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CALVIN AND NATURAL LAW

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Although the subject of Calvin and Natural Law is not a novel one, nevertheless it does seem to be worthwhile to take a fresh look at it, since often discussion of Calvin's theology takes place from prepared positions in which it is assumed that Calvin's attitude to such matters as natural law is clear and uncontroversial. In addition, this topic provides a convenient and illuminating case study within a wider historical enquiry about the relation of Calvin to his medieval and scholastic predecessors and to his Calvinist and Puritan successors. That such continuity exists at all has been questioned on a variety of fronts, and with the use of a variety of arguments, not all of them consistent with each other. I hope that we shall see that whatever Calvin's theological originality there are important elements of continuity between representative medievals such as Thomas Aquinas, the Reformer John Calvin, and representative Puritans such as John Owen.

In the Institutes one finds only two or three passages where Calvin explicitly discusses natural law. In Book II, Chapter II, discussing the bondage of the will, and the question of whether or not sin is due to ignorance, Calvin asserts that men have evidence of God's will quite apart from any special revelation. Alluding to Romans 2,14-15 Calvin says

If the Gentiles by nature have law righteousness engraved upon their minds we surely cannot say they are utterly blind as to the conduct of life. There is nothing more common than for a man to be sufficiently instructed in a right standard of conduct by natural law (of which the apostle is here speaking). Let us consider, however, for what purpose men have been endowed with this knowledge of the law.¹

Calvin then goes on to claim that men have the knowledge of the law in order to make them without excuse before God, saying that

The purpose of natural law, therefore, is to render man inexcusable. This would not be a bad definition: natural law is that apprehension of the conscience which distinguishes sufficiently between the just and unjust.²

In this connection Calvin applauds Aristotle's distinction between incontinence and intemperance, and puts sin down to intemperance. Sin is action against knowledge.

Calvin, by implication, equates this natural law which all men know imperfectly, but with sufficient awareness as to render them without excuse, with the Decalogue. For the measure of how imperfectly men grasp the law of God unaided by special revelation is shown by comparing such unaided knowledge with the Ten Commandments.

And if we want to measure our reason by God's law, the pattern of perfect righteousness, we shall find in how many respects it is blind! Surely it does not at all comply with the principle points of the First Table.³

When we return to Calvin's exposition of the Ten Commandments⁴ in the Institutes we find him once again drawing a comparison between the Decalogue and what he calls 'that inward law' which 'in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the Two Tables.' Because men

are unteachable

the Lord has provided us with a written law to give us a clearer witness of what was too obscure in the natural law, shake off our listlessness, and strike more vigorously our mind and our memory.⁵

This ought to be compared with a later passage in the Institutes

The law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience....⁶

Writing about the Fourth Commandment, Calvin distinguishes between those features of it which are ceremonial from those that are moral (and hence eternal and necessary, and hence in some sense natural). By Christ's coming the ceremonial part of this commandment was abolished (implying that the non-ceremonial part of it was not). And Calvin proceeds to identify the non-ceremonial elements. Later in the Institutes Calvin further elaborates his treatment of the law, making a distinction between moral, ceremonial and legal commands.⁷ Both these matters, the question of the Sabbath, and the three-fold distinction between various commands, will be taken up later.

But how did Calvin use the phrase "natural law"? An answer to this question will enable us to get clearer about what he said, and to offer an evaluation. We shall consider four problems:

- (i) What does the term 'natural law' mean for Calvin? In what sense is there a 'natural' law? What is the relationship of such law to the creation?
- (ii) What is the connection between natural law and the revealed law of God, according to Calvin?
- (iii) How, according to Calvin, do those who are aware of the natural law learn it?
- (iv) What do the answers to questions (i) - (iii) show us about Calvin's relationship both to medieval treatments of natural law and to the later Calvinist and Puritan tradition?

(i) The meaning of 'natural law'. In English 'natural' can be contrasted with 'supernatural', used as equivalent to universal, to innate, to sinful, and as opposed to contrived or designed, and these are but a few of its most prominent meanings. This should make us cautious either in saying without qualification that Calvin does or that he does not have a positive view of natural law. I suggest that when Calvin uses it the term means, at least 'a law that is not in fact specially i.e. verbally revealed by God, though one that is revealable'. In addition, Calvin seems to mean by it 'universally distributed', known to all mankind. So what Calvin appears to say is that the law of nature is that law of God concerning man's relationship to God, and the relationship of men with each other which is known by all human beings. Calvin would also probably add that the natural law that is in keeping with human nature, the proper observing of which would cause human beings to flourish.

Already we can see, in our discussion of the first question, that it is difficult to keep apart questions about what the natural law is and how it is to be apprehended or understood. So let us consider the third question, returning to question (ii) in due course. We have already seen that the law of nature is, for Calvin, to be contrasted with what is revealed by God

in Scripture. Is this natural knowledge natural in a further sense, natural in the sense of innate, or is such knowledge acquired by observation? Is it like, or part of the sensus divinitatis, the innate sense of God, or is it acquired, like human beings acquire the rudimentary belief that some things are round? When Calvin says that

to begin with, God's image was visible in the light of the mind, in the uprightness of the heart, and in the soundness of all the parts⁸

what he says clearly has implications for human knowledge. Was the knowledge that such an enlightened and integrated individual process innate? It would seem so, in that Calvin goes on to say that knowledge of the heavenly life 'was engraved upon his soul'.

Man in his first condition excelled in these pre-eminent endowments, so that his reason, understanding, prudence and judgment not only sufficed for the direction of his earthly life, but by them men mounted up to God and eternal bliss.⁹

But whatever the exact position was originally, whether the knowledge of the natural law was innate or acquired, Calvin is clear that at present, in his sinful and fallen condition, man is unable by his powers ('naturally' in yet another sense) either to acquire or to reacquire and retain the knowledge of God's natural law in its entirety. Calvin is emphatic on this point, as being the plight of all fallen men, all men 'in Adam'. Yet he goes on to add that through the continued activity of conscience each man knows enough of God's original, natural law, as a result of which he is rendered inexcusable before God for his sin.

Now let us turn to question (ii). What is the relationship between natural law and the revealed law of God? A number of separate points need to be made here.

a) Enough has been said to make it clear that despite considerable opinion to the contrary¹⁰ Calvin is not a divine command theorist. Given his position on natural law he cannot consistently take the view that what makes any principle a moral principle is simply the fact that God has commanded it, and that there are no limits to what God might command, and hence no limits to what might become a moral principle. He cannot take this position, because he holds that the morality of certain principles is grounded in their naturalness, and in part this means not merely that they are universally applicable, but that they are suitable to human nature, and become applicable independently of any explicit divine command. They are divine commands, they have the force of law, but God's commanding them does not make them moral, his forbidding them would not make them immoral. And not only cannot Calvin consistently take divine command position on morality, we find that in a number of places he explicitly rejects it. For example, in upholding the position that 'God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous' Calvin nevertheless goes on to say

We do not advocate the fiction of 'absolute might': because this is profane, it ought rightly to be hateful to us. We fancy no lawless God who is a law unto himself.¹¹

Because God has no liability to render an account to others this does not mean that he is a law to himself, and therefore totally capricious. God's choice of law is necessarily governed by his own nature - it is God's choice - and by the character and situation of those to whom his command is addressed. The widespread belief to the contrary is perhaps due to a

failure to recognise Calvin's distinction between the secret and the revealed will of God. The revealed will of God is explicitly in accordance with God's moral character, as sketched above. What of God's secret will? Calvin insists that often the reasons for God's secret will are not available to us, and hence the rationale behind what God secretly wills is unknown. But this is not nominalism on Calvin's part, rather it is an assertion of human ignorance, perhaps of necessary human ignorance.

b) Part of the function of God's revealed law is to draw attention to and to focus upon the natural law. When Calvin in this way recognises that the natural law is obscure, and that therefore the revealed law of God is required to clarify and focus upon it, he does not mean that the natural law is essentially or inherently obscure, but that its obscurity is due to the obfuscating effects of sin. Just as the 'spectacles' of special revelation, God's word, are necessary in order properly to interpret physical nature¹² so the same spectacles are needed in order not to understand the full, precise content of the natural law. So that in a real sense the natural law is now never understandable and acceptable apart from God's revealed, more explicit and emphatic version of it.

c) But in certain important respects the content of God's revealed law goes beyond his natural law. In the first place, as we noted earlier, while natural law finds embodiment in the Decalogue, the Decalogue is not simply a verbalising of the natural law, but contains non-natural conventional, ceremonial elements. 'By the Lord Christ's coming the ceremonial part of this commandment was abolished',¹³ indicating that the Mosaic re-publication of the law of nature contained figurative and proleptic features suited to that era of redemptive special revelation.

Does this mean that the New Testament amendment of the Sabbath teaching of the Decalogue amounts to a return to the pre-Mosaic law of nature? Hardly, since according to Calvin the Lord's Day of the New Testament is inextricably bound up with the fact of Christ's resurrection. So it might be said that while the law of nature, in Calvin's view, obliges all men to keep one day in seven, and perhaps oblige them to keep the seventh day (in Calvin's commentary on Genesis the seventh-day Sabbath is regarded as a creation ordinance¹⁴), it does not oblige all men everywhere and at all times to keep the seventh day as the Sabbath as the Jews under Moses ought to have and did, nor to keep the first day as the Christians ought to and do.

As a footnote to this particular discussion it is worth pointing out that in the Institutes¹⁵ Calvin claims that there is an underlying fittingness, an appropriate orderliness, about the fact that the Lord's Day in the New Testament, whatever its differences from the Old Testament Sabbath, is observed in a pattern of 1 in 7. Is this appeal to order, and are all such appeals in Calvin, another way that he has of invoking natural law?

As the Old Testament Sabbath arrangement contained ceremonial elements, so there are other commands of God which are not all moral, namely the ceremonial laws. The ceremonial law

was the tutelage of the Jews, with which it seemed good to the Lord to train this people, as it were, in their childhood, until the fulness of time should come.¹⁶

Further

The judicial law, given to them for civil government, imparted certain formulas of equity and justice.¹⁷

(Would Calvin say that such formulas were a part of the natural law? I think that he probably would, though this merits further consideration.)

We can see from these statements, incidentally, the far-reaching hermeneutical consequences of Calvin's reliance upon natural law. The natural law, imparted at the creation is of permanent validity. It is re-expressed in the Decalogue. It cannot, therefore, be that law which was the schoolmaster of the Jews to bring them to Christ, and which according to Galatians 3:24,25 is done away with in Christ, but rather the ceremonial and judicial laws which are non-natural or purely conventional in character. The natural law, shorn of its ceremonial and judicial elements, is re-expressed, endorsed and highlighted by Christ (for example, in the Sermon on the Mount), and by the Apostles in their correspondence.

II

How do these views of Calvin on natural law compare with the medieval outlook?

Any attempt to discuss this question has certain initial obstacles to overcome. There are those who have argued that Calvin 'make an entire break from the Scholastic conception of creation and existence'¹⁸. Two arguments are offered by Professor T.F. Torrance for this sweeping view. The first is that Calvin has a view of God's relation to the world as being dynamic rather than static. What this means, according to Professor Torrance, is that in Calvin's theology the idea of secondary causation¹⁹ has no real place. But if Professor Torrance means what he says it follows that Calvin's own express commitment to secondary causation has to be explained away, and that Calvin's theological position becomes indistinguishable from pantheism. For a theology in which there is no secondary causation is one in which God is the only cause of everything that happens, and that rather than it being the case that I am typing this lecture, God is typing it. Not even the most rigid and uncompromising Christian theological determinist would go as far as this. To appeal, in support of such an interpretation of Calvin's theology, to his remarks about God's constant upholding of the creation is not in point here, since similar remarks can be found in the allegedly 'static' medieval tradition²⁰.

The second argument which Professor Torrance offers is that Calvin understands the doctrine of God in terms of verbs rather than abstract qualities or properties. This is not universally true of Calvin's treatment of God²¹, but even if it were it would ignore the fact that for the medievals, with their supposedly static view of God, God is pure act, and it skates over the question of what verbs are used to explain the character of God.

Putting these arguments to one side, then, let us consider the medieval position as expressed by Aquinas. Aquinas discussed the theme of natural law at the greatest length in Summa Theologiae Ia 2ea, in considering what he calls 'the Old Law'. He maintains the following four positions.:

- (i) 'The Old Law clearly set forth the obligations of the natural law, and over and above these added certain precepts of its own'²³

The setting forth of the natural law in the Old Law was entirely appropriate since though with regard to the natural law 'man's reason could not be misled in principle ... it could be confused by the effect of habitual sin as to what ought to be done in particular cases'.²⁴

- (ii) There is a three-fold distinction to be drawn between moral, ceremonial and judicial precepts of the Old Law. This distinction provides that basic framework within which Aquinas discusses the nature of law.
- (iii) 'The moral precepts, as distinct from the ceremonial and judicial, are concerned with matters which, of their very nature, belong to right conduct.'²⁵
- (iv) Because the precepts of the decalogue are, in all essentials, the natural law, they can be understood by natural reason. The precepts, therefore, contained in the decalogue are those the knowledge of which man has in himself from God. They are such as can be known straightaway from first general principles with but little reflection.²⁶ The precepts of the decalogue are concerned with matters which the mind of man can grasp instantly.²⁷

Finally

The moral precepts derive their force from the dictate of natural reason, even if they had not been expressed in the Law. Now they fall into three groups. Some are absolutely certain, and so evident as not to need promulgation, such as the commandments about love of God and one's neighbour, and others of the sort, as we have said, which constitute, as it were, the end of the precepts; and so no one could be mistaken about them. Others are more determinate in character, yet the reason for them can easily be seen even by the most ordinary intelligence. Yet since, in a few cases, human judgment may be misled about them, they need to be promulgated. These are the precepts of the decalogue.²⁸

Reading these words of Aquinas' one cannot fail to be struck by a number of evident similarities and equally evident dissimilarities between his position and Calvin's. In discussing these, and especially the similarities, it is not being suggested that there is a causal link between the views of the two theologians, nor is the existence of such a link being denied, but I am claiming that Calvin was, in general, a contented occupant of a general climate of thought of which Aquinas was a distinguished member, but also someone who did not hesitate to depart from elements in this climate of thought when he judged this to be necessary.²⁹

What are the similarities and differences? Let us begin by making a broad and rough distinction between the ontological status of natural law, what the natural law is, and its epistemological status, how it is known. The relation between Aquinas and Calvin might roughly be expressed as one of considerable agreement about the first, but of considerable disagreement about the second.

There are important similarities. Both maintain that the Decalogue contains the natural law clearly set forth. Both subscribe to the three-fold distinction between moral, ceremonial and judicial precepts of the Mosaic Law. Both ground the goodness of natural law both in the character of God and in human nature, to whose flourishing the natural law conduces.

There is one crucial difference. Aquinas is much more sanguine than is Calvin about what human reason unaided by special grace can understand. For Aquinas the natural law is natural both in the sense that it is a divine law for human nature given at the creation, and in the sense that it is now successfully apprehended naturally, by unaided fallen reason alone. Because of this Aquinas does not stress, as Calvin does, the importance of the enlightening and focussing character of the Decalogue upon the natural law. For Aquinas the Decalogue has an epistemologically subordinate role

to the clearly apprehended natural law.

For Aquinas, natural law is knowable and known by the natural reason of man as he now is. The knowledge of the content of the Decalogue is not, it would seem, innate, but it follows at once from the knowledge of first principles. Thus from the self-evident moral principle that one should do evil to no one it follows that one should not kill. Aquinas says that 'all the precepts of the decalogue are related to them (the primary and general precepts of the law of nature) as conclusions to general principles'.³⁰ This is true even of the fourth commandment, which follows from the (to Aquinas) self-evident principle that some time ought to be set aside for the worship of God. What is not part of the natural law is that this span of time should be one day in seven, or the seventh day, but then both these features, according to Aquinas (and certainly the fact of the obligatoriness for Jews in the Old Testament worship on the seventh day) are ceremonial precepts due to the historically-conditioned circumstances in which the Decalogue was promulgated.

It follows from this that for Aquinas the Decalogue has a supplementing function. It provides a primary set of theorems from the axioms of the natural law, theorems which each person could have worked out for himself from innate moral principles, at least insofar as they do not (as with the fourth commandment) involve a ceremonial element, but which God in his goodness has provided. These are precepts of the middle range. In addition there are precepts of the far range which 'wise men' find by careful examination to be implied by both the basic moral principles and the precepts of the middle range. Such a principle might perhaps be that it is permissible to kill an enemy in the prosecution of a just war.

The contrast with Calvin at this point could hardly be sharper. Whereas for Aquinas the revelation of the Decalogue complements the natural law which is recognised by all, for Calvin, though those without benefit of special revelation know that there is a natural law and have some sense of its content, what that moral law is, what it contains, can only be known clearly, not through reason alone, but through a reasoned understanding of special revelation. It is only with the hindsight that special revelation provides that the content of natural law can now be recognised for what it is.

Furthermore, it is only with the proper motivation and the moral power that regenerating grace gives that there is even the prospect of keeping the moral law. (Only the prospect because, as Calvin's interpretation of Romans 7 indicates, he takes the broadly Augustinian position that the life of the regenerate is characterized by conflict between moral weakness and aspirations to keep the law of God.) So that intellectually the natural unregenerate man fails to recognise the moral law for what it is, and particularly the first table of the moral law, and morally fails to keep it.

If we want to measure our reason by God's law, the pattern of perfect righteousness, we shall find in how many respects it is blind!³¹

Against this unremittingly black picture Calvin offers two elements of relief, though elements which are not sufficient to take him back to Aquinas' position. The first element is that though no men recognise the natural law in its fulness nevertheless all men recognise enough of it to render them inexcusable. It is not as if they do not have a clue. They are given clues, they recognise these for what they are, but they culpably do not follow up the clues. So they are without excuse. They are condemned for their failure to keep even those elements of natural law that they

In the second place Calvin concedes (if this is the correct word) that

men have somewhat more understanding of the precepts of the Second Table (Ex. 20:12ff) because these are more closely concerned with the preservation of civil society among them.³³

To whom is Calvin referring here? Perhaps not only to those who have no benefit of special revelation, but to those who have that benefit but who remained natural men, unregenerate and unenlightened. The reason for suggesting this is that Calvin writes in the immediate context of 'the common judgment of human reason', and of the failure in our keeping of the law. But even such general understanding of the Second Table as there is is superficial and one-sided.

For the natural man refuses to be led to recognise the diseases of his lusts. The light of nature is extinguished before he even enters upon this abyss. While the philosophers label the immoderate incitements of the mind as 'vices', they have reference to those which are outward and manifest by grosser signs. They take no account of the evil desires that gently tickle the mind.³⁴

The difference between Aquinas and Calvin regarding the apprehension of the law of nature encapsulates the Reformation conflict. It was conflict about the primacy, or otherwise, of special revelation, about the extent of human sinfulness, and about the need for power of God's regenerating grace. In the case of Aquinas (as also in the case of those philosophers such as Cicero with whom Calvin sharply disagrees in Institutes II.II.2) Calvin would hold that there is an under-estimation of the noetic effects of sin. The idea that sin is solely a matter of sensuality prevails with them, whereas for Calvin sin affects the understanding, not by destroying it but by depraving it. It is not completely wiped out, but it is choked with ignorance, as a result of which the will cannot strive after what is right.

In my view the relative positions of Calvin and Aquinas on natural law has a precise parallel in their respective views on natural theology.³⁵ We might legitimately discuss what importance Aquinas' natural theology has for his religious epistemology as a whole³⁶ but there is no denying the fact of his natural theology. By reason alone, starting from self-evident principles, any rational man may conclude that God exists. This is what Aquinas thought Paul was teaching in Romans I. Calvin, it seems to me, is much more cautious. It would be wrong to suppose that he thinks that there is no natural knowledge of God. But it would be equally incorrect to suppose that Calvin is committed to a full-orbed natural theology.³⁷ Rather what we find in Calvin here is precisely what we find in his treatment of the natural law, namely that man has from the creation around him clues about the existence of God which he - predictably but cupably - fails to follow up.

But why, if natural law plays the subordinate and residual role that we have been arguing for in Calvin, does he find it important to insist on natural law? Was it indeed important? Or is the reference by Calvin to natural law something that is in fact alien to his real view? We shall discuss these questions later.

III

So far we have been looking back at the medieval tradition which Calvin inherited, and to his modifications of it. What we have seen is that

though Calvin is patently an heir of the medieval natural law tradition he is nonetheless sharply critical of it. It is now time to look forward from Calvin, to his 'Calvinist' and Puritan successors.

In recent years it has been alleged that the intellectual and religious climate of Calvin's thought was sharply different from that of his successor Beza and the later Calvinists in Germany and Holland and Scotland and England. While Calvin was warm, personal, evangelical and Christ and Bible-centred in his thinking, Beza (for example) was cold and rationalistic, concerned to develop a system rather than to proclaim the gospel. In this emphasis it is alleged that he was followed by the tradition of Calvinist scholasticism (leavened to some extent by covenant theology) leading in turn to the Dordt divines in Holland and on the Continent and the Westminster divines in Great Britain. In this system Christ's atonement was limited to the elect, faith became at one and the same time exclusively intellectual and plagued by doubt, and religion became a covenant between divine and human bargain hunters. The result was legalism, the loss of personal assurance, and a virtual overthrow of the spiritual gains of the Reformation by its would-be successors.³⁸

In my view this account is wrong in general and in virtually every particular, though the task of demonstrating this would be a long one.³⁹ But in discussing the relation of Calvin to his successors we are inevitably entering into this disputed territory. What I shall aim to do in what follows is to look at the position of a representative Puritan, John Owen, on the question of natural law. I shall argue that Owen's position, although much more elaborate than Calvin's, is so much like it in essentials that it would be flying in the face of the evidence to suppose that there was any substantial difference of outlook between them.

There lies tucked away (if this is the correct expression for a 200-page monograph) in Owen's monumental commentary on Hebrews, an elaborate discussion of the Sabbath. Owen was writing at a time in England when numerous options on the Sabbath were being canvassed. In setting out and defending his basic view - that the Christian is to observe the first day of the week as a Continuation of the Old Testament Sabbath, but shorn of its Old Testament ceremonial elements - Owen provides us with numerous interesting observations of the natural law, what it is, how it is known, what its relationship to the Decalogue is and so forth. He expresses his basic position as follows:

Whereas it is confessed that the separation of some portion of time to the worship of God is a part of the law of our creation, the light of nature doth and must still, on that supposition, continue to give testimony to our duty therein. And although this light is exceedingly weakened and impaired by sin in the things of the greatest importance, and as to many things truly belonging unto it in our original constitution so overwhelmed with prejudices and contrary usages that of itself it owns them not at all, yet let it be excited, quickened, rectified, by Scripture light, it will return to perform its office of testifying unto that duty, a sense whereof and a direction whereunto were concreated with it.⁴⁰

What is Owen saying here? Three things, each of which echoes what we have found Calvin saying.

(a) There are natural laws, 'the law of our creation', which are known of and understood through the light of nature, natural reason. Owen distinguishes God-given positive laws, those that have no intrinsic reason to be laws for the human race, but are purely conventional, (such as the

command to Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit, or the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament or the New) from moral laws. Moral laws are unalterable, being based upon the nature of the things concerned, and the nature of God the law giver, who is supremely good. Some laws have both moral and ceremonial elements, they are what Owen calls moral-positive.⁴¹ Thus the fundamental law of nature on which the fourth commandment is based is that some part of our time ought to be separated to sacred uses. Owen adds that since as a matter of fact God has indicated at the creation that the time should be one day in seven, and this is known - so Owen seems to say - innately, 'it will be a matter of no small difficulty to find what is purely positive therein'.⁴² Is the principle of one day in seven purely positive, and not natural, or is the principle of the seventh day positive and not natural? Happily we do not need to follow Owen in the thorough and (it must be said) sometimes strained discussion of this particular topic.

But what a striking similarity to Calvin! It is true that, unlike Owen, Calvin does not elaborate upon the distinction between different kinds of law, but the essence of Calvin's position lies in the distinction between moral and ceremonial laws and in his identification of the moral law with the law of nature. Owen agrees. There is, as well, a more explicit Thomism in Owen at this point. Aquinas linked the libligatoriness of the divine moral law to human nature. Perhaps for Martians, with a different nature, a rather different Decalogue would be appropriate.⁴³ Owen does the same.

For it was not possible that such a creature (as man) should be produced, and not lie under an obligation unto all those duties which the nature of God and his own, and the relation of the one to the other, made necessary.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, these differing degrees of explicitness should not cause us to ignore a fundamental agreement between John Calvin and John Owen, and between the two and Thomas Aquinas, on the law of nature.⁴⁵

(b) Further, Owen is emphatic that man in sin canot truly judge what the law of nature is. Because of this, to say that something is a law of nature is not, for Owen, to say either that all men agree on this fact, or that all men would agree on it if asked. For Owen, a law of nature is not a law which is natural because all men consent to it, but because it is given by God at the creation to be the proper end of human nature.

This law, therefore, is that rule which God hath given unto human nature, in all the individual partakers of it, for all its moral actions, in the state and condition wherein it was by him created and placed, with respect unto his own government of it and judgment concerning it.⁴⁶

But there is an endemic human ignorance of this law of nature due to sin. Men do not know where, under God, their true interests lie.

For although we may have some due apprehensions of the substance of it (the natural law) from its remaining ruins and materials in our lapsed condition, yet we have no acquaintance with the light and glorious lustre, that extent of its directive beams, which it was accompanied withal, when it was in him as he came immediately from the hand of God, created in his image. We have lost more by the fall than the best and wisest in the world can apprehend whilst they are in it.⁴⁷

Sin has brought in not only ignorance but a great diversity of moral outlook, a confused pluralism. Owen was as acutely aware of the facts of

cultural moral relativism as was his more famous pupil John Locke,⁴⁸ and as any modern Christian.

At present we know the light of nature is so defective, or so impotent in giving indications of itself, that many nations left destitute of divine revelation, or wilfully rejecting it, have lived and approved themselves in open transgression of the law of it.... All idolators, polygamists, fornicators, and those who constantly lived on spoil and rapine, approving themselves, or not condemning themselves in what they did, are testimonies hereof.⁴⁹

It is perhaps worth noting that Owen (and the whole tradition) would not have been abashed by the objection put to their position in a recent survey of attitudes to the Sabbath by Richard Bauckham. He suggests that while an early Puritan writer on the Sabbath, Nicholas Bownde, adopted the equivalent of natural law, moral law and the Decalogue

in the seventeenth century, however, English thinkers seem to have had difficulty with the idea of a natural law requirement of one day's rest in seven. Natural law theory was growing more rational, and the content of natural law could not so easily be determined simply from Scripture. Certain expedients contrived to bring natural law as close a possible to the Sabbath commandment, but by and large the Puritans abandoned as untenable the notion that the Sabbath law is wholly 'natural'.⁵⁰

This is, of course, a somewhat sweeping generalisation. The diversity of religious thinkers and thought in seventeenth century England is perhaps rivalled only by twentieth century California. It is also a somewhat confused statement. It is one (rather odd) thing to say that the content of natural law could not be determined from Scripture. it is another to say that attempts were made to bring the (independently known) natural law as close as possible to Scripture. But it is clear how Owen, at least, would have responded to such a general criticism: Natural law is logically distinct from Scripture, but under present circumstances is only known in its fulness through Scripture, and therefore the claim that there is a detailed natural law is only accepted by those persuaded of this by Scripture.⁵¹

Later in the same book⁵² A.T. Lincoln provides what he regards as two powerful arguments against considering the idea of a sabbath of one day in seven to be natural. The first is that if the proportion of one in seven is allegedly natural, why is it more natural than one in six? The answer to this that Owen would have given is that while the proportion of one day in seven is natural it is known to be so only through the spectacles (as Calvin would have put it) of special revelation. There was never any question of demonstrating this fact (as far as Owen was concerned) to all rational men, nor of getting an unsolicited acknowledgement of it from all men. Dr Lincoln's second point is that an appeal to some period of time as natural is to be made in terms of human nature as it ought to be. Quite so. Neither Owen (nor, I suspect, Zanchius, about whom Dr Lincoln is writing at this point) appealed to 'natural law discoverable by human reason as it is and without the aid of special revelation'.⁵³ Such a criticism is, I suggest, based on a misunderstanding of the mainstream Puritan and Reformed conception of natural law.

But what is the force of saying that some particular injunction is a part of the natural law, if the apprehension of that natural law is at present hedged about with such difficulties, and in fact can only be apprehended with the help of the special revelation? Why not rest satisfied with an appeal to the commands of special revelation? There are two answers to

this question. One answer must be in terms of the distinction between nature and convention. To suppose that the sabbath and all divine laws were only explicit specially revealed commands, with no grounding in the created nature of things, would allow that they were conventional, a law made merely as a result of divine fiat, and of arbitrary, temporary and adventitious character. But the moral law arises out of the very nature of divine creation. And the second reason is that only by assigning priority to natural law can a satisfactory account be given on the inexcusability of all men, both those who have special revelation and those without benefit of it, and only thus can the true meaning and depth of divine grace be secured.

IV

Having sketched Calvin's doctrine of natural law, and seen important elements of continuity between it and classical medieval treatments on the one hand, and the Calvinistic and Puritan tradition on the other, we are now in a position to see the inadequacy of certain other views of Calvin's position.

In a paper 'The Reformation and Natural Law',⁵⁴ A. Lang took the view that the idea of natural law was foreign to the genius of Reformed theology, and therefore that such references to natural law as one finds in Calvin are a medieval hangover which ought to be expunged from a properly Reformed account. An essentially similar idea has been taken up, of course, with great energy by Karl Barth,⁵⁵ and developed in extenso in relation to Calvin by William Nielson,⁵⁶ T.F. Torrance,⁵⁷ and T.H.L. Parker.⁵⁸ These books, in the words of Arthur Cochrane

showed that Calvin's so-called concessions to natural theology are considerably less than is generally supposed and must be interpreted in the light of his Christology and theology of revelation.⁵⁹

In examining the writings referred to one finds many of their typical statements lacking in clarity and definiteness, and where different positions can be distinguished the views attributed to Calvin can be seen to be inconsistent with what we have been learning about him.

To show this exhaustively would be an exhausting undertaking. We must confine our attention to two or three representative statements.

(i) From Arthur Cochrane

It would do violence to Calvin's thought to consider man's existence, or any natural law governing it, outside of Christ or the Word. The order of nature is created, established and revealed in Jesus Christ. Nature is to be seen within grace.⁶⁰

What does it mean, to see nature within grace, or to consider the natural law inside (or outside) Christ? One thing that it could mean is this: creation is through Christ, and the act of creation is an act of his grace. This would be a position that, I would judge, Calvin would Unswervingly endorse.⁶¹ But I suspect that Cochrane has more in mind than this.

A second, slightly different thing that he could mean is that it is only by the will of Christ that nature is made known. This, again, would be unexceptionable to Calvin.

A third thing, radically different from the first two, is that nature is

made known (its true character, a man's proper relationship to it, and so forth) only ever by Christ's incarnation and words. But this, as has already been shown, Calvin would reject as emphatically as Thomas Aquinas. It is one thing to say that Christ ordains nature. It is another thing to say Christ reveals nature. It is a third thing to say that Christ reveals nature only through his incarnation and his word. As we have seen, the answer the Calvin would give to the claim that Christ reveals nature only through his word is to ask: to whom are we supposing that Christ reveals nature by his word? And when? In the pre-lapsarian situation God gives man his law by some innate or near-innate process which it is difficult for us to understand. In the post-lapsarian situation that law is focussed first by the Decalogue and then, further, by Christ's own teaching, which shows the inwardness and depth of human wickedness, and holds out the law as the pattern of believing discipleship.

(ii) From J.B Torrance

When creation is alternatively interpreted 'in the light of nature' it leads too readily to the arbitrary God or the contract God according to one's interpretation of 'nature' and 'natural law'. It obscures the clear teaching of the bible that the God who is Father, Son and Holy spirit in his innermost Being created all men for sonship, love and communion. But we only have that understanding of creation when creation is seen in the light of its fulfilment in Christ 'by whom and for whom all things are created.⁶²

The separation between Nature and Grace amounts to a pre-Reformation medieval view that grace presupposes nature and grace perfects nature - a departure from the emphasis on Calvin that nothing is prior to grace.⁶³

What are we to make of such comments? For Calvin all that we have is from God and we do not deserve it. It is the gift of his grace. Nothing is prior to grace, nothing is apart from grace. But why is it thought to follow from this that God did not graciously create man, wonderfully endowed, in a framework of natural law, discernable without the help of special revelation? Certainly, then, in Calvin there is no idea of nature apart from grace as a separate, autonomous realm. Calvin did not believe in the eternity of matter, nor in some basic dualism of God and matter. but it surely requires separate argument based upon the data we have of Calvin's to show that he did not teach that there was a fundamental moral structure between the Creator and man which it was possible for man to violate, and which man did violate.

(iii) In his treatment of man's position in creation in Calvin's Doctrine of Man Professor T.F. Torrance omits any consideration of natural law.

In Calvin's view the key to the whole doctrine of man in creation and destiny is the idea of thankful response to the unbounded grace of god.⁶⁴

The idea of law plays no part in the creation of man, since the idea of law is incompatible with grace. What are we to make, then, of Calvin's repeated insistence, for example, that the Scripture speaks of God's hostility towards us? According to Professor Torrance this is a purely didactic effect on God's part.⁶⁵ These are 'didactic devices' of Calvin's, though Professor Torrance allows that Calvin is not consistent in carrying them through.⁶⁶ However, according to Professor Torrance we can be sure that his position is far removed from that of later Calvinist theology

which

too often turned Calvin's didactic devices into dogmatic procedure, producing a doctrine of the fall of man and of human depravity apart from the context of grace, and interpreting grace as God's answer to human depravity.⁶⁷

These remarks prompt certain questions. As we have noted, the emphasis on creation as the gift of God's grace is true to Calvin, and in this sense Calvin's thought proceeds within a fundamental 'context of grace'. But how else are we to understand Calvin's understanding of Christian theology than in redemptive terms, and how else understand redemption than in terms of law? And finally, what is one to make of the alternative interpretation that Professor Torrance suggests, that 'Calvin's doctrine of the fall of man and of sin is a corollary of the doctrine of grace in forgiveness and salvation'?⁶⁸ If this means that according to Calvin we can only achieve a full grasp of what fallen-ness means from the perspective of divine forgiveness and salvation, well and good. But Professor Torrance seems to mean, in using the word 'corollary' that in some obscure fashion the fall of man is itself dependent upon the gospel. If he does mean this, and if it is proper to speak of the fall of man in its own right, and of the gospel as the gospel of forgiveness, how else is this to be understood than within a basic framework of law? And in what respect is it unlike Calvin to interpret grace as God's answer to human depravity?

V

Finally, it might be objected that in concentrating upon Calvin's insistence that fallen men cannot fully discern natural law apart from Scripture we have neglected the positive aspect of Calvin's teaching on natural law, that though there is total failure as regards both the understanding of and the keeping of the First Table of the Law yet

Men have somewhat more understanding of the precepts of the Second Table because these are more closely concerned with the preservation of civil society among them.

And Calvin elaborates this in connection with the closing chapter of the Insistutes, on civil government.⁶⁹ Many Calvinists, often taking their inspiration from Abraham Kuyper, have stressed that Calvin taught a doctrine of common grace, and have often stressed this in opposition to the idea that Calvin appeals to natural law. Have they been correct to do so? If their aim has been to be faithful to Calvin, I would suggest not. Common grace is not a rival to natural law as understood by Calvin. The term 'common grace' as used by Kuyper and others is in effect an answer to the question of why it is that the results of human nature are not as bad as they could be, and ought consistently to be. The answer is that God undeservedly restrains sin, and equally endows men with a variety of creative gifts in society and culture.⁷⁰ But how is this restraint exercised? One central way - as Calvin showed - is by mean of the remnants of the natural law at work through conscience. Only if by 'natural law' one meant a standard of goodness known totally independently of the will of God, and kept by natural strength, by powers that did not have their source in God, would natural law and common grace be antithetical.

Thus in Calvin's attitude to the law of nature we can discern not only important elements of continuity between Calvin, his medieval forbears and his Calvinist successors, but also a common focus for tendencies within Calvinism, about the relationship between Christian faith and the wider culture, that have often been thought to be fundamentally at variance with

each other.

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CREATION CULTURE AND CHARISMATICS

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INTRODUCTION

There is no need for me, I trust, to define the charismatic movement to an audience such as this. In its twenty-five or more years on the religious scene it has not only developed international networks and centres, but also deeply infiltrated (a word I use with no sinister connotation) the life of the churches from Roman Catholic right across to independent Protestant groupings. Conferences are held and a constant stream of popular books written by charismatic leaders appears. Scholars examine the literature, the groupings and the attitudes of charismatic Christians.

Certainly the charismatic movement has been one of the major factors influencing the development of English evangelicalism over the past two decades. Amongst the mass of evaluative literature, the wayfaring Christian like myself will be especially grateful for two judicious and handy works. I find myself referring constantly to Gospel and Spirit (1977) produced by a group of evangelical Anglicans (of which I had the honour to be one), and to Dr J.I. Packer's article on Charismatic Renewal: Pointing to a Person and a Power published in Christianity Today in March 1980.

While it would be ludicrous to attempt to assess the movement in a short paper such as this, even were I competent to do so, it is worth drawing attention at the outset to some strands in its on-going life and spirituality and its contribution to evangelical testimony. As Gospel and Spirit pointed out, "the charismatic movement in the United Kingdom has evangelical roots, but it is now both transdenominational and trans-traditional, and embraces a very wide spectrum of views, attitudes and practices, not all originating from a recognisable evangelical 'stable'." This aspect causes much concern to those in the settled tradition of Reformation theology and piety. To many, its leaders and some of its theological stances are already dangerously (if not hopelessly) compromised by their apparently carefree association with liberal theology as well as with Roman Catholics, who have moved not one step away from their traditional doctrines. All the non-episcopal Protestants see evangelical Anglicans as already seriously compromised by their membership of a church which is unjustifiably 'mixed', thanks to the professed views of a significant proportion of its bishops, theologians and bureaucrats who have flirted with, if not espoused, Unitarian theology, prelatical autocracy, a Tridentine soteriology and the secular ethical package offered (for example) by The Guardian, comprising roughly abortion on demand, euthanasia by request, mildly Marxist politics, Keynesian economics, British imperial guilt, the world over-population scare, nuclear pacifism, divorce by consent and the public defence of sodomy as an acceptable activity. An Anglican evangelicalism already co-habiting with churchmen of those convictions will be said by some to be hopelessly contaminated already, without the further step of tolerating allegedly heterodox doctrines of sanctification. But if we tolerate the new Pentecostalism, (such Reformed critics will say with a grim smile) it will scarcely seem surprising. My own position is, as you may know, that of an Anglican by conviction who grieves over the faithlessness of the leadership in his church at many points, and is doing his best to remedy some of the damage. So perhaps you will not be surprised to know that I do not reject the charismatic movement out of hand either. Let me first say something, however, to show that I am at least aware of the problems, many of them acute, raised in our churches from time to time by charismatic renewal. I will then turn to some more positive suggestions.

Broadly this movement seems to me to have affected church life in two ways.

To the charismatic movement must be attributed first a fresh energy to the irrational element and to emotionalism in religious attitudes and activities. This is seen both in individual piety and in public worship. There is an abandonment of critical scrutiny, and an almost total abnegation of rational caution, whether in private glossolalia or in lengthy un-shaped sessions of worship and praise. There is a lack of appreciation of the God-given conscious artistry of the great hymnwriters of the past, of the treasures of liturgy, and of the wealth of sacred music. The contemporary and the childish are deliberately cultivated for their spontaneity. Guidance too comes less by rational discussion, moral discrimination and an examination of principles, cases and consequences; it is more a matter of feeling, hearing voices and seeing 'pictures' (the word vision tends to be avoided). This irrational and emotional emphasis can be seen in other aspects of the movements, but enough has been said to indicate the general drift, which is well-known.

The second effect is the elitist attitude which is very often found in charismatic groupings and churches. The claim is made that they are experiencing that which is the birthright of all Christians - the church life of the Acts of the Apostles and the worship like that of the church at Corinth to whom Paul wrote. Miracles take place in answer to prayer; the gifts of the Spirit are once more manifested amongst us. Inevitably, those who doubt the validity of some or any of these claims, who are sceptical, or who for one reason or another have not experienced similar blessings, are seen as second class. This leads to self-righteousness and disruption in all but the most mature and loving fellowships. Many local churches have known bitterness and schism as the final result.

Yet having said all this, there seems no doubt that genuine Holy Spirit blessing has come to countless individuals, and even to whole churches, through the advent of the charismatic movement. Many have been reached and soundly converted through charismatic witness. Thousands (perhaps more) have found their personal piety refreshed and reinvigorated by reading charismatic books or attending charismatic conferences. The personal lives of many Christians have been cleansed and healed, often after years of deadness or spiritual unfaithfulness. Families have been restored to health and made into happily functioning units. Social responsibility has increased and its impact has been considerable, even if unsophisticated in its perception of issues and naive in its approach (I am often asked for a list of "all Christian M.P.'s" for a charismatic prayer group!). And although sometimes obsessive in its demonology, there is a genuinely healthy awareness of evil among charismatics which causes them to call upon the name of Jesus, and to perceive the roots of much motivation in a way which their more judicious evangelical brethren have sometimes failed to do.

The benefits therefore, of the charismatic movement have been considerable, and I could list other useful results if time allowed. I would only add at this point that we ought not to be surprised that the hand of God has been manifestly upon so many individuals and groups associated with this movement. The reason is that in its simple - perhaps naive - theology - the movement is concerned to honour GOD - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I am aware that a former Director of the Fountain Trust has suggested that God the Father needs re-emphasis if we are to achieve a Scriptural balance. Nevertheless, the charismatic movement exalts Christ, who is in the bosom of the Father, and we know that men are intended to honour the Son even as they honour the Father (Jn.5:22-23, 14:10-11). A simple love of Jesus is the heart of charismatic piety, and the background to their glorification of the Mediator is an orthodox Trinitarian theology. Furthermore, despite what we might justifiably see as a naivety in methods of exegesis, the charismatic approach to the Bible involves loving God's Word and taking Him at His word. The challenge of faith is seen as an adventure. The

Christian is called to launch out and see whether God will not bless His word and His servants who are trusting it, sometimes frighteningly literally! Is it any wonder that this kind of devotion manifestly enriches believers? It is, after all, part of our own evangelical heritage, as a glance at the lives of Whitefield or C.T. Studd demonstrates.

It is perhaps enlightening to see as a judgement upon an arid evangelical piety on the one hand, and upon pan-denominational attempts to regain a better ecclesiastical grip upon communal life by church leaders without a submission to God's Word on the other. Dr Packer put it well towards the end of his article in Christianity Today:

The movement is forcing all Christendom to ask what it means to be a Christian, and to be Spirit-filled. It is bringing into recognisably evangelical experience people whose ears were closed to evangelical witness as such. As 'egg-head' radical theology invites the church into the wilderness of a new Unitarianism, is it not (dare I say) just like God to have raised up against it not a new Calvin or Owen, but a scratch movement that proclaims the Deity and potency of the Son and the Spirit - not by great theological acumen or accuracy, but by the evidence of renewed lives and lifestyle? A movement which by its very existence reminds both the world and the church that Christianity in essence is not words but a Person and a power? Surely we see divine strategy here."

In the light of these features which I have so inadequately sketched and summarised, it should be clear that when traditional Reformation evangelicals have come upon the charismatic movement for the first time they have felt sometimes encouraged, sometimes challenged and sometimes threatened - often all three at the same time. And the results of such encounters in the wider Protestant world have been the breaking of moulds - new insights, new alliances and new doubts have emerged. The socio-ecclesiastical pattern has become more fluid, and so too has the theological and doctrinal atmosphere. At some points we now speak hesitantly where once we spoke dogmatically, and at others (thank God) we now affirm with joyful certainty where once we only spoke cautiously or, at best, with a grim hope. The rest of this paper will be given over to some reflexions - many of them obvious, but nevertheless important, I feel - on the changing stance of some Reformed evangelicals in England in the light of our encounter with the charismatic movement. We have, I believe, been invited to a re-examination of certain aspects of our theology and of our style of religious expression.

As I have asked myself how and in what respects charismatic Christian emphases have enriched the church, I have more than once suspected that one important clue lies in the doctrine of creation. Now I know of no work in English or any other language written by a theologian of charismatic sympathies dealing with the doctrine of creation. But I am not entirely surprised, nevertheless, when a whole host of small and apparently insignificant events cohere in my memory around this doctrinal focus. For I recall that it was by the brooding Spirit of the Lord that creation as a process began its stately motion (Gen.1:2), that the hosts of heaven were made by the breath of the Lord's mouth (Ps.33:6), and that the heavens were made fair by that same breath (Job.26:13). The work of the Holy Spirit in creation (of which Kuyper makes much in his magnum opus) is the ordering, vivifying, beautifying and perfecting of that which the Father had decreed, and of which Christ was the principal Agent. It is therefore not surprising that a movement taken up with the Holy Spirit (though in a way which many might think dangerously obsessive) should uncover for us some truths about the Christian's attitude to creation which had been neglected in

recent centuries.

One aspect of the immediacy of the Christian awareness of God as Father is the acceptance of His providence. At its best, charismatic Christian experience encourages the believer to look at the world about him and say "Thank you Lord" for each good and lovely thing which the Father designed and holds in being. This is a profoundly Christian awareness. It is pre-rational and instinctive, and it is something which is rescued and re-made from the ruin of fallen human nature when a man or a woman is born again. I have noticed that charismatic fellowship helps it to grow. The believer is encouraged consciously to accept God's good gifts in nature, in people and in human artefacts, to delight in them unashamedly, to share them with others and to thank God for them. The apostle reminded Timothy that everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving (1 Tim.4:4); this world-affirming principle seems to me to be a valuable contribution to contemporary evangelical spirituality.

As in so many other fields, the more thoughtful Christian will remind me that we must be seeking a right balance. Are we not also warned that all that is in the world consists of "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life", that these are not of the Father, doomed to pass away and may constitute a rival allegiance to such a degree that the love of the Father cannot co-exist with loving the world (1 Jn.2:15-17)? This is indeed authentic Christian reading - but what is meant by 'the world'? The pagan mind-set (*kosmos*) referred to by the Apostle John was not only felt in the three lusts mentioned, but was sensed by all the New Testament writers as the driving principle behind pagan culture of the Graeco-Roman world, and embodied in many of its institutions. Nevertheless, the New Testament nowhere presents the material creation as evil, nor all human institutions as unrecognisably distorted. It is significant that in this same context where Paul urges Timothy to thankful acceptance of God's creation gifts, two specific items are mentioned - food and marriage. One is a material thing, the other an intangible institution. Asceticism was a threat - doubtless from Gnostic and/or Ebionite sources - even while the New Testament was being written, and Paul would have none of it. There were, of course, voluntary self-disciplines rightly undertaken by individuals; by virtue of which they denied themselves items which they might properly have enjoyed, in order to attain a particular spiritual goal or for a period of particular spiritual concentration. But there was no general rule, nor any suggestion of second-class spirituality in those who did not renounce such things, or renounced them only temporarily (as in fasting, which Our Lord Himself enjoined).

Reformation Christianity faced a Herculean task when it took over the spiritual leadership in so many European countries in the 16th and 17th centuries. The first problem was ignorance. People needed to be taught the Gospel and the nature of true Christian obedience. Because the way of salvation in scripture was so different from the decadent works-righteousness of the Roman system, some centuries-old falsehoods had to be eradicated, and other distorted emphases re-fashioned in their true Biblical context. This took time. It is scarcely surprising that the Reformers of the first generation did not always get things right. A glance at the Introduction to the Marriage Service in the Book of Common Prayer will show the backlog of suspicion and the grudging acceptance of sexual relations as poor second best, something for which last-minute emergency provision had been made by the Creator after the Fall. Not all the service transmits this message, of course, but some key phrases in the important introduction echo all the medieval suspicions of human sexuality and the superiority of celibacy.

With the advent of the Evangelical Revival, another strand of strenuous self-denial was added to the evangelical tradition, particularly through the teaching of Wesley, who was not nick-named 'Methodist' for nothing. The discipline of his pre-conversion years in the Holy Club at Oxford fashioned a mould from which Wesley was never to break completely free. Abstinence from legitimate enjoyment easily becomes an end in itself, virtuous irrespective of motive or purpose. The rigours of John Wesley's educational prescription for schoolboys are well-known; they suggest a positive merit in regime of a severe deprivation (by most standards) of play, sleep, food and recreation. Wesley's defence was that "Scripture, reason and experience jointly testify that, in as much as the corruption of nature is earlier than our instructions can be, we should take all pains and care to counteract this corruption as early as possible. The bias of nature is set the wrong way. Education is designed to set it right. This, by the grace of God, is to turn the bias from self-will, pride, anger, revenge and the love of the world to resignation, lowliness, meekness and the love of God" (Works 13, 436-7). Fifty years before he published these words in A Thought on the Manner of Educating Children, his mother Susannah had written "In order to form the minds of children the first thing to be done is to conquer their will and bring them to an obedient temper." The school at Kingswood which Wesley founded in 1748 was calculated to do just that. The day started at 4 a.m. There were no sports, no leisure time, and very few holidays.

Though the social history of English evangelicalism remains to be written, it is worth speculating whether the aggressive Philistinism of the 'keener' evangelicals in the latter part of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century is the legacy, not of the Reformers and Puritans, but rather of the Spartan regime of Wesley and some of the eighteenth century evangelicals. Certainly English evangelicalism became more attractive when sport was added to the list of approved activities. Bodily exercise - so much favoured by the English boarding school system in view of its supposed character-training properties - became a permitted activity as the influence of Thomas Arnold spread.

Beneath all this lurk some profound theological issues. We maintain that man is a fallen creature - fallen but not as bad as he could possibly be. Total depravity is not total in the sense that our humanity is distorted out of all recognition, but that every aspect of human existence has suffered, to a degree, the fatal infection of sin. The image is defaced not effaced; marred but not obliterated. Man is a noble ruin, and the adjective (noble) as well as the noun (ruin) must be made to count in our thinking. The fact that the Roman system made the effects of sin seem less than Scripture assured us they were (and are) is no good reason for any attempt to exaggerate them beyond Scriptural warrant. Similarly, the creation around us is subject to vanity, and groans in its longing for its cleansing and restoration; this does not imply that it sets its snares for the unwary at every turn, or that in admiring our Creator's handiwork in it we are inevitably led into temptation. There is a right use of the created order, and part of that use is the joyous acceptance of all that is good and beautiful in it. There are some unworthy suspicions which have lurked for generations among English Evangelical pietists and Scottish Calvinists alike. Modern studies of Luther and Calvin which have painted the great Reformers in the round have done something to correct earlier, bleaker pictures; so too have the writings of Francis Schaeffer.

Another aspect of the doctrine of creation is undoubtedly the importance of variety within the ordered categories of human existence. As a student I can still recall a gifted Christian art student explaining to me that every tree was a different tree as well as belonging to a botanical category which emphasized its solidarity with a whole class of trees which were

genetically identical. This, she stressed to me, gave each tree its own particular characteristics, just like human beings. There was a glorious and inexhaustible diversity, constantly giving us surprises and thrills of pleasure as we met and became acquainted with new trees. I have never looked at trees in quite the same way since that conversation. I thank God for opening my eyes. God had willed it so, and we may rejoice in this wonderful variety.

I do not know whether the multitude of forms which living things adopt has become a leading theme in charismatic preaching or writing. I suspect it has not, or I should have noticed it somewhere. But there is an allied theme which has strong theological links with the doctrine of creation at this point. It is in fact the simple extension of the assertion of created variety to the human level. People are created different. They should not be shaped into the same moulding by a strong process of regimentation or organisation, but rather helped to be themselves as God made them. Here we find one of the main themes which have been reiterated to the point of almost becoming slogans - the well-known emphasis on 'every member of the ministry'. In fact all that is being asserted here is the perfectly orthodox and well-known point that there is a variety of gifts in the church and that each Christian has his or her part to play in the Body of Christ. None is dispensable, everyone has 'a ministry'. It is the task of the whole fellowship to cherish its members so that they find what their contribution is, and then give them encouragement to develop their particular ministry. We see this variety, in other words, in the context of redemption rather than in the context of creation. Yet significantly the point is most powerfully made in the childish ditty which has become known outside charismatic circles, and relentlessly taught to children in Sunday schools and Bible classes all over the country. I refer of course to the "Butterfly Song", in which the singer pretends to be a different animal in each verse, and then thanks God for making him just what he is ("Thank you Lord for making me me!").

There is no doubt that this is rightly seen as a Creation truth as well as a Redemption truth; at this point the one reinforces the other by happy analogy, and the one becomes a teaching method for the other. The wider implications are enormous. It is the artist and the poet who see the items of our created world in their particularity. It is one special sunset or statue, willow tree or whale, landscape or lioness which the painter or the poet capture and help us to experience with them. If our doctrine of creation had been richer and fuller, the evangelical community would surely have produced more poets, artists, novelists and musicians than it has.

At the level of the communal life of the church, the implications are being actively explored in local churches. Undoubtedly the charismatic movement has loosened up the rather formal approaches to pastoral work and fellowship meetings; under its influence, there is far more laughing together, crying together and rejoicing together, which would have pleased the Apostle Paul in the light of Rom.12:15. English people do not easily share their problems and their grief; Scottish people, I would guess, even less so. Yet if the fellowship is to mean anything, we need to know each other in our particularity. We have different strengths and different weaknesses - we ought to let each other know about both. This can only happen where people are valued for what they are as God made them; though marred by sin, the Holy Spirit will be doing a work within them to restore the image, to heal the scars, to create a Christian uniquely useful in the fellowship where he or she has been providentially set. These emphases come over more strongly in charismatic circles than in more traditional evangelical groupings and (as I have tried to show) they go right back to our God-given creation diversity.

One interesting problem which admits of no easy or univocal solution is that of alcoholic drink. As is well-known, the association of evangelicism with total abstinence is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Denominationally the Salvation Army has always been teetotal, as was the nineteenth-century Methodism from which it sprang. But in earlier generations, despite the horrors of the gin age, it was alcohol abuse rather than its moderate or occasional use which was regarded with repugnance. It can of course be argued that the extent of addiction has now become such a national (and indeed international) problem that the only socially responsible thing for Christians to do is to adopt a policy of total abstinence. The facts are frightening, the deaths so numerous (especially when accidents involving driving with alcohol in the bloodstream are taken into consideration) that the church may be called upon to take up a new position. Hitherto however the majority of churches have been tolerant of the right to use (i.e. moderate use) of alcoholic drink. But evangelicals in this century, certainly in Britain, managed to convey the message "Rarely if at all" - i.e. total abstinence in practice if not in principle - to young people in Bible classes, camps and elsewhere. At this point the charismatic movement has been more permissive than the rather narrower evangelicism from which it sprang. This has been due not so much to the ethical declassifying of public houses as permitted places for evangelism (which has happened to some degree) but much more in the domestic field in relation to wine drunk with meals. There are pros and cons here. Wine carries, measure for measure, a far higher alcohol content than beer, though larger quantities of beer are drunk in public houses than wine with meals, whether in restaurants or at home. Again it can rightly be pointed out that wine drunk with food is far less likely to affect the central nervous system than alcoholic drink taken alone in a communal setting such as a bar. At a theological level there is no doubt that the Bible contains explicit teaching both that wine makes glad the heart and is to be accepted as a good gift (indeed it appears as a symbol of both joy and prosperity in the Old Testament on many occasions) and as a digestive aid, yet also that strong drink can be a terrible snare which can ruin a young man's life and destroy the dignity and modesty of the older generation (Genesis 9). Certainly habitual drunkenness was regarded as a sign of pagan moral corruption and excluded a man from the kingdom of God in apostolic teaching (1 Pet.4:3, Gal.5:21, 1 Thess.5:7, Rom.13:13, etc.). Here perhaps is one problem which we can only for the moment leave to the individual conscience.

In the field of sexual relations the charismatic movement presents us with a paradox. On the one hand there has been a welcome re-statement of the plain teaching of Scripture about the nature of marriage and human diversity. These are given creation truths. The different and complementary natures of man and woman have been reasserted in the strongest terms. One of the most popular of all evangelical books on family life has been that of the Lutheran charismatic minister Larry Christenson, The Christian Family. Much of the book is based upon a book by H.W.J Thiersch, Christian Family Life, first published in German in 1854. As might be guessed from its date of origin, it is Scriptural and patriarchal in approach. It was thus a counter-cultural blast on its first appearance in 1971 in the United States, where militant feminism was everywhere apparent. As Christenson puts it in his introduction: "We found ourselves calling into question many of the attitudes and practices of/in our present-day culture. Against the prevailing pattern of relativism and permissiveness, we began to see the Biblical concept of order and authority" (p.13). Adam's priority, male headship, the authority of the husband - all these are expounded and applied unashamedly as God-given. So the charismatic movement has at this point been conservative, even reactionary, some would say. Certainly the book comes as a shock to Guardian-reading Christian intellectuals in England, intent upon a cautious accommodation of the secular liberal conser-

sus with the main emphasis of Christian ethical teaching, but often a little too ready to take the hermeneutical way out of difficult and challenging texts which appear to be asserting views not easily tolerated in the corridors of the media establishment.

Hand in hand with this trend however has gone a very different influence. This springs from the concern that worship shall be genuine, and from the identification of authenticity with spontaneity (a disastrous error which we owe to Rousseau, as we do other equally damaging ideas in other fields). To equate the authentic with the spontaneous is of course to react against all order, and in particular to suspect liturgical or set forms for Christian meetings, especially those for public worship. Anglican evangelicals, who still hold - though tenuously - to the principle of a shared public liturgy, are less prone to err here, but the conferences, free-floating evangelists and teachers' monthly rallies, special all-day gatherings for fellowship or prayer all give ample scope for the Romantic approach to Christian worship, as Dr Packer has styled it. Now the unscripted and spontaneous approach is essentially the feminine approach, and it is noteworthy that the most accomplished leaders of this kind of worship are women. I have known some men, but only a very few, who have adopted this approach with success, one of them being the late Denis Clark.

There is, it seems to me, a place for each of these approaches in Christian devotional activity. If I am right in styling one approach (the spontaneous, improvised, slowly taking shape as we go on) as being essentially feminine, while the rational, ordered and logical framework approach is essentially masculine, then clearly each has its strengths and weaknesses, and - as with man and woman in human society - God's total provision is seen when both are present. Yet there seems to be a hidden assumption in many evangelical circles today, especially where inter-denominational gatherings are concerned, that the 'feminine approach' to worship is the only valid one, or somehow spiritually superior. Meetings for teaching are run on spontaneous worship lines, with the result that there is a conflict of styles and objectives. More subtly, Christian groups where the feminine approach prevails will tend to attract more gentle or less masculine young men, and confirm them in an attitude of Christian life, learning and discipleship which is at variance with the full sanctified development of their masculinity. In addition, more masculine Christians have been known to feel unsuited to worship and fellowship meetings run by those who favour the predominantly feminine approach, and have left churches and other groups where a more masculine style of worship and learning was sorely needed to balance the spontaneous and emotionally rich ethos of the group. Christian girls in particular have sensed the lack of what some of them call 'real Christian men' in inter-denominational Christian gatherings over the past decade. Younger Christians do not normally have the degree of perception to see the needs of any fellowship to which they belong in the light of church history and of theology. There is a challenge here for a fresh assessment of the constituent emphases of an all-round mature Biblical spirituality.

There is time for only one more field which needs sympathetic Christian analysis in the light of the fresh religious landscape created by the charismatic movement. This is a wider cultural phenomenon which invites more detailed sociological analysis than I am able to give it in this paper. But it is worth referring to all the same. I am thinking of the correlation of pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity with social class.

Modern twentieth century pentecostalism settled into institutional form in the first two decades of this century, the two main church groupings being the Elim Four-Square Gospel Churches and the Assemblies of God. It is

well-known that these are almost exclusively working-class churches, doing a valuable work in mainly down-town areas, often with pastors who have weekday jobs in full-time employment. The charismatic movement however has emerged from evangelicalism which is, like its parent body, largely middle class. Its message and distinctive ethos has been formed through conferences, magazines and similar initiatives. Its links with the pentecostal denominations, whose distinctive doctrines of sanctification it shares, have been occasional and particularly close. In the middle class areas of south-east England the 'house church' movement has flourished, creating structures different from the pentecostal denominations (who resemble classic nonconformist churches) but much more like a modern version of the Plymouth Brethren. I would judge that the Brethren themselves have always been largely middle class too. The result is that the total charismatic influence has been guided into three different channels - the pentecostal denominations (largely working class), the house churches and similar independent groups (largely middle class) and the charismatics in the mainline denominations (where the class characteristics are that of the denomination). It would be interesting to see whether the distinctive charismatic experience and church life was better able to bridge class barriers than other forms of evangelical witness. I would guess that it had this potential because of its emphasis upon acceptance of differences, and the strong welcome given to evidences of Christian leadership potential, insight, gifts of utterance, etc., irrespective of educational or social achievement of any other kind. The concomitant danger is of course the emergence of the spiritual autocrat, who, by force of personality (interpreted by him as a spiritual gift, and subsequently perceived as such by others) takes over the leadership and becomes a church dictator. Illuminist sectarian groups since Montanus have followed this pattern and the so-called radical reformation spawned many such groupings who appealed to Bible and Spirit. It is not surprising that the charismatic movement has produced its own intense 'fringe', a world of gurus and ghettos.

Nevertheless, the movement should be judged by its best fruits rather than by its worst. The small group of cultural and doctrinal questions I have examined show that Reformed believers have much to give and much to learn.

THE INCARNATION AND "LIMITED ATONEMENT"

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Many years ago I was invited to take part in a conference at Tyndale House in Cambridge on the "five points of Calvinism" - total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, the perseverance of the saints - the well known TULIP - in terms of which Calvinists, in the tradition of the Synod of Dort, rejected Arminianism. I read a paper on the subject of election, and sought to show, as Dr Kendall has argued recently¹, that Calvin, although he taught, in a carefully formulated way, a doctrine of "double decree", did not allow this to lead him to reach a doctrine of "limited atonement" in the manner of the later Calvinists. In the very lively discussions which followed, the question was put to me 'Did Christ die to make our Salvation actual or possible?' - a good seventeenth century scholastic Calvinist question! How does one answer this question? If I had replied that Christ died for all to make the salvation of all men "possible", but it only becomes "actual" IF we repent and believe, I would have been accused of being an "Arminian"! The weakness of this position is that it can run into a doctrine of conditional grace, and ground election on the divine foreknowledge of our human decision, a view rightly rejected by John Calvin and the Calvinist tradition. My questioner knew I would avoid that answer! If I said, "No, Christ died to make our salvation actual, not just possible," that he actually bore our sins in his own body on the Cross long ago, as I would say, the next question would have been, "Did he make the salvation of all men actual or only of some!" In other words, this question implies, that there are only three possible positions - Arminianism, universalism or limited atonement.

How then should we answer such a question? I think I would say a number of things. (1) The confession of faith of the believer is to say that our salvation is made actual by the work of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is from the beginning to end entirely the work of God's grace, but within that one work there are three great 'moments' - the moment of eternity, the eternal love of the Father; the moment of history, when Christ died and rose again nineteen hundred years ago to fulfil for us in time God's eternal purpose, so that (in Calvin's phrase) "all parts of our salvation are complete in Him"; the moment of experience when the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ and brings us to personal faith and repentance. This is the basic Trinitarian structure of the first three books of Calvin's Institutio. As in the doctrine of the Trinity there are three persons, but one God, so there are three "moments" in the one work of grace and forgiveness.

(2) Within this, certainly there is a mystery, but if we are true to the New Testament we must assert that the Father loves all his creatures, Christ died for all, but none can come to the Father except the Spirit draw him. But to say it is a "mystery" does not mean we abandon any attempt to probe this mystery, and see what light the Bible and the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ throw on the mystery. Theology is faith seeking understanding. What kind of 'logic' controls any answers we seek to give? It is a mistake, I believe, to interpret the relation between the headship of Christ over all as Mediator, and the effectual calling of the Spirit in terms of an Aristotelian dichotomy between "actuality" and "possibility".

(3) It is important to recognise in theology, as in any science or a court of law, that the nature of the questions we ask determines the kind of answers we give. In response to the above question, to echo an American

right in law, I would appeal to the "fifth amendment of the constitution" the right to refuse to answer a question which can incriminate. ("Have you or have you not left off beating your wife, yes or no?")

(4) It is precisely this kind of Aristotelian logic which led the later Calvinists like John Owen to formulate the doctrine of a "limited atonement". The argument is that if Christ died for all men, and all are not saved, then Christ died in vain - and a priori, because God always infallibly achieves his purposes, this is unthinkable. Where does this same argument lead us when we apply it to the doctrine of God, as John Owen and Jonathan Edwards did? On these grounds they argued that justice is the essential attribute of God, but his love is arbitrary. In his classical defence of the doctrine of a limited atonement, The Death of Death in the Death of Christ² in Book IV John Owen examines the many texts in which the word "all" appears, saying that Christ died "for all", and argues that "all" means "all the elect". for example, when he turns to John 3:16, he says "By the 'world', we understand the elect of God only...."(p.209). What then about "God so loved...."? Owen argues that if God loves all, and all are not saved, then he loves them in vain. Therefore he does not love all! If he did, this would imply imperfection in God. "Nothing that includes any imperfection is to be assigned to Almighty God". In terms of this "logic" he argues love is not God's nature. There is no "natural affection and propensity in God to the good of his creatures". "By love is meant an act of his will (where we conceive his love to be seated...)" God's love is thus assigned to his will to save the elect only. It seems to me that this is a flagrant case where a kind of logic leads us to run in the face of the plain teaching of the Bible that God is Agape (pure love) in his innermost Being, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and what he is in his innermost being, he is in all his works and ways. It is Aristotle's argument that there are no unrealised potentialities in God, that he is pure actuality (actus purus), the Unmoved Mover. So quite consistently Aristotle also argued in precisely similar terms that we cannot predicate love of God (only of contingent creatures), as love (eros) is a desire for what we do not possess. Owen's argument illustrates the point, so often made by theologians (like Pascal, Barth, Moltmann, Rahner and many others) of the problems involved in fusing an Aristotelian doctrine of God with the teaching of the Bible about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the Incarnation is not that an impassible God came in Jesus Christ. It is that God came as man in Christ and "suffered under Pontius Pilate". As God and as man he experiences the rejection of those who hate him (not of those whom he hates!) but loves them to the end in spite of their hatred. He takes vicariously to Himself for mankind both his own divine judgements and the rejection of men, when he dies for us that we might be forgiven, and receive His forgiveness by the gift of the Spirit. This is not "universalism" but it is universal love. There is a sin of "denying the Lord who bought us" and a "sin against the Holy Ghost" - a sin against the Incarnate love of God. If we apply the same kind of "logic" to the doctrine of Creation which Owen applies to the death of Christ, we cannot say that God in covenant love created all men in Adam for covenant love and communion, because if he did, he did so in vain. The Calvinist conclusion from this doctrine of God is that he creates all men under natural law for obedience but only the elect for love. The end result of this kind of argument is the desperate attempt to argue against the plain literal meaning of such great passages as John 3:16; 1 John 2:1-2; 2 Cor 5:19; 1 Tim 2:4-6; Heb 2:9. A clear illustration of this is John Owen's determined attempt to explain away the words in 2 Peter 2:1 about those who are delivered to destruction "for denying the Lord who bought them"³ (p.250ff).

This raises for us in the acutest way the question of how we formulate our doctrine of God. Twice in recent months I have had students who have said

to me, "Doesn't the Bible say in Romans 9:13 'Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated? Is that not proof that God loves the elect and hates the reprobate?" - as some of the Puritans and Calvinists like William Perkins taught. My immediate reply was to ask, "Do you hate your father and mother? You should if you interpret Scripture (Luke 14:26) in that way!" Surely such passages must be carefully interpreted in their context. But more important, it is a mistake to construct a doctrine of God out of isolated texts, even if they appear to fit a "logical system", rather than in the light of the Incarnation. The question I put to these two students was, "How do you interpret the second table of the law, 'thou shalt love thy neighbour'? Does this not include our enemies?" The good news of the Gospel is that God sent his Son, born of a woman under the law, to redeem us who are under the law, fulfilling the law for us. Who then is Christ? The doctrine of the Incarnation is that he is at once the God who gives us the two tables of the law, who commands us to love our enemies, and he is the one who as man for us fulfilled the law - loving his enemies, praying for those who spitefully used him and rejected him. Does God tell us to love all men, including our enemies, but he himself does not? The logic of the Incarnation is not the logic of Aristotle. It seems to me a danger in "Systematic Theology", the subject I teach, to have a neatly structured "system" (no doubt based on biblical texts) into which we fit God and Christ and atonement "logically", as into pigeon holes, and fail to see that every doctrine must be seen in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of a limited atonement emerges where we draw inferences from certain "logical premisses" or isolated texts or an Aristotelian idea of God. Rather we must see atonement as the work of the One who loves all his creatures, the one by whom and for whom all things were created - the one who so loved Jerusalem the he wept over it, who is our "suffering God". The logic of the incarnation may at times conflict with the logic of Aristotle.

Does this mean that therefore we abandon any doctrine of election? Surely not. One aspect of the biblical doctrine of election of which we too often lose sight is the thought of "the one and the many", "the one for the many", "the many in the one". God elects Israel as the one nation on behalf of "all nations" to be a "royal priesthood", a "holy nation", that Israel might be the custodian of grace, God's instrument of grace for the world that all nations might be blessed in Abraham. The language of election is the language of Israel, the Suffering Servant, the Messiah. Jesus is the fulfilment of God's purposes for Israel, the true servant of the Lord, the Royal Priest, the One for the Many, the One for all, the One in whom and through whom God's purposes of grace are worked out in the world. So Christ appoints twelve apostles to reconstitute Israel about Himself, and pours out His Spirit on the church at Pentecost to call people out of all nations to be a Royal Priesthood, a Holy People, to be the elect of God, to carry the Gospel to all nations, to every creature, as Good News for every creature. Election is thus in and through Christ, and is both corporate and personal, for none can come unless he or she is drawn into the household of faith by the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of election, interpreted in this Christological way, enshrines the good news that our salvation is by grace alone, and is from beginning to end the one work of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He chose us, not we him. The doctrine of election is another way of saying that all is of grace. This, it seems to me is why Calvin deals with it at the end of Book III of the Institutio, after having said all he has to say about the love of the Father ("the efficient cause" as he puts it); after all he has to say about Incarnation and atonement ("the material cause"), that all is "complete in Christ"; after all he has to say about the Spirit, ("the instrumental cause"), union with Christ, repentance.

As I see it, the mistake of his successors was twofold. The scholastic

Calvinists made election prior to grace, beginning with the doctrine of a double decree as a major premiss, and then moving on to formulate the doctrines of grace, incarnation and atonement, as God's way of executing the eternal decrees - thereby "logically" teaching that Christ died only for the elect, to secure infallibly the salvation of the elect. The Arminians on the other hand made grace prior to election, that grace means that Christ died to make all men salvable, but God, foreknowing those who would decide, elects them. This, as we have said above, grounds our salvation on our human decision. This separation of election from grace, from a proper Trinitarian understanding of the Being and Will of God, led to the polarisation of "Calvinists" and "Arminians" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To speak about election - the eternal Will of God and the decrees - apart from Christ, or about election as prior to grace in the order of the decrees, is to go behind the back of Christ to some inscrutable impassible God. It is to fail to see the significance of the Trinity, that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in Being (homousios), and that this Triune God has made known his Nature and his Will to us in Jesus Christ. We know of no Nature of God nor Will of God other than that of the Father, made known to us in Christ by the Spirit. When St Thomas Aquinas in his 'mediaeval synthesis' sought to wed the God of Aristotle to the God of the Bible, was his Aristotelian idea of God as Necessary Being, the Unmoved Mover, Pure Actuality, not also wedded to an Islamic notion of the Will of god, as in the Arab Aristotelians like Averroes and Avicenna, who preserved Aristotle's Metaphysics in the earlier Middle Ages when they were unknown in Europe?⁴ This concept of an omnipotent impassible God, who knows all and wills all was certainly injected deeply into Western theology and emerges in certain forms of scholastic Calvinism. In Zanchius, for example, we find "a whole hearted acceptance of Aristotelian scholasticism. 'For this Aristotle - or rather God through Aristotle', he wrote, 'presents us with a most useful work, his book Sophistical Refutations'".⁵

What happens if we make the doctrine of a double decree our logical starting point or major premiss? The answer is very clear in the subsequent developments of the so-called "federal Calvinism" or Covenant Theology which was to develop in England, Scotland and Holland. In this brief article I can only summarise.

(1) Calvinism commits itself thereby to the Nature-Grace model, with a radical dichotomy between the sphere of Nature and the sphere of Grace, of natural law and the Gospel, with the result that the relationship between the Church and the World, Church and State, is no longer understood Christologically as in the Greek Fathers, and basically in Calvin and Knox, but in terms of Gospel and natural law. God creates Adam, the child of nature, who can discern "natural law" by the light of reason, and then on the basis of natural law and "symbolical law" (the tree of life, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the law of the sabbath) makes a covenant or contract (foedus) with him, that if he will be obedient, God will be gracious to him as the "federal" contracting head of the race. So taught Robert Rollock, who first introduced the federal scheme of theology into Scotland, Rutherford, Dickson, Durham, Witsius, "The Sum of Saving Knowledge", Thomas Boston, etc. - in Scottish theology. Because of the failure of the covenant of nature, God provides a covenant of grace for those whom he elects out of the mass of fallen mankind. But their separation between Nature and Grace amounts to a reversion to the pre-Reformation view that grace presupposes nature and grace perfects nature - a departure from the emphasis that nothing is prior to grace. An illustration of this is the interpretation of the Sabbath in Scotland and Puritan England. The ten commandments are a transcript of the law of nature, and the law of nature, (including the law of the Sabbath) is the foundation of society, and for the State consequently to violate the law of nature is to expose the State to divine judgment. Again such a doctrine of the separation of nature and grace, lies behind the

American radical separation of Church and State, and has been the ground of certain doctrines of "the spirituality of the church" where the church is concerned with "spiritual" matters like the preaching of the gospel, but civil matters like civil rights and race relations should be left to the State - as Charles Hodge said of slavery. But are we to interpret the State and the civil order simply in terms of the orders of creation and preservation, but not also in terms of the orders of redemption? Hodge's Systematic Theology, in the old Princeton school, was the massive elaboration of the Nature-Grace model in the North American scene.

(2) The procedure of making the double decree the major premiss of the scheme of salvation, and restricting grace to the redemption of the elect implies the priority of law over grace. But has this not inverted the biblical order? Calvin in the 1536 edition of the Institutio followed the pattern of Luther's Short Catechism of Law-Grace, but subsequently abandoned it as not true to the Bible. His study of the Old Testament and the clear teaching of Paul in Galatians, chapter three, led him to see the priority of grace over law - that law is the gift of grace, spells out the unconditional obligations of grace and leads to grace - its fulfilment in Christ. He contends for this very eloquently in Book Two of the Institutio, expounding law in the context of promise and fulfilment.⁶ But the priority of grace over law is true not only in the life of Israel and the story of man's redemption. It is the grammar of creation. God in grace, in covenant love, creates Adam for covenant love and then lays him under unconditional obligations, warning him of the consequences which would follow "if" he transgresses these commandments.⁷ But that was not the way the federal theologians interpreted it, because of their doctrine of election. It was after God created Adam under natural law and after he gave him symbolic law that then he made a contract with him, that "if" he kept the terms of the contract, God would be gracious to him - making life conditional on obedience. This not only turns a "descriptive IF" into a "prescriptive IF" - the covenant into a contract. It implies the priority of law over grace, that grace presupposes natural law. So Thomas Boston (following Rollock, Rutherford, Witsius, etc.) in a chapter on "The conditions of the covenant of works" in his *A View of the Covenant of works*,⁸ after expounding the doctrine of Creation in terms of "Natural Law", writes "This law was afterwards incorporated into the covenant of works, and was the chief matter of it. I say, afterwards; for the covenant of works is not so ancient as the natural law. The natural law was in being when there was no covenant of works; for the former was given to man in his creation, without paradise; the latter was made with him, after he was brought into paradise". Passages like this abound in the federal theologians, making it crystal clear that the scheme implies the priority of natural law over grace. It was for this reason that the Covenant of Works was regularly called the foedus naturae - the "covenant of law" or the "legal covenant". Calvin never taught this doctrine of a Covenant of Works nor interpreted Genesis 1-3 in this way.

(3) As a consequence, in the federal scheme, not only is the doctrine of the double decree, but also the Covenant of Works (as so expounded) a major premiss. Because of the failure of the Covenant of Works, in the scheme of salvation, God provides a Covenant of Grace whereby Christ fulfils the conditions of the Covenant (contract) of Works on behalf of the elect, to secure their redemption. There were different forms of federal Calvinism. Some divines like Owen, Rutherford, Dickson, Durham, Witsius, distinguish three covenants (contracts) - the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Grace. In the Covenant of Redemption, the Father makes a covenant or contract with the Son that if the Son will become man and fulfil the conditions of the Covenant of Works for the elect then God will be gracious to the elect. The Covenant of Grace then becomes the covenant between God and the elect, that on the "condition" of faith and

repentance, the elect will receive the benefits of the covenant of redemption (the covenant of suretyship). This threefold scheme was vigorously rejected by Thomas Boston, who rewrites the federal scheme, to teach two covenants only, of Works and of Grace, in the manner of the Westminster Confession. Christ fulfils the conditions of the Covenant of Works for the elect, that grace may be unconditionally free for the elect. This was the theology which led to the "Marrow Controversy" in Scotland in the early eighteenth century. But all these divines, whether they taught three covenants or two covenants, interpreted the scheme of Salvation as God's way of fulfilling in grace the conditions of the covenant of works - the covenant of nature. Deep in this whole way of thinking lies not only a doctrine of the priority of law over grace, of nature over grace, but a deepseated confusion between a "covenant" and a "contract". The standard definition was that "a covenant is a contract between two parties based on mutual conditions". In terms of this they spoke of different species "of this sort of contract" (*huius generis foederis*), and went on to ask who are the "contracting parties" (God and Adam, the Father and the Son, God and the elect) and what were the "conditions" of the different covenants.⁹ One can see why Boston wrote in his diary, federalist although he himself was, "I perceived I had no fondness for the doctrine of the conditionality of the covenant of grace", and why the Marrow men were to make their protest against the "legal preaching" this brought into Scotland. Genesis 1-3 was being expounded in terms of a Stoic anthropology of "Nature", "natural law", "reason", "light of nature", "law of contract". Federal Calvinism has moved a long way from Calvin.

(4) In this kind of predestinarian scheme, the doctrine of God is going wrong. The God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a Covenant-God - not a Contract-God. The Latin word *foedus* obscured the distinction because it means both a covenant and a contract. The words were used quite interchangeably, and the whole federal scheme is built upon this deep-seated confusion. The failure to draw this distinction arises in part from the failure to allow the doctrine of God as Creator and Redeemer to be controlled by the Incarnation, to recognise that Christ is not only the Redeemer. He is the One by whom and for whom all things were created who fulfils in the New Covenant his purposes in creating man. When Robert Rollok first expounded the federal scheme in Scotland in 1596¹⁰ he could say, "The Covenant of Works, which may also be called a legal or natural covenant, is founded on nature.... Therefore the ground of the covenant of works was not Christ, not the grace of God in Christ, but the nature of man...". This doctrine of the priority of nature over grace arises as this quotation shows because creation is not being interpreted Christologically, as in the New Testament. The federal scheme, in its doctrine of creation, is not only moving away from Calvin, it is also moving away from the New Testament, and reading into the Old Testament a Western Latin juridical concept of a contract God. This is why John Owen in England and Jonathan Edwards in New England take this to its logical conclusion in teaching that justice is the essential attribute of God, but the love of God is arbitrary. God is related to all men as the contracting sovereign, the giver of natural law, the judge, but only to some men in grace. This may be the logical corollary of federal Calvinism, but it is not true to the New Testament, and it is not Calvin. God is love in His innermost being, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father after whom every family in heaven and earth is named. Love and justice are one in God, and they are one in all His dealings with His creatures, in creation, providence and redemption. God's sovereignty is His grace, His freedom in love. We must interpret Genesis 1-3 in the light of the New Testament, not in terms of Stoic anthropology or Western jurisprudence.¹¹ Who is the God who created Adam? He is the Triune God whose nature is love, and who is in creation (*the opera trinitatis ad extra*) what He is in His innermost being, the God who reveals Himself in covenant love in Christ, and who brings to fulfil-

ment in redemption his purposes in creation. The doctrine of the Incarnation and the Trinity are our Christian logical starting points. Where conversely we begin with the doctrine of "the double decree" and an abstract concept of an impassible God as the Law giver who knows all and wills all, and where we also begin with the "Stoic" interpretation of Genesis 1-3, and try to fit Christ and grace into this forensic "scheme of salvation", we are led to the doctrine of a "limited atonement". It may be the logic of Aristotle, but it is not the logic of the Incarnation.

Long ago, James Orr, in his Progress of Dogma chapter 9,¹² maintained the same thesis as that of this article, in a powerful discussion of Calvin and Calvinism. "It ought to be noted further, that, however fundamental this doctrine (of predestination) may be in Calvin, it is brought in, not at the head of his system - not, therefore in the all-dominating place it holds, e.g. in the Westminster Confession - but towards the close of the third book as a corollary from his exposition of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification" (p.292). "In the hands of Calvin's disciples, on the other hand, it tended to become more severe, exclusive and unyielding than Calvin himself had made it. With Calvin, as I have stated, predestination is a corollary from the experience of salvation, and so is treated in the Institutes. With his successor Beza, and, after him, with Gamar of Leyden, predestination is placed at the head of the theological system, and is so treated that everything else - creation, providence, and grace - is viewed as a means to the fulfilment of this initial purpose" (p.296). Orr goes on to question the concept of abstract sovereignty in Calvin and Calvinist doctrine of God. "There is undoubtedly a side here of Calvin's system which urgently calls for rectification and supplement... That defect does not lie simply in the doctrine of predestination. It lies rather in the idea of God behind that doctrine... Calvin exalts the sovereignty of God, and this is right. But he errs in placing his root-idea of God in sovereign will rather than in love. Love is subordinated to sovereignty, instead of sovereignty to love... The conception is that God wills, as the highest of all ends, His own glory...." The reprobate "are not the object of God's love in the more special sense. Now this, I think I may safely say, is not a conception in which the Christian mind can permanently rest. Our deeper penetration with Christ's doctrine of God as love, as well as the express testimony of Scripture respecting God's character and love to the world, forbid it." (p.293). Orr then goes on to speak about the difference between the infralapsarian and the supralapsarian Calvinists, and says of the latter "A doctrine of this kind...is one which no plea of logical consistency will ever get the human mind to accept, and which is bound to provoke revolt against the whole system with which it is associated."

The person who expounded the supralapsarian position most powerfully in Scotland, paradoxically, was Samuel Rutherford "the saint of the covenant". Does that symbolise something deep in Scottish religion, a passionate concern for the Evangel, combined with an abstract severe concept of the sovereignty of God, which can too easily lead to intolerance and lack of love for those from whom we differ?

Notes

1. R.T. Kendall, Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649, Oxford University Press.
2. The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1959, with an introductory essay by Dr J.I. Packer.
3. Not all the federal theologians taught this doctrine of God, nor indeed did all subscribe to a limited atonement. Robert Rollock in 1596, commen-

ting on John 3:16, suggests that the Gospel can be put in the form of a syllogism. Major premiss: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Minor premiss: I am a sinner. Conclusion: Therefore he came to save me. But he recognises that the syllogism is only valid if the major premiss means Christ died for all sinners. So he adds at once, quoting 1 Tim.2:4, "Out of which it followeth, that in the publishing of the Gospel, God hath respect not only of all men in common, but also distinctly of every several person", Select Works of Robert Rollock, Wodrow Society, Vol.1 p.214ff. But within a few years limited atonement became the widely accepted federal view in Scotland.

4. I am grateful to Bishop Lesslie Newbigin for this suggestion. See Western Philosophy and Philosophers, edited by J O Urmson, Hutchinson, London, 1960, article on Avicenna. "Avicenna's concept of God in whose Being existence and essence are identical gained wide acceptance in the West, especially with the Jew Maimonides and the Christian Thomas Aquinas". In Avicenna's concept of God, which is based on Aristotle as seen through the eyes of Neoplatonic commentaries and the Stoics, God is seen as an absolute unity in whom knowledge, will and power are one. He fuses this concept of God as Uncaused Cause with that of Creator.

5. Prof G Yule, Puritans in Politics, Sutton Courtney Press, 1981, p.29. Zanchius like Beza deeply influenced William Perkins in his A Golden Chaine or a Description of Theologie, concerning the order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation to God's Word.

6. Institutio 2.9.4

7. This is what we might call a "descriptive IF" (a description of the consequences which would follow disobedience) not a "prescriptive IF" (a prescription of the conditions under which grace can be obtained).

8. p.17ff Second Edition. Edinburgh 1776. David Dickson, in Therapeutica Sacra, ch.4, writes "the law of nature, within the heart of man, in order both of nature and time, went before the covenant made for keeping that law; because the covenant for keeping that law was not made till after man's creation and after his bringing into the garden to dress it and keep it". He goes on to discuss "How the Covenant of Works may be called the Covenant of Nature", and answers "because the covenant of works is grounded upon the law of nature". See Select Practical Writings of David Dickson, Vol.1, pp.225ff, 282ff, 292.

9. This kind of language and this way of thinking is found in endless writings of the federal divines. Eloquent illustrations of this occur in Witsius' The Oeconomy of the covenants between God and Man, with chapters on the "contracting parties" and "the conditions"; in David Dickson's Therapeutica Sacra, ch.4; "The Sum of Saving Knowledge", etc. The concept of the Covenant of Redemption in these writers as a contract between the Father and the Son - between the "Will" of the Father and the "Will" of the Son - is virtually a tritheistic way of thinking about God which has lost sight of the fact that they are "one in being" (homoousios) in love. It also comes perilously near saying that the Father has to be conditioned into being gracious to the elect by the Son fulfilling the conditions of the covenant of Works!

10. "A Treatise of God's effectual calling", Ch II, p.32ff. Select Works of Robert Rollock, Wodrow Society, 1849.

11. In the federal scheme we see the adaptation of Calvin's thought to the Western *ordo salutis* (the order of salvation): *Man-in-law-sin-satisfaction-grace*, with its roots in Tertullian, Roman jurisprudence and notions of law

of contract. In the federal scheme it becomes: Man (Adam, reason) - law (natural law, contract, covenant of works) - fall - satisfaction (by God for the elect) - grace (covenant of redemption and/or covenant of grace, limited atonement). This is clearly the Nature-Grace (law-grace) model which Calvin was seeking to reverse. A more biblical model would be: God (Triune-Holy love) - Man (sonship, covenant love) - obligations (unconditional obedience) - fall - Israel (election of grace) - torah (gift of grace) - Jesus Christ (fulfilment of promise and law in New Covenant) - union with Christ by Spirit (faith, evangelical, not legal filial prior to the judicial). Is this not the pattern of Calvin's Institutio?

12. London, Hodder and Stoughton 1901. Orr comments "The limitation of atonement is not taught by Calvin". p.297.

FEDERAL THEOLOGY AS A THEOLOGY OF GRACE

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The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that federal theology is a theology of grace. That is to say, over against the suggestions of some recent critics it will be argued that the system of doctrine which is called federal theology is, in its essence, as a way of understanding the revelation of God in the Scripture, a system which gives the necessary commitment to the sovereign grace of God in all His dealings with mankind.

There are two particular problems associated with this enterprise due to the nature of the questions to be asked and the issues which are at stake:

1. The first problem concerns the need for definition. Federal theology as a system has a long history, as we shall see presently. The system has been developing, changing and adapting throughout the whole course of that history. The federal theology of Robert Rollock was not the same as the federal theology of William Perkins which in turn was not identical to the federal theology of the Westminster Divines as expressed in the Confession and Catechisms. Even in the modern era, the federal theology of Charles Hodge was different from the federal theology of John Murray. The fact that this is so should encourage us to be precise in our definitions when we speak of federal theology.¹
2. The second problem arises directly from this. These various species of federal theology are each open to criticism, but the criticism which is justifiable in the case of one may not be justifiable in the case of another. For example, those who hold to a 'Three covenant' system of federal theology have sometimes been charged with a mistaken understanding of the relationship between the persons of the Trinity, by positing a covenant between the Father and the Son. This charge is less easily directed at those who hold a 'Two covenant' system.

We could go so far as to say this: even were it possible to prove conclusively that the federal theology of, for example, William Perkins was fundamentally mistaken and misguided, this does not necessarily involve a general indictment of federal theology. In other words, criticisms which may be legitimate in respect of one period during the rise and development of federal theology may not be justified at a later juncture.²

In order to sharpen this issue a little way we may express it in a somewhat different manner: for Dr R T Kendall or Prof J B Torrance to criticise federal theology as it has developed historically is one thing, but unless it can be proved that federal theology, by its very nature, is incompatible with the gospel of God's free grace in Christ then the critics have done no more than enable the federal theologians to identify certain problems and weaknesses adapt the system accordingly. In short, those who point out the problematic nature of certain aspects of federal theology are really assisting in the development of the system.

To use an illustration: when the Board of Trade representative comes to Mallaig to examine the Knoydart ferry he may identify certain flaws in the boat which require to be dealt with. This is a help (if also a financial burden) to the boatman who then has the necessary repairs made and sets sail with a new confidence in his vessel. If, on the other hand, the Board of Trade representative discovers that the ferry has a major, irreparable structural fault, then the boat would simply have to be scrapped.

It is my contention that the criticisms raised against federal theology

(where valid) are of the former variety which, when recognised, cause us to adjust the system and carry on with a new confidence. I do not believe that the ship has been demonstrated to be unseaworthy.

In order to prove this case I want to do three things. First, to speak briefly of the rise and development of federal theology, second, to outline some of the criticisms levelled against it and to identify two of the most significant of these, and third, to answer these criticisms by citing the example of one particular federal theologian and by engaging in a comparative historical analysis of Calvin.

In all of this I am working under the following hypothesis: if it can be demonstrated that a given theologian was both a consistent federal theologian and also a theologian of grace, then the case will have been made. That is to say, it will have been proved that federal theology is consistent with the Reformed understanding of grace. The corollary of this is that the critics will henceforth be confined to showing that 'certain' federal theologians at 'certain' points in history were guilty of 'certain' errors.

A. The Rise of Federal Theology

Let us begin, then, by outlining briefly what federal theology is and how it developed. Federal theology (or covenant theology) is that system of thinking about the relationship between God and humanity which places the doctrine of the covenants at the centre, around which everything else revolves. The plural 'covenants' is appropriate here because sometimes three covenants are used, sometimes only two: the covenant of works with Adam, the covenant of grace made with the elect in Christ, with the covenant of redemption made between God the Father and God the Son as the possible third. Historically this system is located in the 'Calvinist' or 'Reformed' tradition of Protestantism.

Before embarking upon either an explanation of federal theology or a discussion of its history, there are two preliminary remarks to be made. First, as W A Brown has shown³ we must distinguish between the 'covenant idea' and 'covenant theology'. The word 'covenant' appears 275 times in the Old Testament and 31 times in the New Testament⁴ and, this being the case, any theology seeking to do justice to the Bible must give serious consideration to an understanding and explanation of this concept. This, clearly, does not involve the development of a covenant theology, and hence we must remember throughout that the 'covenant idea' is common to Christianity whereas what we are considering is distinctive and related to a specific group of theologians. Second, although in its later forms federal theology posits two or three covenants we must not thereby assume that those who only speak of one covenant are not federal theologians.⁵

To put it another way, if a writer who holds to the covenant of grace also teaches that Adam was representative of all men, that he was promised life for himself and his descendants if he obeyed God's will, and that by deliberately going against God he brought ruin both upon himself and his seed, then that writer holds to the covenant of works, even if he should never express it in those terms. Let us consider a concrete example of just such a situation.

L J Trinterud⁶ and later J G Moller⁷ trace the beginnings of federal theology in Britain back to William Tyndale. Moller writes, 'The earliest English exposition of covenant theology is to be found in the works of William Tyndale',⁸ and Trinterud comments, 'The various writings of William Tyndale show a whole-hearted and systematic adoption of the law-covenant scheme as the basis of his entire religious outlook,'⁹ An examination of

Tyndale's writings shows that he did indeed contrast what we are by nature in Adam and what we are by grace in Christ, despite the fact that he speaks of only one covenant, that is, the covenant of grace.¹⁰ Even William Ames¹¹ who did distinguish between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, normally uses the word 'covenant' to refer to the latter of these.¹²

Bearing these two things in mind let us now summarise the way in which federal theology interprets the Bible. Having created the world God made Adam, an innocent creature formed in his own image with no moral flaw. Adam did have the freedom to rebel against God, since otherwise he would have been a mere puppet, but the conditions in which he found himself were such as could not themselves create in him any thought of rebellion, all things being 'very good'. It is important to stress this freedom, however, and say with Perkins, "...our first parents were created perfect but mutable."¹³

While Adam was still in this innocent state God made a covenant with him. By nature Adam deserved nothing of God, the Creator being in no way obliged to the creature, and hence even if he had continued in an innocent state he would not thereby have earned anything, far less eternal life. Only when God, by His grace, entered into a covenant with man did the possibility of such a hope arise. In this covenant (Gen.2:16,17) life was promised to Adam upon condition of perfect obedience and in particular obedience to God's command about not eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The sanction, in case of failure to obey, was death. This covenant was made not only with Adam but with all humanity, he being the 'federal' or corporate head of the race.

When Adam broke the covenant (Hosea 6:7) he did so as a public figure on behalf of humanity and therefore his sin was imputed to all those whom he represented in the covenant, that is, everyone except Christ the Second (or last) Adam. This is our original sin, actual sin being the outworking of the principle of sin in our lives.

Since God could not ignore his righteousness or justice in order to forgive sinners a satisfaction had to be made. This was in the form of a sacrifice as 'typified' by the ceremonial law. This, God completed and enacted in the form of a covenant. As Boston puts it, "As man's ruin was originally owing to the breaking of the covenant of works, so his recovery, from the first to the last step thereof, is owing purely to the fulfilling of the covenant of grace."¹⁴ In what, then, did this covenant consist?

God elected some certain individuals out of the mass of fallen humanity and made a covenant with them in Christ their federal head. Christ offers Himself as a penal, substitutionary sacrifice to atone for the sins of the elect. This act of propitiation satisfies the justice of God. This is not to suggest that God was propitiated into loving the elect, rather it was His love which led to the propitiation. The elect are kept by the power of God and therefore cannot 'fall from grace'. Ultimately they will be with God in heaven through all eternity.

Now this has been a very brief summary of the main points of federal theology and we could have expanded at length upon any of the doctrines raised, but it should serve to give the general picture as we now move into a discussion of the history of federal theology.

A view which has been influential in some quarters is that of A H Strong who claimed that Cocceius was the originator of the scheme.¹⁵ It is extremely difficult to see why this retained credibility in the light of the rather obvious fact that the William Ames mentioned above was one of Coc-

ceius' teachers, and the federal system is clearly expounded in his work.¹⁶ It would seem that Strong's determination to show that the federal doctrine of imputation was not sufficiently Augustinian¹⁷ has led him to be careless in his research. There is no question but that federal theology as a two covenant system can be traced back many years before Cocceius to Mattias Martinus, and as a one covenant system to Martinus' direct predecessors, that is, Caspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus, the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism.

From this point on, federal theology developed gradually. During the sixteenth century treatises appeared by Zwingli in 1526 (on the subject of infant baptism) by Bullinger in 1534 (this was the first specifically on the covenant theology) and subsequently by many others throughout Europe, all bearing witness to the rise and influence of the federal position.

In order to correct an error, let us consider for a moment the following statement by W A Brown, "The covenant idea makes its earliest appearance in practical rather than theoretical form in the National Covenants entered into by the Scottish people and their rulers."¹⁸ This is simply not true. The Scottish people at this stage had not only the 'covenant idea' but developed covenant theology. The National Covenant (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643) were declared only a few years before the Westminster Assembly of Divines at which there was a strong Scottish presence in men such as Samuel Rutherford. It is inconceivable that anyone could imagine that the 'covenant idea' appeared in 1638 but by 1645 it had grown into fully fledged federal theology. This opinion also fails to take account of monographs on federal theology which appeared earlier. The best known of these is by Robert Rollock published in 1596.

Federal theology received its first confessional expression in the Irish Articles (article 21) written by James Usher and subsequently received classic expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith and associated Catechisms. From then until the beginning of the present century federal theology was dominant theological perspective within Calvinism, with the Princeton School of theologians giving the classic form to what has come to be known as 'Westminster theology', these writers leaning heavily upon Owen and the other Puritan writers.

B. The Critics

Having briefly outlined the nature and history of federal theology, it is now necessary to take note of certain criticisms which have recently been made of the system.

R T Kendall, in his Oxford thesis¹⁹, deals with the nature of saving faith from Calvin to the Westminster Confession. He sets out to answer five main questions:

1. Whether the 'seat' of faith is located in the understanding or in man's will;
2. Whether faith precedes repentance in the *ordo salutis* (or vice versa);
3. Whether assurance of salvation may be enjoyed by a 'direct' act of faith or if such assurance must be delayed until a 'reflex' act of faith comes;
4. What is the ground of assurance; and
5. What place a doctrine of temporary faith has in theology that makes one's sanctification or repentance the ground of assurance.²⁰

In answering these questions Kendall puts forward the thesis that there was a significant difference between the theology of John Calvin and that of

Beza his successor. He further argues that federal theology can be traced to Beza (through Ames and Perkins) but certainly not to Calvin. On every major doctrine, including the nature and extent of the atonement, the nature of saving faith, assurance, repentance and sanctification he draws a distinction between the federal position and that of Calvin. He concludes, "Calvin's thought, save for the decrees of predestination, is hardly to be found in Westminster theology."²¹ In short, he regards federal theology as a radical departure from the theology of the Reformation.

Prof. J B Torrance is also critical of federal theology, and his main criticisms are as follows:

1. In federal theology there takes place a change in the *ordo salutis* from that of earlier writers, such that there is a growing emphasis on election which is seen to 'precede' grace and becomes the major premise from which all the other doctrines are worked out.²²
2. The federal scheme "is built on the priority of Law over Grace".²³ Prof. Torrance means by this that "the English Puritan tradition, in its practical concern to use the law as a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ, universalised from that use of the law ('law-work'), read it back into Creation and into the doctrine of God, and grounded the Two Covenants on it."²⁴
3. Federal theology, through its adoption of a Western 'Nature-Grace' model mistakenly regarded Christ as head of the elect. Prof. Torrance writes, 'The State, the civil order, is thus interpreted non-Christologically in terms of natural law and the light of reason (in terms of 'common grace' by later Calvinists). But this dualistic model fails to take adequate account of the New Testament doctrine of the Headship of Christ over all creation and all nations as Mediator.'²⁵
4. Federal theology, with its doctrine of the covenant of works, is guilty of a misunderstanding of the nature of a covenant and in fact confuses a covenant with a contract, and hence views man's relationship with God in a legal, contractual manner.²⁶

Obviously it is not possible in a paper of this length to deal with all of the criticisms raised by Dr Kendall and Prof. Torrance, but it seems to me that there are two charges presented against federal theology by these writers which deserve specific consideration.

1. The crux of Prof. Torrance's critique of federal theology is that it rendered the covenant of Grace conditional through a misunderstanding of the nature of a Biblical covenant, and hence regarded faith and repentance as pre-requisites for pardon.
2. The crux of Dr Kendall's critique of federal theology is that it involves a radical departure from Calvin and a distortion of Reformed theology through the introduction of the doctrine of limited atonement.

C. The Response to these criticisms

In order to respond to the first of these we now move to the main section of this paper, namely, a consideration of the theology of Thomas Boston. The thesis may be put like this: I believe that an examination of the life and works of Thomas Boston enables us to regard him as a paradigm of federal theology properly understood as a theology of grace.

We can sharpen the issue at stake here by putting it like this: does repentance precede or follow saving faith and pardon of sin? As you will

know, Boston's principal claim to fame was as one of the "Marrow Men" and you will recall that the "Marrow Controversy" arose out of a previous disagreement about the nature of repentance. There is no need at this point to discuss Fisher's Marrow of Modern Divinity²⁷ and its treatment by the General Assemblies of 1720 and 1722 except to remind you that these "Black Acts" were originally occasioned by the Auchterarder Creed.

A student in the Presbytery of Auchterarder in 1717 was asked to sign a proposition before being licensed. The proposition ran, "I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ."²⁸ The student, William Craig, would not so affirm and the Presbytery of Auchterarder refused to license him. The General Assembly of 1718 condemned the Presbytery in the strongest terms and supported the student.

Those of you who were present at Sinclair Ferguson's masterly lecture on this subject will recall the serious implications for the doctrine of God which were implicit in the ensuing controversy. This morning, however, I want us to concentrate simply on the question of repentance. The Auchterarder Presbytery, by asking students for the Ministry to assent to the proposition, were saying that repentance is not a qualification for grace nor a condition for the covenant of grace. The General Assembly, in opposing the Auchterarder 'Creed' asserted that it was.

Here then is the issue: were Boston and the other Marrow Men being consistent and true to their federal theology and Reformed heritage when they reviewed repentance as a result of grace and not a cause, or was it the General Assembly and the theologians representing that position who were the true federal theologians? In order to answer this it is necessary to do two things: first, to show that Boston was a consistent federal theologian and committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith; and secondly, to deal with his understanding and exposition of the doctrine of repentance.

1. Boston, the Federal Theologian

An examination of Boston's treatises on the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace²⁹ should be sufficient to convince anyone that he was committed to federal theology and to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as an expression of that theology. These treatises compare favourably with anything which has ever been written on the covenants, and certainly with the work of Witsius and Cocceius.

If this were not sufficient then Boston's two volumes of commentary on the Shorter Catechism³⁰ must be cited in his favour. At every point he supports and expounds the position advocated by the Confession, and indeed his sermons on the catechism follow precisely the corresponding sections in the Confession itself. At no point does Boston express disagreement with the Westminster Divines.

If this is not sufficient then we must refer to the Marrow Controversy and make the point that during the whole course of the controversy Boston and the others were at pains to point out that they were not disagreeing with the Westminster Confession, but that they accepted the doctrines contained therein. In particular, in their response to the 'Twelve Queries' put to them by the General Assembly, the Marrow Men affirmed their allegiance to the Confession, and indeed at several points quoted the Confession against the Assembly.³¹

Despite this clear evidence, D J Bruggink, in his Edinburgh thesis on Boston³² puts forward the astonishing view that Boston was not really happy

with the Confession standards. Of Boston's aforementioned two volume commentary on the Shorter Catechism he writes, 'the attempt to conform to a given pattern has resulted in a Boston who is not at all true to himself.'³³ Thereafter Bruggink always refers to these volumes as Boston's 'formal exposition'³⁴, underlining his view that they represent a Boston 'from whom life has largely disappeared.'³⁵ Those of you familiar with these volumes and their wealth of solid Biblical exposition will no doubt be astonished to learn that this is a Boston with no life in him! You will probably be less astonished to learn that Bruggink does not offer one convincing reference to support this hypothesis.

Having made this general case, Bruggink then goes on to assert that Boston's theology is centred upon the doctrine of Union with Christ, and that this involves a lessening of the importance given to federal theology within the whole scheme. He writes, 'Among Boston's earliest theological writings there are strong traces of the doctrine of union with Christ'.³⁶ Strong traces but again no references. Bruggink later writes, 'The Marrow contains a strong implicit doctrine of union with Christ'.³⁷ Again, no references. It seems to me that Boston and the Marrow Men do not give any more place to union with Christ than to other significant Biblical doctrines, and to say that Boston's entire theological system centres on this concept is simply indefensible. Bruggink's determination to prove that Boston was not a consistent federal theologian has led him astray.

One amusing point is that both the General Assembly of 1720 and Bruggink in 1956 are concerned to prove that Boston (and the Marrow Men) were going against the Westminster Confession, but that the Assembly did it to protect the Confession and Bruggink does it to protect Boston!

2. Boston on Repentance.

Having attempted to demonstrate that Boston was a consistent federal theologian let us now consider his views on repentance. We do this by first making reference to his edition of the Marrow of Modern Divinity³⁸ and then to his other writings.

The Marrow's teaching on repentance is that repentance follows saving faith. It is presented in the dialogue in this way: the various characters are discussing the freedom with which a sinner may come to Christ when Nomista (a legalist) says, "But, sir, suppose he hath not yet truly repented of his many and great sins, hath he any warrant to come unto Christ by believing, till he has done so?".³⁹ In answer to this Evangelista (a minister of the Gospel) insists that the sinner's warrant is to come to Christ by believing and not by repenting. He goes on to ask Nomista if he would require the sinner to repent before coming to Christ, to which Nomista replies, "Yea, indeed, I think it very meet he should".⁴⁰ Evangelista is clear and firm in his response when he says, "why, then, I tell you truly, you would have him do that which is impossible".⁴¹

Boston is wholehearted in his support of the Marrow at this point. In commenting upon this last statement of Evangelista he writes, 'We must take Christ in our way to the Father, else it is impossible that we guilty sinners can reach unto Him. And no man can come unto Christ but by believing in Him (John 6:35) therefore it is impossible that a man can truly repent before he believe in Christ'.⁴² A little later in the argument, presumably in case anyone should imagine that the Marrow is antinomian, Boston writes, "It will not be amiss here to observe how our author, in his accounts of the relation betwixt faith and repentance, treads in the ancient paths, according to his manner".⁴³

Boston goes on to support this remark by citing Calvin, Rutherford and both

the Shorter and Larger Catechisms, together with several other contemporary catechisms and confessions. He thus shows that the Marrow was in line with Reformed Orthodoxy. Had he wished he could have quoted from Perkins, Owen and numerous others also.⁴⁴ The Marrow itself, of course, is largely a compilation of quotations from the great Reformed and Puritan writers and hence this uniformity of opinion on the matter of repentance is precisely what we should expect.

We can assert three propositions at this stage: first, the Marrow of Modern Divinity and Thomas Boston are agreed that repentance follows saving faith. Second, this view was consistently held by the major Reformed theologians from Calvin on. Third, those who opposed the Marrow's doctrine of repentance were themselves out of step with Reformed orthodoxy and were, in fact, legalists.

Having shown Boston's view of repentance as found in the Marrow let us begin to consider his view as argued in the other writings. His argument is most clearly presented in an essay entitled, "Whether or not repentance be necessary in order to the obtaining of the pardon of sin?"⁴⁵ He begins by distinguishing between 'legal repentance' such as was seen in Judas and which he describes as "arising merely from the sense of God's wrath", and 'gospel repentance' "which is a saving grace, and acceptable to God."⁴⁶

He writes of the necessity of repentance in this way: "Faith and repentance, as they are ordinarily linked together in preaching, so they cannot be separated in practice. And though we may, and must distinguish between them, yet they must not be divided. And whatsoever precedence is here, it is rather in order of nature, than order of time..."⁴⁷ He also sees the necessity of repentance for full assurance of faith. He says "Repentance is a fruit of faith; and where there is no repentance, it cannot be supposed that assurance can be had. Yet this concession I understand so as, that although a clear discerning of repentance in a believer unto a firm assurance which fully quiets the heart, yet the believer may, without that, attain unto such an assurance, as is that of an adherence unto the truth of that proposition, 'My sins are pardoned'."⁴⁸

One important paragraph draws very near to the very issues at stake in the Marrow controversy: "I assert, with Rutherford, that in regard of our obligation to eternal wrath, and all the punishments of sin according to the order of justice by the law of God, faith in Christ is the only means and way to get out of our bondage and misery. And I wish this way of speaking of faith as a mean were more generally received. If it were so, it might be of good use to bury the debates about the conditionality of the covenant of grace, and the instrumentality of faith in our justification, and might tend to give us distinct uptakings of the true nature of the second covenant."⁴⁹

Boston then goes on to the most important section for our present study, namely, the place of repentance in the *ordo salutis*. He begins by saying that the first effect of saving faith is to unite the believer to Christ. He goes on, "Now if union with Christ be the immediate effect of faith, repentance must either go before faith, or it must come after remission of sins. The former cannot be said seeing the repentance in question is pleasing to God; but 'without faith it is impossible to please God' (Heb.11:16). The Lord himself tells us, that without him we can do nothing (John 15:5)...Now we are still without Christ till by faith we be united to him (Eph.3:17) wherefore true repentance cannot go before faith. It remains then that it comes after remission of sins."⁵⁰

Boston then underlines this by noting that true repentance flows from love to God. He writes, "Hence I argue thus: Our love to God follows upon, and

is a fruit of remission of sin; but our repentance proceeds from love to God, and so in order of nature is posterior thereto: ergo, repentance follows remission of sin.⁵¹ He supports this by arguing that repentance is a 'sanctifying grace' and to suggest that a sanctifying grace could be prior to pardon is to upset the juxtaposition of justification and sanctification.⁵²

When he goes on to the offensive Boston is particularly devastating. He refers to Socinian who believes that repentance comes before remission of sin and shows that the federal writers of his day who saw the need for repentance as a condition of salvation, were falling into the same trap. He sums up his argument against them in this way:

1. To use repentance as a condition of pardon is 'natural religion', that is, to give credence to the view that a person must earn his own salvation - this being the natural inclination of all men.
2. To see repentance as a condition is to change the covenant of grace out of all recognition. Indeed as a condition he goes so far as to say that it is to change the covenant of grace into a 'bastard covenant of works'.⁵³

There is no question, then, but that Boston was both a federal theologian and one who taught that repentance follows remission of sin. In other words, it is possible to have a federal theology which does not make the covenant of grace conditional.

Federal Theology and Calvin

We must now give some consideration to the second major objection brought against federal theology, namely, that it involves a radical departure from Calvin. In this context two specific charges are made. R T Kendall argues that the introduction of limited atonement was quite inconsistent with Calvin's theology and J B Torrance argues that the place of election in the *ordo salutis* is correct in Calvin but mistaken in the federal theology.

It is interesting to notice that the analysis of Calvin upon which these criticisms are based is not one that is universally accepted. The views of Karl Barth on matters such as limited atonement and the need to interpret election Christologically are very similar to those of R T Kendall and J B Torrance, but even he does not attribute such views to Calvin. Indeed he gives us quite a different picture.

Barth is extremely critical of Calvin's doctrine of predestination which he admits was "...quite unequivocably double predestination"⁵⁴ and accuses Calvin of being speculative rather than Biblical. His most serious criticism of Calvin on this score is that he failed to interpret election Christologically.⁵⁵ In his assessment Calvin's doctrine was supralapsarian, although he says that it is difficult to judge.⁵⁶ More seriously (and contrary to Kendall) Barth says that the 'Grim doctrine' of limited atonement "...does follow logically from Calvin's conception of predestination."⁵⁷

The other point at which Barth's historical analysis differs from that of Kendall is on the effect of putting predestination at the beginning of the *ordo salutis*. With others, Kendall would argue that all the doctrines are effected adversely when predestination is put at the beginning. But Barth would not agree. Of the Westminster Confession he writes, "...it was not a matter of deducing all dogmatics from the doctrine of predestination.... If we read their expositions connectedly we are more likely to get the impression that from the standpoint of its systematic range and importance they gave to the doctrine too little consideration rather than too much."⁵⁸

Could Dr Kendall or Prof Torrance really agree that the Westminster Divines put too little emphasis on predestination?

This question of predestination leads us to the other argument. Prof Torrance argues that in the first draft of the Institutes Calvin followed the pattern of Luther's Smaller Catechism where election appeared in the second chapter, but that in the first draft of his catechism (1537) and later drafts of the Institutes he abandoned that pattern. Prof Torrance further argues that this was a most significant change since Calvin then began to treat election in the third book of the Institutes after dealing with the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Atonement.⁵⁹

What Karl Barth shows us, however, is that in the final form of the Catechism (1542) Calvin returned to Luther's original pattern. This change back would surely suggest that the shift between 1536 and 1537 was not so significant as is sometimes portrayed. In other words, to argue that Calvin's move from putting election at the beginning to putting it at the end of Book 3 involves a significant theological move, is simply not borne out by the historical evidence.

Barth demonstrates clearly that Calvin "...did partly share and partly inaugurate four different conceptions of the place and function of the doctrine of election."⁶⁰ Barth does not regard any one of these as being any more significant than any other and certainly would not draw the kind of conclusions which Prof Torrance does. I would suggest that the evidence does not allow us to do so.

Those of you who have been following the paper closely will have recognised that I am not a follower of Karl Barth, and I confess that it does feel strange to be quoting him in defense of my thesis, but Barth's historical analysis is both honest and rigorous and indeed represents the best sections in the whole Church dogmatics.

On the issue of the *ordo salutis* then, it is clear that the question of where we put the doctrine of election is less important than what we actually say about it. It is surely indisputable that Calvin has a stronger doctrine of predestination than many of the federal writers, and certainly stronger than the Westminster Confession.

On the issue of limited atonement it would be helpful to discuss the contribution of Boston who held together the doctrine of limited atonement and also the view that in some respect the death of Christ had a wider scope than the elect. The paradox involved in his position is very similar to the paradox of Scripture itself which must surely be a recommendation. There is, however, no time to take that further here.

Conclusion

In this paper, then, I have attempted to show that federal theology can be a theology of grace, but I am not for a moment arguing that federal theology and all federal theologians are free from error. Far from it, but I do believe (and this is surely the most important factor) that the Scriptures are best understood in federal terms, albeit with the qualifications I have suggested.

UNDERSTANDING CALVIN

The Revd Peter Cook, Cheadle, Cheshire

FORMATIVE YEARS

John Calvin was born in Noyon in Picardy in 1509. His forebears had been boatmen on the River Oise, and the family had its roots in the small village of Pont-l'Eveque, some two miles away from Noyon. John's grandfather may also have been a cooper by trade. His two sons Gerard and Richard left Pont-l'Eveque to find their fortunes elsewhere. Richard went to Paris and established an ironmongers business and the young John was later to lodge with him during part of his stay while at the university. Meanwhile Gerard, John's father who had managed to procure a good education had established a legal practice in Noyon, securing a number of ecclesiastical appointments for himself including that of legal secretary to the Bishop, Charles Hangeste, a member of the local aristocracy and one of the twelve peers of France.

At a very early age John's attractive personality and exceptional ability had captured the attention of the Hangeste family, and he was taken from the local primary school, the Cappettes, to be tutored in the household of the Montmors, a branch of the Hangestes, with three of their boys and also with Claude d'Hangeste, who was to become Abbe of St. F'loi, and to whom Calvin was to dedicate his Seneca commentary. Thus Calvin's own family had given him his religious background, but the Hangestes were to provide him with a firm educational foundation and to polish his manners, which was to account for the distinctive aristocratic bearing of his adult life.

When John was eleven the boys were sent under the guidance of a tutor to Paris, to the University, which in those days offered a secondary as well as a higher education. The Spanish philosopher, Anton Coronel, may have been his teacher of Aristotelian philosophy. Aristotle's golden mean influenced Calvin's hermeneutical principle of moderation, which as we shall see was used by him to iron out difficulties of exegesis as he sought to argue for the unity of scripture. At the Montagu he also studied logic which, there, being nominalistic in its bias carefully examined the relationships between words and concepts and was to give rise to Calvin's frequent contentions in his later writings that although Catholics and evangelicals used the same theological words they attached quite different connotations to them.

CALVIN'S CONVERSION

Shortly after Calvin had received his bachelor's degree, pressures of a new kind began to alter the direction of his life. His education in Paris had been paid for chiefly from the income of two benefices connected with the Diocese of Noyon. It is likely therefore that he had been intended for the priesthood, but his father persuaded him to change to law, possibly because he felt that since the Reform was gathering momentum the plum livings of the church which he hoped would be open to his son would soon disappear. Calvin may now therefore have set his sights on becoming an ordained lawyer. He went to study at Orleans Jaques Lefevre. Also moving to Orleans at that time was Melchior Wolmar with whom he had been on the bachelor's course. He had already proved himself to be distinguished in Greek and encouraged Calvin likewise to study the language. Meanwhile Marguerite of Angoulenne was building up her new university at Bourges. Wolmar moved there after only a year. Calvin was attracted to follow him, not merely to continue his Greek studies but primarily to study law under Andreas

Alciate, a lawyer of the highest esteem in Europe. While Calvin turns out to have been disappointed by Alciate, he nevertheless learned from him elegance of style, having already benefited from Lefevre's training with a more deeply penetrating mind, and thus developing two more characteristics to be displayed throughout his writings. But he received something far greater from his association with Wolmar. The latter was a Lutheran, convinced by the Reform, and no doubt influenced Calvin's conversation which took place about that time and is best described in some of his own words.

"God...turned my course in another direction by the secret rein of his providence. What happened first was that by an unexpected conversation he tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years...I was so strongly devoted to the superstitions of the Papacy...this mere taste of true godliness that I received set me on fire with such a desire to progress that I pursued the rest of my studies more coolly."

THE DE CLEMENTIA COMMENTARY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Calvin received his licentiate in law in 1531. By this time his father had died and the pressure for his becoming a ecclesiastical lawyer was removed. At the same time he came to feel increasingly estranged from the Roman Church. He therefore returned to Paris to try to establish himself as an academic. Hopeful of making his mark in this field he produced his first major literary work, his commentary on Seneca's De Clementia, which is seen by some to be an oblique appeal to Francis I for more tolerance towards his evangelical subjects. Although it was not viewed at all well and has become virtually forgotten amongst the students of classics its significance for us is that it is the prototype of his New Testament commentaries. The preparation of it consolidated his skills in training, bringing him to the threshold of his life's work. Those who are familiar with these commentaries will immediately see the resemblance. The De Clementia commentary takes the text section by section, making explanatory, historical, philosophical and other comments. It carefully examines the linguistic material, heaps up references from fifty to seventy Latin authors and twenty-four Greek, and seeks to improve the Erasmus text. It was this latter exercise which was chiefly the cause of the coldness of the academics who regarded it as the arrogance of youth to wish to correct the most venerable scholar in Europe, although Calvin was only responding to Erasmus's invitation for anyone to do so.

"THE NIGHT OF THE PLACARDS" and the FIRST INSTITUTES

France was experiencing a period of religious tolerance at the time because Francis I was trying to live in rapprochement with the English and German protestant princes. Nevertheless there was tension with the Sorbonne, whose rigorous Catholicism caused it to condemn the Reform. Matters came to a head when Nicholas Cop, a boyhood friend of Calvin having become Rector at the University delivered an inaugural address which turned out to be influenced by the ideas of Erasmus and Luther and contained reference to the doctrine of justification by faith. By modern standards, even among Catholics it would appear to be very moderate in its sentiments. The Sorbonne however was in an uproar, and Calvin whom some said was the author of Cop's address was advised to leave Paris quickly. He went to Angouleme, where he stayed with another old student friend sympathetic towards the Reform, Louis du Tillet, a wealthy Canon of the Cathedral who had a fine library. There Calvin was able to study the early fathers, and may have begun work on the first edition of the Institutes. On May 4th 1534 he went to Noyon where he resigned his chaplaincy which had provided his income as

a student. By this time he was able to return to Paris where during that summer he may have written his first major theological treatise, Psychopannychia - Against soul sleep, which was not however published until 1542. In October 1534 an event occurred which caused Calvin to flee Paris for his life. Throughout France in the major cities placards appeared during the night denouncing the Mass. This became known as "the night of the placards". Francis saying that this was inspired by anarchists, began rigorous persecutions against the Protestants, and many executions took place. Calvin narrowly escaped to Basle which had been won for the Reform by Oecolampadius. There he became earnestly involved in the production of the first edition of the Institutes as a means of elementary instruction for the many converts, as well as in the production of the Serrieres Bible for Waldensian Christians.

In the epistle dedicatory of the Institutes which he published in August 1536, addressed to Francis I, he argued that Christianity which was the religion of France was defined by the Nicean-Constantinopolitan Creed according to the Scriptures. It was the Roman Catholics not the evangelicals who had moved away from this definition and so the latter not the former should be recognised as the true Christians in France. Certainly evangelicals were scattered through Europe in sects, while the Romans were held together in an impressive edifice. But the true church of Christ did not need to be visible. The church was where the Gospel was preached and the Sacraments practised in the Spirit of the New Testament and not in a historic structure subservient to the Pope.

The first edition of the Institutes contained a powerfully experiential theology orientated around justification by faith and assurance of salvation. Its publication brought Calvin into the front line of the Reformers. Yet he was dissatisfied with it, beginning very soon afterwards to work on its first major revision, having established more firmly in his mind his theology of the inspiration and authority of scripture.

Calvin did not remain in Basle much more than a year. He intended to lead the life of a scholar, but needed some means of support. He left Basle early in 1536 to go to Verona where he secured a secretarial position in the service of the Princess Renee, Duchess of Verona, sister of Francis I and Margueritte de Navare. Calvin made a further journey to Basle in November 1536 before he settled in Geneva, where he remained for a short time as a reader in theology and as a pastor, lecturing on the Pauline Epistles "with great applause", and as well as undertaking preaching, pastoral and administrative duties, he worked on his first revision of the Institutes, which this time contained a much stronger emphasis on the authority of the scripture, to which we return for a moment's consideration.

Calvin came to regard Holy Scripture not only divinely inspired, and authoritative, but also infallible in its teaching, and the only clear revelation of God and his ways. He argues that while God reveals himself in creation, and indeed to such a degree that nature itself may be said to be almost identifiable with God - certainly it is the mirror of God - mankind is unable properly to receive the revelation there. In order that he may recognise God's activities both in creation and the affairs of men, God has as it were provided him with both a pair of spectacles and new sight. Scripture constitutes the spectacles. The new sight is the illumination of the Holy Scripture which believers receive in their regeneration. Scripture must have rule in the church, Calvin maintained.

The Church is built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles. Scripture defines the Church, nourishes it and must always be revered by it. Whenever the Church ignores Scripture it is acting outside the will of God.

It was not the Church which provided the Scripture, as the Romans taught. That would be as if the daughter gave birth to the mother. Calvin argues that only when one becomes a true believer does he really appreciate the divinely inspired nature of Scripture. First of all he recognises that Scripture is self authenticating, the majesty of it captivates the mind. Secondly he has the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit of its divine authority. The believer can neither have nor need any higher persuasion than these. Whenever he approaches Scriptures as if it were the Word of God he is very soon confirmed in his experience that it is so. Calvin often alludes to the Scriptures as having been dictated by the Holy Spirit. In doing so he is speaking metaphorically and seems to have meant that the end product was, as it were, dictated. He fully recognised that Scripture contains the records of divine activity, written down by ordinary human writers, and yet their writings were inspired. The Holy Spirit controlled them and directed them in such a way as to make them his own, and so Calvin regards the Spirit to be the true author of Scripture. Hence he frequently comments as he examines a text "here the Holy Spirit teaches us". The student of Scripture who is inwardly illuminated by the Holy Spirit as he reads the Bible is brought into an encounter with the living God by means of the dual operation of the Holy Spirit: on the one hand working objectively through the text of Scripture, and on the other subjectively in the believer.

Calvin recognises the difficulties which begin to arise. The one possessed with the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit is not automatically bestowed with the ability to understand everything which is contained in the Bible, although even the simplest believer has a perceptiveness which the most profound scholar can never grasp if he be not regenerate. To understand the Scriptures clearly and fully, the student must equip himself with the necessary tools. Scripture has many dark sayings and only patience and perseverance will discover their meaning. Calvin realised that even the most able of men were limited especially by time and thus could not do all the work which was required. It was to help such students that he was to embark on his commentaries and reviews of the Institutes.

Calvin held that the Scriptures were doctrinally inerrant, infallible in what they taught, and the yardstick of Christian experience. Whether or not he believed in what today is called verbal inerrancy is a matter of much discussion. His constant references to the Spirit's authority in the text suggests that he did so. For Calvin, to disagree with the Scripture was in effect to disagree with the Spirit, and for anyone in Geneva to persist in so doing could well lose him his head. And yet there are several passing remarks which demonstrated that Calvin believed the Biblical authors could be inaccurate. It should be noted however even in such cases Calvin either excuses the authors, or else provides a reason to render insignificant their apparent mistakes. He does not allow any of them to affect his theology.

Calvin was no Bibliolator. The Bible, he fully recognised, was an earthly document. He saw in it, to use his own language, God lisping to us like a mother or nurse in talking to her baby. It seeks to communicate in language which men can understand truths which are really far above comprehension. At the same time it is ever the Word of God and is to be treated as such with due reverence and awe. Its language is always controlled, restrained and directed to fulfill its divine purpose of reconciling God with man.

STRASBOURG AND GENEVA

Calvin's major literary work really began during his stay at Strasbourg. Firstly he brought about the publication of the second edition of the Institutes in 1539 followed by its translation into French and subsequent publication in March 1540. Calvin's first commentary, that on the Epistle to the Romans, was published by Richelius, the Strasbourg printer. Calvin was probably also planning a Commentary on 1 Corinthians and then a further series of commentaries, working steadily through the Pauline Epistles. Richelius had helped Calvin financially and therefore it is likely that he felt beholden to him to allow the publication of these works.

With the decline of the Artichauds Calvin was pressed to come back to Geneva and he consented, although only with mixed feelings. His return brought about the establishment in Geneva of church order and worship which was claimed to be after the style of the New Testament and the early church. The Ordinances Ecclesiastiques which set it up provided a church government under four orders, Pastors, Doctors, Elders and Deacons. The Pastors would do the preaching and catechising and the visiting of the prisoners and the sick - no-one was to be confined to bed for more than three days without informing the ministers. The Doctors were responsible for instruction in the faith and for drawing out error, and also for supervision of the school curriculum. The Elders were laymen and responsible for church discipline, and the Diaconate responsible chiefly for the material care of the sick. Worship established in Geneva on Calvin's return centred round preaching.

The Holy Communion was to be held only four times a year. The service proper other than the sermon lasted for only about 15 minutes although there was added to it a great deal of praise. Calvin looked on music as a force for God, to be rescued from Satan and to be used to His glory. He objected to harmony and felt that the Psalms were the best songs since they were written by the Holy Spirit. Aided by French refugees he produced a Psalter for worship in the Genevan church. Calvin's return to Geneva was to mark the beginning of the era of his great commentaries on Scripture.

CALVIN'S APPROACH TO BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Clearly the Bible is not a manual of instructions and directives from Heaven. Even in Holy Scripture, God speaks to us obliquely, for instance through the record of historical events or in doctrinal arguments written on specific occasions.

The text had one meaning for him and that was what was natural to what it actually said, taking into account of course figures of speech. Where the Old Testament was merely unfolding history, the reader is not to start spiritualising it but rather to take it as an account of God's dealing with men as he unfolded his redemptive plan.

The Psalms for their part are genuinely concerned about the feelings of their authors towards God and are not, as Faber Stapulensis had contended, more about Christ than David.

The New Testament is the fulfilment of the unfolding of God's purposes in Christ, to which the text bears clear and adequate testimony. The same text can be understood in two different ways, according to the state of mind of the reader. Either, illuminated by the Holy Spirit he accepts in faith what the Bible has to teach him, or else while understanding it intellectually he rejects its message through unbelief. What is believed and accepted or disbelieved and rejected is the plain meaning of the story,

incident or argument, that is, of the text of the document.

Having decided that it was in the plain meaning of the text that the mind of the reader and the Holy Spirit is to be found, Calvin argued, in his dedicatory epistle to the Commentary on Romans, that the task of the interpreter of Scripture was merely to make its meaning clear, "since it is about his only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark, or at least strays outside his limits by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author." The expositor is not therefore to turn the meaning of Scripture about as though it were some game that we were playing. Moreover at the very outset he takes very great care to try both to establish the best texts, and to ascertain the most accurate translations, frequently because he complains that this or that translation does not express the mind of the particular author concerned.

Calvin had a further problem to tackle, which was once having attained the right text, how to interpret it adequately, and yet without obscuring it with his comments. Melancthon, for example, had isolated matters of particular importance for the text and enlarged on these, passing over lesser matters and paying little or no attention to nuances, and in Calvin's view he did not adequately reflect the mind of the writer. On the other hand Bucer had almost obscured the text by saying everything he could about it and going into detail over all the doctrinal issues raised. With this in mind, Calvin wrote to Grynæus "Both of us felt that Perspicua Brevitas constituted the particular virtue of an interpreter". Calvin devised the method as he wrote his commentary on Romans of separating the doctrinal from the general comments of the text. He then systematically set out the points of doctrine in the revision of the Institutes. The New Institute was to become the doctrinal handbook to the Commentaries, as he clearly teaches in the Epistle to the Reader of the 1539 edition. Meanwhile, the Commentaries, starting with Romans, were to follow the style of the Seneca Commentary, the text having been split up into small thought units was commented on by means of brief descriptions, explanations, and arguments, precisely expressed, and so as to form a running commentary on the text, leading the reader all the time into an engagement with the text itself.

Calvin, committed to the "plain meaning" as he was, nevertheless devised qualifications where he felt it necessary. The interpretation of a text must be in keeping with the sum of theology which he believed emerged from Scripture. Where a problem arises therefore he resorts to one or other of a number of literary devices, which he feels will very readily resolve it.

Let us look at one or two of these devices. First of all there is the principle of accommodation. Theologically Calvin could not accept any suggestions within Scripture that God had similar feelings and passion to men, or that he really manifested any kind of human behaviour. God is holy, other, spiritual, immeasurable, immutable. When dealing with anthropomorphisms therefore Calvin frequently appeals to the principle of accommodation which we have already noted. The Bible - the Holy Spirit - is using language which our limited capacities can take on about the otherwise incomprehensible God. It is the effect of God's activity among us which makes him appear to have behaved in a human way. Thus when Paul tells us that the wrath of God is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, we are not to understand the Bible as telling us that God has anything like human anger, but rather that what we term wrath is how his active opposition to our sin appears to be.

Another interesting device used by Calvin in exposition is the principle of moderation. Although he will not allow there to be any external norm of

interpretation of Scripture, his own mind had been fashioned in its formative years in the philosophy of Aristotle, and he demonstrates a definite desire for a golden mean. Moreover he believed that Christ's life was properly regulated and that this also ought to be true of Christians. Calvin saw Scripture continuously giving instruction to this end. But what is to be made of those passages where the Bible seems to approve abnormal behaviour? There is for example the quite extraordinary conduct of some of the prophets, the display of anger by Christ in the cleansing of the Temple, and the moment in Gethsemane when Christ appears to suggest that the immutable God should change his mind, and then of course there are those passages especially in the Sermon on the Mount which call for more unconventional responses. The inspiration of these is to be regulated by the principle of moderation. Christ's prohibition against swearing is moderated to prohibition against swearing lightly, since oaths are not forbidden by the law, and Christ said that he did not come to destroy the law and the prophets. Giving the other cheek is not to be taken literally since this would encourage wrong doing, while the coat taken and the coat given arouses in Calvin the reaction that only the fool would allow the plaintiff to have his way without a proper court hearing. The woman taken in adultery indeed ought to have been stoned, but Christ was not exercising his office of judge, while the parable of the wheat and tares is not to be taken to exclude rigorous purification of the Church.

Calvin justifies his modifications by bringing other teaching from the Scripture to bear on the instance under question. He interprets Scripture by Scripture. Sometimes where there are conflicting accounts, as for example the anointing of the head of Christ in Matthew and Mark, but of the feet in John, he adds the two together and says that Christ was anointed in the whole body.

Occasionally he adds to or modifies the text in itself. When Matthew or Mark say that two blind men were healed on entering Jericho and Luke says two were healed as they left, Calvin argues that there was one when entering, who implored the other as he was leaving, adding that the evangelists were not always concerned about the exactness of detail. Calvin very frequently resorts to the synecdoche, the whole representing the part or the part representing the whole, to rescue divergencies of accounts. Matthew's ass and colt are for Calvin a synecdoche where two is used for the single one mentioned by the other synoptics.

It is by no means always clear why one passage must be interpreted literally and another figuratively, and where there is no obvious criterion personal preference overrules, which he often admits when comparing his own interpretation with that of another authority.

The years between 1540 and 1556 are of the highest significance in that they constitute the period when Calvin produced his Commentaries on the New Testament. Romans had been published in 1540, although it was not to be followed by any other commentary for five years, when 1 Corinthians was to appear. Geneva and commentary writing were not very compatible and Calvin expressed a desire for more time and better health as Farel urged him on.

CALVIN'S PREACHING

Throughout this same period Calvin conducted an extensive preaching ministry as well as writing Commentaries, and it was on his expository sermons that his Old Testament Commentaries in particular were based. He initially preached twice on Sundays and once every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

From 1549 he preached every day of alternate weeks after his Sunday commitments. 1549 was the year when his sermons began to be taken down in shorthand by a French emigre and professional secretary who had them transcribed and bound. Hence more is known of his preaching from 1549 onwards. His aim was to preach on the New Testament and occasionally on the Psalms on Sundays, and the Old Testament on weekdays. Prior to 1549 he preached through Hebrews and Psalms from the Service Book, and may well have preached through Romans, John, Philippians, Colossians and the Catholic Epistles since he did not preach on these books after this date. Between 1549 and 1564 he worked through Acts, some Pauline epistles and the Harmony of the Gospels, and on weekdays on Jeremiah, Lamentations, the minor prophets, Ezekiel, Job, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Genesis, 1-2 Samuel and Kings. We can only afford a word on his style of preaching although as T.H.L. Parker has said, "It is impossible to do justice to his work in Geneva unless preaching be given the main place". His belief was that the proper preaching of the Gospel was almost synonymous with the voice of God Himself. Thus the preacher must like the commentator, be concerned with presenting as faithful an interpretation of the text as possible. Calvin's preaching was expository. He would take a clause, verse or passage, carefully explain it, paying particular attention to the difficulties, and apply it to a given set of circumstances. He preached without notes. He had an immense knowledge of the Bible, and was very widely read. He had a good memory and was gifted with the ability to keep to the point. This enabled him to overcome his lack of time for preparation. His style of preaching was from the heart, clear direct, intimate, lively and sometimes dramatic, passionate and even vitriolic. That which was central was the context of the passage under consideration. The chief themes he chose related to God's goodness and mercy, the promises of God, the merits of Christ and the need for obedience and self-sacrifice. Calvin regarded the sermon as being at the heart of the service and worship of God. It was the audible eucharist.

We draw towards a conclusion in taking a brief look at how Calvin's concern for the Church of God inspired some of his other writings. The Romans could no longer be seen as part of the Church of God for the Gospel was conspicuous in its absence. It had imbibed false doctrines and superstitions and distorted the sacraments. It was deprived of the headship of Christ. Calvin would therefore not deal with it as an institution, though he would be friendly towards individual Roman Catholics, but always exhorting them to come out of the mirey clay. He protested against Bucer and Melancthon in their efforts to find common ground between Romans and evangelicals, even without surrendering anything of their own. This approach he maintained was fit only for those who are content with half a Christ. He advocated that unity could only be achieved through obedience to Scripture. These convictions inspired a series of treatises between 1544 and 1549 and especially one of his most brilliant pieces of work, but one in which his polemics became most savage. The Treatise on Relics, "an inventory of all the sacred bodies which are in Italy, France, German, Spain and other kingdoms and countries," and in which he catalogues fourteen nails of the cross, several heads of John the Baptist, endless bones of St Peter and Paul, two bodies of St Anne, and three of Lazarus, the hair and milk of the virgin, and the miraculously saved water pots (albeit the wrong size). Calvin knew where they all were, exposed them as sham, and asked whether any serious man would wish to place his faith in the counterfeit rather than entirely in the truth of God, the Jesus Christ of the Scriptures. While Calvin reserved his elegance of style influenced by Alciate for orthodox theology, he showed his contempt for all deviationary teaching with the language of the farmyard or circus.

On the other hand, Calvin was unfortunately unable to establish his ideal of unity among the Protestant churches. The 1540's and 1550's witnessed

worsening relations between him and the Lutherans chiefly over the nature of the Eucharist. The initial Lutheran attack was against the Swiss churches but Calvin became embroiled. Calvin answered in 1540 with his Little Treatise on the Lord's Supper which with the 1539 Institutes was received well by Luther. A cordial relationship existed between them until 1544 when Luther once again delivered a blast against Zurich and the Swiss theologians. Calvin counselled Bullinger, who had taken over from Zwingli at Zurich, to exercise restraint and endeavour to heal the breach, writing a conciliatory letter to Luther. Unfortunately it was never delivered. Relations with the other reformed churches were also strained on the same issue along with some others relating to Church order, and of course with personalities. Calvin was able however to treat more successfully with Bullinger and managed to bring some of their Swiss reformers to agreement at Zurich in 1549 - the Consensus Tigurinus signed by Zurich, Geneva and two other of the Swiss churches. A Synod of Evangelical Churches which Cranmer tried to organise and which greatly interested Calvin unfortunately came to nothing. Had it come about it would possibly have been the Protestant equivalent to the Council of Trent.

Calvin's literary endeavours were powerfully influential beyond the boundaries of Geneva, but his chief efforts outside Geneva were in his own country of France, where under King Francis I, and more especially after 1547 under Henry II, there was prolonged persecution on a similar level to that of Mary I of England. Nevertheless he helped the French Evangelicals to grow. Geneva sent to France upwards of one hundred pastors between 1555 and 1562 and they were fed by the Institutes and Commentaries. He wrote pastoral letters to the persecuted, most notably to the five young men of Lausanne who were burned for the evangelical faith at Lyons. His most illustrious piece of writing directed over the French border was the 1544 Apologies of John Calvin to the Nicodemites on their complaint that he is too vigorous, an appeal to those French clergy who were (privately) sympathetic to or interested in the Reform to come out into the open and obey the Word of God.

"As to my doctrine I have taught faithfully, and God has given me Grace to write what I have written as faithfully as it was in my power. I have not falsified a single passage of the Scripture, nor given it a wrong interpretation to the best of my knowledge...and always aimed at simplicity".

There, surely, lies the key to understanding Calvin.