institutio) we come to "the knowledge of ourselves". This section consists in a brief exposition of the doctrine of man. Adam, our common father, "was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1: 26-27), that is, he was endowed with wisdom, righteousness, and holiness, and by means of these gifts of grace, he thus cleaved to God, so that he would have lived in him forever, had he remained in this integrity of nature

(1) And as Creator, also as Father.

which he had received from God. But as soon as he fell into sin (Genesis 3) this image and likeness of God was erased and obliterated (inducta et oblitterata est), that is, he lost all the gifts of divine grace, by means of which he could have been led into the way of life. Furthermore, he was far separated from God, and was made a complete stranger, " (C.R.I, pp. 27-8). This condition was not peculiar to Adam, it also "fell upon us who are his seed and posterity. Therefore, as all of us are descended from Adam, we are all ignorant and deprived of God, perverse, corrupt and destitute of all good." The notitia nostri, therefore, is the knowledge primarily of our sinfulness. But this knowledge is not an end in itself; its purpose is to drive us to seek forgiveness in Christ our Lord. We must seek another way of salvation than through the righteousness of our works. And this way is the remission of our sins.

The light of God's revelation reveals not only guilt, but also grace, as Calvin points out in a citation from St. Bernard, (INST. III.ii.25): "Man has been made like unto vanity. Man has been reduced to nothing. Man is nought. Yet how can he whom God magnifies be utterly nothing? How can he upon whom God has set his heart be nothing? Brethren, let us take heart again. Even if we are nothing in our own hearts, perchance something of us may be hidden in the heart of God. O Father of mercies. O Father of the miserable. How canst thou set thy heart upon us. For where thy treasure is thine heart is also. But how are we thy treasure if we are nothing?" Calvin is concerned with the two-fold portrayal of man, in his guilt and in the grace of God. How should man truly know himself without

this revelation ? How can something which has its basis in God's grace be wholly destroyed ?

I must disagree with the view that for Calvin sin is an utter and complete separation from God.⁽¹⁾ It takes place, as Dr. Dowey rightly points out⁽²⁾, "in the presence of God and even at its worst finally redounds to his glorification by means of the condemnation of the lost, (see, for example, INST. III.xxiv. 14).... If sin caused an utterly negative relation between God and the creature, the result would be autonomy: man would no longer be mere man, and Satan would be a second God. But all revolt against God occurs both within the divine omnipotence and within the realm of creaturely responsibility which is based on knowledge."

(1) W.G. Hards, "A Critical Translation and Evaluation of the Nucleus of the 1536 edition of Calvin's Institutes," as appears in Dillenberger, "John Calvin - selections from his writings," p.268.

(2) E.A. Dowey, Jr. "The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology", 2nd Edit. p. 22.

CHAPTER 2

THE DOCTRINE OF THE IMAGO DEI

For Calvin there is, as we have seen, a very close bond between self-knowledge and the knowledge of God. It would be foolish to try to dissolve this bond, for every view of man which sees him as an isolated unity is incorrect. Karl Barth holds the same position, Church Dogmatics III.ii.83f.: man's nature "must from the very beginning be understood as a nature standing in some kind of relation to God." Man does not exist as "a self-enclosed area of reality" but as related to God. This relation is not "coincidental, contingent, transitory, but a necessary and constant determination of his nature."

The Bible does not give us any kind of systematic theory about man as the image of God. It is rather striking that the term is not often used at all, and that it is far less central in the Bible than it has been in the history of Christian thought. In his commentary on Genesis (1902, pp.99f.)

Professor Gunkel maintains, "The primary difference between the Old Testament and Christian dogmatics as regards this point is that in the latter it plays an important role - it has sometimes served as occasion for developing a complete anthropology - while in the former it has no special importance; in the Prophets and the Psalms, for example, it is wholly absent."

Nevertheless, the references to the image of God whenever they appear in the Bible, have a peculiar importance. At Genesis 1:26 we read of God's original decision to "make man in our likeness, after our image," and the following passage: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." These passages are

shortly followed by Genesis 5:1, "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God," and Genesis 9:6, where the shedding of man's blood is forbidden "for God made man in his own image."

In Genesis 1:26 two words are used; "image" and "likeness", "tselem" and "demuth". This has led to various views of the image of God which were based on a fairly strong distinction between "tselem" and "demuth". Origen, for example, writes that Genesis mentions man's creation in the image but is silent about any creation in the likeness, in order to indicate that man in creation received the dignity of the image, but that its fulfilment in the likeness was reserved for the future, and is reached through works and exertion.⁽¹⁾

This tradition appears to have been broken by Calvin (Inst. I.xv.3) who says that the traditional commentators sought a distinction between the two words which is not really there, since "likeness" is added to "image" simply for purposes of clarification, and he refers to the Hebrew use of parallelism. His view is now widely accepted: Bavinck says that the two terms "are used promiscuously and one is used in place of the other for no special reason."⁽²⁾ He notes that Genesis 1:26 uses both "tselem" and "demuth", "image" and "likeness"; Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 9:6 use only

(1) Origen, "De Principiis," III.iv.1. Opera Omnia, ED. De La Rue, p.375. Note the passage "indicat quod imaginis quidem dignitatem in prima conditione percepit, similitudinis vero perfecto in consummatione servata est; scilicet...."

(2) Bavinck, "Gereformeerde Dogmatiek," II, pp. 492, 493.

"tselem". And if God's plan for man (that man should have both image and likeness) was only partially realised by man's creation in His image (as Origen and others claimed), then it is difficult to explain Genesis 5, which speaks of man's creation in God's likeness (demuth). And it goes on to speak of Adam's begetting a son "in his own likeness (demuth) and after his image (tselem)." Because of the variable usage of the two terms in Genesis Dr. Bavinck maintains that it is impossible to hold that "tselem" and "demuth" refer to two different things.

Both terms, obviously, refer to a relation between man and his Creator; a "likeness" between man and God, with no explanation given as to exactly what this likeness consists of or implies. Genesis 1:26 indicates that man, who is to be created in God's image, is intended for a unique status and task in the created world (his dominium). Nevertheless, as Dr. Berkouwer makes plain, this does not imply that the content of the image of God should be sought in this lordship, or that Genesis I is concerned with this dominium over other creatures as an image or representation of the complete and absolute sovereignty of God, ("Man - the image of God", p.71).

Calvin believes that the image of God is to be found in a sense in all of his creatures. He conceives of God's relation to his world in the following manner. Not only did God at the beginning create all things out of nothing (Inst. I.xvi.1) but by his Word alone is the created universe from moment to moment sustained in being. "The Word of God was not only the source of life to all the creatures so that those which were not began to be, but his life-giving power causes them to remain in their condition; for were it not

that his continual inspiration gives vigour to the world, everything that lives would immediately decay, or be reduced to nothing," (Comm. on John 1:4, C.T.S.p.31).

As God from moment to moment sustains the universe in being, the function of the universe is from moment to moment to image forth God's glory. In his commentary on Psalm 19 ("The heavens declare the glory of God"), Calvin writes: "There is certainly nothing so obscure or contemptible, even in the smallest corners of the earth, in which some marks of the power and wisdom of God may not be seen; but as a more distinct image of him is engraven on the heavens, David has particularly selected them for contemplation", (C.T.S.p.308). The result of this manifestation is that where anyone has been given spiritual vision, he should be "ravished with wonder at God's infinite goodness, wisdom and power," (Comm. on Psalm 19:1, C.T.S.p.309).

But there is a special sense in which man is said to be created in God's image. Commenting on John 1:4 ("In him was life, and the life was the light of men") Calvin says: "John speaks of that part of life in which men excel other animals; the life which was bestowed on men was not of an ordinary description, but was united to the light of the understanding. The purpose for which men were created was that they might acknowledge him who is the author of so great a blessing," (C.T.S.p.32).

It is clear that the reference here is to a divinely planned life for man, which should constitute him God's image in a singular manner.

In his commentary on Genesis 1:26, Calvin rejects Augustine's view of the image as consisting in a trinity within the self. He equates the image with the likeness, and rejects the view that the image can refer to any physical resemblance, saying further that man's dominion over nature can be only a very small part of it. He continues: "Since the image of God has been destroyed in us by the Fall, we may judge from its restoration what it originally had been. Paul says that we are transformed into the image of God by the gospel..... Therefore by this word the perfection of our whole nature is designated, as it appeared when Adam was endued with a right judgement, had affections in harmony with reason, had all his senses sound and well regulated, and truly excelled in everything good. Thus the chief seat of the image was in his mind and heart, where it was eminent, yet there was not part of him in which some scintillations of it did not shine forth," (C.T.S., pp.94, 95).

It is thus in the mind and heart that the image is principally seated, and there can be no doubt that according to Calvin the image is present when a man truly knows God with his mind and loves him with his heart. At Institutio I.xv.4. we learn that the imago dei consists "in the light of the mind, the rectitude of the heart and the soundness of all the parts of our nature." As Calvin says in a sermon on Deuteronomy 4:10, "God created us after his own image in order that his truth might shine forth in us. It is not God's purpose that men should abolish and destroy the grace that he has put in them, for that would be utterly to deface his image in spite of him, but rather, that as he comes nearer to us and we to him, so he will have his

image known in us, and his truth shine forth in us all the more. Let us understand that it is not the intention of God that we should be ignorant of him, but to utter himself in such a way, that we may be able to distinguish him from forged idols, that we may be able to take him for our Father, and assure ourselves that we are called to the knowledge of the truth, and that we may boldly resort to him to call upon him and seek succour at his hand," (cited by Prof. T.F. Torrance, "Calvin's Doctrine of Man" pp.30,31).⁽¹⁾

There is thus a close similarity between the image of God in the world of nature, and the image in man. In both cases there is a reflection of God's glory back to himself through praise, but inanimate creatures and creatures without reason do this unconsciously while men do it in gratitude and humility when they acknowledge their complete dependence on God and give him their obedience. It was for this that they were given the light of reason.

Calvin pictures God as all-powerful creative activity. It is therefore natural that he should conceive of man, who was created in God's image, as also being, in his measure, a dynamic being. Therefore it may be said that man is in God's image in so far as he reflects back God's glory to him in gratitude. Professor Torrance notes that the picture of a mirror is the governing one in Calvin's mind, ("Calvin's Doctrine of Man", p.36).

(1) Professor Torrance makes use of A. Golding's translation of the "Sermons on Deuteronomy" (1581).

Calvin followed Luther in his equation of the image with man's original righteousness and ^{his} restoration in Christ. In his sermon on Genesis 1:26 (Werke : Weimarer Ausgabe 24, 49) Luther links the passage with two others from the New Testament. The first is 1 Corinthians 15:48, "As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." The second passage is the one in Ephesians 4:21-4, which tells us to put off the old nature and to put on the new nature, "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

We all, says Luther, bear the image of the fallen Adam. He was a sinner, though he was not so created. Christ is the heavenly image, full of light and love, we must bear his image, and be conformed to his suffering.

"So you see what image means." Man must be an image either of God or of the devil, for he is like whichever of the two he copies. Man originally had righteousness, but he did not remain good, and lost the image, so that we have become like the devil.

We may summarise Calvin's thought, at this point, in the following manner: "In the beginning, the image of God was conspicuous in the light of the mind, the rectitude of the heart, and the soundness of all the parts of our nature," (Inst. I.xv.4). But such a soul and mind ceased to exist when Adam fell. Man, being far removed from his God, can no longer perceive the revelation of God. Although the Divine image has not been utterly annihilated and effaced (Inst.I.xv.4), man does not have any righteousness or soundness whatsoever.

At Institutio II.ii.12, Calvin draws a division between what in man is destroyed by sin and what is only impaired: "the natural talents in man have been corrupted by sin, but of the supernatural ones he has been entirely deprived. For by the latter are intended both the light of faith and righteousness, which would be sufficient for the attainment of a heavenly life and eternal felicity. Therefore, when he revolted from the Divine government, he was at the same time deprived of those supernatural endowments, which had been given him for the hope of eternal salvation... Again, soundness of mind and rectitude of heart were also destroyed; and this is the corruption of the natural talents... Reason, therefore, by which man distinguishes between good and evil, by which he understands and judges, being a natural talent, could not be totally destroyed, but is partly debilitated, partly vitiated, so that it exhibits nothing but deformity and ruin..... So the will, also, being inseparable from the nature of man, is not annihilated; but it is fettered by depraved and inordinate desires so that it cannot aspire after anything that is good."

In his commentary on Ephesians 4:17, Calvin emphasises his conclusion: "With respect to the kingdom of God, and all that relates to the spiritual life, the light of human reason differs little from darkness; for, before it has pointed out the road, it is extinguished; and its power of perception is little else than blindness, for before it has reached its fruition, it is gone. The true principles held by the human mind resemble sparks; but these are choked by the depravity of our nature, before they have been applied to their

proper use. All men know, for instance, that there is a God, and that it is our duty to worship Him; but such is the power of sin and ignorance, that from this confused knowledge we pass all at once to an idol, and worship it in the place of God," (C.T.S. p.290).

CHAPTER 3

DE AETERNA PRAEDESTINATIONE DEI

In the last chapter we observed how man in his created state was capable of the knowledge of God. His soul and mind was so enlightened in virtue of bearing the imago Dei that he was capable of hearing the Divine voice, of seeing the Divine representation.⁽¹⁾ But such a soul and mind ceased to exist when Adam fell.

In § viii.5 of the treatise De aeterna Praedestinatione Dei⁽²⁾ (C.R. vol. xxxvi) Calvin seeks to vindicate the justice of God in the punishment of Adam and his posterity. Adam himself was created perfectly righteous, and he fell by his own will. By this fall, Adam involves the whole race in a similar all-inclusive liability, since they inherit from him their lost condition. But, we learn, Adam does not fall without the knowledge and ordination of God. Does this mean that God Himself is the author of sin? By no means, replies Calvin. The reason for this is that, though the ordination of God is involved in the fall, nevertheless the fall comes about by Adam's own will. Calvin reiterates with emphasis: we must always remember that he voluntarily deprived himself of the rectitude he had received from God, voluntarily gave himself to the service of sin and Satan and voluntarily precipitated himself into destruction.

(1) "The primitive condition of man was ennobled with these eminent faculties; he possessed reason, understanding, prudence, and judgement, not only for the ruling of his life on earth, but also to enable him to ascend to God and eternal bliss," (C.R.11, p.142).

(2) The treatise De aeterna Praedestinatione Dei is the longest and most sustained exposition which Calvin wrote on the subject. The translation I shall use in the discussion which ensues is that by Professor J.K.S.Reid: "Concerning the eternal Predestination of God."

The fact is, as Augustine says, that what is done against God's will is not done without God's will. In Calvin's mind, divine ordination in no way conflicts with the voluntary and therefore culpable character of human wrongdoing. Between His ordination and sin there stands the proximate cause of sin which is man's will. The intervention of this proximate cause on the one hand removes all guilt from God, and on the other hand leaves man with a liability which he cannot escape. Men, therefore, justly incur eternal loss, and no one has cause to complain of an unjust severity on the part of God.

One consideration may be urged by way of excuse and so of exculpation of Adam and his posterity. What if there was no possibility of his evading this ordination of God? Calvin dismisses this suggestion summarily. If, he says, the action is done voluntarily, this is enough to establish his guilt. It is indeed more than enough; for what he calls the proper and genuine cause of sin lies in the will of man, and it is therefore idle to look elsewhere for its cause, with the intention of diverting culpability to another quarter.

Calvin continues: Man is not only responsible in some logical but unapprehended sense; he is in fact knowingly responsible. He recognises (§ vi) that there is apparent absurdity or contradiction in affirming both the voluntary character of the fall and also its ordination by the counsel of God.

There is, however, a factor which cannot be ignored and which must in this matter be accorded precedence. "Over against a thousand witnesses," he says, "the voice of conscience ought to suffice for us," (J.K.S.Reid, "Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God," p.99). There is an "internal sense" (§ vii, Reid, op.cit.p.100), or more specifically an "internal feeling of the heart" (§ vii, Reid, op.cit.p.101), or again a "sense of sin" (§ viii.5, Reid, op.cit.p.122); and this is so engraved upon the hearts of men as never to be entirely lost. His own conscience condemns a man; and it follows from this that any attempt to absolve himself is the work of impiety.

At paragraph ix.7, Calvin declares that the sins a man commits must be imputed by him to himself. Adam may not plead the solicitation of Eve as excuse for what he does; for the poison of infidelity is to be found within himself. Nor may man evade his own responsibility by tracing back into the recesses of the hidden counsels of God the cause of the sin that he commits, since the cause of the sin is to be found nearer at home in his own heart. These attempted evasions are not only ineffective. They are known to be ineffective; for man is too strongly bound by the chains of conscience to free himself from the condemnation which he incurs.

For mitigating some of the difficulty involved in affirming both man's responsibility and God's ordination, Calvin makes use of the distinction between proximate and remote causes. As has been stated, an "internal sense of their own mind" forces men to the conclusion that evil arises from the voluntary defection of the first man. More explicitly, if they look

around in the attempt to divert the blame for sin to another quarter, they are prevented by the fact that its proximate cause resides within themselves, whereas it is only the remote cause that is to be traced to the divine ordination (§ vii). Or again (§ viii.5), what Calvin calls the proper and genuine cause of sin is not God's hidden counsel, but the will of man. The point is emphasised by an illustration suggested by a fragment of the poet Ennius. Medea, for love of the stranger, Jason, betrays her country. They both flee to Corinth, where Jason deserts his accomplice in crime. This infidelity awakens her to a sense of her own perfidy; but what she immediately denounces is not herself, but the timber of the grove of Pelius which was hewn down to build the ship they had used. This the poet ridicules, for she is clearly seeking the cause of her misfortune in manifestly remote conditions, while the real cause is to be found within herself. So in the case of those who, seeking the cause of their sin and consequent ruin, break into the recesses of heaven, instead of listening to that internal sense which declares that the real cause is in themselves. A consideration of the distinction between proximate and remote causes corrects this self-deception. On the one hand, the distinction means that God is not the author of sin, and on the other it involves man in total culpability. It is in this way that Calvin settles the question of culpability or moral responsibility. Culpability attaches to the proximate cause of the sinful action, and is so completely absorbed by it that none remains over for attachment to the remote cause.

Nevertheless, the reader might well ask: What if metaphysically the divine ordination, though only a remote cause, rendered the independence of the proximate cause so void that it became unable to be the bearer of moral blame ? Calvin tackles this problem later in the treatise (§ x.7). He begins by repeating that even the most fortuitous things are directed by the divine counsel. To support this statement, he quotes Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is thrown into the lap, but the judgement of things is from the Lord"; and also Exodus 21:13, where Moses declares that it is God's purpose that the accidental blow of the axe should kill a man. The objection is alleged that this catches up everything into an iron necessity such as the Stoics propounded. Calvin repudiates the charge. The Stoic philosophy does indeed weave all causes into a kind of Gordian complex, just as the astrologers of the day hold that absolute necessity originates from the position of the stars. The doctrine of Predestination, however, has nothing to do with such a fateful necessity. It is true, he says, that what God freely decrees necessarily happens. But this is quite different from natural necessity, which is embedded in things in themselves; and at the same time, it is quite compatible with what we must call natural contingency. To illustrate the first point: it is true that God in the beginning commanded the earth to produce herbs and fruit, and this initially sufficed, without the intervention of human work. But now man is invited to work, and certainly must not expect to have bread by mere idle desire. God then makes the earth fruitful, but man must work. Similarly (§ viii.4) we may not deny that the day is created by God because it is also made by the splendour of the sun. As for the second point to be

made, Calvin declares that the future is hidden from us, and we must at the same time trust the providence of God and also conduct our lives in view of the contingency of unknown things. We have therefore to conceive of two orders of necessity. There is the supernatural order which belongs to the divine ordination of all things. But besides this, there is the natural order, which may also in certain aspects be called an order of contingency. It is within this natural order that proximate causes have their place, and it is here in the case of man that the idea of culpability applies.

So far we have mentioned the word "predestination" in our discussion, but have not defined what Calvin means by his use of the term. The clearest exposition is given at Institutio III.xxi.5 : "We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death."

The actual state of man, after the Fall, is that he is "despoiled of his divine array"; "a miserable ruin"; "an immense mass of deformity"; ignorant, corrupt, impotent, obstinate, superstitious, far removed from God. Nevertheless, in the Bible, we have accounts of the election of Israel, the people of God, and also accounts of choice and rejection within

the nation itself, so that, for example, Isaac and Jacob were chosen, Ishmael and Esau rejected. How can this be? Calvin supplies an answer: "eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others." 'Foreordained,' in the sense of an eternal decree of God made before time and before the foundation of the world. ⁽¹⁾

Let us follow Calvin's exegesis through: When we believe in Jesus Christ, this does not come of ourselves, our own wills, our own efforts, or our own decisions, but from the grace of God. Faith is a gift of God. Now faith is not given to all men. God Himself gives faith according to His will. Therefore faith proceeds from a higher source than human will. It springs from the free election of God by which He chooses for salvation whomsoever He pleases.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians (1:4, 5), Calvin comments: St. Paul says that God has chosen us in Christ from before the foundation of the world in order that we might be holy. He has predestinated us in His love to become His children by adoption. He has saved us and He has called us by a holy calling, not according to works but according to His own plan, according to His grace which has been given to us in Jesus Christ before all the ages (2 Timothy 1:9).

(1) Note the first chapter relating to this doctrine in the Institutio: "Concerning the eternal election of God by which He has ordained some to blessedness and others to damnation," Inst. III.xxi.

It is true that God has regard to us in choosing us, but what does He find in us ? Nothing but wretchedness and poverty, and hence He is moved with compassion and shows mercy to whomsoever He pleases. And why ? The reason is not known to us; let it suffice us to know with St. Paul that God has decided it according to His own secret counsel. He has chosen us in Christ because we are unworthy of it in ourselves. For in ourselves we are hated and worthy of God's abomination, but He sees us in His Son and thus He loves us.

This is also the sense of Romans 8:29,30. "Those whom He foreknew, them He predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. . . and those whom He predestinated He also called; those whom He called He also justified and those whom He justified He also glorified."

For fuller confirmation, Calvin comes to John 6:44. Jesus said: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Now how is this "drawing" exercised ? God presents His word to all men, but He does not speak to all men within their hearts. If all do not come to Jesus Christ, this follows from the fact that all have not been taught of the Father (6:45). Therefore it does not derive from our virtue, dignity or merit, but from an act of God's pure grace.

When we come to Jesus Christ the fact is that we have been given to Him by the Father (John 17:6). In consequence Jesus receives into His care and protection those who have been given to Him by the Father and does not allow any of them to perish. When once we are in His care He will

give us such strength that we shall persevere unto the end. Jesus said (John 10:29): "No man shall snatch them out of my hand. The Father who has given me them is greater than all."

CHAPTER 4

THE TEACHING CONCERNING HOLY SCRIPTURE

In the preceding chapters we observed how, before the Fall, man had the true knowledge of God close at hand in the world around. He utterly failed however to discover and take advantage of it, and for his failure he is solely and entirely responsible. What help then is there for him, and in what way can he ever attain/the knowledge of God ? /to

Calvin here introduces the Scripture. He directs us to the Scriptures as the source of all our knowledge of God. "All that we think and speak about God or ourselves is but vain folly and empty words," (Inst.I.xiii.3). The human mind is too weak to be able to fathom and comprehend the being of God, (Inst.I.vi.4). If we wish to say anything meaningful about God and his relation to mankind, we must be taught by God Himself.

Inasmuch as no one can understand the smallest part of true and saving doctrine unless he be a student of Holy Scripture⁽¹⁾: "We must go to the Word, in which God is clearly and vividly mirrored for us in his works, and where the works of God are appraised not by our perverse judgements but by the criterion of eternal truth," (I.vi.3). Without the Scriptures "our search for God will merely be a wandering in a labyrinth of which we do not possess the plan, and in which there is no possibility of our striking upon the right way by accident. Without the teaching of the Scriptures the god whom we worship will be, not the true God, but the product of our own mind, the deification of a projection of our own personality," (T.H.L.Parker, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God," p.72).

(1) Inst. I.vi.2.

Yet, even though we read the Scriptures, because our natural disposition is entirely contrary to everything spiritual, we remain men "who are born in darkness" and "ever more and more are hardened in our blindness," (O.S. III.63). Scripture remains for us in our present condition "a dead and ineffectual thing," (C.R. LIV.285). We will hear its words, discover its teachings, but we will not arrive at the Truth. If this were not so, the Bible would be like a mere text-book, setting out the facts to be learned. The inclinations of our heart must be changed if our study of the Scriptures is not to be so much lost time, (C.R.IX.825). We must be given eyes and ears to register the truth of the Bible if we are really to recognise and grasp it, (C.R. LII.383). God effects this change in us through His Spirit, (C.R.IX.825).

The Holy Spirit alone is the true expositor of Scripture, (C.R.VI.270). By His agency the word of Scripture is "powerfully imprinted upon our hearts"⁽¹⁾ so that we truly receive and understand it. Calvin will never think of the Word without the Spirit. Through the agency of the Spirit, doctrine becomes revelation. "Since, then, we are told here that men are unfit to contemplate the arrangements of divine Providence until they obtain wisdom elsewhere than from themselves, how can we attain to wisdom but by submissively receiving what God teaches us both by His Word and by His Holy Spirit ? David, by the word sanctuary alludes to the external manner of teaching, which God had appointed among His ancient people; but along with the Word he comprehends the secret illumination of the Holy Spirit," (Comm.Ps.73:16. C.T.S.III, pp. 142-3).

(1) Inst. I.ix.3.

The Scriptures, then, are the primary source for all man's knowledge of God. Even so, there can be no doubt that Calvin recognised a self-declaration of God to mankind in the natural order: "Thus He has revealed Himself in the design of the universe, allowing Himself to be recognised every day, so that men cannot open their eyes without seeing the traces of His presence," (Inst.I.v.1). There is no spot in the universe wherein a man cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. Calvin can even go so far as to speak of the "very beautiful fabric of the world" as the clothing in which God "comes forth into view" in order that we may cast our eyes upon Him.⁽¹⁾ Even more significant is the "fair and beautiful order" observed by the heavenly bodies in their conflicting revolutions uninterruptedly maintained in the most perfect subordination and harmony for ages. In all this, "the glory of God shines forth more clearly."⁽²⁾ God permits Himself to be recognised surely and clearly in the course of natural processes.⁽³⁾

(1) *Comm. on Psalm 104:1, "Si de essentia eius agitur, habitat certe lucem inaccessam: sed dum irradiat totum mundum suo fulgore, haec vestis est in qua visibilis quodammodo nobis apparet qui in se ipso erat absconditus... Quare ut conspectu eius fruamur, prodeat in medium cum suo ornatu, hoc est, vertamus oculos ad pulcerrimam hanc mundi fabricam, in qua vult a nobis conspici," (C.R. XXXII.85).*

(2) *Comm. on Ps. 68:33, see also Ps. 147:7, C.R. XXXII.428. "Were the same serenity always to continue, we would not have so wonderful a display of His power as when He suddenly veils them with clouds, etc."*

(3) *C.R.XLVIII.328.*

Nevertheless, "in order truly to know God, and praise Him as His due, we need another voice than that which is heard in thunders, showers, and storms in the air, in the mountains and in the forests; for if He teaches us not in plain words, and also kindly allures us to Himself, by giving us a taste of His fatherly love, we will remain dumb," (Comm.Ps. 29:9 C.R.XXXI.290).

For Calvin, God Himself is not to be encountered in the world of nature and history. He exists above the order of nature (C.R. XXXIV.432), and is thus not immanent within it. The world does, of course, show traces of His reality from which we may infer His existence. He has impressed upon His works sure signs of His glory, "so that in the created world as in a picture His power is reflected," (Inst. I.v.10).

The self-disclosure of God in the worlds of nature and history is objectively real. As Creator He has left in the world traces of His glory and still manifests His sovereignty in the processes of nature and in the events of history. But the knowledge of God which we may acquire from His works and deeds is subjective and unreal. It would only be fully real for us if Adam had not fallen but had "remained in his primal perfection," (Inst.I.ii.1). Thus "it is undoubted that we with our senses and powers of understanding will never reach true knowledge of God," (C.R.XXIX.425, and again at XXXIII.429). For this we lack not only the will but also the capacity," (C.R.XLIX.326).

Faith is not inevitable for us, because our condition is one of revolt against God, and in consequence we have lost the capacity to recognise the traces of God's sovereignty in His works. All that Calvin says about the

natural knowledge of God is subject to the one condition: if Adam had not fallen. In the very passage of the Institutio where he speaks about the twofold source of our knowledge of God he goes on immediately to add that the simple knowledge of God from nature would only be possible to us if Adam had not fallen: "Now, the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him. Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety. Here....I speak only of the primal and simple knowledge to which the very order of nature would have led us if Adam had remained upright.⁽¹⁾ In this ruin of mankind no one now experiences God either as Father or as Author of salvation, or favourable in any way,"(Inst.I.ii.1).

Man, in the person of Adam, was granted the privilege of knowledge of God. In his sinful rebellion he has forfeited that knowledge, by a wilful refusal he has lost all cognisance of it. As a result of the Fall the natural man has become completely deprived of the power to rise in heart and mind above this world. Concupiscence manifests itself by producing in man's heart improper and intemperate love for this present world, which brings

(1) "Si integer stetisset Adam." The L.C.C. footnote (vol.I.p.40) reads: "The controlling thought of I.ii-v, which is the locus classicus for a discussion of "natural theology" in Calvin, is contained in this phrase. The revelation of God in creation, for Calvin, would have been the basis of a sound natural theology only "if Adam had remained upright." Because of sin no sound theology of this type is possible."

Calvin expressed himself similarly at the beginning of his Preface to the New Testament, written in 1534 and published in Olivétan's French Bible (1535), C.R.IX.791.

him into such bondage to this world as prevents him from even seeking God truly, (Inst. III. ix. 1-4). "We are inclined by nature to a slavish love of this world," (Inst. III. ix. 1. In belluinum mundi huius amorem (sumus) natura inclinati). If man truly considered the brevity and vanity of this life he would realise that it is but a shadow which must pass away soon, and his desires for the things of this life would lessen. But the concern of man's mind is continually directed to earthly objects and the affection of the heart follows the mind. His heart is an insatiable gulf which it is impossible to fill to contentment with the things of this earth. Yet he goes on vainly seeking satisfaction in this earth.⁽¹⁾ Men bury all aspiration after the heavenly life under earthly cares so that, "while living in this world, they die to God."⁽²⁾ Man deceives himself by imagining that this world is his rest forever, and that he is secure in the frail nest he has built here for himself, (Comm. Ps. 90:4, C.R. XXXI. 835). Calvin approves of the comparison made by the Apostle James of such immoderate love of this world to adultery, for it is a violation of the marriage which God seeks to make with us when He

(1) Sermon on Job 14:1-4, C.R. XXXIII. 657. "C'est un abysme et un gouffre insatiable que l'homme, tellement qu'il n'est question de se contenter de toutes choses de la terre, il n'y a ne fin ne mesure en lui. Et qui en est cause ? Or si nous pensions à la breveté de nostre vie, il est certain que nos cupiditez seroyent attrempees, que nos appetis ne seroyent point ainsi bouillans... Mais cependant nous sommes si aspres pour amasser des biens, et ceci et cela, que nous ne pensons a autre chose. Et qui en est cause ? Nous pensons tousiours ici bas."

(2) Comm. on Ps. 119:144, C.R. XXXII. 280. "Quando itaque terrenis curis obruitur coelestis vitae meditatio, nihil aliud quam se in sepulcrum demergunt homines, ut mundo viventes, Deo moriantur."

seeks to espouse us to Himself as a chaste virgin, and a transference to a baser object of the affection which we owe to God, (Comm. James 4:4, C.R. LV.415-416).

Calvin constantly emphasises that it is impossibly hard for a man by his own strength to rid himself of this love for the present world that can so hold down his soul in evil bondage. It was to this difficulty that Jesus referred when he spoke of how hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, (Comm. Matthew 19:26, C.R. LXV.543). Our minds are naturally so set on this earth and so much given up to its pleasures and cares that it is impossible for us even to taste the pleasures of eternity, the experience of which alone can deliver us from bondage to this earth, (Comm. Ps. 119:132, C.R. XXXII.274; and on Ps. 90:4, C.R. XXXI.835).

If fallen man is to enjoy once again the knowledge of God, a further act of Revelation has become necessary. In Scripture God has given us this revelation concerning himself from heaven, (Inst. I.vi). The Scripture is a thread, guiding us through the labyrinth, the enigma of the universe in which we live. The revelation which was frustrated by man's blindness becomes, objectively as well as subjectively, revelation by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The universe is now perceived to be, not an unmeaning or accidental system, but the opus Dei. That revelation which our sin vitiated into a condemnation, the Scripture restores to a source of knowledge of the Creator.

From the Scriptures we learn to know God the Creator - that is, we learn His identity and His nature; both, in relation to ourselves. In teaching us

this, the Scriptures interpret aright the creation and history: "We must come, I say, to the Word, which contains a just and lively description of God as He appears in His works, when these works are estimated, not according to our depraved judgement, but by the rule of eternal truth," (Inst. I.vi.3).

CHAPTER 5

AUTHORITY

We have seen that the basis of Calvin's theology is the belief that through the Bible alone can God be known. He is not so discernible in any other place - in the creation, or in man's conscience, or in the course of history and experience. And since, if we are to know of God, we must go to the place where He is to be found, it is to the Scriptures that we must go, and there we shall find Him as He is.

Without doubt the chief concern of the New Testament - and in the last resort its only concern - is with Jesus Christ. The four Gospels are occupied entirely with Him; the other figures who come into the story are present not because they have an independent importance of their own, but solely because of their relationship to Him and His story. The Acts of the Apostles, although it tells us about the life of the apostolic Church, makes it plain that the importance of the apostles lies in their being the bearers of the gospel about Jesus Christ. Luke is not really interested in church history as such, nor in apostolic biography. What he wishes to show is how the apostles and others preached about Jesus Christ, and how the life of the Church was built upon Him. In Acts Luke writes of what Jesus Christ went on doing in His Church after He had ascended. The writers of the epistles have the same theme of Jesus Christ, whether it is Paul summarising his gospel as "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified," or whether it is Hebrews exhorting us to "consider him", or Peter seeing Him as the "chief corner stone, elect, precious," or John declaring "the Word of life" which he had seen and touched. They are all writing primarily about Jesus Christ. The chief concern of the New Testament is with Him. He occupies the central place in the faith and witness of the early Church.

The twelve apostles, then, do not hold authority because they have been invested with an office, but because they are in a position to witness to what Christ did in the days of his flesh and to his appearances as risen Lord. But as the Church gradually became a fixed and relatively uniform institution, official, external authority⁽¹⁾ inevitably came to play a greater and greater part. By the fourth century Christian writers are appealing to earlier authors as "the tradition of the Fathers" - having regard rather to who they were than to what they said.⁽²⁾ This century also sees the advent of decisions of councils, which, once made, naturally have external authority attaching to them as expressing the judgement of the whole church or of a large part of it. As the centuries passed more and more external authorities came into being. Fathers, doctors, councils, popes, and the origin and extensive growth of a codified Canon Law assisted this development. By the end of the Middle Ages the Church was supported by a vast system of external authority.

But the advent of the Reformation with its emphasis upon the response of the individual in faith to the demand of the Scriptures, gradually brought about an entire change of attitude towards authority in the minds of Christians.

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- (1) For purpose of argument it is useful to divide authority into external and internal authority. External authority is that attaching to a person as an official or to an office as an office. Internal authority is the authority residing in convincing argument or weighty moral or spiritual example or experience.
- (2) Professor R.P.C. Hanson, article 'Authority' in 'A Dictionary of Christian Theology', ED. Alan Richardson.

In Calvin's letter to Sadoleto (1539), there is a very instructive passage in which a layman, seemingly adapting to his purpose Calvin's own experience, states his case at the Day of Judgement. It begins by describing how the speaker was brought up in the Christian faith, but was denied access to God's Word, on the ground that examination of the Scriptures was reserved for the few, whom the many must obey; the Christian rudiments which he did receive were not sufficient to bring him to the true worship of God or put him on the way of salvation. He was told that his own merits would gain him salvation, but found that this was of no use to a sinner like himself, and he failed therefore to find inner tranquillity, becoming terrified of the divine wrath. But, in default of anything better, he was following the way in which he had been brought up, when "an entirely different doctrinal system was raised up, tending, not to seduce us from Christian allegiance, but to lead it back to its source and restore it to purity by cleansing it, as it were, from its dregs. I, offended by its novelty, afforded reluctant ears to it; and at the beginning, I admit, resisted it strenuously and vigorously.... It was very difficult to induce me to admit that I had spent all my life in ignorance and error. One thing in particular kept me from agreeing with them, my reverence for the Church. But when at last I opened my ears and allowed myself to be taught, I realised that my fear that the majesty of the Church would be impaired was unnecessary."⁽¹⁾ The Reformers persuaded him, he

(1) Full text in English: "Tracts Relating to the Reformation," vol. I, C.T.S. This passage is contained in pages 61-64.

goes on to say, that they were concerned, not to destroy the Church, but to correct its faults; and that the Pope was not set up by the Word of God (certe non verbo Dei constitutum), but was self-chosen. They were able, too, to show that the elevation of the Pope to supreme power had ruined the good order of the Church. At last they persuaded him of his error and guilt, and because of his misery and the prospect of eternal death, he gave up his old way of life with "tears and groans", and followed the new.

From the extract we learn:

- (i) the essential change of thinking in the Reformers, was the abandonment of the idea that salvation could be obtained by means of one's own works or merits, and the adoption of the idea that it required surrender to, and trust in, the Grace of God,
- (ii) it meant a recognition that the Papal power was not founded on, or set up by, the Bible,
- (iii) there is perhaps a hint at the beginning of the passage that at the time in question Calvin believed the Roman Church to accept the authority of the Scriptures, but held that it misinterpreted them.

It is quite certain that by the time Calvin had finished writing the first edition of the Institutio he had fully recognised the problem of authority, and the fact that he was in conflict with the Roman Church in the matter. For in the course of his treatment of the Church's power he says: "Has

the Church no power ? This question makes many of the simpler people anxious, and it is these to whom we particularly write. Our answer is: the Church certainly has power, but power which is given to it for building up, not for destroying; those who use this power aright reckon that they are nothing more than servants of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God. To define this power correctly, you must call it the ministry of the Word of God, (ministerium verbi Dei). For it was defined in these terms by Christ when he bade his apostles go and teach all nations whatever he had commanded them. I wish that those who in the past have ruled the Church of God, and those who rule it now, had remembered that the principle of this command was enjoined upon them.... Whatever authority and dignity the Scripture gives, either to prophets, or to priests, or to apostles, or to the successors of the apostles, we have stated before that it is given not to the men themselves, but to the ministry which is in their charge; or, to put it more briefly, to the Word of God, into the ministry of which they are called. If we go over all classes in order, we shall find that neither prophets nor priests, apostles nor disciples, were endowed with the power of commanding or teaching anything, or of making any reply to questions except in the name and Word of God."

After referring to the Incarnation, Calvin proceeds: "And indeed what ought to be expected or required by man, when the very Word of Life has lived intimately with us in our flesh ? Unless, of course, there is some hope that the wisdom of God can be excelled by man. Rather is it fitting that the mouths of all men should be closed, after he has once spoken in whom

the Heavenly Father wished all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge to be hidden. . . . What else does this mean then than that all the inventions of the human mind, from whatever head they have taken their origin, should be kept away, in order that the pure Word of God may be taught and learned in the Church of the faithful; that the decisions of all men, of whatever rank, should be abolished, in order that the decrees of God alone should be laid down ? "

Having thus stated what he holds to be the right position in the matter, he goes on to give what he takes to be the position of his opponents: Firstly, they wish our faith to stand and fall by their judgement, so that whatever they have decided in either direction may be determined and fixed for our minds. So that, whatever they have approved ought to be approved by us without any doubting, and whatever they have condemned ought to stand condemned by us. Hence their axioms: it is in the power of the Church to lay down articles of faith and to equate the authority of the Church with the authority of the Sacred Scripture; a man is not a Christian who does not consent with certainty to all their doctrines, positive as well as negative, either with implicit or with explicit faith; and other things of the same kind. Meanwhile, at their own pleasure, despising the Word of God, they hammer out doctrines, in which they later insist that men should have certain faith, and lay down laws, whose observance they make obligatory. . . ."Citing Romans 10:17 ("Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.") Calvin concludes: "Plainly, if faith depends on the Word of God alone, relies on it and rests in it alone, what place is left for the word of man ? When the power of laying down laws was unknown

to the Apostles and was so often taken away from the ministers of the Church by the Word of God, I wonder that they dare to take it to themselves despite the example of the Apostles and the plain prohibition of God," (I.205-9, see also the 'Prefatory Address to Francis, King of the French, I.20,21: "One of the marks of the Church is the pure preaching of the Word of God.").

Wholly in accord with the spirit and meaning of this passage are Calvin's words in the Preface added to the Psychopannychia in 1536: "We ought to think that there is one Word of Life : that which comes from the mouth of the Lord; that we ought to open our ears to this alone when it is a question of the doctrine of salvation; that they ought to be closed to all others. His Word, I say, is not new; it is that which was from the beginning, is now, and always shall be. And what a great mistake those people make, who defame the Word of God which has been allowed to fall into decay through misuse and laziness, with the charge of novelty when it returns to the light of day... Is this to learn Christ, to lend one's ear to any doctrines on earth, even true ones, without the Word of God ?" (V.176).

For Calvin, then, the Bible is the sole authority that must rule the life of the Church. The preacher of the Word is bound to turn to no other source for his testimony than to the Scriptures. This means that the Scripture is set over the Church by God as the authority that must be allowed full freedom to rule the life of the Church. It must be given a place of unsurped honour within the Church. Calvin cannot admit the existence of a Church where the Word of God does not so rule, for "this is the perpetual mark by

which our Lord has characterised His people: Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice (John 18:37)."⁽¹⁾ No one must argue that it was the Church that produced the Word and that the Church, being therefore antecedent to the Word, is superior to it. "Paul testifies that the Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets (Ephesians 2:20). If the doctrine of the Apostles and prophets is the foundation of the Church, the former must have had its certainty before the latter began to exist," (Inst. I.vii.2).⁽²⁾ Then, realising that the favourite Romanist argument for the contention that the Church must determine the validity of Scripture, or at least interpret it, hinged upon the passage in Augustine where he said that "he would not believe the Gospel unless he were influenced by the authority of the Church," (Augustine, "Contra Epistolam Fundam." chap.5), Calvin points out that if Augustine's statement here be taken in conjunction with the context, it will be seen that Augustine, arguing against the Manichaeans, urges the authority of the Church not as ultimate and final, but as confirmatory of the truth of Scripture. And he lays such emphasis upon the Church for the reason that he himself, while still an alien to the truth of Scripture, was brought into an understanding of Scripture through the agency of the Church. "Thus the authority of the Church is an introduction

(1) Inst. IV.ii.4. "Haec enim perpetua est nota, qua signavit suos Dominus noster..."

(2) See also Comm. Eph. 2:20, "It is laid down by Paul, that the faith of the church ought to be founded on this doctrine... Christ is the only foundation. He alone supports the whole church. He alone is the rule and standard of faith... Nothing else, Paul tells us, was ever intended by the prophets and apostles, than to found a church on Christ," C.T.S. pp. 242-3.

through which we are prepared for faith in the gospel," (Inst.I.vii.3).

But for Augustine (such is Calvin's insistence), the final goal is the Scripture truth itself, of which the Church is but the custodian. Hence, it is false to say that it is necessary to have recourse to the decree of the Church to be persuaded of the divine origin of Scripture.

Calvin, in denying the Roman claim that the Church has the authority to judge Scripture, admits that it is the proper office of the Church to distinguish genuine from spurious Scripture, since the Sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd and will not listen to the voice of strangers.

But "to submit the sound oracles of God to the Church, that they may obtain a kind of precarious authority among men, is blasphemous impiety. The Church is, as Paul declares, founded on the doctrine of Apostles and Prophets; but these men speak as if they imagined that the mother owed her birth to the daughter," (C.R.VII.612-3).

CHAPTER 6

THE TESTIMONIUM SPIRITUS SANCTI

Alongside the idea of the authority of the Bible, Calvin developed his doctrine of the "testimony of the Holy Spirit" - the testimonium Spiritus Sancti, to which we have already briefly referred. "It is generally recognised that this doctrine is the Reformer's special contribution to the difficult problem of authority, that it is indeed a distinctive mark of the Calvinistic theology," (Dr. A. Dakin, "Calvinism", p.197). According to Doumergue, it was John Calvin who introduced it into dogmatics, ("Jean Calvin" vol. IV.p.56. See also, B.B. Warfield, "Calvin and the Reformation," p.209).

What does the phrase mean ? As we have seen, Calvin maintains that from eternity some are predestinated to salvation, the whole purpose of God in creation being to this end: "faith flows from the secret election of God, because he enlightens, by His Spirit, those whom it seemed good to Him to elect before they were born, and by the grace of adoption grafts them into His family," (Letter to Melanchthon, Geneva, 27th August 1554, reprinted Dillenberger, "John Calvin," p.54). The Bible also exists for the benefit of the elect. Divinely given and divinely ordained, it is the book for the elect, for they alone "can make anything of it," (Dakin, "Calvinism", p.198). The elect are able to grasp the Truth, for God, in His great mercy, has graciously bestowed in their hearts the witness of His Spirit. The Spirit of God "enlightens our minds to perceive His truth....seals it on our hearts, and by His sure attestation to it confirms our conscience."⁽¹⁾ The Spirit both

(1) Reply by Calvin to Cardinal Sadolet's letter, reprinted Dillenberger, "John Calvin," p.105.

certifies the authority of Scripture and gives its correct interpretation.

With the conviction of the truth of Scripture and of its divine origin there comes also by the agency of the same Spirit the ability to understand and receive the truth.

Calvin is tireless in making the claim that to those who have faith you do not need to prove the authority of Scripture. It will be most readily accepted. To argue from the authority of Scripture is for him "the surest kind of proof with Christians," (Comm.Rom. 3:10, C.R.XLIX.53. "Apud Christianos firmissima probationis species"). To those who have faith, the Word of Scripture shines with a majesty of its own and a completely self-evidencing power. "Verbum enim Domini maiestate sua, tanquam violento impulsu, nos ad obediendum sibi cogit" - "The Word of the Lord constrains us by its majesty, as by a violent impulse, to yield obedience to it," (Comm.1 Cor. 2:4, C.R.XLIX.335). This majesty arrests and holds the human mind in a different and more powerful manner than ordinary human wisdom uses with its insinuating allurements and blandishments, (Comm. 1 Cor. 2:4, C.R. XLIX. 335). The testimony of the Spirit is superior to all reason, (Inst.I. vii.4, "Testimonium spiritus omni ratione praestantius esse respondeo."). "Those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture," (Inst.I.vii.5). But it is only on the minds of those who have faith that the Scripture so impresses itself. "It is foolish to attempt to prove to infidels that Scripture is the Word of God. This it cannot be known to be, except to faith," (Inst.I.viii.13). "The Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the

full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit, (Inst.I.vii.5).

Because it is the Spirit of God who enlightens our minds to perceive His truth, "we must come with reverence to the Scriptures. We must wait entirely upon God, knowing that we need to be taught by His Holy Spirit, and that without Him we cannot understand anything that is shown us in His Word" (Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:8-10, C.R.LIII.300). "Hereby it comes to pass that the reading of the Scripture profits few at this day, because we can scarcely find one among a hundred who submits himself willingly to learn Qui se libenter ad discendum subiicitⁱ). This is the true reverence of the Scripture when we acknowledge that there is wisdom laid up there which surpasses all our senses, and yet notwithstanding we do not loathe it, but, reading diligently, we depend upon the revelation of the Spirit and desire to have an interpreter given us", (Comm. on Acts 8:31, C.R.XLVIII. 191-2). This interpreter of Scripture is the Holy Spirit who is given to those who are humble before the word.

Calvin continually asserts that those who take up the right attitude towards Scripture and who persevere in their search of its pages will find its teaching clear. He affirms the "claritas"⁽¹⁾ of Scripture (Comm.on 2 Peter 1:19. C.R. LV.457, and also in the Comm. on Isa. 45:19, C.R. XXXVII.145) to those who "refuse not to follow the Holy Spirit as their guide" (Comm. on 2 Peter 3:16, C.R.LV.478, and again, the Comm. on Deut. 29:29, C.R.

(1) Scripture possesses "claritas" i.e. it has illuminating power, so that a clarifying light shines from it.

XXIV. 255-6). "God does not propound to us obscure enigmas to keep our minds in suspense," (Comm. on Deut. 30:11, C.R. XXIV.257). If we find it obscure and hard to understand this must be ascribed to the darkness of our understanding and not to the Scripture (Comm. on Isa. 45:19, C.R. XXXVII.145), or it may be that we are inflated with too much self-confidence (Sermon on Job 1:6-8, C.R. XXXIII.63). "We look down, as it were from on high, on that doctrine which ought, on the contrary, to be reverently adored by us" (Comm. on Zech. 4:12, C.R. XLIV.193). To this attitude the Scripture yields nothing. We must, however, learn to depend on the ministers of the word to illuminate the Scripture for us as well as the Spirit, in the same way as Zechariah had to depend on the angels to interpret his visions (Comm. on Zech. 1:21, C.R. XLIV.151-2). Thus, "we need not despair when prophecies seem obscure to us," (Comm on Zech. 4:4, C.R. XLIV.183-5).

Calvin's thought here is largely influenced by Luther. On Luther's doctrine of the claritas scripturae I note especially De servo arbitrio (W.A.XVIII.pp. 606-609; 652-653). "For it should be settled as fundamental, and most firmly fixed in the minds of Christians, that the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light far brighter even than the sun, especially in what relates to salvation and all essential matters..." "I certainly grant that many passages in the Scripture are obscure and hard to elucidate, but that is due, not to the exalted nature of their subject, but to our own linguistic and grammatical ignorance; and it does not in any way prevent our knowing all the contents of Scripture".... "You see, then, that the entire content of the Scriptures has

now been brought to light, even though some passages which contain unknown words remain obscure. Thus it is unintelligent, and ungodly too, when you know that the contents of Scripture are as clear as can be, to pronounce them obscure on account of these few obscure words. If words are obscure in one place, they are clear in another. What God has so plainly declared to the world is in some parts of Scripture stated in plain words, while in other parts it still lies hidden under obscure words. But when something stands in broad daylight, and a mass of evidence for it is in broad daylight also, it does not matter whether there is any evidence for it in the dark," (W.A.XVIII, p. 606, lines 22 - 37).

CHAPTER 7

THE UNIQUE ORIGIN OF SCRIPTURE AS A BASIS FOR ITS AUTHORITY

We have seen that the inward authentication of Scripture, the force with which it comes home to the believing Christian as he reads it, is what Calvin means by the testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum; God Himself authenticates His own Word in the hearts of those who will receive it.

"For as God alone can properly bear witness to His own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.... Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture... Enlightened by Him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgement or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgement, feel perfectly assured - as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it - that it comes to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God,"
(Inst.I.vii. 4 and 5).

It may be objected that this line of reasoning makes the criterion of biblical authority purely subjective. How are we to differentiate between the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit and our own predilections? What guarantee have we that what John Calvin accepts as the Word of God is anything more than the projection of his own wishes and ideals upon the page of Scripture? The objection has some force. C.H.Dodd concedes, "the criterion lies within ourselves, in the response of our own spirit to the Spirit that utters itself in the Scriptures," ("The Authority of the Bible," p.296). But we are not thereby reduced to pure subjectivism all the same. As Professor Dodd adds in a footnote, "Christianity

recognises a 'somewhat not ourselves' in the most inward form of experience: that is the testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum. The ultimate 'fact' is the unity of experience in which 'subjective' and 'objective' are one," (op.cit., p.297, note).

For Professor Abba, "this unity of experience is the hallmark of the Bible itself and provides an objective criterion of its authority. Faith and fact are linked indivisibly together. Inner conviction is authenticated by historic event. While neither determines the other, each substantiates the other; and together they form a single complex demanding an origin common to both," ("The Nature and Authority of the Bible," p. 295).

H.H. Rowley has elaborated this point in his Joseph Smith Memorial Lecture. He points out that in the Exodus, "we have a complex of human and non-human factors, and neither could determine the other, and the only possible common source of both was God. Deliverance was achieved by the timely act of Nature. But that timely act fulfilled the prior promise of Moses, who had no means of knowing how deliverance would be effected... His conviction was justified and his faith vindicated, and the confidence that God would not let him down led to the experience that Nature came to his aid. Nature could not have given him his commission; his confidence in God could not of itself have stirred the forces of Nature. He therefore found the hand of God in the whole complex, and there is no other hypothesis which is both scientific and adequate," (The Authority of the Bible, p.13). Professor Rowley claims

that "there is demonstrable ground to believe that behind the Bible and its record is God, and that therefore its sublimity is not of merely human origin, but charged with a higher authority," (Op.cit. p.20). Here, then, is the objective biblical fact which matches the subjective experience of the divine-human encounter through the medium of the Bible.

Calvin attaches considerable importance to the inspiration under which the authors of the Scripture wrote. He declares that the Holy Scripture will never be of any service to us unless we are persuaded that God is the author of it. The Scripture must not be read merely "as the history of mortal men," (sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16, C.R.LIV.284 f.). "Since no daily responses are given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign His truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognised, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them," (Inst.I.vii. 1... "Non alio iure plenam apud fideles auctoritatem obtinent, quam ubi statuunt, e coel^o fluxisse, acsi vivae ipsae Dei voces illic exauderentur."). But how are we to understand the phrase, "come from heaven" ?

Calvin frequently uses phrases which suggest that he held the view that the Holy Scriptures were orally dictated from heaven. "The law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and

pleasure of men but dictated by the Holy Spirit (a spiritu sancto dictatum)."⁽¹⁾ "The ancient prophecies were dictated by Christ," (comm. on 1 Peter 1:11, C.R. LV. 217). In his commentary on Isaiah 40:6, "The voice said cry...", Calvin seizes on the analogy of a voice crying from heaven and another echoing the heavenly voice, as an explanation of the origin of the prophetic oracles. "There is also a beautiful comparison between the two voices, that we may receive with as much reverence what the prophets utter as if God Himself thundered from heaven; for they speak only by His mouth, and repeat as ambassadors what He has commissioned them to declare," (comm. on Isa. 40:6, C.R. XXXVII.9. "Quia non loquuntur nisi ex eius ore, et quasi intermedii recitant quod suggestit."). "He (Moses) wrote his five books not only under the guidance of the Spirit of God, but as God Himself had suggested them speaking out of His own mouth," (comm. on Exod. 31:18, C.R. XXV.79. "Unde colligimus, quinque libros, non modo praeunte Dei spiritu scripsisse, verum sicuti Deus ipse ore ad os loquendo suggererat.").

There are other passages in Calvin's writings, however, which seem to indicate that when Calvin speaks of a dictation of the words from heaven he really means that the writers were inwardly moved to utter as the Word of God something that was at the same time the product of their own inspired thinking and feeling. "The prophets did not speak at their own suggestion but..... being organs of the Holy Spirit they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare," (comm. on 2 Timothy

(1) Comm. on 2 Timothy 3:16, C.R. LII.383.

3:16, C.R.LII.383. "Scimus... non ex suo sensu loquutos esse prophetas, sed ut erant spiritus sancti organa, tantum protulisse quae coelitus mandata fuerant."). "Prophets are the organs of the Holy Spirit," (comm. on Ezekiel 14:10, C.R.XL.312, see also Ezekiel 5:16, C.R. XL.134). The Holy Spirit "directed" David's tongue in the composition of his Psalms, (comm. on Psalm 8:1, C.R. XXXI.88. "Davidis linguam direxit." At C.R. XLVII.469, Calvin writes "S.Jehan a donc bien este l'instrument et l'organe de Dieu, comme une plume escrira en la main de l'homme."). In giving forth their inspired utterance the prophets, though they "obediently followed the Spirit as their guide," were, however, "not bereaved of mind - as the Gentiles imagine their prophets to have been," (comm. on 2Peter 1:20, C.R.LV.458). "Calvin no doubt means to emphasise that, though the resultant Word was really the Word that God intended should be uttered in all its details, nevertheless the prophet acted throughout as one who really experienced all that he said and who gave forth the message as one coming naturally from his own heart through a process of thought, on a psychological level, no different from that of ordinary human authorship," (Dr. R.S.Wallace, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament," p. 108). Dr. Wallace sees these points brought out in Calvin's comments on Ezekiel 2:8 f., (C.R.XL.72 f.). Ezekiel sees the roll of a book and this leads to the comment: "There is no doubt that this volume comprehended whatever the Spirit of God afterwards dictated to the prophet; and yet the effect was just as if God had made a mortal the channel of His Spirit: as if He had said, 'Now you shall utter nothing

human nor terrestrial; because you shall utter what my Spirit has already written in this book." But then Ezekiel has to eat the roll of the book, and Calvin further comments, "The true servants of God... not only learn what they speak of, but, as food is eaten, so also they receive within them the Word of God, and hide it in their heart so that they may bring it forth as food properly dressed." Calvin further adds, "God's servants ought to speak from the inmost affection of the heart," (comm. on Ezekiel 3:3, C.R. XL.76.).

Calvin insists that in the resultant Word there is freedom from human error and from the marks of human infirmity. Ezekiel 'put off, as it were, his human infirmities (exuerit quodammodo hominem) when God intrusted to him the office of instructor," (comm. on Ezekiel 1:2, C.R. XL.27). Isaiah's writings contain nothing of his own imagination and "no human reasonings," (comm. on Isa.1:1, C.R.XXXVI.27). Daniel's writings are "free from any human delusion or invention," (comm. on Dan. 10:21, C.R.XLI.215). Moses in writing Scripture acted "not as a man, but as an angel speaking under the impulse of the Holy Spirit (angelus instinctu spiritus sancti loquens), and free from all carnal affection," (comm. on Gen. 49:5, C.R. XXIII.595). The Apostle Paul brings forward "nothing but what he has received from the Lord, so as from hand to hand... to administer to the Church the pure word of God," (comm. on 1 Cor. 15:3, C.R. XLIX.538). They all "dared not announce anything of their own, and obediently followed the Spirit as their guide, who ruled in their mouth as in his own sanctuary," (comm. on 2 Peter 1:20,

C.R. LV.458). The result is that in the Scripture we have a book of which we can say that its words "are those of God and not of men," (comm. on Heb.3:7, C.R. LV.39 "Dei non hominum esse voces, quae ex prophetarum libris proferuntur.").

In the last four paragraphs we have been studying passages from the commentaries. Exemplary of similar teaching that occurs in the Institutio are the following: The Scriptures "ought to have with believers the same complete authority as though they were able to hear the voice of God from His own mouth" (I.vii.1); "God's own voice" (I.vii.1); "dictated by the Holy Spirit" (IV.viii.6); "authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit" (IV.viii.9); the scriptural "writings are to be received as the oracles of God" (IV.viii.9); Scripture is the "school of the Holy Spirit" (III.xxi.3).

Such phrases affirming the reliability of Scripture have been held as evidence of a belief in verbal inerrancy. But on the manner of the inspiration of Scripture, Calvin is far from being systematic. As well as the passages cited above we have the no less frequent places where he treats the text as a human production and, as such, sometimes incorrect on matters of fact.

After discussing possible reasons for the discrepancy between Luke's figure of seventy-five with Moses' figure of seventy as the number who accompanied Joseph to Egypt, he goes on to add, "We ought rather to weigh the miracle which the Spirit commendeth unto us in this place than to stand long about one letter whereby the number is altered," (comm.

on Acts 7:14, C.R. XLVIII.137). On a difficulty about chronology in the gospels he can say, "Anyone who will consider how little care the evangelists bestowed on pointing out dates will not stumble at this diversity in the narrative," (comm. on Matt. 21:10 f., C.R.XLV.597). "In Scripture, it is well known, things are not always stated according to the strict order of time in which they occurred," (comm. on Psalm 51:9 f., C.R.XXXI.517). On the difficulty about the exact number of people slain by Phinehas he can say, "We know that the exact account of numbers is not always observed," (comm. on Num. 25:9, C.R.XXV.299). Moreover, Calvin shows complete indifference about whether the Apostles in the New Testament writings quote the Old Testament accurately or not. He notes that the Apostles took "complete freedom" in quoting Scripture. "They never had any hesitation in changing the words provided the substance of the text remained unchanged," (comm. on Psalm 8:6, C.R.XXXI.92). "Quare modo de summa rei constaret verba mutare, nulla illis fuit religio.".

The Apostles in this matter "were not squeamish, for they paid more attention to the matter than to the words," (comm. on Isa. 64:3, C.R.XXXVII.409). The Apostle is also free to accommodate the meaning of Old Testament passages to a new sense not necessarily implied in the words of the original writer (for example, comm. on Romans 10:6, C.R.XLIX.198-9), and to change the expression of the text without undue care, (comm. on Eph. 4:8 f., C.R.LI.193-4). There are also passages in which Calvin seems to betray like indifference about the quality of the science taught by Scripture. The writers when referring to scientific matter can be supposed to speak "in mere accommodation to mistaken, though

generally received, opinion," (comm. on Psalm 58:4, C.R.XXXI.561 'Nisi forte magis placeat ex communi vulgi errore loquutum esse Davidem.'). Since the Biblical writers were addressing the "humble and unlearned" they did not need to have any care about the profundity or accuracy of their statements on such matters as astronomy, (comm. on Psalm 136:7 f., C.R.XXXII.364-5).

Professor Reid notes that, "sometimes Calvin manifests indifference about the exact way in which the Word of God is conveyed," and that it is "difficult to regard this indifference as supporting a literalist view of the Bible," ("The Authority of Scripture," p.38). He cites the following passage at Institutio I.vi.2. to support his claim: 'But whether God revealed Himself to the patriarchs by oracles and visions, or suggested by means of the ministry of men what should be handed down by tradition to their posterity, it is beyond a doubt that their minds were impressed with a firm assurance of the doctrine, so that they were persuaded and convinced that what they had received came from God.' "This suggests," says Reid, "a greater degree of latitude in his use of the terms employed than is compatible with a literalist view. One thing, he says, is certain and assured; another thing is more obscure: the certain thing is the divine origin of the Holy Scriptures; the uncertain thing is the exact means their divine author employed for their communication," (op.cit. p.39). He quotes Doumergue: "Calvin is saying that the Bible comes not from men but from God; he does not say how," (Jean Calvin', IV.74)

In an article for "Church History,"⁽¹⁾ Dr. J. T. McNeill examines the "strong phrases" for evidence of a belief in verbal inerrancy.

He notes:

Institutio IV.viii.9. The Apostolic writers are "sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit."

Institutio IV.viii.6. Calvin uses the phrase dictante spiritu sancto, "the Holy Spirit dictating."

2 Timothy 3:16, "the prophets... did not speak at their own suggestion but being organs of the Holy Spirit they uttered only what they were commissioned to declare."

Jeremiah 36:4-6. "the words which God dictated to his servant were called the words of Jeremiah, yet, properly speaking, they were not the words of man, for they did not proceed from a mortal man but from the only God."

In each case Dr. McNeill draws the conclusion that it is with the teaching (doctrina) of the passage that Calvin is concerned, and that he shows no interest in the verbal expression of this.

I note with interest his treatment of the passage at Institutio IV.viii.6.

Dr. Dowey has called this, "the most extreme of Calvin's expressions of "the divine origin and complete validity of Scripture," ("The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology," p.91). McNeill notes that "it is certainly inten-

(1) J. T. McNeill, "The Significance of the Word of God for Calvin," in "Church History", vol. 28. pp.131 f.

ded. to convey that judgement," but he is "far from being convinced that Calvin had in mind also the divine perfection of the very words of Scripture." Calvin uses the phrase "dictante spiritu sancto." Having referred to the Old Testament prophecies of Malachi and Deuteronomy, he continues: "To these were added at the same time histories which are the compositions ("lucubrationes") of the prophets but framed ("compositae") at the dictation of the Holy Spirit." "It is true", says McNeill, "that the last phrase in some appropriate context might be taken as supporting a view of the literal or verbal inspiration of Scripture. But the writings are "lucubrationes" of the prophets who wrote them. Calvin, the classical scholar, knew well that lucubrations are literally compositions by lamp or candle light. He seems to be telling us that the Scripture writers burned the midnight oil, composing at the dictation of the Holy Spirit. He notes that the Law, Prophets and Psalms taken together constituted the Word of the Lord for the people of old and the standard by which priests and teachers were to weigh their own teachings ("suam doctrinam exigere debuerunt"), turning neither to the right nor to the left, so that they might speak "from the mouth of God". He concludes: "The concern of the passage is evidently with sound doctrine; I fail to see that it shows an interest in the verbal expression of this," (op.cit.p.141).

Dr. McNeill's position is interesting and stimulating, and is typical of the approach to this area of Calvin scholarship in recent decades. Professor Reid's article, "Calvin on the Authority of Holy Scripture,"

(in "The Authority of Scripture," pp.29 f.), and a paper by Professor R.C.Prust for the "Scottish Journal of Theology," ("Was Calvin a Biblical Literalist ?" in S.J.T. vol. 20, 1967), both arrive at the same conclusion as McNeill, albeit by differing routes. This view, that it is the doctrina contained in the Scriptures which is the sole concern of Calvin, is certainly no new one. At the turn of the century Doumergue had stated quite categorically: 'It is not the words that are important, it is the doctrine, the spiritual doctrine, the substance,' ("Jean Calvin," IV.p.78). The view is most attractive, and can be supported by quotation from Calvin. At Institutio I.vi.3., for example, he writes that we have in Scripture "such a depository of doctrine as would secure the truth from perishing from neglect, vanishing amid error, or being corrupted from the presumptuous audacity of men." Against what has just been stated, there are those who attribute to Calvin "verbal and mechanical" inspiration. Reinhold Seeberg ("Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte" vol. iv (part 2), 1920) and B.B.Warfield ("Calvin and Calvinism," pp. 29-130) held the opinion that Calvin fathered the seventeenth-century orthodox doctrine of inspiration. This view has been revived with very little change by K.S.Kantzer, (in J.S.Walvoord, ed., "Inspiration and Interpretation") R.E.Davies, "The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers," defends Warfield against Doumergue. Davies' book, however, was published in 1946 and showed no knowledge of Peter Brunner ("Vom Glauben bei Calvin," 1925) who had reoriented the discussion. Brunner draws attention to the fact that Calvin is fond of comparing the word of Scripture

with a mirror. He makes two remarks on the point : "The mirror clearly reflects an image but this reflection is not identical with the image itself," (op.cit.p.93). In proof he quotes especially Calvin's exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:7 where we read: "We see indeed, but as in a glass darkly - that is, instead of having the thing itself we have to be content with the message about it," (op.cit.p.94: C.R.L.63, and again at C.R.IX.823). Professor Niesel notes that Calvin expresses the same point when he describes the word of the Bible as an instrument of the Spirit, ("The Theology of Calvin," P.32; Inst.I.ix.3, again at IV.xi.1.). "This means that the Holy Spirit uses the word but it does not mean that it has so penetrated the word as to be identical with it."

In this connection we may remember that Calvin describes the elements of the Eucharist as instruments which the Holy Spirit uses in order to work in the souls of the elect, (O.S.I.508). St. Paul speaks of the bread as the communion of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16), but, as Calvin points out, communion is something different from the Body itself, (Inst. IV.xvii.22). "As, therefore, the apostle says that the rock from which spiritual water flowed forth to the Israelites was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4) ^{thus} and was/a visible symbol under which that spiritual drink was truly perceived... so the body of Christ is now called bread, inasmuch as it is a symbol under which our Lord offers us the true eating of His body," (Inst. IV.xvii.21).

Here is the ground upon which He justifies the use of the copula is:

"For although the sign differs essentially from the thing signified, the latter being spiritual and heavenly, the former corporeal and visible -

yet, as it not only figures the thing which it is employed to represent as a naked and empty badge, but also truly exhibits it, why should not its name be justly applied to the thing ?" (Institutio IV.xvii.21).

The Bible is the Word of God in the same way as the sacramental bread is the Body of Christ. Yet in neither case is logical identity implied. As Niesel makes clear: "God wills to make use of these elements as His instruments. That must be strictly borne in mind; but these means are not the thing itself. They must be carefully distinguished from God Himself. If this is true of the visible signs of the Eucharist, the same consideration applies to the word as the instrument of the Spirit. Instrument and thing are not to be divorced, but they are plainly to be distinguished," ("The Theology of Calvin," p.32).

The opinion that the biblicism of Calvin is based on literal or verbal inerrancy has led some critics to the conclusion that for Calvin the human writers were mere pen holders whose hands moved under the direction of the Spirit. They wrote as mere automata. Thus: "God spoke into their spiritual ears as an announcer would speak into a microphone at the broadcasting station, and their hands wrote and mouths spoke, like the reproducing horn of the receiving set, only the words God had spoken," (E.H. Pruden, "Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture," unpublished thesis, (Edinburgh, 1930) p.22).

Again: "If God's revelation was confined to this volume (the Bible), if its contents were to be the infallible touchstone of truth, if the perfect harmony of its parts was to be depended upon, it must be that Providence, which preserved the constituent books and secured their compilation into a canon, took care that no error should creep into its pages. For the assurance of faith, it was necessary to be able to trust the accuracy of every word of the record. "This amounts to the "assertion of the inerrancy of Scripture," (A.M.Hunter, "The Teaching of Calvin", p.72). Further: "Anticipating the Quakers, M^unzer held that "God still speaks to His own today as once He spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob". To that Calvin, of course, could not agree; to do so would have deprived him of his infallible criterion and touchstone of truth, and he could then no longer clinch an argument or silence an opponent by the final words, Thus saith the Lord, with his finger on a text," (Hunter, op.cit.p.71).

I am far from persuaded that Calvin in fact held such a mechanical theory of inspiration. Had he done so I do not think he could have found within the pages of Scripture the allegories and contradictions which he did find. To have done so would have meant that not everything had really taken place. It would have destroyed the mainspring of this kind of rationalism, viz. "God is truth and therefore I will find in the Bible which is the Word of God, only true and trustworthy sayings. " Though it is easy to understand this kind of reasoning, it is nevertheless a way of rationally dominating the Word of God, instead of following it obediently.

CHAPTER 8

WORD EVENT AND THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

It is certain that Calvin held the text of the Scriptures to have been written by men: it is equally certain that he believed the Scriptures to be the speech of the Holy Spirit. We have seen how certain scholars, depending on their position, have emphasised the one side to the detriment of the other. Both views can be supported by stringing together isolated quotations in the Calvin corpus, and for this reason the problem is insoluble so long as the discussion is confined within these limits. If our study of Calvin's thought in this area is to advance at all, then we must move outside the limits which scholars have set themselves in the past, and see the issue in terms of Calvin's general concept of God's dealings with men, (on this point see, Dr. T.H.L.Parker, "Calvin's New Testament Commentaries," pp.56 f.)

When Calvin speaks of Scripture as God's word, then he means here unreservedly word as word - word that as far as its word character is concerned, is completely normal. He can, of course, radically contrast God's word and man's word, but not in regard to the spoken character of the word concerned, but rather in view of the question who is the real speaker of it: God who is verax, or man, who is mendax, (Romans 3:4). Thus the point of the contrast is whether the word event is one that is sound, pure, and fully realised - which is the natural destiny of words in human society. And that implies at the same time a contrast in what the word produces: whether it is a destructive and deadly word or one that brings wholeness and gives life. The full theological bearing of this difference can come to light

only when word is really taken as word. Dr. Ebeling has pointed out that it is word that unites God and man. Word serves understanding. Where word happens rightly, existence is illumined, and that naturally means existence in association with others, (G.Ebeling, "The Word of God and Hermeneutic," in, "New Frontiers in Theology," vol.II, "The New Hermeneutic," p.104).

Revelation can only be revelation if it is comprehensible. "Therefore, God's thoughts and God's language must become comprehensible, and this takes place when God, so to say, translates them into human thoughts and human language," (T.H.L.Parker, "Calvin's New Testament Commentaries," p.58). In condescending to man's sinful state God "stammers (balbultit) to us in a rough and popular style," (comm. John 3:12). He "accommodates (accommodet) himself to the ordinary way of speaking on account of our ignorance, and sometimes, if I may be allowed the expression, stammers," (comm. John 21:24). Modes of expression such as anthropomorphisms are examples of God lisping in speaking to us. "Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness," (Inst. I.xiii.1).

Calvin frequently expresses this under the simile of a mother communicating with her child and confining herself to concepts, syntax and vocabulary that the child can understand. "So God 'babbles' or 'prattles' with man in the Scriptures. But what is the element of 'babbling' in regard to Scripture ?

It is that the form of concepts and the arguments are human, as also is the language," (T.H.L.Parker, "Calvin's New Testament Commentaries," p.58). Thus God speaks to the writer in the way that he individually will understand, and it is the word that mediates understanding.

The word is event in the comprehensive sense that it embraces both linguistic tradition and encounter with reality. In his book, "The Nature of Faith," Dr. Ebeling points out that word here does not mean any special, supernatural word, but true, proper, finally valid word. God's word is the ultimate ground of understanding because it is here in the last analysis that word is encountered as word and understanding as understanding. For the claim to truth which is made here means truth absolutely. And for that reason it always combines both things: agreement with all truth and opposition to what everyone is expected to reject as untruth, ("The Nature of Faith," pp.84 f. 182 f.).

It is clear, therefore, that when we turn to the Biblical writers, we may say, "Now let us hear God himself speaking," (Inst. III.viii.12). Calvin clearly conceives the Biblical writers as secretaries who wrote down what they had received from God. Thus they are the instruments or organs (C.R.LII.383) or amanuenses (Inst. IV.viii.9.) of the Holy Spirit.

What was the task of a secretary ? The printer, Jean Crispin, informs us about the modus operandi of three of Calvin's secretaries, Charles de Jonviller, Jean Budé and Denis Raguenier: "In copying they followed this plan. Each had his paper ready in the most convenient form, and each separately wrote down with the greatest speed. If a word escaped

the one (which sometimes happened, especially on disputed points and on those parts that were delivered with some warmth), it was taken down by another... Immediately after the lecture, de Jonviller took the papers of the other two, placed them before him, consulted his own, and, comparing them all, dictated to someone else to copy down what they had written down hastily. At the end he read it all through so as to be able to read it back to M. Calvin at home the following day. When any little word was missing, it was added; or if anything seemed insufficiently explained, it was easily made clearer," (CR.XLII.189 f.). Dr. Parker makes the point: "With such a painstaking method, we may reasonably assume that the commentaries composed in this way set before us mainly the ipsissima verba of Calvin and certainly everywhere represent his opinion," ("Calvin's New Testament Commentaries," p.22).

And so to Calvin's image of dictation to a secretary. The "speaker" in the Scriptures is God: God reveals Himself to man: so that man may understand Him, God uses completely human speech.⁽¹⁾ In that God speaks to man, man enters into a new relationship with his God.

God reveals Himself in the Scripture to man. But this statement needs expanding. That God reveals Himself in the Bible means that the Father

(1) T.H.L.Parker, "Calvin's New Testament Commentaries" pp.58,59.

reveals Himself in the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁽¹⁾ By
the power of the Holy Spirit demands in this context both that the original
writing of Scripture shall be in some way, but in a real way, the work of
the Spirit and that the full understanding of it shall be by the inner
enlightenment of the Spirit, (T.H.L.Parker, "Calvin's New Testament
Commentaries," p.57). By the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit,
Scripture is believed and accepted.

We must be careful not to minimise the role of the human writer of
Scripture. Calvin's secretaries will have worked very hard in the
performance of their duties, both physically and intellectually, and there
is no reason to believe that he thought otherwise as regards those who
penned the Scriptures.

God speaks to men in the Scriptures, he calls them to repentance and
faith, he sets before them the way of life, (T.H.L.Parker, "The Oracles
of God," p.95). The destiny of man is, for Calvin, to exist as response:
"The purpose for which men were created was that they might acknowledge
him who is the author of so great a blessing," (comm. on John 1:4). Herein
are we rightly to understand the doctrines of obedience and man as the image
of God in Calvin's thought; viewed in this way they are seen not to stand in
opposition, but to coincide.

(1) The mainspring of the classical Reformation was not concerned
with the doctrine of the Trinity for which Scriptural evidence was
regarded as sufficient. The technical aspects of Calvin's
doctrine are as follows: The essence of God is simple and
undivided, yet within it there abide a Trinity of persons or a
personal Trinity. A Person is a subsistence within the divine
essence which is related to others and distinguished by an
incommunicable property. This implies distinction but not
division, (Inst.I.xiii).

Acting in response, man is responsible. He is not destined to have nothing to say and to have to remain dumb. His existence is, rightly understood, a word event which has its origin in the word of God and, in response to that word, makes openings by a right and salutary use of words, (see Ebeling, "The Word of God and Hermeneutic," p.104). Therein man is the image of God, (- as I previously stated: "The image of God in man consists in the acknowledgement of God's goodness and greatness.").

I have called this section "Word Event and the Doctrine of Revelation." The word of God is a revelation of God. It is a revelation of God to man. We have suggested that "word" is only rightly understood when it is viewed as an event which involves at least two. Man is therefore responsible for his actions before God. The basic structure of word, for Calvin, is not statement - but appraisal, certainly not in the colourless sense of information, but in the pregnant sense of participation and communication. Where word happens rightly, existence is illumined. If man does not respond in obedience to the word of God, then the word is withdrawn, and man cannot know God.

The primary gap between God and man in Calvin's thought is not the philosophical divide between finite and infinite. The gap is that caused by sin. Man does not respond in obedience to the word. There is thus a double alienation of God from man and of man from God. "This fact lends urgency to the search for that word which is a true, necessary, salutary, remedial, and therefore unequivocal and crystal-clear word, for

the word which, because it accords with man's destiny, corresponds to God, that is, the search for the word by means of which one man can speak God to another so that God comes to man and man to God," (Ebeling, *op.ci.* p.104). It is Jesus Christ who is this Word. Jesus is the Mediator between God and man; without Him there can be no bridge between God and man. If the Divine Majesty had not condescended man could not climb to it.

Revelation in Calvin's thought is always from above. We can only know God through His own communication of Himself to us - that is, through His Word. But the Word of God is not a fortuitious, transient, human word⁽¹⁾ that passes away: there are not "x" words of God, there is only One Word of God, and He is Jesus Christ. "It is therefore He, this Person, who is really the Word."⁽²⁾ God thus communicating Himself to man, God in His revelatory action, is what Calvin means by God the Son⁽³⁾ - the Second Person of the Trinity.

(1) Karl Barth, "The Epistle to the Romans, "Eng. transl. Hoskyns, 1933, p.341.

(2) Emil Brunner, "The Divine - Human Encounter," pp.77-8.

(3) "The Son... is Himself the eternal and essential Word of the Father," (In.I.xiii. 7.).

CHAPTER 9

THE WORD IN RELATION TO GOD

We have seen that, for Calvin, we can only know God through His own communication of Himself to us - that is, through His Word. Indeed, it is with revelation and the knowledge of it, that Calvin's theology begins. "It is no accident," says Dr. Dowey, "that the Institutio, from the first edition to the last, opens with the category of knowledge, the knowledge of God and ourselves, not speculations about being or existence," ("The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology," p.8). By His Word God transmits to man the truth, He conveys to him understanding and wisdom. The Word of God possesses a power of information. It is directed to the intelligence, it instructs in knowledge. With regard to this didactic aspect of the Word, we emphasise again that it is not for Calvin a philosophical concept, the mode of expression of a truth which is impersonal and outside of time, an object of speculation. It always points back to Him from whom it proceeds. It is in this relationship which it holds with God that its truth resides. It instructs to the degree that it brings man face to face with the living God and causes man to become aware of his position of responsibility before Him who speaks. It is through the Word that man knows God and knows himself.

At Institutio I.xiii.7. Calvin explains that, "Word means the everlasting Wisdom, residing with God, from which both all oracles and all prophecies go forth. For, as Peter testifies, the ancient prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ just as much as the apostles did (1 Peter 1 : 10-11; 2 Peter 1:21), and all who thereafter ministered the heavenly doctrine. Indeed, because Christ had not yet been manifested, it is necessary to understand the Word as begotten of the Father before time."

When we turn to the Commentary on John 1:1, we learn that there is in the Word of God a two-fold relation (duplex relatio) : the former to God in that it is His eternal Wisdom; the latter to men in that it is the revelation of God to men..." first, because He is the eternal Wisdom and Will of God; and, secondly, because He is the clear expression of His purpose (expressa consilii eius effigies); for, as speech is said among men to be the image of the mind, so it is not inappropriate to apply this to God, and to say that He expresses Himself to us by His Word spoken," (John 1:1. C.R. XLVII, p.1). "No sooner was the world created than the Word of God came forth into external operation; having been formerly incomprehensible in his essence, he then became publicly known by the effect of his power," (C.R. XLVII.4).

At Institutio I.xiii.9. Calvin identifies the Son, Word, or Wisdom of God with Jesus of Nazareth: "Christ is the same Word clad with flesh." As Mediator Christ is both true God and true man. His functions to conquer sin and death depend upon His divinity. But, the mediation of Christ did not begin with the Incarnation, though His reconciling work started here. And this eternal mediation must continue unbroken even during the Incarnation, (hence there can be no kenosis in the later sense).

Christ must also be true man. It is true that the New Testament speaks of the Mediator in the flesh, but this is not docetic Kenosis, it is krupsis (veiling or concealment): "Christ veils the majesty of God which otherwise would be terrible to us, so that it is manifest to us only as grace and fatherly kindness," (C.R. LV.56), but again this has no docetic intention. Christ must become true man since God can only draw near to us in that disguise without annihilating us. The veiling of the revelation is thus a sign of God's goodness and mercy towards us.

For Calvin, the fact that we encounter God in human flesh is an important pledge of our destiny to be related to Him. "We trust that we are the children of God because the eternal Son of God accepted a body like our body, became flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, so as to affirm His solidarity with us," (Inst.II.xii.2). The true manhood of Jesus Christ is the presupposition of our communion with Him and so for our salvation. Because the Son of God has become one with us, in communion with Him there can be an exchange between what properly belongs to us and what properly belongs to Him (Inst.IV.xvii.2). By the brotherhood which the Son of God establishes between Himself and us in becoming man, the eternal inheritance which is His own is guaranteed to us also as our possession, (Inst.II.xii.2).

When Calvin speaks of the Incarnation, he often says that "Christ appeared": "Our Lord then made His appearance as a real man," (C.R.XLVI.73). The Incarnation did not mean "that Christ began to be the Son of God, which He was not before," but "that He was manifested among men in order that they might know Him to be the One who had been promised before," (C.R.XLV.28). "He who had been the Son of God in His eternal Godhead, appeared also as the Son of God in human flesh," (C.R.XLV.31).

The teaching contained in this last paragraph provided for an extremely important defence of the faith against Michael Servetus and his followers. Servetus (A.D.1509-1553), a Spaniard, developed Unitarianism in the direction of Pantheism. In his two works entitled De Trinitatis Erroribus and Dialogorum de Trinitate libri duo Servetus maintained the peculiar

theory, that before the Creation of the world God had produced within Himself two personal representations, or manners of existence, which were to be the means of communication between Himself and men: that these two representatives of the Deity were called the Word and the Holy Ghost: that the Word was united to the Man Christ, Who might thus be called God: that the Holy Ghost animates all nature, and produces in men all that is good in them: and finally, that both these representatives of Deity would, after the destruction of the world, be re-absorbed into the Person of God, (C.R. VIII. 453-872; XIV.58 ff.; XXVI).

In accordance with Peter Lombard (Sent. 1, dist.), and with the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (Denzinger, Enchiridion symbolorum No.431 f.), Calvin teaches that the divine essence is absolutely one and unbegotten in all three Persons. Indeed, he declares it to be impossible that each one of the three Persons could have a portion of the divine essence, (Inst.I.xiii). The divinity of the Son is a necessary foundation of the faith. To deny the divinity of the three Persons was, as Professor Wendel shows, "tantamount to ruining the divinity of the Christ and, at the same stroke, removing the keystone not only of Christian theology, but of all saving faith," ("Calvin", p.167).

For Calvin then, the essence of God is simple and undivided, yet within it there abides a Trinity of persons or a personal Trinity: "He also designates Himself by another peculiar character, by which He may be yet more clearly distinguished; for while He declares Himself to be but One, He sets Himself forth to be distinctly considered in Three Persons, without apprehending which, we have only a bare and empty name of God floating in our minds, without any idea of the true God," (Inst.I.xiii.2). A Person is a subsistence

within the divine essence which is related (relatio) to the others and distinguished by an incommunicable property: "We particularly use the word relatio here, because, when mention is made simply and indefinitely of God, this Name pertains no less to the Son and Spirit than to the Father," (Inst. I.xiii.6). This implies distinction but not division. There are not trois marmousets within the Godhead. The distinction of incommunicable properties consists in this: "that to the Father is attributed the principle of action, the fountain and source of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the dispensation of all operations; and the power and efficacy of the action is assigned to the Spirit," (Inst.I.xiii.18). Even so, since the essence of God is simple, there can be no question of one Person of the Trinity acting in isolation from the other Persons.

The Mediator is one single, eternal, divine person, at once very God, and very man. In the unity of the Theanthropic person the two natures remain pure and unmixed, and retain each its separate and incommunicable attributes distinct, (Inst. II.xiv). At first sight this may read as Nestorianism, but such a charge against Calvin would be utterly false. He does start from the two natures, but gives equal weight to the unity of Person. The idea of a dualist Christ is not permissible, (Inst.II.xiv.4). Jesus Christ is not on the one hand God and on the other, and in isolation from the first fact, man also; rather "the truth is that both natures are so closely bound up together that Jesus Christ is one Person only," (C.R.XLVI.110). "If Jesus Christ had not assumed a human body, or had kept His Godhead in separation from it, where would be today our chances of salvation? But

since He was both God and man in one, and the two natures are united, look - we can come boldly to Him and reckon Him as our brother, without doubting that He will own us as members of His body," (C.R.XLVI.110).

On the other hand there must be no fusion of the Godhead and manhood: "The confession that the Word became flesh is thus not to be understood as if it were transformed into flesh or fused with the flesh, but in the sense that it chose for itself from the body of the Virgin a temple in which to dwell; and thus He who was the Son of God became a Son of Man not by a confusion of modes of existence but by the unity of His person. That is to say that according to our belief His divinity became conjoined and united with His humanity in such wise that each of the two natures constantly kept its distinct qualities, and yet one Christ arose from the union of both," (Inst. II.xiv. 1).

Equally we must not so emphasise the unity of the Person as to destroy the distinctness of the two natures, (Inst.II.xiv.4). "The error of Eutyches must be rejected just as much as that of Nestorius. If it is not noted that the one Person of Christ consists of two natures, so that the characteristics of each remain intact then we are taught the existence of a hybrid thing which is neither God nor man," (Inst. IV.xvii.30).

If the humanity of Christ participated in the characteristics of His divinity, then the humanity of Christ would no longer be a true humanity, (Inst. IV. xvii. 29) - and our salvation, which depends on the true manhood of Jesus Christ, is jeopardized.

Again, at Institutio II.xiv.7. Calvin points out that by a fusion of the divinity and humanity in Christ His true Godhead would similarly be threatened. The question would then be whether God Himself were in Christ or only divine powers. Again our salvation would be in jeopardy.

CHAPTER 10

CHRIST AS THE WORD OF GOD, THE MEDIATOR OF
ALL REVELATION

We have seen that, for Calvin, the Word of God is the mediator of all revelation between God and man, and this same Word of God is the Christ who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Calvin asserts that Christ, the Word of God, who "remains with God perpetually one and the same and who is God Himself," (Inst. I.xiii. 7.), was "always the bond of connection between God and man," (C.R.XXIII.584. Semper vinculum fuit coniunctionis hominum cum Deo), and "the source of all revelations," (Inst. I.xiii.7. Oraculorum omnium scaturiginem). "Never did God reveal Himself outside of Christ," (C.R. XLVII.115. Nunquam tamen citra Christum se patefecit Deus). "Nor indeed, had any of the saints ever any communication with God except through the promised Mediator," (C.R.XXIV.35-6). "God formerly manifested Himself in no other way than through Him," (C.R.XXIII.584). God only revealed Himself "in His eternal Word and only begotten Son," (C.R.XXXVI.126).

Thus the salvation of the saints of the Old Testament is founded, just as much as our own, in Jesus Christ, (C.R.XXVIII.288). Christ is the foundation of the divine covenant to which both the Old Testament and the New bear witness, (C.R.XLVIII.289). All the Old Testament theophanies, then, are only rightly understood and interpreted in the light of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Commenting on John 9:5 ("As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world."), Calvin likens the revelation given in the earthly life of Jesus to one day: "His bodily presence was a true and remarkable day of the world, the lustre of which was diffused over all ages, (Verus

et singularis dies mundi cuius splendor in omnia saecula diffusus fuerit).

From whence did the holy fathers in ancient time, or whence do we now, desire light and day, but because the manifestation of Christ has always darted its rays to a great distance, so as to form one continued day ?"

(Christi exhibitio semper radios suos longe emisit qui perpertuum diem

texerent). The earthly life of the incarnate Word is thus, for Calvin, the reality from which all revelation, both previous and subsequent, derives its meaning. Revelation under the Old Covenant is thus seen to be a real participation in the event.

Participation in Christ given under the Old Covenant is described in terms of union with God. The fathers "both had and knew Christ the Mediator, by whom they were united to God," (Inst. II. x. 2).

"All mankind, except the Jews, as they sought God without the Word, must necessarily have been wandering in vanity and error," writes Calvin at Institutio I. vi. 4. Because "God promised salvation to His ancient people and also regenerated His chosen and illuminated them by His Spirit," (C. R. XXXVIII. 697), they "were favoured with the same benefits as we this day enjoy," (C. R. XLIV. 451). When David writes, 'I will magnify the Lord who hath given me counsel,' "the counsel of which David makes mention is the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit," (comm. on Ps. 16:7). When making expiatory sacrifices at the temple the worshippers there experienced a true reconciliation with God. Sins under the law were "remitted through Christ," (C. R. LV. 112). "The ancients were reconciled to God in a

sacramental manner by the victims, just as we are now cleansed through Baptism," (C.R.XXIV.507. Modo sacramentali reconciliati fuerunt Deo veteres per victimas, sicuti hodie abluimur per baptismum). "Let not that profane imagination be listened to, that the sacrifices only publicly and as far as regarded man, were absolved," (C.R.XXIV. 519. Atque ita facessat profanum figmentum, politice tantum hominum respectu sacrificia eos a quibus offerebantur a culpa et reatu absolvisse).

"These symbols were useful as exercises unto faith and repentance (exercitia ad poenitentiam et fidem), so that the sinner might learn to fear God's wrath and to seek pardon in Christ, (C.R.XXIV. 507). The fathers found a pleasure in the Word of God similar to that which the Christian finds in the hearing of the Gospel. David's delight in the law is due to it being for him "quickened by the Spirit of Christ." He found in the law "the free promises of salvation, or rather Christ Himself," (C.R.XXXI. 201).

"By the term law," Calvin says in definition, "I understand not only the ten commandments, which prescribe how one should live in piety and justice, but the whole cultus of religion which God communicated through Moses," (Inst. II.vii.1.). The whole cultus includes ceremonies which God added "in order to support the commandments and to sustain and promote the faith," (C.R.XLVIII.305). Even so, the Mosaic law itself belongs integrally to the covenant which God concluded with His servant Abraham, (C.R.XXXVIII.688). "For Moses was not made a lawgiver in order to set aside the promise given to the seed of Abraham; rather we see that he constantly reminds the Jews of the covenant of grace concluded with their fathers whose heirs they were, just as if his special mission were to renew that covenant," (Inst. II.vii.1).

We see, then, how Calvin's understanding of divine law is based on the recognition that the law of God is covenantal law. The law is misunderstood if it is viewed simply as a collection of commands about how to live well. It is much more than this because it is included in the covenant of grace which God founded, (Inst. II.vii.2), Abraham and his heirs were accepted by God as His children, and this act of adoption was grounded solely in the mercy of God, (C.R.XXVIII.549). God in entering into a covenant with His people makes an absolute claim upon them, and it is this divine demand which is the meaning of the law for Calvin.

"God gives us all things of His free grace," says Calvin at Institutio II.vii.4. The covenant is a sovereign and merciful initiative by God for the sake of the people whom He has chosen. He binds His people to Himself, but in so doing He likewise binds Himself to His people. This view is fundamental : "Of course God desires that each one of us should be consecrated to Him, that we should renounce self-will, that we should be subject to Him and surrendered to His guidance; but before He requires that of us He bestows Himself upon us," (C.R. XXVIII.513). God gives Himself to those whom He commands to walk in His way. "And herein lies the origin of the radical difference between the Law of God and every other law. In other cases there is a sharp opposition between a law and those to whom it is applicable, and this implies compulsion and servitude for those whom the law affects," (Dr. W.Niesel, "The Theology of Calvin", p.93).

"This must soften our hearts, even though they were harder than stone. Who are we then that our Lord should condescend so low in order that He

make a covenant with us, and to promise us that He will be our Father and Saviour, so that He comes before us as one who has concluded with us a contract that is a gift ?" "This should so delight us as to cause us to yield ourselves to God without hesitation, since He persuades and invites us to do so by His example," (C.R.XXVIII. 513). Calvin can take delight in the law precisely because it is the convenantal law of the gracious and faithful God.

"Whatever the law teaches, prescribes, and promises is always orientated towards Jesus Christ its centre," writes Calvin. "Thus no one can have a correct understanding of the law unless he constantly relates it to Him" (C.R.XLIV. 196). Here we see that for Calvin the covenant of God with His people is grounded in the Incarnation. "The main content of the law and the foundation of the divine covenant consists in the fact that the Jews have Jesus Christ as their Leader and Protector - the heart of their sacred history; without Him there can be no religion and they themselves would be the most wretched of men," (C.R. XLVIII. 289). Thus God adopted the Jews as His children, declaring to them His will, only because His Son was to fulfil that will here on earth. "From the Law we may properly learn Christ, if we consider that the covenant which God made with the Fathers was founded on the Mediator; that the sanctuary, by which God manifested the presence of His grace, was consecrated by His blood; that the Law itself, with its promises, was sanctioned by the shedding of blood; that a single priest was chosen out of the whole people, to appear in the presence of God in the name of all, not as an ordinary mortal, but clothed in sacred garments;

and that no hope of reconciliation with God was held out to men but through the offering of sacrifice," (C.R.XLV. 807).

The ritual and sacrifices have no efficacy of their own to make atonement apart from Christ, (C.R. L.603). "Jesus Christ is the grace and truth which the cultus and its ceremonies foreshadowed." "The power and efficacy of the ritual depended on Him," (Inst. III.ii.32). Much the same is to be said of the moral law. It is given "in order that by disclosing the divine righteousness which alone is valid in the sight of God it should remind, convict, and picture to each one of us his own unrighteousness and finally condemn us because of it," (Inst. II.vii. 6). "This does not happen to the end that we should sink in despair and without consolation be plunged into ruin," (Inst. II.vii.8). The point is "that we should be led to resign foolish delusions about our own strength and to realise that we can stand upright only in the strength of God, so that, naked and exposed, we flee to His mercy to lean wholly upon it, to hide ourselves utterly within it, appreciate that it alone is our true virtue and merit and is ever open to us in Christ as long as we desire it with all our hearts," (Inst. II.vii.8).

In Jesus the law has completed its function of judging and punishing, and this has affected the final fulfilment of the law and of the will of God which it represents. For our sakes, and in the sight of God, Jesus Christ walked in the way prescribed by the law; now the law invites us simply to follow in His footsteps. Thus taught, the promises subjoined to the law gain significance for us: "For as God gives us all things of His free grace, so also among other things He confers on us this benefit: that He does not reject our

imperfect obedience, but overlooking its defects He accepts it as perfect and on the score of it allows us to enjoy all the good which He has promised in His law," (Inst. II.vii. 4).

The teaching given above is brought out very vividly by Calvin in his comments on Paul's statement at Romans 3:31, "Do we then make void the law through faith ? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." - "The moral law is truly confirmed and established through faith in Christ, since it was given to teach man of his iniquity, and to lead him to Christ, without whom the law is not fulfilled." Man cannot be reconciled to his God via the law alone, for : "In vain the law proclaims what is right, yet it accomplishes nothing but the increase of inordinate desires, in order finally to bring upon man greater condemnation." Yet, "when we come to Christ, we first find in him the exact righteousness of the law, and this also becomes ours by imputation. In the second place we find in him sanctification by which our hearts are formed to keep the law."

The highest confirmation of the law lies in the fact that it has attained its truth in Christ.

Although there is considerable unity between the Old and New Covenants, the latter dispensation has a superiority over the former that gives it the right to be called "New". The New Testament flows from that Covenant which God made with Abraham and afterwards sanctioned by the hand of Moses. That which is promulgated for us in the Gospel is called the New Covenant, not because it had no beginning previously, but because it was renewed, and better conditions added," (C.R. XL. 393). "Though Christ is the substance of both He is not equally manifested in both," (C.R.IX.177.

Quia etsi communis utriusque substantia est Christus, non tamen aequalis est ^{rius} eius exhibitio). "Those mysteries which the men of the Old Testament beheld in the form of shadows have been plainly revealed to us," (Inst. II.ix.1).

Calvin sees a progressive increase in the clarity of revelation. "For this is the order and economy which God observed in dispensing the covenant of His mercy, that as the course of time accelerated the period of its full exhibition, He clarified it from day to day with additional revelations. Thus, in the beginning, when the first promise was given to Adam, it was like the kindling of some feeble sparks. Subsequent accessions caused a considerable magnifying of the light, which continued to increase more and more, and diffused its splendour over a wide extent, until at length, every cloud being dispersed, Christ, the Sun of righteousness, completely illuminated the whole world," (Inst. II.x.20).

But we must not assume that revelation given to man under the old dispensation was not genuine revelation because it was the less clear - that would be entirely to misinterpret Calvin. As we have seen, all revelation is by the Word of God and is genuine revelation.

Commenting on the quotation from Joel in Acts 2:17, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh," Calvin notes a "twofold antithesis" between the times of the two Covenants, "for the pouring out signifies a great abundance, whereas there was under the law a more scarce distribution. All flesh signifies an infinite multitude, whereas God in times past did vouchsafe to bestow such full participation of His spirit only upon a few." To-day those who are

the least among the disciples of Christ are endued with as much light of knowledge as the outstanding prophets and teachers of the older dispensation, says Calvin, (comm. on Jer. 31:34, C.T.S., "Jeremiah and Lamentations," vol. iv., p. 134 f.).

The Gospel differs from the law "only in respect of clearness of manifestation," (Institutio II. ix.4. dilucidae manifestationis). When Paul says that Christ at His advent brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, "he claims for the Gospel the honourable distinction of being a new and extraordinary kind of embassy... For though believers at all times experienced the truth of Paul's declaration, that all the promises of God in him are Yea and Amen inasmuch as these promises were sealed upon their hearts; yet because He has in His flesh completed all the parts of our salvation, this vivid manifestation of realities was justly entitled to this new and special distinction," (Institutio II. ix.2..... Viva ipsa rerum exhibitio iure novum et singulare praeconium obtinuit). "As painters do not in the first draft bring out the likeness in vivid colours and expressively but in the first instance draw rude and obscure lines, so the representation of Christ under the law was unpolished - a first sketch, but in our sacraments it is seen drawn out to the life," (comm. on Col. 2:18). "Under the law was shadowed forth only in rude and imperfect lines that which is under the Gospel set forth in living colours and graphically distinct," (comm. on Heb. 10:1).

Revelation under the New Covenant is more satisfying than under the Old. The men of the Old Covenant "had only a slight foretaste; to us is given fuller fruition," (Inst. II. ix.1. Quum eam modice delibaverint, uberior nobis offertur eius fruitio). They "could not be satisfied with the state in which

they were then, but aspired to higher things," (comm. on Heb. 7:19.

Praesenti suo statu non poterant esse contenti quin longius adspirarent.).

After being granted at Peniel as full a revelation of God as could then be given

him Jacob still asks, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name." "It is not to be

wondered at," comments Calvin, "that the holy man, to whom God had

manifested Himself under so many veils and coverings that he had not yet

obtained any clear knowledge of Him, should break forth in this wish; nay

it is certain that all the saints under the law, were influenced with this wish,"

(comm. on Gen. 32:29. Nec mirum est si sanctus vir in hoc votum prorumpat,

cui se Deus patefacerat sub multis involucris, ut nondum familiaris esset nec

liquida cognitio). The fathers "inquired as though they possessed not what is now

offered to us," (comm on 1 Pet. 1:10). As a proof that they "desired

something more," Calvin refers to the example of Simeon, who, "after seeing

Christ, prepared himself calmly and with a satisfied mind for death thus

showing that he was before unsatisfied and anxious," (comm. on 1 Pet. 1:10).

Christ has "in a manner opened heaven to us so that we might have a near

view of those spiritual riches which before were under types exhibited at a

distance," (comm. on 1 Pet. 1:12). Jesus announced this new era when before

the paralytic man He claimed to have power on earth to forgive sins. The use

of the phrase on earth is, for Calvin, highly significant. "Christ's meaning

is that forgiveness of sins ought not to be sought for at a distance: for He

exhibits it to men in His own person, and as it were in His hands..... Now

as Christ descended to earth for the purpose of exhibiting to men the grace of

God as present, He is said to forgive sins visibly, because in Him and by Him the

will of God was revealed, which, according to the perception of the flesh, had been formerly hidden above the clouds," (comm. on Matt. 9:6 Nempe dicere voluit Christus, ne procul quaerenda sit peccatorum remissio, in sua persona quasi ad manua esse hominibus exhibitam...). It is true that our salvation like that of those in former ages is yet "in hope,"⁽¹⁾ but Christ stretches out His hand directly to us that He may withdraw us from the world and raise us up to heaven, whereas those who lived before His coming were directed to Him only "by the circuitous course of types and figures, " (comm. on Heb. 4:8, see further the comm. on Heb. 7:12).

(1) See, for example, the comm. on Hebrews 10:1, where Calvin says that the "full fruition" of the promised blessings of the Old Testament is "deferred to the resurrection and the future world." The good things to come "are not only future blessings as to the Old Testament but also with respect to us who still hope for them," (comm. on Dan. 12:2).

CHAPTER 11

THE ATONEMENT

The true Word of God is Jesus Christ - the hidden God who has become the "involved God." Calvin makes much of the Pauline concept of Jesus as the New Adam. In Romans 5:12-21 Paul contrasts Christ with the first Adam in order to throw into relief the victory of grace over condemnation. The principal phrase is the "much more" of verse fifteen: "if death entered into humanity by the trespass of the first Adam, how much more shall grace reign by the one man Jesus Christ." In 1 Corinthians 15 the figure of Adam enables Paul, by way of contrast, to establish the certainty of the bodily, that is to say, personal, resurrection of believers. The creation of humanity, was performed at two different times: first "earthly" humanity, represented by the first Adam, then "heavenly" humanity represented by the second Adam, Jesus Christ. By faith in Christ man can pass from proto-adamic humanity, doomed to death, to deutero-adamic humanity summoned to the last resurrection. This transfer from one humanity to the other is not understood in Paul as a magical or impersonal process, but as the personal act of faith in response to the gospel of grace, (see art. "Jesus," § 7.p.198 f., by Dr. P. Bonnard, in "Vocabulary of the Bible," ed. Von Allmen).

"Sin and death entered in through the fall of Adam and have been destroyed by the work of Christ," says Calvin at Institutio II.i.6. Our Lord "has assumed the person of Adam and taken his name in order that in his place He might render obedience to the Father and offer our flesh as a ransom to the just judgement of God, and in the same flesh bear for us the punishment which we deserved," (Inst. II.xii.3). The death of Christ was the work of God who

was showing mercy to sinners: "Our Lord Jesus Christ was beaten and smitten by the hand of God so that we might be released," (C.R.XXXV. 624). By His death the forces of sin, death and Satan which separated man from God were overcome: by His resurrection man was given the blessings of life and righteousness. "Because all these things (faith, love of God and neighbour and the striving for holiness and righteousness) have been restored to us in Christ, they must be considered as something added to our nature rather than as something belonging to it. Hence we conclude that they were utterly effaced in us," (Inst. II. ii. 12).

The work of Christ consists essentially in the fact that He bears the punishment of death which was to fall upon us. That implies according to Calvin: "Because God alone cannot suffer death and man alone cannot overcome it, therefore Christ unites the human with the divine nature, so that for the atonement of our sins He may subject the weakness of the one to the power of death and in the strength of the other may endure the struggle with death and obtain victory for us," (Inst. II.xii. 3).

From what we have said so far, it will be observed that Calvin is concerned with the work of Christ no less than with His Person; indeed, he approaches the Person through the work. This is in marked reaction from Scholasticism as a viable way of doing theology.....its logical subtleties, its pressing of questions beyond Biblical limits, its failure to check back its results against the New Testament starting-point. Calvin's question was not "Granted the doctrine of the Person of Christ what can be said about His work?" but "Granted the doctrine of the work of Christ what doctrine of the Person is implied?" We may compare here Melanchthon's words, "To know Christ is to know His benefits."

Jesus Christ, says Calvin, paid the price of our peace and redemption (Inst. II. xvi. 7), and the penalty of sin (Inst. II. xii. 3). His task in offering atonement was to "interpose between us and God's anger and satisfy His righteous judgement," (Inst. II. xvi. 10). In doing this He substituted Himself in our place (Inst. II. xvi. 7), and transferred to Himself the guilt which made us liable to punishment, (Inst. II. xvi. 5). Calvin speaks of Christ as bearing the vengeance, anger, or hatred of God, or at least the signs of such vengeance, (Inst. II. xvi. 11). Being accursed on the cross (comm. on Gal. 3:13), He was "beaten and struck by the hand of God," (C.R. XXXV. 624). In this way He appeased the wrath of God, and gave God satisfaction, (Inst. II. xii. 3).

Such is Calvin's language when interpreting the Cross. Against Calvin's interpretation it might be objected that God is not thus shown to be just but rather unjust, in that he allows the innocent to suffer for the guilty. This, however, is not a valid objection, for Calvin, dwelling on the Pauline saying that the sinless Christ "was made to be sin for us,"⁽¹⁾ did not hesitate to assert that Christ so completely identified himself with mankind that he was also identified with sin. In this vein it is interesting to note Luther's words: "This saw all the prophets, that Christ was to be of all men the greatest robber, murderer, thief, profaner, blasphemer, and so on.... who bears in his own body all the sins of men - not in that he committed them, but in that he took upon his own body the things committed by us, to make satisfaction for them with his own blood."⁽²⁾

(1) 2 Corinthians 5:21

(2) Quoted by Professor L.W. Grensted, "History of the Doctrine of the Atonement," p. 200.

There are scholars who find Calvin's understanding of the Atonement (the 'Penal Theory', as it is termed) "crude" and "repellent."⁽¹⁾ It is "not surprising" that such a view prevailed, however, for "the Renaissance brought with it a revival of interest in ancient law"..... and "it was natural that society at a certain stage of its evolution should believe that its laws are so sacred that every violation of them must receive plenary punishment."⁽²⁾

Now of course we must not discount the social and political environment of the age in which scholars live; but R.S.Wallace is surely right when he says that Calvin's language when interpreting the Cross is his language because it is the language he finds in the Bible.⁽³⁾ "To him such language is so integral an aspect of the Cross itself that to allow ourselves to be taken aback by it is to take offence at the Cross itself, and to refuse to use it is to refuse to glory in the Cross."⁽⁴⁾

Calvin indeed recognises that his language, like all human language about God, is "inappropriate": "Such expressions are inappropriate. Yet they stand necessarily as the only adequate expressions we have for the spiritual events and realities which they have been used to signify, even though they but dimly point beyond themselves to such. "They" enable us gradually to form some apprehension "of things" which our reason cannot all at once

(1) See, for example, Alan Richardson, "Creeds in the Making," pp. 105-108.

(2) Richardson, *op.cit.* pp. 105, 107.

(3) R.S.Wallace, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life," p.3.

(4) Wallace, *op. cit.* pp. 3-4.

comprehend," (C.R.XXXI.137). Yet even though his language may mislead some, he cannot find any more suitable terms in which to speak about the Atonement than those which the Bible uses when it speaks of propitiation and appeasement and substitution. His understanding of the doctrine of the Atonement is not based on philosophical speculation, it is entirely rooted in the Biblical terminology.

The Old Testament literature is rich in the language of sacrifice, and it is the sacrificial patterns and analogies of the Old Testament that provide the background of Calvin's thought when he comes to interpret the Atonement. Jesus fulfils in His death the role of sacrificial victim offered to God as a propitiation for the sins of the people. He died as the propitiatory victim fulfilling in a unique way that cannot be deduced from any general moral principles a destiny and office decreed for Him by His Father, (C.R. XXIV. 428). "The only end which the Scripture uniformly assigns for the Son of God voluntarily assuming our nature..... is that He might propitiate the Father to us by becoming a victim," (Inst. II.xii. 4).

The "hour" of the cross was "not an hour which is determined by the fancy of men, but an hour which God had appointed," (C.R.XLVII. 375). For "we ought always to remember, that the wicked executioners of Christ did nothing but what had been determined by the hand and purpose of God; but God did not surrender His Son to their lawless passions, but determined that according to His own will and good pleasure, He should be offered as a sacrifice. And if there were the best reasons for the purpose of God in all those things which He determined that His Son suffer, we ought to consider

on the one hand, the dreadful weight of His wrath against us, and on the other hand, His infinite goodness towards us," (C.R.XLVII. 414). God so loves men that He gives His only Son to die in their place. He cannot ignore the sins of mankind, they have to be dealt with: but behind what takes place on Calvary there lies not the anger of God but His love.

In His death Jesus Christ fulfils not only the role of propitiatory victim offered for the sins of men, but also of the priest who consecrates himself in blood to the service of the heavenly sanctuary in order that he might be fit to offer acceptable sacrifices to God, (R.S.Wallace, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life," p. 6). The crowning feature of the infinite love shown in the Incarnation lies in the fact that, through putting on our human nature, He who could not be subject to death nevertheless becomes capable of dying, and of offering Himself in death, (C.R. LV. 32. Inaestimabilis enim erga nos eius amor hic apparet. Sed cumulus exstat in eo, quod naturam nostram induit ut moriendi conditioni se subiiceret). The human nature which He assumed was the temple which He Himself sanctified through His blood and in which He consecrated Himself through death in order, as eternal High Priest, to offer Himself in expiation of our sins, (C.R. LV.110).

But the self-consecration of Christ to His eternal priesthood took place not only during His death but throughout His whole life. Christ effected the reconciliation between God and man not only through His death but, says Calvin, through the whole course of His obedience. He did not only die to redeem us from the curse of the Law but was born to do so, (Inst. II.xvi.5).

Therefore, though it may be right to ascribe salvation quasi peculiare ac proprium to His death, He nevertheless from the moment of His birth began to pay the cost of our redemption, (inst. II.xvi. 5). Again, though the highest illustration of the sanctification by which we are reconciled to the Father belongs to the death of Christ, nevertheless His sanctification was effected throughout His whole life, (C.R. XLVII. 385).

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSION

We have seen how, for Calvin, the term Word of God is used to express God communicating Himself to man, God in His revelatory action. By the power of the Holy Spirit the Father reveals Himself in the Person of His Son, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The true and substantial Word of God is this man Jesus Christ who alone reveals God to man: "the ancient prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ just as much as the apostles did, and all who thereafter ministered the heavenly doctrine!" The Incarnation did not mean "that Christ began to be the Son of God, which He was not before," but "that He was manifested among men in order that they might know Him to be the One who had been promised before".... "He who had been the Son of God in His eternal Godhead, appeared also as the Son of God in human flesh."

There is, then, in Calvin's thought, only one Word of God, this same Jesus of Nazareth. Yet throughout his theological writings Calvin consistently refers to Scripture as Word of God. How can this be? There cannot be a duplex Word of God, Calvin's theology will not allow for this. I believe the answer to the problem is to be found in the statement that, "for Calvin the term Word of God is used to express God communicating Himself to man, God in His revelatory action." This statement allows for the primary truth in Calvin's thought that all revelation of God is the revelation of the Son of God, but does not supply limits as to the modus operandi of the Word. By the power of the Holy Spirit the Father revealed Himself in the Son to the patriarchs of old, the prophets, those who heard and saw Jesus of Nazareth in his earthly life in Palestine, and afterwards to those who call upon His name in His church.

Those to whom the Truth was revealed by the power of the Holy Spirit, faithfully unfold to us to-day in the pages of Scripture that which was delivered to them if by the grace of God we are granted this self-same Spirit to come and reside within us, opening our hearts and minds to the knowledge of the Truth. And what is the Truth to which we will arrive ? none other than Jesus Christ Himself who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The Bible is, from beginning to end, a witness to the Word of God, that is to say, to the eternal Son of God who became incarnate as Jesus Christ to bring man back to his God. He is dominus et rex scripturae.

Scripture, and the Holy Spirit working within the individual, is a means which Our Lord uses to claim men for the Father just as surely as He did when He was manifest here on earth. It is in this sense that Scripture is correctly understood as Word of God: it is the vehicle by means of which Our Lord has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind. He uttered that which the prophets and fathers penned, and that which the prophets and fathers penned witnesses to Him. The words of Scripture are God communicating Himself to men, God in His revelatory action.....Word of God.

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