KNOWING THE TRIUNE GOD
TRINITY AND CERTITUDE IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN

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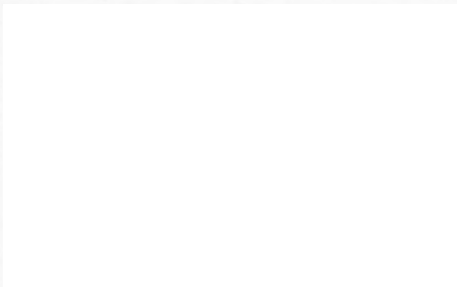*Promoter:* **Professor Pieter Coertzen**

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"*Declaration*

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

JOHN CALVIN is said to have played a significant role not only in the shaping of Western Christianity, but also in the shaping of Western culture. An adequate appreciation of his thought therefore remains of ongoing significance. In the history of Calvin scholarship, varied interpretations of him have been presented, though in the recent past there has been a growing disinclination towards presenting a coherent exposition of his thought. In the context of these disintegrative proposals, a counter-argument is presented for the viability and desirability of a comprehensive construal of Calvin's thought along historical-theological lines.

The argument primarily takes shape by locating Calvin within the sixteenth century intellectual milieu, and particularly by means of uncovering the epistemological consciousness of the Reformation period in reaction to the Renaissance revival of scepticism. The nature of human knowledge, particularly of God, was at the forefront of the sixteenth-century intellectual debate. Calvin, reformer *and* humanist, was particularly sensitive to this climate, as is illustrated by the *Institutio* which took the form of a discourse on knowing. However, the theme of knowing God on the basis of Scriptural revelation alone is prevalent in all his work, as an investigation into his neglected writings confirms. It also emerges that the kind of knowledge that Calvin advanced was experimental in nature and Trinitarian in foundation. *Experientia* and certitude disclosed the dynamic and proof of knowing God on an economic-Trinitarian and soteriological basis. This aspect of Calvin's thought has been overlooked in spite of its relevance to the contemporary post-Kantian crisis of knowing.

Having sketched the epistemological background, Calvin's Trinitarian *doctrina* is examined. A historical-theological orientation to the doctrine provides the framework for appreciating Calvin's axiomatic exposition of the Trinity in the history of doctrinal formulation. Calvin's Trinitarian *doctrina* is unpacked by means of a historical review in relation to his Trinitarian debates, and by means of its definitive exposition in the 1559 *Institutio*. Through these, it becomes apparent that he displayed a hitherto mostly unrecognised theological acumen in assimilating Western (Augustinian) and Eastern (Cappadocian) aspects of Trinitarian doctrine due to his exegetical priority. What emerges is a Trinitarian doctrine that affirms God's *Triunity* and translates into God's *Person*-al knowability. This thesis is confirmed by a discussion of Calvin's Trinitarian explication of the Christian life, and is shown to complement the previously

highlighted emphasis on knowing. Recovering Calvin's Trinitarian *doctrina* is therefore of great consequence to post-Enlightenment and contemporary theological debates on God and the Trinity.

It naturally follows that both *Trinity* and *certitude* were woven into the fabric of Calvin's God-centred hermeneutics. All of his exegetical labour, from *Commentary* to *Institutio* to *Preaching*, was focused on hearing the voice of the Triune God speaking in the Word under the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit. The final presentation of a comprehensive interpretation of Calvin is viewed in the light of the transmission of Reformed theology. *Knowing the Triune God* has the power to confirm and rejuvenate Calvin's theological vision amongst those who view him as their progenitor.

OPSOMMING

DIT IS al van Calvyn gesê dat hy 'n beduidende rol gespeel het, nie alleen met betrekking tot die vorming van die Westerse Christendom nie, maar ook wat betref die hele Westerse kultuur. 'n Toereikende evaluering van sy denke is dus steeds van belang. Binne die omvang van Calvyn navorsing is daar alreeds 'n verskeidenheid van interpretasies van Calvyn aangebied, hoewel daar 'n toenemende teensin teen die voorlegging van 'n samehangende uiteensetting van Calvyn in die onlangse verlede na vore gekom het. In die konteks van hierdie laasgenoemde standpunte word 'n teenargument aangebied vir die uitvoerbaarheid en ook die wenslikheid van 'n omvattende uitlegging van Calvyn se denke, in ooreenstemming met 'n histories-teologiese grondslag.

Calvyn word binne die sestiende-eeuse intellektuele mileu geplaas deur die epistemologiese denke van die Reformasie as reaksie teen die Renaissance oplewing van skeptisisme bloot te lê. Die aard van menslike kennis, veral die mens se kennis van God, was op die voorpunt van die sestiende-eeuse intellektuele debat, en Calvyn as, hervormer *en* humanis was baie bewus van hierdie debat. Dit blyk o.m. duidelik uit die *Institutio* wat die vorm van 'n diskoers oor kennis tentoonstel. Die tema van Godskennis, vanuit 'n Skriftuurlike openbaring as enigste grondslag, tree na vore nie net in die *Institutio* nie, maar in al sy werke. Dit blyk ook uit 'n ondersoek van selfs sy minder bekende werke. Uit die ondersoek kom dit ook na vore dat die tipe kennis wat Calvyn bevorder het, eksperimenteel en Trinitêr van aard was. *Experientia* en sekerheid word die bevestiging van Godskennis op 'n ekonomies-Trinitêre en soteriologiese basis. Hierdie aspek van Calvyn se denke is misken ten spyte van die belangrikheid daarvan vir die post-Kantiese kennis-krisis.

Nadat die epistemologiese agtergrond geskets is, word Calvyn se Triniteitsleer *(doctrina)* ontleed. 'n Histories-teologiese grondslag vir hierdie leerstelling verskaf die raamwerk waarbinne Calvyn se unieke uiteensetting van die Drie-Eenheid in die historiese verloop van dogmatiese formulering waardeer kan word. Calvyn se Triniteitsleer *(doctrina)* word uiteengesit na aanleiding van sy Triniteits-debatvoering, en na aanleiding van die bepalende uitleg daarvan in die 1559 *Institutio*. Op hierdie wyse word dit duidelik dat Calvyn as gevolg van sy eksegetiese prioriteit 'n tot op hede grootliks onvermelde insig getoon het in die vereniging van die Westerse (Augustiniese) en Oosterse (Kappadosiese) Triniteits-leerstellinge. Wat aan die lig kom is 'n

Triniteits-leerstelling wat God se *Drie-Eenbaarheid* bevestig, en wat voortvloei in 'n weergawe van God se *Persoon*-like kenbaarheid. Hierdie tesis word gestaaf deur 'n naspeuring van Calvyn se Triniteits-uiteensetting van die Christelike lewe. Daar word ook aangetoon hoe hierdie standpunte die voorvermelde nadruk op kennis bevestig. Die herontdekking van Calvyn se Triniteitsleer (*doctrina*) is dus van groot belang vir die post-Verligting en kontemporêre teologiese debatte oor God en die Drie-Eenheid.

Beide *Drie-Eenheid* en *sekerheid* is ten nouste verweef met Calvyn se God-gesentreerde hermeneutiek. Die somtotaal van sy eksegetiese werk, van *Kommentaar* na *Institutio* na *Prediking*, was daarop gefokus om die stem van die Drie-Enige God onder leiding van die Heilige Gees te hoor. Die poging tot 'n omvattende interpretasie van Calvyn word uiteindelik in die lig van die voortgang van Gereformeerde Teologie beskou. "Om die Drie-enige God te ken" is dus 'n integrerende motief wat Calvyn se teologie bevestig en ook sy werk besonder aktueel maak vir die hedendaagse teologiese debat.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the guidance of my promoter Professor Pieter Coertzen. What an encouragement it was to receive and hear his thoughtful interaction with the material here presented. Even in prayer.

My wife Corli was a pillar of strength and patience, unwavering in her belief that the task would get done. This, in spite of countless hours steering little Miléna away from the door of her dad's quiet and unresponsive study. As always, I owe an enormous debt to her.

Finally, and not for convention's sake, but for the reality of his Person and grace, I want to thank the Triune Lord — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — for leading me on a journey of knowledge, of knowing him and of being known by him.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS for primary source compilations of Calvin are:

CO   *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, 59 vols., ed. Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss (Brunswick and Berlin, 1863-1900).

CR   *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halle, Berlin, Brunswick, Leipzig, and Zurich, 1834–).

OS   *Ioannis Calvini Opera Selecta*, 5 vols., ed. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (Munich, 1926-1936).

TRANSLATIONS of Calvin, unless otherwise noted, are taken from:

Calvin: Catechism (1538), trans. F. L. Battles, in I. J. Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1997).

Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2 vols., ed. J. T. McNeill and F. L. Battles, LCC 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960). Abbreviated as *Inst.*

Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536 Edition), trans. and annotated F. L. Battles (Grand Rapids: Meeter Centre/ Eerdmans, 1986).

Calvin: Instruction in Faith (1537), trans. and ed. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1992).

Calvin: Sermons on the Deity of Christ, trans. Leroy Nixon, in *The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection* (Albany: AGES Digital Library Vs. 1.0, 1998).

Calvin's Commentaries, 47 vols. (Edinburgh, 1843-1859).

Calvin's Commentaries, ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959–).

Calvin's Tracts, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1844-1851).

Letters of John Calvin, 4 vols., ed. Henry Beverage and Jules Bonnet (Philadelphia, 1858).

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

NIV   *New International Version* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1973).

ESV   *English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2001).

"What greater joy can a theologian have than to contemplate the glory of God the Father in the face of Jesus Christ, his Son, by the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit! What greater privilege can a theologian have than to seek to expound the doctrine of the Mystery of the Blessed, Holy, and Undivided Trinity — God blessed forever and unto the ages of ages. Is not the chief end of man to enjoy and glorify God forever?"

Peter Toon

"It has been said that though God cannot alter the past, historians can; and it is perhaps because they can be useful to Him in this regard that he tolerates their existence."

Samuel Butler

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: *INTERPRETING JOHN CALVIN*

IN HIS RECENT biography on John Calvin, Bernard Cottret suggested that "the history of a particular man is also the history of the hope he entertained as much as the history of what actually happened," for, "faith is a point fleeing over the edge of the horizon."[1] Cottret's brief reflection on writing biography articulates something of the expansive trajectory that any true historical investigation embraces, for the historian is in the words of Friedrich von Schlegel, "a prophet looking backward."[2] Hindsight without vision lacks insight. In the present study we have taken cognisance of this historiographical design, and have thus resolved not only to look *at* the sixteenth-century Calvin, but also to look *with* him; to explore aspects of the historical and theological fabric of his life not merely for its own sake, but in order to comprehend the central Biblical truths that impassioned him and contributed to making him an epochal figure in intellectual history.[3]

In the same work Cottret readily recognised that "*relationship with God* occupied the central place in the life of Calvin."[4] Any study of the Genevan Reformer that does not take this as its point of departure, sets off on a journey of errors. The fundamental premise of Calvin's life was his belief that God had made it possible for fallen human beings to enter into fellowship with him through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into our world (his life, death and resurrection), and the self-evidencing and procurement of the 'benefits' of this historical event through the powerful and all-embracing work of the Holy Spirit. He never wavered from the certainty of this truth, and he never tired from having to re-state it on the basis of Scripture alone.

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[1] Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/ Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 347. Cottret called his biographical undertaking a 'history of faith.'

[2] Cited in Lewis W. Spitz, "The Historian and the Ancient of Days," in *God and Culture: Essays in Honour of Carl F. H. Henry*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/ Carlisle: Paternoster, 1993), 161.

[3] After a long period of 'conscious silence' on Calvin's importance in intellectual history, it is becoming possible again to value his remarkable influence not only on European history, but also and subsequently, on the history of Western Culture. (For example, Alister E. McGrath's *A Life of John Calvin* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1990], carries as its subtitle "A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture.")

[4] Cottret, *Calvin*, 347. [Emphasis added.]

Yet, many have failed to see the transparency and simplicity of Calvin's Gospel agenda. When Karl Barth in his 'encounter' with Calvin in 1922 called him "a cataract, a primeval forest, something demonic, directly descending from the Himalayas, absolutely Chinese, marvellous, mythological,"[5] he may have been so captured by Calvin's theological depth, as to disregard his Gospel-clarity. The irony is that though Barth's comment was designed as a complement, it nevertheless gave expression to a change of mood which had been growing in Calvin scholarship for more than a few decades. In 1954, the famous historian and Calvin scholar J. T. McNeill summarised the expression of that mood like this; "Calvin formerly stirred debate because people agreed or disagreed with his teaching. Recently, men have been in disagreement over what that teaching was."[6] McNeill made a poignant analysis of the unfolding state of affairs in twentieth-century Calvin scholarship and in Christian scholarship in general. As the new millennium gets under way, there are still too few signs of this situation abating.

Two areas of Calvin research were particularly affected by the twentieth century hermeneutical mood. The first was the gradual loss of the notion that Calvin could be read with a view to a comprehensive understanding of his thought. This was witnessed by the rejection of all readings making claims to 'centralisation' in his theology. Though some reactions against the former rationalistic tendencies were well warranted, the resulting fragmentary consensus has proved a poor substitute for translating Calvin to the church. The second was the surrender of Calvin's high view of God coupled with the Christian certitude that results from holding such a view. For example, readings which either overemphasised predestinarian sovereignty on the one hand, or totally rejected it in sceptical fashion on the other, were mostly based on presuppositions entirely foreign to the sixteenth century. Furthermore, it has become popular in contemporary historiography to view Calvin as a man riddled with doubt and anxiety, and to see his theology as internally antithetical. This clearly constitutes a problem on the basis of the available evidence. In what follows below we will address the challenges these critical issues present to interpreting Calvin more broadly, and offer a glimpse of the proposal we develop through our own study.

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[5] From a letter to Thurneyson, dated June 8, 1922. Cited in Hans Scholl's *Preface* to Karl Barth's *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1995), xiv. Barth did go on to state that he could easily spend "the rest of his life with [Calvin]." *Ibid.*

[6] John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 202.

1.1 Interpreting Calvin

1.1.1 THE QUESTION OF CENTRALITY

Ever since Hermann Bauke published his influential *Die Probleme der Theologie Calvins*[7] in 1922 in which he argued that there is no single doctrinal premise in Calvin's theology from which the other doctrines derive, scholars have shied away from making any overtly 'systematised' comments on the structure of Calvin's thought. Bauke did of course argue for coherence (*form* vs. systematic *principle*) in Calvin's thought revolving around three formal principles: rationalism, *complexio oppositorum* and biblicism,[8] and his own critical stance must be understood as a reaction against Alexander Schweizer and Ferdinand Christian Baur's nineteenth-century proposal that predestination was the central dogma in Calvin's scheme.[9] Nevertheless, after 1922, scholars adopted one of two positions. As Mary Potter Engel observed; "They either nodded in Bauke's direction before going on to specify what they considered to be the 'heart' or 'inspiration' of Calvin's thought. Or they concluded that there was finally no system or definite structure in his theology."[10] The latter stance has since hardened towards denying any thematic or structural consistency in Calvin at all, to the point of proposing that his theology is "finally contradictory."[11] The most popularly influential study in this regard, though not strictly theological, has been that of the historian William J. Bouwsma who projected his "approach by way of tensions and contradictions" onto the very person of Calvin, thus giving expression to "two Calvins" coexisting uncomfortably within the same historical personage.[12] Though this study has been very influential, it has by no means been satisfactory in terms of comprehending Calvin.[13] The first approach which sought out the

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[7] Hermann Bauke, *Die Probleme der Theologie Calvins* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'schen, 1922). According to him the theology of Calvin did not derive from "any central or root doctrine" (11f.) and had no "basic principle" (31).

[8] *Ibid.*, 20. He did not mean intrinsic, but formal rationalism. The *complexio oppositorum* was a means to integrate doctrine in spite of logical or metaphysical opposition. Biblicism was his reference for Calvin's Scriptural adherence in formulating doctrine (i.e., not Biblicism in the narrow sense).

[9] Alexander Schweizer, *Die Glaubenslehre der evangelische-reformierten Kirche dargestellt und den Quellen belegt*, 2 vols. (Zurich: Orell, Fussli, 1944-47), 1:8; F. C. Baur, *Lehrbuch der christlichen Dogmengeschichte* (Tübingen: Fues, 1858), 297-84.

[10] Mary Potter Engel, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), x.

[11] *Ibid.* Engel here cites aspects of the work by John Leith, Jack Forstman, Richard Stauffer and even Françoise Wendel.

[12] The one Calvin being a rationalistic moralistic orthodox theologian, and the other a creative free rhetorician and humanist. See William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5.

[13] The same goes for the work of Suzanne Selinger; *Calvin Against Himself* (Hamden: Archon, 1984).

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source of Calvin's 'inspiration,' has on the other hand produced a number of perspectival studies, all of which offered a contribution towards a more informed, but perhaps not finally coherent description of Calvin's theology.

Against this backdrop (though prior to Bouwsma's work), Charles Partee made a fresh attempt at pursuing the question of Calvin's central dogma in 1987, but on a theological as opposed to a philosophical basis.[14] Previously, the desire to comprehend the structure or heart of Calvin's theology had led to the suggestion that the doctrine of God's sovereignty and its logical corollary, predestination, presented the essence of his thought. Partee noted however, that:

> ... this consensus has come under increasing scholarly attack in the absence of compelling textual evidence that Calvin was attempting to devise a logical system, and by those who reject the concept of rationality, developed and maintained in the era of Reformed Orthodoxy, as adequate for Christian faith and life today. Doubtless, the Kantian revolution and the resulting suspicion of all metaphysical systems contributed to this reappraisal as did renewed interest in the rhetorical tradition, but in any case Calvin is now being interpreted by scholars more as a biblical and less as a philosophical theologian. Thus many recent Calvin studies ignore or reject the possibility of finding a "central dogma" in Calvin's thought.[15]

Partee went on to argue that it was nevertheless impossible to exposit Calvin's thought, and the *Institutio* in particular, without a point of view, and as he put it, "some points of viewing are more comprehensive, and therefore more adequate, than others."[16] The conclusion he came to, was the following:

> First, ... Calvin did not produce a deductive "system," therefore it is futile to seek a basic principle in the philosophical sense. Second, ... the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is a summary of Calvin's thought and, therefore, contains not only the traditional topics of theology, but also Calvin's essential and "systematic" point of viewing. Third, in Calvin's shaping of his material for exposition, a root metaphor or central theological theme may be discovered, in the sense that the reader can find a clarifying organisation without being required to prove that the author deliberately and consciously put it there as organising principle. As a matter of fact, the older quest for Calvin's central dogma did not, in the main, contend that Calvin himself expounded the doctrine of God's sovereignty (and predestination) for this purpose, but only that it was correct for interpreters to do so.[17]

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[14] Charles Partee, "Calvin's Central Dogma Again," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18:2 (1987): 191-199.
[15] *Ibid.*, 191.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*, 192-193.

Finally, Partee offered his own proposal that "Union with Christ" be the most useful theological way of summarising the *Institutio*. Thus Calvin studies were left with an interesting case scenario in which centrality was rejected on a philosophical basis, but affirmed on a theological basis. Richard Gamble in assessing the same situation was however less optimistic than Partee. He rejected the idea of any *single* central theme outright in favour of *several* centrally important themes.[18] Yet, ironically he too could not resist suggesting in the very same monograph *duplex cognitio Dei* (*De cognitione, Dei creatioris* and *De cognitione Dei redemptoris*) not merely as *a* controlling principle, but *the* controlling principle of Calvin's theology. It would seem from these examples then, that the desire and necessity to be able to read Calvin from a perspective which clearly resides in his own work, is still very much alive.[19] After all, the legacy of Calvin's theology in Western Christendom and Western society suggests at every turn an influence which could not have come about without a remarkable coherence and comprehensiveness present in his thought.

1.1.2 THE VIABILITY OF A CONSISTENT-COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

One of the main factors often put forward as a stumbling block towards gaining a comprehensive and singular understanding of Calvin, is the sheer volume and enormity of his literary output. However, according to Professor James Packer, the prospect of actually gaining such an understanding of Calvin is greatly aided by two factors. The first is his remarkable *consistency*. As Packer put it, "he never changed his mind on any doctrinal issue," with the result that "among creative theologians there is hardly any parallel [in consistency], save, perhaps, on a smaller scale, Athanasius."[20] The second is the *comprehensiveness* of his *magnum opus*, the *Institutio*. In the *Institutio* Calvin had, according to Packer, accomplished the following critical tasks which established the work as a key to all of his thought. He had "set out a complete statement of Christian truth," of which he made "knowledge of God his central theme," and as a result, "was

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[18] Richard C. Gamble, "Current Trends in Calvin Research, 1982-90," in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 106.

[19] Wilhelm Niesel amongst others for example, also laboured to keep the 'quest' alive. See his *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956).

[20] James I. Packer, "Calvin the Theologian," in *Honouring the People of God: The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer, vol. 4* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 144. (Originally published in *John Calvin*, ed. G. E. Duffield [Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1963], 149-175.)

the first to bring out the Trinitarian character of the work of salvation."[21] Packer's points are well worth pursuing and suggest to us that in spite of the current scholarly trend against integrative studies focused on the unity of Calvin's thought, there is still scope for transcending the artificial parameters of critical-historical scholarship by means of a consistent-comprehensive reading of Calvin.

1.1.3 THE HISTORICAL-THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE[22]

It goes without saying that any attempt at a coherent and integrative construal of the thought of a historical figure runs the risk of distortion. Some aspects will inevitably receive greater priority by virtue of interpretative choice, while others will be marginalised. However, as the renowned Cambridge University historian Herbert Butterfield put it; "If history could be told in all its complexity and detail it would provide us with something as chaotic and baffling as life itself; ... chaos acquires form by virtue of what we choose to omit."[23] The challenge of judicious omission is thus the only way in which the historiographical conundrum of objectivity/ subjectivity can be transcended. Lewis Spitz put it as follows:

> [Historians] need general concepts in order to impose order and to give their version of meaning to their account of past actuality. The extent to which their conceptions correspond to the reality of history as past actuality determines its viability, its correctability, and its utility for teaching history.[24]

In an attempt to understand Calvin according to the reality of *theological* history, the Reformation historian David Steinmetz very helpfully suggested that "the best and most productive way to study Calvin is to place him in the context of the theological and exegetical traditions that formed him and in the lively company of the friends and enemies from whom he

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[21] *Ibid.*, 144-145, 147, 159.

[22] *Historiography* involves the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the sources, and the synthesis of those particulars into a narrative which will withstand the test of critical methods. *Historical-Theology*, which explores the historical development and 'situatedness' of Christian *doctrine*, produces a 'narrative' complementary to that of the historiographical enterprise, which explains why we are using the concepts in complementary fashion in this section.

[23] Cited in Spitz, "The Historian and the Ancient of Days," 149. Spitz quoted Samuel Butler as saying that "It has been said that though God cannot alter the past, historians can; it is perhaps because they can be useful to Him in this regard that he tolerates their existence."

[24] *Ibid.*

learned and with whom he quarrelled."[25] In the same breath however, he derided the attempts by scholars who find in Calvin elements which "could be invoked to reinvigorate the theological discourse of their own time; a Calvin who could address them, not as an alien figure from the past, but as a familiar contemporary."[26] In spite of Steinmetz's derision, this is inevitable. No matter how distorting anachronistic and personal-perspectival readings of history may be, they are the inescapable results of the contemporary investment in history.

It may therefore be more helpful to suggest with Philip Butin, "a way of rehabilitating the constructive use of the past that is both historically responsible and unapologetically invested in it," especially in historical-theological studies, as "the events and ideas of the past are constitutive of the living theological traditions of the present."[27] It becomes necessary therefore to resist the false notion of mutual exclusivity between the so-called objective *historical* method (the Calvin of history), and the *confessional* approach which with varying degrees of critical awareness show commitment to the theological worldview of Calvinism (the Calvin of the Calvinists). Contrary to such a presuppositionally slanted stance, it may indeed be possible to pursue historical accuracy without forfeiting confessional commitment, and similarly, to pursue transcending aspects of Calvin's theology without forfeiting historical reliability. On this more realistic and reasonable historiographical basis, a comprehensive construal of Calvin's thought far from being ruled out, becomes a desirable historical-theological objective.

1.1.4 PREVIOUS ASSESSMENTS OF CALVIN'S THOUGHT

Following Partee's proposition that "The value of the search for a central doctrine or theme in Calvin need not be its complete accuracy, but its usefulness in the initial presentation of and continuing reflection on Calvin's theology,"[28] various 'centrally important themes' have been presented in the last century of Calvin scholarship.[29] The selection below gives only a small indication of the ground-breaking studies in proximity to the theme embarked upon in this study (the proponents having been limited to two or less per subject). In the course of the study, these and other texts are more fully investigated.

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[25] David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 209.

[26] *Ibid.*, 211.

[27] Philip Walker Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.

[28] Partee, "Calvin's Central Dogma Again," 192.

[29] See also Wilhelm Niesel's survey in *The Theology of Calvin*, 9-21.

In primary studies which have assumed for themselves a certain thematic importance, and that have touched upon Calvin's doctrine of God, the following perspectives have been offered: Anthropology (Torrance and Engel);[30] the Knowledge of God (Dowey, Parker and most recently Van der Kooi);[31] Pneumatology (Van der Linde and Krusche),[32] Christology (Willis),[33] and Union with Christ (Niesel and Partee).[34] Alongside these major works, a number of smaller studies, themes, articles and suggestions have appeared, some on the idea of a central theme itself (e.g., Armstrong on the *duplex cognitio Dei*),[35] and others on a doctrine in isolation (e.g., Warfield and Torrance on the Trinity).[36] It is of significance to note that the interrelatedness of the above studies together add up to an inevitable Trinitarian analysis, the basis upon which this study proceeds.

In terms of Calvin's understanding of the divine-human relationship, Calvin scholarship has had a persistent tendency to interpret Calvin's view "in terms of a radical, oppositional contrast between the divine and the human."[37] Ganoczy's analysis of Calvin's 1536 *Institutio* in a chapter entitled "The Dialectical Structure of Calvin's Thought" (in *The Young Calvin*)[38] was an early indication of this, as were a number of articles written by Ford Lewis Battles.[39] Ironically,

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[30] T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949/ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); Mary Potter Engel, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology*.

[31] T. H. L. Parker, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Study in the Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1952), reprinted as *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); Edward A. Dowey, Jr. *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952, 1965); C. van der Kooi, *Als in Een Spiegel: God kennen volgens Calvijn en Barth* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2002). Unfortunately the work by Van der Kooi came off the press just after this study came to completion. It has thus not been possible to incorporate or interact with his insights.

[32] Simon van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn: Bijdrage tot de kennis der reformatorische theologie*, Diss. (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943); Werner Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, Diss. (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957).

[33] E. David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

[34] Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, and Partee, "Calvin's Central Dogma Again." Neither Niesel nor Partee offered full studies, but the same theological organising principle.

[35] See for example Brian Armstrong's influential article; "*Duplex cognitio Dei*, Or? The Problem and Relation of Structure, Form, and Purpose in Calvin's Theology," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honour of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, ed. Elsie A. McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 135-153.

[36] Benjamin B Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," *The Princeton Theological Review* vii. (1909): 553-652; Reprinted in *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1956), 189-284; We will be making reference to the latter edition. T. F. Torrance, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," *Calvin Theological Journal* 25:3 (1990): 165-193; Reprinted in *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 41-76.

[37] Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 15.

[38] Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987).

[39] See the compilation of his essays in F. L. Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, ed. Robert Benedetto (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), especially "*Calculus Fidei*: Some Ruminations on the Structure of the Theology of John Calvin," 139-178.

Ganoczy was also one of the first to counter this dialecticism in a later article on Trinitarian grace,[40] followed by suggestions from various Calvin scholars to review the Trinitarian structure of the Apostles' Creed as the organising paradigm for the *Institutio*[41] as well as for reviewing the relationship between God and man in Calvin. Butin's 1995 study offered the most radical challenge to date of the previous dialectical readings of Calvin, whilst simultaneously suggesting the viability of a Trinitarian construal for the divine-human relationship.[42]

In the present study, the agenda is therefore not to bypass these earlier achievements and so diminish their significance, but rather to build upon them by means of integrating a broad historical analysis on the human quest for *knowing*, and an in-depth historical analysis of Calvin's understanding of God's *Triunity*, into his overarching knowledge-of-God theme. In the section that follows, we provide a brief overture to these ideas.

1.2 Reappraisal:

Trinity and Certitude in the Theology of John Calvin

IN A LUCID essay entitled "Knowing God: The Transmission of Reformed Theology," James Houston made the following penetrating comment with regards to Calvin:

> [For Calvin], the self-revelatory character of God in his triune Being has opened up for us a way of communion with himself that is the source of ceaseless worship and of meditation upon his Word, through his Spirit. Indeed, we can say that the greatest impact made upon the Christianisation of the world of the fourth century, as upon the sixteenth century, is the recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity.[43]

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[40] Alexandre Ganoczy, "Observations on Calvin's Trinitarian Doctrine of Grace," trans. K. Crim, in *Probing the Reformed Tradition*, 96-107.

[41] See for example here T. H. L. Parker's *Calvin: An Introduction to his Thought* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

[42] Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response*. See also his "Reformed Ecclesiology: Trinitarian Grace According to Calvin," *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* 2:1 (1994). Butin himself drew on previous studies such as that by Jan Koopmans (*Het oudkerkelijk dogma in de reformatie, bepaaldelijk bij Calvijn*, Diss. [Wageningen: Veenman, 1938]).

[43] James M. Houston, "Knowing God: The Transmission of Reformed Theology," in *Doing Theology for the People of God; Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer*, ed. Donald Lewis and Alister E. McGrath (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 236-237.

Houston's remark surfaced in the context of favouring Calvin's reforming legacy above that of Loyola (1491-1556), de Valdes (*c.* 1509-1541), and Luther (1483-1546). However, the allusion to the sixteenth-century recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity is provocative, and pregnant with inquiry. Is there a case to be made for a sixteenth-century Trinitarian recovery in the theology of Calvin? The most obvious obstacle to such an argument is that Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity has persistently been seen as "orthodox precisely because of its unoriginality,"[44] and therefore routinely glossed over in scholarly treatments. Yet, to this common perception, Gerald Bray in his brilliant study on the doctrine of God raised a serious challenge:

> It comes as something of a surprise to discover that the Protestant Reformers, in spite of their links with the Augustinian tradition, and notwithstanding Karl Barth's claim that he was walking in their footsteps, *had a vision of God which was fundamentally different from anything which had gone before, or which had appeared since.* The great issues of Reformation theology — justification by faith, election, assurance of salvation — can be properly understood only against the background of a trinitarian theology which gave these matters their peculiar importance and ensured that Protestantism, instead of becoming just another schism produced by a revolt against abuses in the medieval church, developed instead into a new type of Christianity.[45]

Bray traced his argument along the outlines of Calvin's Trinity doctrine in the same manner as did Benjamin B. Warfield at the turn of the previous century, and which led him to conclude that Calvin's distinctive Trinitarian formulation marked "an epoch in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity."[46] These pointed assessments from able historical-theological investigators suggest to us that it has become necessary to review Calvin's Trinity doctrine in the light of its current scholarly neglect.

From his sixteenth-century Reformational vantage point, we will discover that Calvin's own reappraisal of the two major Trinitarian traditions, Eastern (Cappadocian) and Western (Augustinian), constitutes a fascinating study, and that his doctrinal formulation may well come to be seen as an axiom of historical theology. However, a number of other factors converged around the central issue of God's Triunity in Calvin's life. His own exegetical priority led him to challenge the orthodox *status quo* around what had the appearance of Nicene Trinitarianism, but which was often far removed from it. As Timothy George put it:

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[44] See for example McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 155. McGrath follows the assessments of Niesel and Wendel.
[45] Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 197-198. [Emphasis added.]
[46] Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 230, 283.

[Calvin] was not interested in the metaphysical niceties of abstract theology, nor was he slavishly attached to traditional terminology. *The Trinity was crucial because it was a witness to the deity of Jesus Christ and thus to the certainty of salvation procured by Him.* The purpose of Calvin's trinitarianism was, like that of Athanasius, soteriological. He wanted to safeguard the biblical message, 'God is manifest in the flesh,' against false interpretations.[47]

Calvin's soteriologically driven insistence on the full deity of Christ led to his Genevan life being one of doctrinal debate from first to last over the Trinitarian issue, all of which laid bare the underlying critical conversation around creedal adherence and Protestant orthodoxy in the sixteenth century. Biblical, Patristic and Soteriological concerns converged in Calvin's Trinity doctrine, while the Trinitarian trajectory of his thought allowing him a certain structural justification for the revision of Protestant theology in accordance with Catholic orthodoxy. Of this, the Trinitarian and creedal form of the definitive 1559 *Institutio* (Book One corresponding to *Credo in Deum*, Book Two, *Et in Iesum Christum*, Book Three, *Credo in Spiritum sanctum*, and Book Four, *Sanctum ecclesiam catholicam*) affords the most obvious example.[48] Yet, Calvin would not separate doctrine from the practice of the Christian life. In the case of the Trinity, no doctrine was more pertinent to the pervasive theme of communion with God and the human response of worship and adoration which permeated all of his writings. Calvin clearly drew the distinction between knowing *about* God and *knowing* God in favour of the latter. The opening statements of his 1537 catechism put it plainly:

> *All men are born in order to know God.* ... It is necessary, therefore, that the principle care and solicitude of our life be to seek God, to aspire to him with all the affection of our heart, and to repose nowhere else but in him alone.[49]

Knowledge of God was given on the basis of God's Scriptural self-revelation alone. Calvin abhorred speculative theology. Hence, the connection between God's revealed Triune nature and real knowledge of him.[50] However, when Calvin's overarching theme of knowing

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[47] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman/ Leicester: Apollos, 1988), 200-201. [Emphasis original.]

[48] The Apostles' Creed, though internally present in the first edition, gave external and theological structure to the *Institutio* from the 1539 edition onwards.

[49] *Instruction in Faith (1537)*, trans. and ed. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 21. [*Instruction et confession de foy dont on use en l'eglise de Genève* (CO 22:25-74; OS 1:378-417).]

[50] Ontology and epistemology were inseparable in the mind of Calvin. A recent Reformed work on revelation seeks to address the many problems which arose from separating the two in Reformed theology, by focusing again on knowledge of God and the Gospel as the appropriate starting point for the doctrine of revelation. See Peter Jensen's *The Revelation of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002). Not surprisingly, this work leans heavily on Calvin and on a thoroughly Trinitarian doctrine of God.

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God which is echoed clearly throughout the *Institutio* and the writings, is placed within the historical framework of the philosophical and intellectual world of the sixteenth century, some further fascinating facts emerge. It becomes apparent that Calvin was apologetically sensitive to the important questions of his time to a far greater extent than previously appreciated, especially the predominant preoccupation of the sixteenth century with *knowing*. The Renaissance introduction of scepticism into the late Medieval world had altered the intellectual and religious landscape Calvin inhabited, and the Reformation which revolved around a reappraisal of questions of authority, sources of knowledge and methods of thinking, was greatly challenged by it. The most pitched battles of this period therefore revolved around theological *certitude*, and it has justifiably been claimed that "certainty was the fundamental theological locus of the sixteenth century."[51] A study of Calvin's Biblical and *Theo*-logical (indeed, Trinitarian) reaction and response to this crisis of knowing will yield the most surprising results; results that may challenge many preconceived notions of Calvin and which transcend the sixteenth century to find application in our own epistemologically provoked age.

The hypothesis of this dissertation is thus that the conjunction of *Trinity* and *certitude* — *knowing the Triune God* —, presents itself as a powerful paradigm for understanding Calvin's work as a whole, both historically and theologically. *Trinity*, not only because it is the central dogma of classical theology, but also because of its prominence in Calvin's thought *and* life. Calvin's unique articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity translated into an eminently *knowable* God. *Certitude*, because no other locus was better suited for intellectual intersection with the growing scepticism of the sixteenth-century world. Calvin assailed this epistemological crisis from a Biblical perspective and gave 'knowing' a unique emphasis in his theology. *Knowing the Triune God* therefore opens a window into Calvin that allows us to interpret him comprehensively.[52]

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[51] Susan E. Schreiner, "'The Spiritual Man Judges All Things': Calvin and the Exegetical Debates about Certainty in the Reformation," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 215.

[52] The dissertation will therefore seek as a whole not to minimise the importance and excellence of the various other ways of approaching Calvin's thought in favour of our own, though in many cases that will be inevitable, but to suggest that true knowledge of the Triune God presents a useful and comprehensive way of introducing and surveying Calvin's theology.

1.3 Motivation for the Study

THE VALUE of recovering a consistent-comprehensive approach to Calvin's thought has been demonstrated above, and as Niesel stated, without it "no attempt at an exposition of the whole can succeed."[53] This section therefore seeks to motivate and explicate the particular perspective we bring to a study of such a nature.

From the outset it was argued that it is not a *fait accompli* for confessional and historical approaches to exist in mutual exclusivity; the former inadvertently subjective and the latter supposedly objective.[54] Similarly, it must be recognised that while every approach is governed by its own (conscious or subconscious) perspective, it does not therefore constitute all perspectives to be equally valid. The perspectival criteria brought to the evidence investigated must be open to scrutiny and debate in order to be eligible for credibility. In the course of our study, the presuppositions that govern it will become self-evident as the investigation unfolds. However, two factors are worth mentioning at the outset; the first is the reception of Calvin into the English-speaking world, and the second, the association of Calvin within Reformed Evangelicalism.

1.3.1 CALVIN IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

In his introduction to Calvin, Steinmetz made the bold claim that "*nowhere* has Calvin's influence been more pervasive than in the English-speaking world."[55] This may come as something of a surprise, but Steinmetz ably verified his claim by means of the remarkable English publication history of Calvin's writings from the sixteenth century to the present,[56] as

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[53] While our approach does not exactly match the "governing intention" Niesel and others had desired, it does have strong similarities. See Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 9.

[54] One of the few virtuous effects of Postmodernism on hermeneutics (and historical studies) in general, has been its exposure of the perspectivalism inherent in *all* so-called 'objective' enterprises. Presuppositional neutrality can no longer be claimed by any interpreter. The danger lies however, in the rhetoric that all approaches are therefore equally valid (or invalid, depending on which way the argument runs), and in the politics of subverting ruling notions in favour of the previously disenfranchised.

[55] Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 3. [Emphasis added.]

[56] "During Calvin's own lifetime his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was translated into English by Thomas Norton and went through eleven editions by 1632. There were eighteen editions of Calvin's catechism by 1628. Even Arthur Golding's translation of Calvin's sermons on Job appeared in five editions between 1574 and 1584. The *Institutes* was

well as the substantial influence Calvin exerted at grassroots level. John Knox for example, studied at Geneva and became the pivotal figure of the Reformation in Scotland, while other influentials like William Whittingham (Dean of Durham), Edmund Grindal (Archbishop of Canterbury) and John Jewel (Bishop of Salisbury), who came under the sway of Calvin's influence whilst in Geneva, Strasbourg and Zurich respectively, similarly exerted a strong Calvinist effect once back in England. Though Calvin himself was primarily interested in political developments in France, he was able to correspond with Edward VI, the Duke of Somerset, Lady Anne Seymour and William Cecil (Elizabeth's chief minister).[57]

Calvin's main influence on English thought however, only came after the reign of Edward VI through the return of the Marian exiles, whose influence merged with that which Bucer had earlier exerted at Cambridge and Peter Martyr at Oxford. It also happened that the Puritans in England particularly favoured Calvin's ideas, and though Puritanism is often used as a pejorative label for the variety of religious activism that took place during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), it is this party which sought most consistently to "broaden the distance between the English church and her Roman Catholic heritage, as they pressed for the adoption of values similar to those of the continental Reformed churches."[58] However, the Calvinist influence in England extended beyond Puritanism to almost every organised Protestant religious group in England, and it is this "broadly based English Calvinist heritage" that was exported to the New World and became the main ingredient in its intellectual and religious history.[59] It is thus not possible to talk about English Church History without appreciating the enormous influence Calvin had exerted upon it.

The analysis can easily be extended to the confessions. The Westminster Assembly (1643-49) was a Puritan forum and its products, the Confession and Catechism, were self-consciously Calvinistic.[60] The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571) were also the result of the sixteenth-century English Reformation (originally under the pen of Thomas

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translated into English in the nineteenth century by John Allen and Henry Beveridge, and in the twentieth century by Ford Lewis Battles. The Calvin Translation Society of Edinburgh published translations of all of Calvin's commentaries in the mid-nineteenth century, while the New Testament commentaries were redone in the mid-twentieth. The Old Testament commentaries are currently being retranslated in the Rutherford House edition." *Ibid.*, 3-4.

[57] *Ibid.*, 4.

[58] R. N. Frost, "Puritanism," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/ Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 441-442.

[59] Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 5.

[60] Leith noted that it was "the product of numerous theological traditions: native British Augustinianism, Puritan Covenant theology, the Reformed theology of the Rhineland, and Calvinism." The common strand being the influence of John Calvin. *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3rd edition, ed. John H. Leith (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 192.

Cranmer [1489-1556]),[61] and while suppressed under Mary Tudor, it found its authority in the Anglican church during the reign of Elizabeth I. Of particular interest is the fact that its First Article, like that of the Augsburg Confession (1530), dealt with *Faith in the Holy Trinity*, something which very few of the other Reformed confessions managed to express with such clear priority.[62] It signified an immediate claim to Catholic *and* Calvinist orthodoxy, and in the course of the study it will become clear why this is of such significance.

It is clear that within the English speaking world then, the Calvinist theological and confessional legacy is immeasurable. The approach taken to this study is one which seeks to draw from this rich legacy, as can be detected from the bibliographical sources and dialogue partners chosen, and in return, attempts to contribute to its ongoing conversation with its Reformational and Calvinist roots.

1.3.2 CALVIN AND REFORMED EVANGELICALISM

A pertinent question within the English speaking theological world, is the relationship between the theological concepts *reformed* and *evangelical*. Both terms have become difficult to analyse, especially the latter, as it takes on a different semantic scope depending on the context in which it is found and used. However, if we were to return to its sixteenth-century usage, would it be possible to call Calvin an evangelical?

Harriet Harris argued that "The term 'evangelical' has been used of Reformed and Lutheran churches since the Reformation because they base their teaching pre-eminently on the 'Gospel' [εὐαγγέλιον]."[63] Alister McGrath similarly explained that "The term 'evangelical' was especially associated with the 1520s, when the French term *évangélique* and the German *evangelisch* begin to feature prominently in the controversial writings of the early Reformation."[64] Clearly the word *evangelical* could have been on Calvin's lips, but would it therefore be appropriate to

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[61] Cranmer and his colleagues prepared several statements of Protestant persuasion, and shortly before Edward VI's death, he presented a doctrinal statement of forty-two articles to him. These later became the basis for the Thirty-Nine Articles. See *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 211-212.

[62] The Belgic Confession (1561) has it as Article 8; The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) as Question 24; The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) as Chapter III; The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as Chapter II; the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) as Question 6; and The Westminster Larger Catechism (1648) as Question 9. Surprisingly, the Canons of Dort (1619) omit it altogether. See *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 20-21.

[63] Harriet A. Harris, "Evangelical Theology," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, 197.

[64] A. E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 13.

associate him with *Evangelicalism*? Harris would respond negatively, as she argued that "Evangelicals affirm most creedal statements as a matter of orthodoxy, but they have not developed theological thinking on all creedal matters. Notably, there is no distinctive evangelical contribution to the doctrines of the Trinity or of Christ."[65] (Whether she therefore implies that the Reformation made no contribution to creedal matters or simply that modern Evangelicalism has not done so, is not clear from her article.) McGrath on the other hand, claimed exactly the opposite:

> Evangelicalism is historic [orthodox] Christianity. Its beliefs correspond to the central doctrines of the Christian churches down the ages, including the two most important doctrines of the patristic period: the doctrine of the 'two natures,' human and divine, of Jesus Christ, and the doctrine of the Trinity. In its vigorous defence of the biblical foundations, theological legitimacy and spiritual relevance of these doctrines, evangelicalism has shown itself to have every right to claim to be a standard-bearer of historic orthodox Christianity in the modern period.[66]

Clearly there is a contemporary battle waging over terminology and orthodoxy which cannot be resolved here.[67] Yet, what is significant, is that both Harris and McGrath agree that the Incarnation and the Trinity are the defining doctrines securing the historical credibility and hence orthodoxy of a theological movement, whether it be evangelicalism or another. Those who claim to be evangelical in the manner of Calvin, as those who call themselves Reformed Evangelicals do, must therefore be able to demonstrate both in Calvin and for themselves a distinctly orthodox contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity.

From within the Reformed Evangelical position it has therefore been necessary to do two things. First, to reclaim the importance of Christian doctrine that can be expressed with confessional commitment, and second, to call for a renewal of the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. David Wells has for example argued that "[reformed] evangelicals have always been *doctrinal* people,"[68] though viewing doctrine not as formalised orthodoxy per se, but as that

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[65] Harris, "Evangelical Theology," 198.

[66] McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 94.

[67] The twentieth century has seen an enormous effort by English-speaking churchmen to rehabilitate the term 'evangelical' according to its original meaning and in terms of freeing it from the associations it may have had with the hermeneutical framework of 'fundamentalism' on the one hand, and the theological vacuity of 'enthusiastic pietism' (including Pentecostalism and Charismaticism) on the other. Confessional evangelicals within mainstream denominations have been hard at work (and often under duress because of self-imposed criticism) to show the historical veracity, theological rigour and scholarly credibility of the evangelical position. Only time will tell if their efforts will have been successful, and if the claims of McGrath and others will stand.

[68] David F. Wells, "'No Offence: I am an Evangelical': A Search for Self-Definition," in *A Time to Speak: The Evangelical-Jewish Encounter*, ed. A. James Rudin and Marvin R. Wilson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 22.

which has been crystallised from what the Church believes on the basis of God's Word. As he put it elsewhere; "Confession must be at the centre of every theology that wants to be seen as *theologia*, the knowledge of God, a knowledge given in and for the people of God."[69] As such it constitutes 'the public doctrinal inheritance of the Christian tradition,' whether it is "expressed through the historic creeds and confessions of the church or understood more informally."[70] In other words, the revealed knowledge of God confessionally expressed, is the starting point of all Christian theology. In terms of the doctrine of God the Trinity, James Packer has affirmed that "theology is essentially our proclamation of God," but that the present situation is one in which the doctrine of God is "a confused area in Protestant theology."[71] He explained the confusion as follows:

> The Western heritage of post-biblical theism is a hybrid that grew out of the apologetic theology of the early centuries, in which much was made of the thought that Graeco-Roman philosophy (Platonic and Stoic — Aristotle's day came later) was a providential preparation for the gospel, just as the Old Testament revelation was from the Jews. This theism, which found its fullest statement when Thomas formulated it in terms of the Aristotelian potency-act dialectic, is part of [our] common heritage ... Western Christian theism as generationally received today is a blend of philosophical and exegetical reasoning, the former appearing to constitute the frame into which the latter has to fit.[72]

Packer was calling for a Biblical renewal of the doctrine of God, and adamant that the 'anatomy of theism' for it to be true theism, had to start instead with the revealed Triune nature of God. This viewpoint he has persistently articulated in numerous places in his writings, employing Calvin as historical precedent. It is not surprising then to find in the list of evangelical distinctives or *sine qua nons*, the necessity of a *Trinitarian shape*; "God is Yahweh, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Grace is the work of this triune God, whereby the Son redeems and the Spirit renews sinners whom the Father chooses."[73] Salvation is always to be seen in such economic-Trinitarian terms, which is the only way to give true glory to God. In other words,

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[69] Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 99.

[70] *Ibid.*, n.4.

[71] James I. Packer, "Theism for Our Time," in *God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays presented to D. B. Knox*, ed. P. T. O'Brien and D. G. Peterson (Homebush: Lancer Books, 1986), 4, 5. Note, he did not state 'evangelical' theology, but Protestant theology.

[72] *Ibid.*, 5-6.

[73] The list includes the following: "First, *a biblical perspective*. ... Second, *a Trinitarian shape*. ... Third, *a radical view of sin and grace*. ... Fourth, *a spiritual view of the Church*. ..." Packer, cited in Adrio König, "Evangelical Theology," in *Initiation into Theology*, ed. Simon Maimela and Adrio König (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1998), 96.

confessed or redemptive knowledge of the Triune God on the basis of Scripture, is seen as the hallmark of Reformed Evangelicalism.

This is not to say that the study has been embarked upon in order to justify the Reformed Evangelical position by means of establishing an umbilical link to Calvin. That would render the exercise historiographically fraudulent. However, if it should turn out that the above components are indeed foundational to Calvin's theological understanding without having read them into it, then that does allow Reformed Evangelicalism a certain justification in claiming Calvin as progenitor.

1.4 Style and Orientation

1.4.1 STYLE

The comprehensive nature of the topic and the synchronous and broad manner in which it is has been embarked upon, called for the use of a method of style that allows the freedom to carry the main argument in the text while at the same time running a (mainly bibliographical) commentary below. Though the 'apparatus' may therefore appear to be cumbersome, it in fact actually allows the main argument to continue unhindered whilst not prohibiting access to indispensable information by relegating it to endnotes. A decision was therefore made to use footnotes for reasons intrinsic to the comprehensive nature of the study, and for the sake of the reader who desires further or specialist information on a topic touched upon in the main text. The method of style employed throughout the study is the Turabian method (based on the famous *Chicago Manual of Style* and compiled as Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*[74]), which has become an international standard for research and academic publication.

As Turabian allows for it, it was decided to note bibliographical sources in full from the start of each chapter, in conjunction with a complete bibliography at the end of the whole study.

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[74] Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed., Revised by John Grossman and Alice Bennett (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1996). "Turabian," as it is referred to, is selected from *The Chicago Manual of Style*, Fourteenth Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), and has become a standard in international publication.

This allows each chapter to stand as an independent argument and bibliographically completed unit, and facilitates easier access to the work by means of any given chapter.

1.4.2 ORIENTATION

A brief map of orientation to the chapters in the study looks as follows:

Chapter 1. Introduction: *Interpreting John Calvin*, sets the stage by placing the proposed study in the context of past interpretations of Calvin, and argues for the viability and desirability of a comprehensive construal of Calvin's thought along historical-theological lines. It briefly surveys similar and related studies previously undertaken, and offers a sketch of the upcoming investigation. A motivation for the study as related to the reception of Calvin in the English speaking world and in relation to Reformed Evangelicalism, concludes the chapter.

Chapter 2. Knowing …: *Certitude in an Age of Scepticism*, seeks to locate Calvin firmly within the sixteenth century intellectual milieu, by uncovering the epistemological consciousness of the Reformation period in the light of the 'Renaissance revival of scepticism.' In doing so, it interacts critically with the most recent scholarship on the broader intellectual background of the period and the questions that plagued Calvin. From here an investigation is launched into the prevalence of the theme of knowing in the writings of Calvin, uncovering his links with Augustine and his desire to address the burning needs of his own time for the sake of the Gospel and the church. Part of this research is conducted on a section of Calvin's writings which is often overlooked. One aspect that comes forward from this discussion is the experimental value Calvin attached to knowledge of God, which opens a whole vista of information about experience and certitude in Calvin's thinking often neglected and easily overlooked, yet fundamentally important to his doctrinal formulation and theological intention. In the light of the fascinating facts which emerge, Calvin's contribution is taken up as a rebuttal to the many problems Christians have experienced ever since the epistemological crisis ushered in by Modernity. The way that Calvin linked ontology and epistemology in Trinitarian fashion (i.e., to the Triune God), sets the debate free from many of the constraints it has found itself in Sceptical times such as the current Postmodern climate.

Chapter 3. … the Triune God: *The Significance of Calvin's Trinitarianism*, proceeds by offering a historical-theological orientation to the doctrine of the Trinity from the early centuries up to the Reformation. Following this, Calvin's axiomatic understanding and

exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity is unpacked first by means of a historical overview (including the various challenges and conflicts brought against it), and subsequently by detailed exposition on the basis of its final form in the 1559 *Institutio*. Many surprising and previously misunderstood aspects of his doctrinal debates and doctrinal content will emerge. Calvin's Trinity doctrine is followed by a survey of his 'Trinitarianism,' and how his Trinity doctrine has found practical and doxological expression in other areas of his theology, such as his understanding of grace. The chapter concludes by showing how Calvin's unique understanding of God as Triune, complements and facilitates his previously highlighted emphasis on knowing. This aspect of his theological achievement allows for bringing him into conversation with critical post-Enlightenment and contemporary problems around God (ontology) and knowledge of him (epistemology).

Chapter 4. Hearing the Triune God: *Calvin's* **Theo-*logical Hermeneutics***, strives to bring the knowledge gained through the previous chapters to bear on Calvin's hermeneutics, as well as the much neglected area of preaching. It is noteworthy that for Calvin the Bible could not properly have been interpreted if all three phases of *exegesis*, *doctrine* and *preaching* were not followed through. This makes it necessary to explicate Calvin's understanding of all three, as well as track the relationship between them. The necessity of understanding Calvin as theological exegete is placed alongside the tremendous achievements of sixteenth-century theological hermeneutics. However, as the title of the chapter indicates, the ultimate distinctive of Calvin's hermeneutics is that the Triune God is to be encountered in and through the Biblical text. The chapter concludes by exploring Calvin's understanding of divine communication leading to a knowing encounter with the Triune God as a solution to the hermeneutical crisis currently experienced in the Christian church.

Chapter 5. Conclusion: *Knowing the Triune God and the Transmission of Reformed Theology,* brings the study to a close by summarising the main conclusions reached through the course of the investigation in three areas of significance: God's knowability, knowing as communion with God, and the interpreting and interpretation of Calvin. The significance and benefits of the study will be explicated primarily in terms of its value for the transmission of Reformed Theology, but its implications in terms of Calvin studies, historical-theological studies, and constructive-theological debates on the Trinity will also become clear. Finally, it will be suggested that *Knowing the Triune God* presents a useful and comprehensive way for introducing and understanding John Calvin.

CHAPTER 2

KNOWING ...: *CERTITUDE IN AN AGE OF SCEPTICISM*

IT HAS BEEN observed that "epistemology is a window onto metaphysics," and that one's "theory of knowledge is a commentary on one's understanding of reality."[1] It is this twin investigation of the nature of what is — 'being' (ontology and/or metaphysics), and the nature of knowledge — 'how we may know' (epistemology), that have primarily occupied thinkers within the mainstream of the history of Western philosophy. But, as Aristotle put it; "All men by nature desire to know."[2] The question of *knowing* has therefore been the driving force behind intellectual and religious history, and the desire for *certain* and *reliable knowledge* an enterprise which is said "to characterise the human quest for meaning throughout the centuries."[3] John Calvin, reformer *and* humanist,[4] lived in a period of history with a heightened interest in the human quest for knowing. He had an extensive knowledge of classical philosophy due to the interests of sixteenth-century Humanism, yet chose to formulate his own answers to the questions of 'being' and 'knowing' strictly on the basis of Scriptural revelation. Particularly important and intriguing was the manner in which he oriented the question of 'knowing' within the shared milieu and overlapping interests of the Renaissance and Reformation. In this chapter our primary focus will therefore be on 'knowing' rather than 'being,' even as we will discover that though the two matters were distinct in Calvin's mind, they were absolutely inseparable.

Our investigation will commence with the sceptical predilection of late Medieval and Renaissance intellectual history, and from there seek to correlate Calvin's Christian (and as we shall discover, Trinitarian) response and interaction within its critical paradigm. Once Calvin's

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[1] Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform (1250-1550): An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 53.

[2] Cited in Bryan Magee, *The Story of Philosophy* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2001), 36.

[3] Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 23.

[4] Thanks largely to the work of Heiko Oberman, the antithetical manner of relating 'humanist' to 'reformer' is disappearing. The 'historical Calvin' was thoroughly imbedded in the spirituality of the later Middle Ages, and his culture and formation was that of Renaissance humanist. (See Heiko A. Oberman, "*Initia Calvini*: The Matrix of Calvin's Reformation," in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor*, ed. W. H. Neuser [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 113-154.) Our own position is that Calvin's conversion was sufficiently radical for him to break with humanism decisively. Yet, his humanistic background and education comes to light everywhere in his theological achievements. See Mary Potter Engel's insightful appendix on "Calvin on Humanism" in her study, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 199-205.

agenda has clearly emerged, the hermeneutical particulars and benefits of his attitude towards 'knowing God' will be better appreciated.

2.1 The Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Knowing

2.1.1 THE LATE MEDIEVAL INTELLECTUAL AGENDA

The historian William J. Bouwsma was the first to properly uncover the epistemological foundation of Calvin's theology by placing due emphasis on the philosophical questions that were raging during Calvin's time.[5] As a result he noted that "Evidence of Calvin's preoccupation with the problem of knowing, or with knowing as a problem, can be discerned everywhere in his work," and suggested that Calvin was therefore "representative of the most profound and characteristic novelties of Renaissance thought," namely a collection of innovations bundled together into what can be termed the "Renaissance Crisis of Knowing."[6] Bouwsma went so far as to claim that this 'crisis of knowing' takes us to the heart of Calvin's understanding of the Gospel.[7] Amongst other inquiries in this chapter, we will be investigating Bouwsma's claim to see if it is true. However, whether we endorse his interpretation of Calvin's assimilation of this crisis or not, it remains clear that "*certainty* was the fundamental theological locus of the sixteenth century."[8] As we shall discover, there were many reasons for this phenomenon, which by necessity grew out of the central intellectual agenda of the late Middle Ages. Ozment summarised it as follows:

> The major philosophical problem of the Middle Ages was the nature of human knowledge. What did it mean to know something and to know it truly? How did

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[5] See his 1982 essay "Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," *Calvin Theological Journal* 17:2 (November 1982): 190-211; and subsequently his massively influential book, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). He has also contributed two related essays: "The Spirituality of Renaissance Humanism" and "The Spirituality of John Calvin" in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Rait (London: SCM Press, 1989), 236-251, 318-333.

[6] Bouwsma, "Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," 201, 190.

[7] *Ibid.*, 211.

[8] Susan E. Schreiner, "'The Spiritual Man Judges All Things': Calvin and the Exegetical Debates about Certainty in the Reformation," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 215. [Emphasis added.]

knowing occur? What were its presuppositions and its limits? How these questions were answered depended very much on how one conceived man and reality. Medieval epistemology was a long essay on medieval man's concept of himself and his world.[9]

In order to understand the concept of self and world during this *renaissance* from Medieval to Modern, we turn to the classical philosophical interests of some sixteenth century thinkers.

2.1.2 THE RENAISSANCE REVIVAL OF SCEPTICISM

There is little doubt that the Reformation was greatly indebted to the rebirth of secular learning and the overall quest for knowledge which originated and began to blossom in the Renaissance. The Renaissance, to be reminded, was preoccupied with the philosophy of Greece and Rome and led to an interest in literature which had been neglected for centuries. With the aid of the printing press, republications like Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* and Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, were dispensed to a wider public. Calvin made numerous references to these and other classical writings in his own work.[10] The main philosophical stream continued to be Aristotelianism, though in Italy a revival of Platonism and Neoplatonism took place, and Stoic ideas made a return through republications of Cicero, Seneca and other classical authors. Even Epicureanism was revived in spite of the severe condemnation it received from Medieval theologians.[11] However, the most significant of all the renewed interests in the sixteenth century and which is by and large underestimated in terms of its impact, was the rediscovery of classical or Pyrrhonian scepticism.

Pyrrhonian scepticism was called such after Sextus Empiricus (*c.* 200 AD) wrote a work on Pyrrho (*c.* 365-270 BC.) the first Greek sceptic, called *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. In the 1560's, there appeared a Latin republication of this work which questioned "the reliability of either the

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[9] Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 42.

[10] A very significant and fruitfully used concept in Calvin's epistemology, namely the *sensus divinitatis*, he took from Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, for example. See Charles Partee's work, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 14 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977).

[11] The Church Fathers had repudiated Epicurus as an atheist, because he believed that the soul perished at death. See Colin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas & Movements, Volume 1: From the Ancient World to the Age of the Enlightenment* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 144.

senses or reason to prove the existence of God."[12] The other main sources of access to ancient scepticism were Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* and the writings of Cicero, but Sextus' ideas became so surprisingly influential, that he was hailed the founder of modern philosophy by the end of the seventeenth century.[13] The Reformation, which revolved around a reappraisal of questions of authority, sources of knowledge and methods of thinking, was hugely intensified through the application of these sceptical ideas to the theological clashes of the day. The Pyrrhonists for example, launched an attack on all intellectual and religious claims to knowledge, especially knowledge of God (in terms of its sources and authority), and interestingly, particularly the claims made in this regard by the followers of Calvin.[14] This said, they not only gave birth to a rising tide of religious doubt, but created suspicion of both the main streams of philosophical reasoning (knowing) based on either Aristotle (senses) or Plato (reason),[15] and anticipated in the sixteenth century a method of thinking belonging to an era much later.

The leading Pyrrhonist of the sixteenth century was the French nobleman Michel de la Montaigne (1533-92). Montaigne, an avowed pessimist who perhaps ought to be recognised as the first modern philosopher prior to Descartes (1596-1650),[16] adopted for himself the motto *que sais-je* ('what do I know?') from Sextus. As a contemporary of Calvin and reckoned by many to be the successor of Erasmus, Montaigne came to believe that no certainty could be reached by rational means alone. In his *Essais* he argued that the Christian message was about "the cultivation of ignorance in order to believe by faith alone."[17] We see in his proposal a retreat from scepticism to fideism in the face of a growing crisis of knowing.[18] Calvin's use of

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[12] Cited in Kenneth A. Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 1989), 54.

[13] After a 1400 year silence! Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought*, 168.

[14] According to Brown, Jesuit Catholic apologists like Gentian Hervet, Jean Gontery and Francois Veron who taught philosophy and theology at the Jesuit College de la Flechte (while René Descartes was a student there!), were quite bent on the destruction of Calvinism. *Ibid.*, 169. Brown does not make the reason for this specific attack clear, though one can speculate that it may have had something to do with Calvin's strong Scriptural epistemological foundation laid out in the *Institutio*.

[15] "Plato and Aristotle are the two archetypes of the two main conflicting approaches that have characterised philosophy throughout its history. On the one hand there are philosophers who set only a secondary value on knowledge of the world as it presents itself to our senses, believing that our ultimate concern needs to be with something that lies 'behind' or 'beyond' (or 'hidden below the surface of') the world. On the other hand there are philosophers who believe that this world is itself the most proper object of our concern and our philosophising." In this scheme for example, Rationalists stand against Empiricists. Magee, *The Story of Philosophy*, 38.

[16] So argued by Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, in *A Short History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 178-180.

[17] Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought*, 169.

[18] We must mention however, that sixteenth-century 'scepticism' did not imply indifference or resignation as it so often does in its modern usage. "Central to classical Scepticism was the mood of inquiry coupled with a desire to live

'knowledge' in his definition of faith, which we will come to below, marks an interesting reaction to this kind of 'Christianised scepticism.' Salutati (1331-1406), the great early Italian humanist, had also specified all knowledge to be nothing more than 'reasonable uncertainty,'[19] introducing the same precarious notion as Montaigne into a society whose intellectual categories were all religious. The average religious knower was subsequently left with only two options for recourse, either to subscribe to the unquestionable convention of Roman ecclesiology and dogma, or to the religious individualism (mysticism) of extreme fideism. The Reformers, naturally, were not satisfied with either. A third 'secular' option was also brought into the picture perhaps for the first time in Western history by Montaigne who promoted 'diversion and distraction' as a way of existential immunity from religious despair, a noteworthy non-religious solution to a religious problem. "Variety," he wrote, "always solaces, dissolves, and scatters ... by changing place, occupation, company, I escape into the crowd of other thoughts and diversions, where it loses my trace, and leaves me safe."[20] The contemporary ring to Montaigne's solution serves to illustrate the enormous consequences of the sixteenth century crisis in knowing. It should also be noted that this discomfort about the lack of certainty and the pursuit to alleviate its resulting anxiety preceded Descartes by almost a century, yet culminated in his *cogito ergo sum*, the so-called birth-cry of modern man.

Because the extent of the impact of the Renaissance introduction of sceptical notions into the sixteenth century intellectual world is not well recognised, the preoccupation of the Reformers with matters of knowing and certainty is not duly appreciated. John Calvin in particular amongst the Reformers, with his humanistic background, education, and career, gives evidence to the prevalence of this 'crisis,' and his own writing testifies to its predominance. Consequently, it is therefore neither illogical nor historically inappropriate to choose to intersect the life and thought of Calvin at the point of 'knowing.' But, before we explore the theme of knowing in his writings, it is important to uncover the 'novel ways of knowing' introduced by some Renaissance thinkers in response to intellectual scepticism, and to evaluate whether Calvin is as truly representative of these as Bouwsma has suggested.

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a thoroughly exemplary human life. This also was Montaigne's chief concern." Samuel E. Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 213.

[19] He stated that "Every truth that is grasped by reason can be made doubtful by a contrary reason. ... The more you know, the more true you will know it to be that you know nothing at all. For, to speak properly, what to us is knowledge is really only a kind of reasonable uncertainty." Cited in Bouwsma, "Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," 196.

[20] Cited in Myers, *All God's Children*, 54.

2.1.3 CALVIN, BETWEEN BELIEF AND DOUBT?

Bouwsma's *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (1988), brought about for the first time in the history of the International Congresses on Calvin Research, a seminar devoted to a book rather than a theme. Even the *New York Times* hailed it as a creative study "with a 20th-century psychological scheme, giving a genuinely new insight into the man and the 16th century as a whole."[21] Central to Bouwsma's thesis, is the positing of "two Calvins, coexisting uncomfortably within the same historical personage,"[22] the one a rationalistic orthodox theologian, and the other, a creative, free humanist and rhetorician. Our concern here is not so much with Bouwsma's 'Portrait,' but with his 1982 article, "Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," which initiated the larger study into Calvin's life and laid the foundation for his 'two Calvins' thesis on the basis of Calvin's reaction to the Renaissance crisis of knowing.

The Renaissance crisis of knowing according to Bouwsma, came about when the traditional, authoritarian and optimistic conception of 'knowing as God might know' and of 'the mind being united with the thing known' (cf. Aristotle), was challenged. This kind of knowing assumed that language had a direct correlation to realities which existed (i.e., words were 'signifiers,' and meaning was determined by etymology and not usage), and that knowing was generally analogous to *seeing*. This for example, implied that church and sacraments above all else had to be *visible*, and that the highest religious intellection was represented through the experience of a beatific *vision* (cf. Aquinas and Dante). Even *looking* at the heavens, humans in whom the *imago Dei* was primarily identified with rational and intellectual faculties, were able to discern and gain wisdom. The implications of this view for theology were important:

> It suggested that man can know God as he is, unlimited by the contingencies of the human condition; and that theology itself is thus a science, devised by God, that presents truths, from his perspective, which possess an absolute and unchanging validity and authority. Our knowledge, then, and especially our theological knowledge, could claim a certain *certitude* that reflected its divine origin.[23]

This position is the one, which according to Bouwsma, became eroded from the fourteenth century onwards chiefly because of the Renaissance humanist revival of ancient

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[21] John Todd of the *New York Times*, Cited in I. John Hesselink, "Reactions to Bouwsma's Portrait of John Calvin," in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor*, 209.
[22] *Ibid.*, 210.
[23] Bouwsma, "Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," 193.

rhetoric and philological investigation. Suddenly a multiplicity of (theological) opinions came about creating a considerable amount of disillusionment. The human (*versus* divine) element in the knowledge of divine things received greater interest; a new priority on *hearing* replaced the older preoccupation with seeing; and language, it was discovered, served many varied functions other than the signification previously suggested. In general, confidence in knowing receded to a point of radical doubt, and as radical doubt constitutes a condition under which humans find it hard to exist, Renaissance thinkers were led to start experimenting with new ways of knowing. What Bouwsma in other words suggests, is that not only did the Renaissance thinkers cause the revival of scepticism (against a certainty of dogmatic dimension), they also offered a tempering of its worst consequences. Like the eighteenth century sceptic David Hume, they were aware that no-one could live on the basis of complete scepticism, and that scepticism therefore needed to be 'mitigated.'[24]

What was significant was that the new ways they were introducing were ways which had traditionally been rejected as uncertain or unreliable. In the absence of absolute knowledge, 'maximum probability' qualified as a reasonable option. This allowed them to introduce *empirical/experiential* knowledge and *instrumental/practical* knowledge as valid epistemological options.[25] In this framework, it was important for knowledge to be related to human contingency, and above else to be *useful*, which implied a move away from abstract dogmatic systems towards a *humanisation* of theology. It is Bouwsma's contention that Calvin was deeply sensitive to these streams of thought, and that there resulted in him a conflict between the traditional and the Renaissance conception of what it meant to know something, a conflict with which he wrestled all his life but could never quite resolve, yet which gave vitality to his thought.[26] This ongoing inner conflict constitutes the 'two Calvins,' one of doubt and one of faith.

The ways in which Calvin is supposed to be representative of the new methods of knowing, include the manner in which the *Institutes* represents a 'discourse on knowing;' his insistence that all human knowledge is contingent; his scepticism about the value of scientific knowledge; his emphasis on language as a cultural artefact; his insistence that philosophical truth-claims were nothing but empty speculation; and that real or right knowledge had to be *affective* and *practical* in nature. In short, what made Calvin so representative of the Renaissance

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[24] Life on this schema, comprises of steering a course between "demanding a degree of certainty that we can never have and treating all possibilities as if they were of equal weight when they are not." Magee, *The Story of Philosophy*, 43.
[25] Bouwsma, "Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," 198-199.
[26] *Ibid.*, 200-201.

crisis, was his deeply *rhetorical* view of knowledge. This according to Bouwsma, also made him the most 'modern' of all the Reformers.[27]

Bouwsma's wide-ranging insights into the intellectual environment of the sixteenth century are profound. However, his perceptions of the psychological complexities of Calvin's persona may not be equally well founded. For example, his method of 'proof-texting' paradoxical sounding statements from the mouth or pen of Calvin, very often does not take into consideration the context in which the specific texts are found. A number of Calvin scholars have pointed out this anomaly. In some cases Bouwsma's citations from primary sources point to exactly the opposite of what he alleges Calvin to be saying.[28] As a result, to say that Calvin was "afflicted with serious doubts"[29] in a manner which is meant to reveal a psychological dualism in his persona, is in our view not credible. The presence of doubt does not *de facto* represent internal conflict of the proportion he suggests, nor does Calvin's central concern with certainty reveal an underlying obsession with doubt. The sources simply do not bear this (twentieth-century psychological) hypothesis out.[30] The *humanising* of faith and theology which Calvin is supposedly to have achieved, also appears to be in conflict with the general tone of Calvin's writings, especially on knowledge of God (and the role of the Holy Spirit in faith and the Christian life). Nevertheless, Calvin scholarship is greatly indebted to Bouwsma for bringing about greater awareness of Calvin's sensitivity to such trends in the sixteenth century. Chronologically and culturally Calvin does indeed stand in continuity with Renaissance Humanism, but it would be a grave error to overlook the stark manner in which he also stands discontinuously against it. The course of his own life gives evidence to a change of direction from his humanistic priorities to championing the Reformation cause. Calvin's Biblical-exegetical intention, though greatly aided by his humanistic background and training, also set him on a collision course with most of humanism's intellectual aspirations.[31]

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[27] *Ibid.*, 209.

[28] Tony Lane for example, has assembled a number of these 'inaccuracies' in his review. He also specifically questioned the assertion that Calvin was 'riddled with doubt.' See his review of Bouwsma's 'Portrait.' A. N. S. Lane, "Recent Calvin Literature: A Review Article," *Themelios* 16:2 (January/February 1991): 19.

[29] Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 101.

[30] Brian Armstrong tongue-in-cheek stated that "If Bouwsma has discovered two Calvins, the reader also finds many Bouwsmas: The psychohistorian who believes he can get inside Calvin's mind; the iconoclast who gleefully destroys all theological images erected of Calvin; the scholar of humanism who opens new vistas for Calvin studies ..." Cited by Hesselink, "Reactions to Bouwsma's Portrait of John Calvin," 212.

[31] This brings to the fore again the fascinating debate on how much Calvin was for or against humanism, and whether he should in fact be called one. We find ourselves in agreement with Mary Potter Engel who sees Calvin as a humanist (against Cornelis Augustijn who does not) who nevertheless is also an enemy of humanism on the basis of the Gospel. For a short introduction to this big debate in Calvin studies, see R. C. Gamble, "Current Trends in Calvin Research, 1982-90," in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor*, 97-101.

An analysis of Calvin's life does not suggest to us that he was precariously poised between belief and doubt in sixteenth-century sceptical fashion, as Bouwsma has suggested. Even if Calvin's view of knowing was in accordance with most of the Renaissance criteria for knowing (as we shall see below), it was equally true that the latter could not adequately meet the criteria for Biblical knowing, and it is with Biblical knowing that Calvin was centrally concerned.

2.2 *Prima Cognitio Dei*:
The Place and Purpose of Knowing in Calvin

2.2.1 *COGNITIO* IN CONTEXT

"Characteristic of the spirit of the entire Christian age is the Augustinian view that the only knowledge worth having is the *knowledge of God and self*. All other knowledge, such as the sciences of logic, metaphysics, and ethics, has value only in so far as it contributes to the knowledge of God."[32] Medieval thought viewed all of life as having a point of intersection with God.[33] The Reformation compounded this basic stance or theory of knowledge by adding an intensely personal dimension to it. Luther's wrestling with justification by faith shifted the focus from metaphysical analysis and speculation to personal experience and the fundamental basis of the believer's relationship with God.[34] The fact that there was something of an "Augustinian Renaissance" in the centuries prior to the Reformation, and an intense interest in the *Confessions* by early humanists,[35] created room for exploring the existential aspects of theological epistemology. Furthermore, if we take the point of view that the Reformation from the outlook of history was essentially a religious-theological (as opposed to political, social, or economic) event,[36] what was created then was a situation in which all streams of thought, from science to

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[32] The late Professor Thilly's basic description of Medieval Philosophy's 'Theory of Knowledge.' Frank Thilly, *A History of Philosophy*, rev. Ledger Wood, 3rd ed., (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), 178. [Emphasis added.]

[33] Stumpf put it well: "For most philosophers of the Middle Ages, the sky hung low, suggesting a close bond between heaven and earth, and, accordingly, between philosophy and theology." *Philosophy*, 203.

[34] Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought*, 145.

[35] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 48.

[36] We find ourselves in agreement with George who stated that "While the foregoing approaches to Reformation history [political, social, and economic interpretations] provide valuable insights for understanding such a complex

philosophy to theology, were channelled through the basic question of how human beings can know God. All the theological and philosophical conflicts of the Reformation period grew out of this question.

When we turn to Calvin and his relation to classical and medieval philosophy and theology, we discover some remarkable facts. The 1559 *Institutio* reveals his primary indebtedness to Augustine, the *magister theologiae* of the church catholic, but also to Aquinas and Lombard, the standard conversation partners in sixteenth century theology. The surprise however, comes in that philosophers such as Cicero, Plato and Aristotle feature much more prominently than a host of other near contemporary thinkers, such as Scotus, Ockham, Biel, and Bonaventure. In contrast to Luther who detested the spiritual vacuity of philosophy and called it 'the Devil's Whore,' Calvin stood in a far more complex relation to the world of ideas. Though it is easy to find in his writings statements comparable to Luther's, it is also true that Calvin sought to articulate the Christian faith to a culture which as a result of the Renaissance retained a link with the world of classical antiquity. His humanistic education and early Commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* (1532) naturally has a bearing on this topic, but it is of far greater significance to observe the manner in which he chose to expound the Christian faith as basic instruction and/or apology (such functions as the *Institutio* initially served) to his cultural world. The manner in which he for example set up the *Institutio* in all its editions as a discourse on knowing (following the Augustinian precept of knowledge of God and self), is no mere coincidence. It established a clear connection with what the intellectual and cultural world of his time had become, the world in which he found himself and which he was a part of. The fact that his writings maintained their capacity to evoke response and interest for a further four hundred years, is a different matter, one which we will return to in chapter five.

Calvin and Luther (who was by no means opposed to 'reason') pressed philosophy into service of the faith,[37] but the question of how much Calvin's theology was influenced by his eclectic use of philosophical ideas is still somewhat unanswered. It is clear that he did not submit to any foundational rational or empirical principle, but in more than a few instances he used philosophical categories to explain Biblical ideas. The notion of the *divinitatis sensum* ('awareness of divinity'; *Inst.* 1.3.1) for example, a fundamental concept in Calvin's epistemology,

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period, we must recognise that the Reformation was essentially a religious event; its deepest concerns, theological."
Ibid., 18.
[37] "In both Luther and Calvin, familiarity with ancient philosophy is perhaps most evident in those places which are concerned with the vindication of basic religious beliefs in the face of scepticism." Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought*, 155.

is not taken from Scripture, but from an "eminent pagan" (Cicero) who had stated that "no nation is so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God."[38] Yet, though he borrowed from pagan authors (and criticised those who were too suspicious to do so),[39] he never failed to denounce philosophers for being speculative, for deviating from revealed truth and for failing to worship God. The sixteenth-century was above all else the century of the Bible, and nothing could surpass the *ad fontes* injunction. In Calvin the Scripture principle assumed an authoritative dimension not on the basis of dogmatism, but on the basis of the freeing of the text from the shackles of church abuse and thus preventing the God whose Word it was from being muzzled. Calvin nevertheless brought to the reading of the Word something he also found there, namely an interpretative posture he took from Augustine. The notion of experiential religion, of knowing God, governed Calvin's response to the philosophical-theological issues of his day in true Biblical-Augustinian fashion.

2.2.2 *COGNITIO DEI* IN THE *INSTITUTIO*

A tremendous amount has been written about 'knowledge of God' in the theology of John Calvin, the works of Dowey and Parker being the most influential of the twentieth-century.[40] It is thus not our intention to launch a full enquiry into the same topic, but rather to build on the notion of knowing within its sixteenth-century context as set out above. Knowledge of God is nevertheless the correct place to begin, as all editions of the *Institutio* testify. As a 'treatise on knowing God,' Calvin broke established conventions of systemisation and theologising with his Biblical-rhetorical affirmation of *cognitio Dei*. While many had considered God's 'knowability' in their theologies, Calvin's fondness of the phrase 'knowledge

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[38] *Inst.* 1.3.1. From Cicero's dialogue *On the Nature of the Gods* (1.16.43). Another instance is his use of Aristotle's famous fourfold notion of causation (efficient, material, formal and final causes) to explain aspects of his doctrine of election and predestination. Cf. *Commentary on Ephesians* 1:5.
[39] See *Commentary on Titus* 1:12. "All truth is from God; and consequently, if wicked men have said anything that is true and just, we ought not to reject it; for it has come from God."
[40] Edward A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952); and T. H. L. Parker, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Study in the Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1952). Both these works show some preoccupation with the Barth-Brunner debate (Dowey having completed his work under Brunner and Parker under T. F. Torrance, a notable Barthian). B. B. Warfield was actually one of the first scholars to wrestle with this single aspect of Calvin's theology in "Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God," *Princeton Theological Review* vii (1909): 219-325; reprinted in *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1956), 29-130. Since then, its importance has been recognised in a series of books and articles by Dowey, Parker, Torrance and others. Primacy is also accorded to it in studies of Calvin's thought and theology such as those by Niesel, Wendel and Bouwsma, to mention just a few. It is possible perhaps to say that no student of Calvin can proceed along Calvin's theology if this aspect of his thought has not been dealt with.

of God' signalled a preference which was more than linguistic. It suggested a Biblical concept which was historically suitable for introducing and guiding the sixteenth-century reader struggling with matters of knowing through the Christian faith. Thematically, it was broad enough to unite all of Christian *doctrine* (apprehension of what God is), Christian *experience* (application to ourselves of what he is and gives) and Christian *behaviour* (adoration of God as the giver of these gifts).[41]

Our investigation of the topic will primarily, though not exclusively, be focused on the 1559 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin was by no means a man of one book, his enormous literary output simply does not allow anyone to hold to such opinion.[42] Nevertheless, the *Institutio* comprehends his thought accurately and authoritatively, as he himself indicated by designating it the role of 'hermeneutical key' to the rest of his writings.[43] Furthermore, considering all Calvin's writings, *Institutio, Commentaries, Polemical writings, Letters and Sermons*, indicates not that there were many Calvins, but that the dogmatician, exegete, polemicist and pastor was a single man converted to *docilitas*, and committed to reforming the church by all the means at his disposal.[44]

2.2.2.1 *The Structure of the* Institutio

Much speculation has gone into understanding the structure and development of the *Institutio* through its five Latin and three French editions.[45] It is an important question, as it offers a clue not only to the development and growth of the person and his theology, but a window into the underlying purpose and focus of this thought. The two most common hypotheses offer an understanding of the structure of the *Institutio* (1559), and not surprisingly, at the same time implicitly suggest a main or central theme for Calvin's theology. The first is the *duplex cognitio Dei* (knowledge of God as Creator distinguished from knowledge of God as Redeemer) offered by Dowey[46] and propounded by Armstrong,[47] and the second, the suggestion

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[41] James Packer's schema as expressed in a lecture on the "The Importance of the Theme of 'Knowing God' in Reformed Theology" (illustrated with reference to Calvin's *Institutio*) at the 1975 Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. Cited in Alister E. McGrath, *To Know and Serve God: A Biography of James I. Packer* (London: Hodder 1997), 193.
[42] For an introduction to the complete Calvin corpus, see Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).
[43] See his preface to the 1559 *Institutio*.
[44] Willem van't Spijker in the foreword to De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 7-8.
[45] See for example the work of F. L. Battles, "*Calculus Fidei*: Some Ruminations on the Structure of the Theology of John Calvin," in *Interpreting John Calvin*, ed. R. Benedetto (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996). See also the Appendix on "The Antithetical Structure of Calvin's *Institutes*."
[46] He followed Julius Köstlin's earlier thesis ("Calvins Institutio nach Form und Inhalt," *Theologishe Studien und Kritiken*. Jahrg. 41. [Gotha: F. U. Berthes, 1868]). See Dowey's *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*. This was

by Parker on the basis of the origin and development of the *Institutio*, that it ought to be read along a credal-Trinitarian axis.[48] As the first proposal insinuates that Calvin had effectively made a mistake by casting the *Institutio* into four books rather than two (going contrary his own theological thought), we take our stance with Parker and others who follow the development of the *Institutio* from catechetical work (with an incidental apologetic character) through theological-hermeneutical textbook (*summa religiones*) to its final credal-theological expression.[49] (Both Dowey and Parker in fact follow the structural development of the *Institutio* in order to propose a significant ordering principle. Though the two schools of thought reject each others' proposals, Noble has demonstrated that there is some overlap and agreement in that the *duplex cognitio*, or the *scopus duplex* as Parker prefers to call it, is a function of the Apostles' Creed.)[50] Parker nevertheless specifically rejected the radical textual criticism imposed on Calvin by Dowey, and is adamant that we do an injustice to Calvin by not accepting the way he has arranged his own work and by negating or ignoring the precise titles he gave to each section in sixteenth-century fashion. This seems to us a sound method of procedure. We quote Parker at length:

> ... by the new [final 1559] form of the *Institutio* Calvin is claiming that its teaching is an authentic statement of the Faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. More than that, however (and this is surely Calvin's chief reason for the manner of revision), *the Trinitarian form accorded more clearly and strongly with the character of his*

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followed this up with "The Structure of Calvin's Theological Thought as Influenced by the Two-fold Knowledge of God," in *Calvinus Ecclesiae Genevensis Custos*, ed. W. H. Neuser (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1984).

[47] Brian Armstrong takes up Dowey's case in, "*Duplex cognitio Dei*, Or? The Problem and Relation of Structure, Form, and Purpose in Calvin's Theology," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honour of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, ed. Elsie A. McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 141. Richard C. Gamble seems to follow Armstrong in "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 186, n. 16: "Calvin Scholarship has shown increasing unanimity that this basic presupposition of Calvin must be reckoned with as either *a* controlling principle of his theology or *the* controlling principle." Gamble however, goes on to footnote in contradiction to his own statement a number of scholars, none of whom is willing to commit to the *duplex cognitio* as the controlling principle Calvin's theology!

[48] See his *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, as well as his latest work, *Calvin: An Introduction to his Thought* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

[49] The first edition was catechetical with its apologetic character incidental. By the second edition, the readership had changed and a new category was introduced, namely aiding aspirant theologians training in sacred theology to read the Divine Word. It assumed a more 'topical' arrangement, in common with the *topoi* or *loci communes* of the day. These were however arranged accordingly to fit within the faith of Scripture. (Calvin even called it a *summa religiones*.) In the final edition the four chapters of the 1539-50 editions expounding the Apostles' Creed determined the shape (and interpretation!) of the whole work in conspicuous fashion. Calvin divided the Apostles' Creed in four parts (including the Church), perhaps to emphasise the catholicity of his theological intentions. *Ibid.*, 4-10.

[50] "The two are in fact not contradictory. On the contrary, the *duplex cognitio* is a function of the structure of the Apostles' Creed, which speaks of creation relative to the Father, and redemption relative to the Son." T. A. Noble, "Our Knowledge of God according to John Calvin," *The Evangelical Quarterly* LIV (1982): 10-13. Parker acknowledges a two-foldness (*scopus duplex*), but not a *duplex cognitio*. Neither Parker nor Dowey concedes that this two-foldness is related to *general* and *special* revelation. It is a two-fold *way* of knowing God in his character as Creator and Redeemer.

theology, which had been Trinitarian from the beginning. The very form is used to declare the unity and threefoldness of the Godhead. As the first three Books correspond to the credal witness to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so, but less obviously, the titles of these Books testify to the unity by speaking only of 'God' and not of 'Father,' 'Son,' or 'Holy Spirit.' *The interpretation of the* Institutio, *then, must be governed by its form.* This may be a literary truism, but the misunderstandings of the work and, therefore, of Calvin's theology have more often than not been accompanied by a wrenching of its form into one that fitted the misinterpretation.[51]

We will be revisiting the 'Trinitarian form' of knowledge of God in the *Institutio*, but for the moment, it is important to note the obvious though easily neglected emphasis on *knowledge* throughout the work. Knowledge is correlative to the *credo* (I believe) of the Apostles' Creed, and it should immediately be clear to us that Calvin indicated not speculative knowledge, but *affective* knowledge. In other words, *trust* and *knowing*, as opposed to *knowing about*. Similarly, he spoke of the 'knowledge' of God not the 'being' or 'essence' of God, an indication of how central revelation and revealed religion was to his thought. Our knowledge of God must be and can only be in accordance with what he has revealed of himself.[52] Calvin was thus not relying on any order or principle intrinsic to theology as a science, but on *theologia*,[53] theology as earnest belief and trust in God based on the Scriptural revelation of the historic Christian faith encapsulated and articulated by the most universal of Christian creeds, the Apostles' Creed.

2.2.2.2 The Theme of the Institutio

The *Institutio* is a document of the sixteenth century, written for readers thinking in its categories and wrestling with its central issues. It owes its "distinctive ethos" to the "need to address contemporary institutions and intellectual and moral movements."[54] The famous opening line of the *Institutio* is therefore a trumpet call to the sixteenth-century Church and to the Renaissance world:

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. (*Inst.* 1.1.1)

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[51] *Ibid.*, 9. [Emphasis added.]

[52] Compare here the very important injunction to seek 'of what sort God is' (*qualis sit Deus*) rather than 'what he is' (*quid Deus sit*), an attempt to penetrate into his essence. *Inst.* 1.2.2.

[53] The older model of theology (*theologia*) consisted in part of a disposition or *habitus* for theological knowing which included the cultivation of the spiritual and attitudinal life of the individual. See Richard A. Muller, *The Study of Theology: From Biblical Interpretation to Contemporary Formulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 214-220.

[54] Parker, *Calvin*, 2.

This line, one of the most quoted aphorisms in all of theological literature, encapsulated the sixteenth-century contemporary theme of the whole work,[55] as well as hinted at its 'evangelical' purpose, that is, 'true knowledge of God.' It never varied its position in the *Institutio*, though it is interesting to note that the 1536 edition had "sacred doctrine"[56] in the place of "wisdom." This may be suggestive of a broader reference for the work from 1539 onwards, and is indicative of a less theoretical and more practical intention.[57] The French edition of 1560 seemed to suggest this by expressing the idea in a more forceful and personal way; "In knowing God, each of us also knows himself."[58] In his native language (as opposed to Latin), it was possible for Calvin to grammatically differentiate between 'knowing' and 'knowledge of' in the particular construction, which again suggested a personal and rhetorical as opposed to theoretical intention. Even in the Latin renditions Calvin opted for *cognitio* rather than *scientia*, the academic norm. The question of knowledge for Calvin did not revolve around its theoretical possibility or even its foundation for religious belief, but rather the distinction between knowledge directed towards a proper and edifying goal as opposed to knowledge which ultimately would not benefit the knower. "In other words, the sharp distinction between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge, to which we in the modern period have become accustomed to at least since Kant, does not fit Calvin's mental and intellectual world."[59]

Further along in the *Institutio*, Calvin's dictum is again repeated; "We cannot have a clear and complete knowledge of God unless it is accomplished by a corresponding knowledge of ourselves" (*Inst.* 1.15.1, repeated in 2.8.1). But, what did it mean? It seemed to suggest that the

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[55] Bouwsma takes this sentence to be "a formula he had taken from Cicero." See his *John Calvin*, 160. He further postulates that Calvin's conception of the human being "precipitated him into the middle of the general crisis about the nature and possibilities of knowledge, already apparent in the fourteenth century" (p. 150).

[56] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, translated and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans in collaboration with the H. H. Meeter Centre for Calvin Studies, 1995), 15.

[57] A fair amount of speculation has gone into supplying reasons for the change from 'doctrine' (1536) to 'wisdom' (1559). Westhead remarks; "Of significance here is the fact that the term 'doctrine' which could be translated 'philosophy,' with its intellectualist overtones, has given way to 'wisdom,' a broader word embracing knowledge in its practical as well as its theoretical aspects. If there is any significance in this, then it is hardly surprising to find that much of what follows is so practical in its thrust." J. Nigel Westhead, "Calvin and Experimental Knowledge," *The Westminster Conference* (1995): 7. For a comparison of this statement to a number of earlier statements and possible 'sources' (Cicero, Augustine and others), see the footnotes supplied to both (Battles) editions of the *Institutio*.

[58] Cited by McNeill in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 36n3. Calvin's expressions in French are arguably closer to his real intentions. Oberman therefore rightly observes that Calvin's French writings "deserve equal time, and more" [in relation to the Latin]. Elsewhere, he has also listed Calvin's French expressions and proverbs to show his creative use of language, as well as pointing to "the extent to which his native tongue was his primary mode of moulding experience and shaping reflection." Heiko A. Oberman, "*Initia Calvini*: The Matrix of Calvin's Reformation," 123.

[59] Cornelis van der Kooi, "Within Proper Limits: Basic Features of John Calvin's Theological Epistemology," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 366. Van der Kooi stated that it was "existential" from the beginning.

central human quest for knowing (i.e., *certain* knowledge) is wrapped up in a dual and interdependent knowledge. Calvin made this fact obvious when he asserted that it is not clear which preceded which. Yet, "the knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find him" (*Inst.* 1.1.1). Thus far, it would appear in true Renaissance fashion, that the knowledge of *self* preceded all other knowledge, even the knowledge of God. However, Calvin proceeded to turn the whole matter on its head by affirming exactly the opposite. "It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinise himself" (*Inst.* 1.1.2). This subtle manoeuvre is far more illuminating than usually perceived. It would appear that Calvin was setting up his own Biblical programme for knowing in response to the humanistic version of knowing. He was without a doubt borrowing notions of knowing from Augustine, but more significantly, he was stating his intention from the outset of the work to bring the Biblical truths of Fall and Grace (Redemption) to bear on the intellectual human quest for wisdom and understanding in relation to knowledge of God. There was an underlying soteriological intention to these paragraphs. Calvin was convinced that a face-to-face encounter with God would bring insight into the depravity of the human condition and that the need for a Redeemer would become apparent. Yet, the realisation of this need was already a knowing step towards the Redeemer in whom the true substance of self-knowing was realised.[60]

The topic was approached with great subtlety. Calvin beautifully portrayed the sense in which the knowledge of ourselves, having driven us to God, simultaneously presupposed that we have already contemplated him (cf. *Inst.* 1.1.2). "Yet," and here we see his pedagogical-theological intention (vs. a simple methodological agenda), "however the knowledge of God and of ourselves may be mutually connected, the order of right teaching requires that we discuss the former first, then proceed afterward to treat the latter" (*Inst.* 1.1.3). 'Knowledge of God' then takes necessary precedence over 'knowledge of man.' *Cognitio Dei* and not *cognitio homo* was at the forefront of his thought. The unfolding contents of the *Institutio* confirmed this[61] by deferring

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[60] "Man's true knowledge of himself is reflexive of his knowledge of God. He is made to know God, and to live in dependence on God's grace. Therefore, only when a man so responds to the Word of grace that he becomes what he is made to be, can he begin to know his true nature." T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 13.

[61] Book I, "The Knowledge of God the Creator" established the starting point of the work. However, Book I subsumed the doctrines of Trinity, Creation, and Providence. The stress was therefore on God's revealing works and acts and not on God as he is in himself. Calvin's was therefore a revelational/Biblical *versus* an ontological/philosophical approach. The latter is more characteristically Scholastic and 'post-Calvin Calvinist'. Note

the full exposition of *cognitio homo* to Book II based on a discussion of the human predicament. However much some Calvin scholars may want to affirm that there is no basic 'principle' to Calvin's thought,[62] there is no ambiguity to the fact that 'our knowledge of God' is the perspectival horizon (or theme) from which his theology must be seen as a whole.[63]

2.2.2.3 Augustinian Thesis

There is yet another important consideration which must not escape our notice while looking at Calvin's opening lines and at the interrelatedness of knowing God and self. It is almost certain that Calvin here has in his mind Augustine's famous statement in the opening chapters of the *Confessions*; "You move us to delight in praising you; for you have formed us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in you" (*Confessions* I.1).[64] This sentence is followed by the next few lines which can easily be recognised in Calvin's opening sentence; "'Grant me Lord to know and understand' (Ps. 118: 34, 37, 73, 144) which comes first — to call upon you or to praise you, and whether knowing you precedes calling upon you. But who calls upon you when he does not know you?"[65] Armstrong has quite correctly detected in Augustine's divine-human correlation a basic axiom determinative for all of Calvin's theology:

> Worship and adoration of God are for Calvin the end of theology, of our knowledge of God, precisely because of his conviction that men and women were created to be in a vital, necessary, and dependent relationship or communion with God. ... If there is one fundamental assumption which underlies the whole of Calvin's theology, it is found, I believe, in the dictum of Augustine that we are created for fellowship or communion with God and are restless until we find our rest in that God.[66]

Calvin had regarded himself as someone who faithfully followed and expounded the ideas of Augustine, and of owning him in the Reformation cause to the point of claiming that

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[62] that despite the titles of Book I and II, Calvin only developed his epistemology fully in Book III, especially in Chapter 2, 'The meaning of knowledge in faith.'

[63] So argued by Hermann Bauke in his *Die Probleme der Theologie Calvins* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1922).

[64] Noble, "Our Knowledge of God according to Calvin," 2.

"To praise you is the desire of man, a little piece of your creation. You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated with introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3. This sentence by common concession, announces a major theme of the work.

[65] It continues; "In seeking him they find him, and in finding him they will praise him ... My faith, Lord, calls upon you. It is your gift to me." *Ibid.*

[66] Armstrong, "Duplex cognitio Dei, Or?," 141.

"Augustine is totally ours!"[67] Not only did he have broad and independent access to the *Opera Augustini* as a resource, but he personally identified with the Bishop of Hippo seeing him as a key towards doctrinal discernment.[68] He thus adhered closely to Augustine's epistemological approach of *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand); "faith seeks, understanding finds ... And yet again, understanding still seeks Him whom it finds ..." (*De Trinitate* XV.2, cf. VII.12).[69] It is interesting that these utterances which follow on from Augustine's theme in the *Confessions* and which closely resemble Calvin's intention in the opening lines of the *Institutio*, are found in his work on the Trinity. For Augustine, the highest function of faith's pursuit by reason (theology as *scientia*), was directed towards wisdom (*sapientia*), and he developed the relation of the 'objective' *ratio scientia* to the 'subjective' *ratio sapientia* by means of a psychological Trinitarian analogy. Knowledge of the Trinity and of self were intertwined in an analogous manner. As Thilly put it;

> To find the one is therefore to find the other also: the self which Augustine finds, and of which he thinks he achieves a knowledge more reliable than that which he has of external nature, is both a product of and an aid toward the search for God which he undertakes under the stimulus of the doctrine of the Trinity.[70]

Unfortunately as we shall see in the next chapter, Augustine developed this Trinitarian-Psychological theme to an extent which made it somewhat unhelpful in terms of a simple Biblical understanding of God. Nevertheless, it is clear that while Calvin stopped well short of assimilating Augustine's human-Trinitarian analogy,[71] he did borrow from him the fact that true wisdom resided in the knowledge-complex of God and self. For our purposes, it is of no little significance that this dual knowledge-complex originated in the context of understanding and

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[67] *CO* 8.266, cited in Alister E McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 151. For a full assessment of Augustine's influence on Calvin, see J. van Oort, "Calvijn en Augustinus," *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 72 (1992): 92-103.

[68] Oberman, "*Initia Calvini*: The Matrix of Calvin's Reformation," 122.

[69] The full quotation reads: "Faith seeks, understanding finds; whence the prophet says [Isaiah 7:9], 'Unless ye believe, ye shall not understand.' And yet, again, understanding still seeks Him, whom it finds for 'God looked down upon the sons of men,' as it is sung in the holy Psalm [Ps. 14:2], 'to see if there were any that would understand, and seek after God.' And man, therefore, ought for this purpose to have understanding, that he may seek after God." Translation from the Schaff edition of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Numerous Publications). Anselm's approach of *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) comes from here.

[70] Thilly, *History of Philosophy*, 178.

[71] In his *Commentary on Genesis* 1:26, Calvin made the following cautious but negative statements concerning Augustine's scheme: "... Augustine, beyond all others, speculates with excessive refinement, for the purpose of fabricating a Trinity in man. For in laying hold of the three faculties of the soul enumerated by Aristotle, the intellect, the memory and the will, he afterwards out of the one Trinity derives many. If any reader, having leisure, wishes to enjoy such speculations, let him read [Augustine's *Trinity* and *City of God*] ... but a definition of the image of God ought to rest on a firmer basis than such subtleties."

knowing the Triune nature of God. Though this fact seemed to have eluded most Calvin commentators, there is no way in which it would have escaped or faded in Calvin's own theological comprehension.

2.2.3 *COGNITIO DEI* AND THE GOAL OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

It is one of the travesties of history that Calvin has either been represented hagiographically as the sole defender of divine doctrine, or alternatively conceived of as an austere uncompromising personality who pitilessly enforced principles of purity. Contemporary scholarship has gone a long way towards acquitting the academic world of this historical inaccuracy, and it is now becoming possible to view Calvin from a more balanced perspective, as a theologian of head *and* heart.[72] The caricature of Calvin as 'iron-theologician' was especially misplaced on someone whose personal seal was a burning heart inscribed with the motto *cor meum tibi offero domine prompte et sincere* ('My heart I offer, Lord, to Thee eagerly and earnestly'). Calvin's desired contribution to the church of his time was therefore not the erection of an unassailable theological 'system,' as many suppose, but the revival of the knowledge of God, or as he called it often, "true religion."[73]:

> Today, all sorts of subjects are eagerly pursued; but the knowledge of God is neglected ... *Yet to know God is man's chief end, and justifies his existence.* Even if a hundred lives were ours, this one aim would be sufficient for them all. (*Commentary on Jeremiah* 9:23-24)[74]

In this section we will briefly explore this theme and its basis, *pietas* or godliness, chiefly by means of a recently rediscovered and hence previously neglected portion of Calvin's writings, the 1537 *Instruction et confession de foy.*

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[72] Bouwsma's *Portrait* is of significance in this regard.

[73] See especially *Inst.* 1.12.1 (cf. 1.2.2; 1.6, 9, 10) [The terms *pure* and *true religion* are found frequently in Calvin's writings and almost always in connection with knowledge of God on the basis of Scriptural revelation alone]. Note also that it is the *Institutes of the Christian "Religion"* and not Christian "Theology." Religion had a more comprehensive referent for Calvin than that of theology in its academic sense. Note also the thematic title of Section 1 of his 1538 *Catechism* which reads: "All Men Have Been Born for Religion."

[74] [Emphasis added.] Jeremiah 9:24 reads: "But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight declares the LORD" (NIV).

2.2.3.1 *The* Instruction et confession de foy *(1537)*[75]

On January the 16th 1537, only five months after Calvin had arrived in Geneva, he and Farel presented to the Council their *Articles Concerning the Organisation of the Church and of Worship*. The *Articles* included a church constitution and an *Instruction*, as the two reformers knew well that a brief confession of the newly embraced faith was indispensable in such a critical moment in the life of Geneva. Though the first edition of the *Institutio* had been published in Basel the previous year, it was still too long and inaccessible for most lay people and youth. Calvin therefore set out to publish a catechism (in French), the *Instruction et confession de foy*, primarily for the instruction of youth. The following year he translated it (with minor amendments) into Latin, the *Catechismus, sive christianae religionis institutio*, in order to establish a wider readership.[76]

Calvin had given high priority to the instruction of youth in Christian faith,[77] but despite his own high estimation of the *Instruction*, it disappeared soon after its publication and was not rediscovered until 1877 when the original was found in Paris. Paul Fuhrmann has argued that it offers an important insight into Calvin's thought as it represents "the early, elemental, and positive core" of his theology. "With this key" he stated, "we can now open the early Reformed sanctuary and see its simple beauty and great power."[78] Though we may not share Professor Fuhrmann's hermeneutical optimism entirely, the *Instruction* undoubtedly is of great value to Calvin scholarship. Two elements are of particular interest to us in the *Instruction*, namely Calvin's emphasis on knowing God, and the high priority he placed on piety as the basis for knowing God. The *Instruction* affirmed this with its opening heading and paragraph:

ALL MEN ARE BORN IN ORDER TO KNOW GOD: As no man is found, however barbarous and even savage he may be, who is not touched by some idea of

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[75] *Instruction et confession de foy dont on use en l'eglise de Genève* (CO 22:25-74; OS 1:378-417). For an English translation see *Instruction in Faith (1537)*, ed. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1992). We will be making reference to this English translation hereafter referred to as *Instruction*.

[76] The full title reads; *Catechismus, sive christianae religionis institutio, communibus renatae nuper in evangelo Genevensis ecclesiae suffragiis recepta, et vulgari quidem prius idiomate, nunc vero Latine etiam, quo de fidei illius sinceritate passim aliis etiam ecclesiis constet, in lucem edita, Ioanne Calvino autore* (1538) (CO 5:313-62; OS 1:426-32). Hereafter referred to as *Catechism*. For a commentary and English translation (by F. L. Battles), see I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997).

[77] "How frequently we see those who take great pains that their children be indoctrinated in the business of the world! It is true that they provide excellent teachers or their children, but for the purpose of making a grand show, so that they may know some three words of Latin and be able to display at the dinner table that they converse easily ... *Yet, it is never a question of knowing God!* It is the wrong way to proceed! It is putting the cart before the horse" (Sermon 4 in the *Commentary* on Titus). [Emphasis added.]

[78] *Instruction*, 17. Fuhrmann's enthusiasm is based on advances made in understanding other thinkers like Luther through the discovery of early documents. He also finds the absence of 'polemic' and the 'helpful and constructive tone' in the *Instruction* to be a sign of its purity and humanistic value. These arguments are not fully convincing enough to find in the *Instruction* 'the real key' to Calvin's theology. It may however serve to change the austere perception of Calvin held by some scholars and historians.

religion, it is clear that we all are created in order that we may know the majesty of our Creator, that having known it, we may esteem it above all and honour it with all awe, love and reverence. ... It is necessary, therefore, that the principal care and solicitude of our life be to seek God, to aspire to him with all the affection of our heart, and to repose nowhere else but in him alone. (Article 1)

These lines reveal the same indebtedness to Augustine as did the opening theme of the *Institutio*, except that here the style of Calvin's language is more emotive and is used with greater immediacy. This may have been the result of communicating to a simpler Christian audience, but could also be revealing more fully a side of Calvin not detected elsewhere in his writings as Fuhrmann suggested. Note the passionate manner in which he described true piety in the following article:

> Now the gist of true piety does not consist in a fear which would gladly flee the judgement of God but, being unable to do so, has horror of it. *True piety* consists rather in a *pure* and *true zeal* which *loves* God *altogether* as Father, and *reveres* him *truly* as Lord, *embraces* his justice and *dreads* to offend him *more than to die*. All those who possess this zeal do not undertake to forge for themselves a God as their temerity wishes, but they seek the knowledge of the true God from that very God and do not conceive him otherwise than he manifests and declares himself to them. (Article 2)[79]

Calvin quite clearly was arguing for a religion of the heart and placed an experiential emphasis on knowledge of God combined appropriately with the notion that such knowing can only be on the basis of God's own 'Fatherly' revelation. The following quotations on faith (Articles 14 and 15) have the same thrust, and contain the rudiments of what would later become Calvin's Trinitarian definition of faith in the 1559 *Institutio*:[80]

> One must not imagine that the Christian faith is a bare and mere knowledge of God or an understanding of the Scripture which flutters in the brain without touching the heart, as it is usually the case with the opinion about things which are confirmed by some probable reason. But faith is *a firm and solid confidence of the heart*, by means of which we rest surely in the mercy of God which is promised to us through the Gospel. (Article 14)[81]

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[79] Article 2: "What Difference There Is Between True And False Religion." [Emphasis added.]

[80] The 1559 *Institutio* contains the following definition: "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed in our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (*Inst.* 3.2.7).

[81] Article 14: "What True Faith Is." [Emphasis added.]

Hence there is no doubt that faith is *a light of the Holy Spirit* through which our understandings *are enlightened* and our hearts *are confirmed* in *a sure persuasion* which is *assured* that the truth of God is so *certain* that he can but accomplish that which he has promised through his holy word that he will do. Hence (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13), the Holy Spirit is called like *a guarantee* which *confirms in our hearts the certainty* of the divine truth, and *a seal* by which *our hearts are sealed* in the expectation of the day of the Lord. For it is the Spirit indeed who witnesses to our spirit that God is our Father and that similarly we are his children (Romans 8:16). (Article 15)[82]

As our emphases indicate, it contains a fascinating ensemble of concepts relating faith to the work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to knowledge issuing forth in *certitude*. Calvin thus clearly differentiated between a 'mere knowledge of God' and 'a confidence of the heart'; true or certain 'knowing.' All men are born 'to know' God (Article 1), not merely to 'know about' him. As he stated: "As no man is found, however barbarous and even savage he may be, who is not touched by some idea of religion [cf. Cicero], it is clear that we are all created in order to that we may know the majesty of our Creator, that having known it, we may esteem it above all and honour it with awe, love and reverence"(Article 1). This sentence (alongside Calvin's comment on Jeremiah 9:23-24) provided the inspiration for the famous first question and answer of the *Westminster Larger Catechism* (1648):

Q. 1: What is the chief and highest end of man?
A.: Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever.

Or, to hear from Calvin again: "The chief concern of our life ought to be to seek God, to aspire to him with our whole heart, and to rest nowhere but in him" (Section 1, 1538 *Catechism*).[83] The theme of the 1537 *Instruction* like the *Institutio*, was concerned with true religion and the goal of human existence, which is to have a *knowing* knowledge of God.

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[82] Article 15: "Faith Is A Gift Of God." [Emphasis added.]

[83] No doubt, the sense of the earlier *Instruction* is also picked up in the Genevan Catechism of 1541, which had been altered to accommodate the question and answer format: "*Teacher: What is the principal end of human life?* Student: It is to know God. *Teacher: Why do you say that?* Student: Because He has created us and put us on earth to be glorified in us. And it is surely right that we dedicate our lives to His glory, since He is the beginning of it." As translated in T. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1959), 5-6. Another translation is given in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1954), 88-139. Cited in George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 163.

2.2.3.2 Pietas: *The Difference between True and False Religion*

Having stated that "all men have been born to *know God*" (Article 1, 1537 *Instruction*), or, "for *religion*" (Section 1, 1538 *Catechism*),[84] it follows that Calvin would want to distinguish between true and false religion, or right and wrong ways of knowing God. He does this under Article 2 of the *Instruction*, "What Difference There Is Between True And False Religion," and by means of piety. All men, he says, desire to have religion, but there is a marked difference between those who "estimate God not by his infinite majesty but by the foolish and giddy vanity of their own mind," and those who approach him in true piety. False piety leads to men putting "the dreams and fancies of their heart in place of God" and ultimately flees from God, while true piety seeks "the knowledge of the true God from that very God," conceives of him in no way other than he has manifested and declared himself to them, and "loves God altogether as Father" (Article 2). From the standpoint of the doctrine of God as found in Calvin, piety rejects vain philosophical speculation or inquiry into the essential nature of God (cf. *Inst.* 1.2.2; 1.10.2; 3.2.6), and instead leads to a consideration of God as he is toward us (i.e., in revelational, or economic-Trinitarian terms). As God's essence was incomprehensible, the right attitude towards him was not investigation, but adoration. Piety thus played a significant role in Calvin's thought, as it established the right basis or means for approaching God.

It is little surprise then that it has been seen as "the kernel of Calvin's faith"[85] or as a key concept that "permeates his whole theology."[86] Its closest Greek equivalent was ευσεβεια ('godliness') and Calvin aptly defined it as "that reverence joined with the love of God which knowledge of his benefits bring about" (*Inst.* 1.2.2; cf. 1.2.2; 1.10.2). The *Institutio* conspicuously claimed to be "Embracing almost the whole sum of piety and whatever is necessary to know of salvation."[87] God was not known "where there is no religion or piety" (*Inst.* 1.2.1), piety being a requisite for any true knowledge of God. Yet, it must not be confused with the mystical inwardness (private devotion separated from church and world) which is often associated with "pietism."[88] For Calvin it served a more fundamental and comprehensive purpose; "Godliness is

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[84] Cf. the fact that it was the *Institutes of Christian "Religion"* and not Christian *Doctrine* or even *Theology*.
[85] F. L. Battles, *The Piety of John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 13. See also the work of L. J. Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974).
[86] Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism*, 45.
[87] "A work most worthy to be read by all persons zealous for piety." Title of the first Latin edition of 1536 and the first French edition of 1541 of the *Institutio*. In the prefatory address to the King of France (appended to all editions of the *Institutio*), we find why Calvin wrote the *Institutio*: "My purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness (*pietas*)."
[88] "The Calvinist piety embraces all the day-by-day concerns of life, in family and neighbourhood, education and culture, business and politics. Thus, it is also a broader and more dynamic notion than the current understanding of

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the beginning, middle and end of Christian living, and where it is complete, there is nothing lacking."[89] We are now in the position to bring our discussion of *cognitio Dei* to a conclusion by means of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture.

2.2.4 *COGNITIO DEI* AND SCRIPTURE

In our discussion so far, it has been our aim to point to the centrality and significance of *cognitio Dei* as a theme in Calvin's theology against the backdrop of his sixteenth-century milieu. There are a number of other basic features belonging to Calvin's theological epistemology which we subsequently chose not to develop such as the *sensus divinitatus* and *semen religiones*, the role of the human conscience, the created order as the theatre of God's glory, and the *noetic* consequences of sin on the *imago Dei*. Exploring these aspects would have pushed our treatment into the orbit of another whole area of discussion.[90] However, the primary point of the need for revelation and redemption was made clear. Above all, *cognitio Dei* was not a speculative enterprise, but one dependent on and directed by the manner in which God revealed himself. Calvin's arrangement of the *Institutio* in a Trinitarian form was an expression of his understanding of the self-revealing God as well as a reference to the Apostolic faith. This is born out by his use of Augustine and by his Trinitarian definition of faith as seen in his earliest writings. Moreover, his understanding of faith testified to an experiential reality so that *certainty in knowing (the Triune) God* constituted the fabric of his theology. The objective and subjective aspects of *cognitio Dei* were however contingent on Scripture. The Anglican Calvin scholar, James Packer put it as follows:

> The theme of *cognitio Dei* which binds Calvin's material together, is a Biblical theme which unites in itself all Christian doctrine, experience and behaviour. It does this by dealing both with *knowing God* (which is religion) and with *what is known about*

'Spirituality.' It is that — a life of devotion and communion with God — but it is obviously much more, for it is also a life of grateful service to the glory of God". Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism*, 47.

[89] *Commentary on 1 Timothy* 4:8. Cited in *Ibid.*, 47n15.

[90] These aspects of Calvin's epistemology have been thoroughly researched and debated by those (Reformed thinkers) interested in philosophical and scientific epistemology and who seek to find in Calvin a method for warranting belief. Our contention is that Calvin, though anticipating the problems associated with epistemological crises such as we find post-Kant, was still pre-modern in his outlook and practical in his concerns. The philosophical questions that plagued him were Classic and not Modern. We do not thereby suggest that the *sensus divinitatis* etcetera, fall in a different category from the rest of his epistemological tools, but that they are indeed subcategories of the general theme we have already set out.

God (which is theology), and both theology and religion are to be learned and taught from God's own teaching (*doctrina*), that is, from Holy Scripture.[91]

The question of religious authority was by far the most consequential in the ecclesiastical environment of the sixteenth century. The Reformation credo of *sola Scriptura* was not a challenge to the Roman Catholic Church in and of itself, but to its hermeneutical authority.[92] This created for the Reformers the acute problem of having to determine the authority by which the Bible was to be established as the Word of God. Here Calvin entered the debate and made one of his greatest contributions to the Christian church. In the Bible, *God* spoke with the voice of authority:

> Daily oracles are not sent from heaven, for it pleased the Lord to hallow his truth to everlasting remembrance in the Scriptures alone. Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard. (*Inst.* 1.7.1)

The authority of God's voice lay not only in the 'objective' ground of the prophets and apostles, but in the 'subjective' ground of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. (Calvin almost certainly would have rejected our use of objective and subjective in this context. At the very least, he would not have viewed the work of the Spirit to be 'subjective' as it was 'higher' than human reason.):

> Thus the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it.... we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgements, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit. ... the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit [*testimonium Spiritus sancti internum*]. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded. (*Inst.* 1.7.4)

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[91] James I. Packer, "John Calvin," in *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, ed. John D. Woodbridge (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 214.

[92] Note Francis de Sales (1567-1622), the Catholic bishop of Geneva's words in 1595: "If then the Church can err, O Calvin, and O Luther, to whom will I have recourse in my difficulties? To Scripture, they say; but what will I do, poor man that I am? For it is with regard to Scripture itself that I have trouble. I do not doubt whether or not I could adjust faith to Scripture, for who does not know that it is the word of truth? What bothers me is the understanding of Scripture." Cited in James M. Houston, "Knowing God: The Transmission of Reformed Theology," in *Doing Theology for the People of God; Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer*, ed. D. Lewis and A. E. McGrath (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 225.

The right and authority to dispense certainty in matters of faith belonged not to the church or its interpretational apparatus, but to the Holy Spirit himself:

> Therefore, illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgement that Scripture is from God; but above human judgement we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgement may lean, but we subject our judgement and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork. ... God has spoken without deceit or ambiguity ... I speak of nothing other than what each believer experiences within himself. (*Inst.* 1.7.5)

This emphasis on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit is "a gift of John Calvin to the church."[93] Word and Spirit were inseparable and the witness of the Spirit was to the Scripture as a whole, the purpose being to unite all things in Jesus Christ. *Cognitio Dei* through Christ was nevertheless the goal towards which the law and the prophets testified as witnessed to and authenticated by the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. Alongside the emphasis Calvin placed on the work of the Holy Spirit, there was also thus a strong *Christocentric* understanding of the knowledge of God.[94]

> If you ask in what this whole edification consists which we are to receive thereby, in a word, it is a question of learning to place our trust in God and to walk in the fear of Him, and — since Jesus Christ is the end of the law and the prophets and the essence of the Gospel — *of aspiring to no other aim but to know Him.*[95]

In conclusion we may say then that Calvin's central theme of *cognitio Dei* would run shipwreck if blind and sinful men and women did not inquire from God himself about himself, and acquire the 'spectacles of Scripture' (*Inst.* 1.6.1)[96] which is the means he has given to do so. Holy Scripture not only contains right information about God pointing us at all stages to Jesus Christ, but in and through it, Christ himself is encountered through the secret testimony of the Holy Spirit. This knowing encounter with God the Father focused on Jesus Christ by means of

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[93] M. Eugene Osterhaven, *The Faith of the Church: A Reformed Perspective on its Historical Development* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 12.

[94] See Van der Kooi's extensive argument, "Within Proper Limits: Basic Features of John Calvin's Theological Epistemology," 377-379.

[95] *CO* 9:826, cited by Noble, "Our Knowledge of God according to John Calvin," 2-3. [Emphasis added.]

[96] "Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume ... can scarcely construe two words, [yet] with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God."

the Holy Spirit and Scripture, we must concede, would be impossible were it not for the doctrine of the Trinity. The full schema of Calvin's understanding of knowing God thus hinges on a Biblical Trinitarian conception of God.

2.3 *Experientia* and Certitude:
The Dynamic and Proof of Knowing in Calvin

WHILE A great deal of attention has been given to Calvin's doctrinal formulations in historical theology, his description of the experience of God has received comparatively little interest or investigation. This may partly be explained by the somewhat unfamiliar parameters of his personal life — there is little in the way of self-revealing even in terms of his conversion, and by the austere characterisation which has accompanied his persona for so long. It is taken as a given that his theological expression would be similarly guarded or even severe. Nevertheless, this situation remains an anomaly when compared to the many studies of Luther's character and experience, and surprising in the light of the fact that Calvin's experiential treatise on 'the Christian life' (*Inst.* 3.6-10) had according to A. M. Schmidt "an influence on men of the Reformed faith more living, direct and lasting than any other part of [his] writings."[97] The cogent manner in which he articulated the nature and validity of Christian experience, as we shall discover, ought therefore to receive a more equal status alongside the coherence of his theological reasoning.

Calvin agreed with the philosophers that *reason* was proper and even necessary in the process of knowledge. (Though he often renounced reason and even called it "blind,"[98] he was by no means an irrationalist.) Yet, his theology was not based on it but on "his understanding of the teaching of Scripture which is confirmed by the work of the Holy Spirit in the *experience* of the faithful."[99] Not only was experience inseparable from Calvin's understanding of faith and knowledge of God, he was in the words of Émile Doumergue, "tormented by an incomparable

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[97] Cited in Charles Partee, "Calvin and Experience," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26:2 (1972): 171.
[98] *Commentary on John* 3:21. "... let us learn that we must not judge of works in any other way than by bringing them to the light of the Gospel, because our reason is wholly blind."
[99] Partee, "Calvin and Experience," 179. [Emphasis added.]

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need for *certainty*."[100] In this section we will highlight the significance Calvin attached to experience in his theology, as well as explore the way in which he sought to resolve the crisis of certainty which we uncovered at the outset of this chapter.

2.3.1 *EXPERIENTIA*

2.3.1.1 Experientia Docet

Partee in his excellent essay on Calvin and experience, correctly pointed out that in Calvin's writings there is not a single chapter which deals with the subject on its own. Nevertheless, it is encountered everywhere and "is a descriptive term used in a bewildering variety of contexts."[101] Expressions such as *experientia docet* (teaches), *ostendit* (shows), *clamat* (shouts), *confirmat* (confirms), *demonstrat* (demonstrates), *convincit* (convicts), *testatur* (testifies), as well as *ipsa experientia satis docemur* (we are sufficiently taught by experience itself) or *usu ipso docemur* (by practice itself we are taught), appear everywhere in his commentaries and sermons. For Calvin, experience was our "teacher" (*experientia magistra*, cf. *Inst.* 1.10.2), and as the opening paragraphs of the *Institutio* testified, experience was the medium through which knowledge of God and self was conveyed:

> Each of us must ... be so stung by the consciousness of his own unhappiness as to attain at least some knowledge of God. Thus, from the feelings of our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity ... depravity and corruption, we recognise that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone. To this extent we are prompted by our own ills to contemplate the good things of God. (*Inst.* 1.1.1)

This disposition towards incorporating the language of experience into his doctrinal arguments is evident throughout his writings, for Calvin placed a high premium on what can be termed *herzensreligion*,[102] and with the correct 'posture' in approaching the whole subject of theology:

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[100] Cited in *Ibid.*, 169.
[101] *Ibid.*, 174.
[102] We take this phrase from Noble's description of Calvin's emphasis on experience. T. A. Noble, "Scripture and Experience," *Themelios* 23:1 (October 1997): 31.

... in the reading of Scripture we ought ceaselessly to endeavour to seek out and meditate upon those things which make for edification. Let us not indulge in curiosity or in the investigation of unprofitable things. ... The theologian's task is not to divert the ears with chatter, but to strengthen consciences by teaching things true, sure, and profitable. (*Inst.* 1.14.4)

The goal of theology was for doxology and devotion, and Christians had to take care in their 'theologising' not to slip from under the gaze of the God whom they claimed to serve.

Whoever is moderately versed in Scripture will understand by himself, without the admonition of another, that when we have to deal with God nothing is achieved unless we begin from the inner disposition of the heart [*interiore cordis affectu incipimus*]. (*Inst.* 3.3.16)

"Accordingly, the Christian must surely be so disposed and minded that he feels within himself it is with God he has to deal throughout his life" (*Inst.* 3.7.2). Experience also played a role in validating Christian doctrine. As Coertzen pointed out, *doctrina* found its "verification" in *experientia*.[103] For example, Calvin appealed to experience in confirmation of his doctrines of providence and predestination. "It is becoming to us," he said, "not to be too inquisitive; only let us not dare to deny the truth of what Scripture plainly teaches and experience confirms, or to keep nagging that it does not reach agreement in God."[104] Further along in the same treatise on predestination he exclaimed; "I prescribe nothing to others but what comes from the feeling of my heart."[105] In his treatise on the Christian life, Calvin stated the matter in equally plain terms against those who carried the "name and badge of Christ," but had no "intercourse" (union) with him:

Therefore, it is proved that they have falsely, and also unjustly, pretended the knowledge of Christ, whatever they meanwhile learnedly and volubly prate about the Gospel. [But] *it is a doctrine not of the tongue but of life*. It is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart. (*Inst.* 3.6.4)[106]

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[103] "Elke doctrina behoort in die 'experientia,' die ervaring 'n plek te kry. Die verifikasie van die teologie vind plaas op etiese vlak asook in die ervaring." P. Coertzen, "Spiritualiteit en Teologie: Eenheid of Vervreemding. Die Posisie van Johannes Calvyn," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXIII:1&2 (December 1997): 71.

[104] John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke, 1961), 185.

[105] *Ibid.*, 124.

[106] [Emphasis added.]

Or, as he put it in his *Commentary on Galatians,* "He who knows Christ in a proper manner beholds him earnestly, embraces him with the warmest affection, is absorbed in the contemplation of him, and desires no other object."[107] It is not surprising therefore to find Bauke describing Calvin pre-eminently as an *Erfahrungstheologe*, a theologian of experience.[108]

2.3.1.2 Scientia Experimentalis

If experience can teach, as Calvin suggested, does it offer a legitimate form of knowledge? Dowey in his study identified four general characteristics of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God, namely, its *accommodated* character (God 'condescends' to our limitations and sinfulness), its *correlative* character (the knowledge-complex of God and self), its *existential* character (practical knowledge issuing forth in worship and obedience), and its *comprehensive* character (God giving us sufficient understanding of his will).[109] These characteristics have been demonstrated to be reducible to two categories;[110] that which relates to knowledge *about* God (accommodated and comprehensive), and that which relates to knowledge *of* God (correlative and existential). The central thrust of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God was clearly preoccupied with the latter. Westhead subsequently called it "experimental" knowledge[111] (the older theological term for experiential); Noble, "relational"[112] (governed by the relationship within which the knowing is facilitated); Wallace, "mystical"[113] (emphasising the spiritual nature of this knowledge); Bouwsma, "affective"[114] (the act of knowing as inseparable from an active response to what is known); and Torrance, "intuitive"[115] (direct knowledge versus abstractive knowledge). Calvin's own term for it was *scientia experimentalis*, best translated as 'experimental knowledge.' In the *Commentary on Zechariah* he wrote:

> But it is to be observed, that there are two kinds of knowledge, — the knowledge of faith [*scientia fidei*], and what they call experimental knowledge [*scientia experimentalis*]: The knowledge of faith is that by which the godly feel assured that God is true — that what he has promised is indubitable; and this knowledge at

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[108] *Commentary of Galatians* 1:4

[109] Hermann Bauke cited in Partee, "Calvin and Experience," 177.

[110] Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, 3-40.

[111] As argued by Noble, "Our Knowledge of God according to John Calvin," 4.

[112] Westhead, "Calvin and Experimental Knowledge of God."

[113] Noble, "Our Knowledge of God according to John Calvin," 5.

Ronald S. Wallace, "A Christian Theologian: Calvin's Approach to Theology," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, Special Study (1987): 129.

[114] Bouwsma, "Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," 205.

[115] T. F. Torrance, "Knowledge of God and Speech about Him according to John Calvin," in *Theology in Reconstruction* (London, 1965), 76-98.

the same time penetrates beyond the world, and goes far above the heavens, that it may know hidden things; for our salvation is concealed; things seen, says the Apostle, are not hoped for. (Romans 8:24.) It is then no wonder that the Prophet says, that the faithful shall then *know* that Christ has been sent by the Father, that is, *in reality*, or *by actual experience*.[116]

Further along in the same commentary he stated that "the one is of faith, which we derive from the Word, though the thing itself does not appear; the other is of experience [*experientia*], when God adds *accomplishment* to the promise and *proves* that he has not spoken in vain."[117] What Calvin seems to be suggesting is that experimental knowledge penetrates further than the knowledge of faith. Terms such as 'reality,' 'actual experience,' 'accomplishment' and 'proves' imply a conviction which is felt, but which is not merely subjective (as we would understand the language of experience today). The fact that it reaches further than the assurances of the knowledge of faith to bring 'accomplishment,' implies that it is a higher form of knowledge and in this sense superior to faith. In his *Commentary on Joel* Calvin stated almost exactly the same thing as on Zechariah:

> There is a twofold knowledge, — the knowledge of faith, received from his word, — and the knowledge of experience, as we say, derived from actual enjoyment. The faithful ever acknowledge that salvation is laid up for them in God; but sometimes they stagger and suffer grievous torments in their minds, and are tossed here and there. However it may be with them, they certainly do not by actual enjoyment know God to be their Father. The Prophet therefore now treats of real knowledge, when he says, that they shall know that they have a God, — how are they to know this? By *experience*.[118]

Here *experientia* suggests a future reference and again appears to be superior to faith, though connected to it; when the faithful 'stagger in their minds,' then the reality (enjoyment) of their faith also suffers. Though experimental knowledge thus has a connection with the senses and with intuitive reality, it is not to be equated with mere feeling. Calvin knew well that feelings were fickle and that doubts could plague one's confidence,[119] but this was not what he had in mind when he spoke about experience. There was considerably more to the depth of his

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[116] *Commentary on Zechariah* 2:9. [Emphasis added.] Note the Christological, and hence Trinitarian interpretation of this passage: *Ye shall* then *know that Jehovah has sent me.*

[117] *Ibid.*, 4:9. [Emphasis added.]

[118] *Commentary on Joel* 3:17. [Emphasis added.]

[119] In his *Commentary on Isaiah* 14:1, he actually places the knowledge of faith against the knowledge of experience in the face of "God's anger" and "concealed favour." Faith (and not experience) in this context, "raises our hearts above this darkness, to behold God in heaven reconciled towards us."

religious affections. It is useful therefore to draw a distinction between the "certainty of experience" and the "certainty that can be experienced," in the way Willem Balke has done. Calvin, he argued, was occupied not with the experience of certainty, but with "experienceable certainty."[120] The former path may be the one more often travelled as men and women seek security by *means* of experience, but it opens the door to an enormous reduction and ultimately leads to uncertainty. The path of the 'certainty that can be experienced' is a different one altogether. It is grounded in God and his faithfulness to his church (i.e., *extra nos*) rather than in ourselves (individually), and access is gained to it "by way of *means*, that is, by way of Word and sacrament."[121] The Word brings forth a conviction which is above reason and beyond words. As Calvin put it in the *Institutio*:

> Such, then, is a conviction that requires no reasons; such, a knowledge with which the best reason agrees — in which the mind truly reposes more securely and constantly than in any reasons; such, finally, *a feeling that can be born only of heavenly revelation*. I speak of nothing other than *what each believer experiences within himself* — though my words fall far beneath a just explanation of the matter. (*Inst.* 1.7.5)[122]

Though one may want to suggest that Calvin's use of language here is close to 'mystical,' his intention was most certainly the opposite of what is achieved through mysticism. For one, this experience was rooted in and inseparable from God's Word, Scripture.[123] Furthermore, it is important to note that the word *experientia* (from *ex-periri*, 'to attempt') originally described the knowledge gained through an act of active investigation; that is, through participation and observation. It suggested an awareness which came by means of concrete perception, and as an *objective* occurrence. Only later in history did the meaning come to describe the complex of subjective events which we now call experiences.[124] Calvin's use of the word was in its earlier and more objective connotation,[125] and one should be careful not to interpret him through the

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[120] Willem Balke, "Revelation and Experience in Calvin's Theology," in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, ed. D. Willis and M. Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 349.

[121] *Ibid.*

[122] [Emphasis added.] Cf. *Commentary on 1 Thessalonians* 2:5.

[123] Experience followed on from and was in service of Scripture. It's purpose was confirmatory. See Coertzen, "Spiritualiteit en Teologie: Eenheid of Vervreemding" 71.

[124] Balke, "Revelation and Experience in Calvin's Theology," 350n5.

[125] "... certainty of the Biblical authority of the Bible and the assurance of faith depended on the work and experience of the Holy Spirit. Calvin's description of this experience must be evaluated as an obvious attempt to distinguish it from other experiences in which human beings in their own subjectivity are the agents. What he describes as the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit is all but formal: It circumscribes the interactivity of God and human beings with respect to Scripture and the practice of faith, in which God is experienced as actively and personally involved." Van der Kooi, "Within Proper Limits: Basic Features of Calvin's Theological Epistemology," 387.

lenses of something comparable to twentieth-century existentialism. Schreiner regrettably moved in this direction when she argued that the certainty of salvation for the Reformers, revolved around "the claim to an inward, experiential, and subjective certainty."[126] This view influenced her to see the sixteenth-century exegetical debates regarding the certainty of salvation as an *a posteriori* attempt by the Reformers to legitimise their interior experiences. However, such an inference would appear to be in conflict with the Reformers' own *a priori* Scriptural-methodological agenda. Luther, Zwingli and Calvin intentionally sought to proceed from God's Word (God's Speech) to certainty and not vice versa, even though one may concede (in true Postmodern fashion) that seeking justification for one's experience of God was humanly inevitable. Calvin's exegetical writings however were never made in service of subjective experience and certainty. His commentaries by virtue of their exegetical faithfulness and clarity are seldom labelled 'devotional' (though mindfulness of God is never absent from his writing) and in fact became the model for modern Biblical scholarship. Experience and certainty were the results of encountering God through faithful exposition of his revelation.

2.3.1.3 Experientia *as Affective Realism*

The value Calvin attached to experience was closely associated with the new inroads made by Renaissance Humanism against the Late Medieval epistemological consensus. Late Medieval epistemology had come to be dominated by 'Nominalism' (including 'Conceptualism') or the *via moderna* as it was called, which drew a radical distinction between intuitive and abstractive knowledge. Intuitive knowledge was equal to what we have stated regarding the objective nature of *experientia* above, while abstractive knowledge was gained through the relation of ideas to ideas ('abstracting' out the common strain or universal). Nominalists allowed for a detachment of statements from their objective reference, and saw them merely as linguistic units (*nomen*, nouns; or concepts) arranged in syntactical and logical connections, as against the position of the Realists which ascribed reality to them. Torrance spelled out its consequences:

> This view had disastrous effects in late medieval theology. Ockhamist nominalism considered intuitive knowledge of God impossible and fell back on abstractive knowledge working with 'creditive ideas' lodged in the tradition of the church. This bifurcation between intuitive and abstractive knowledge drove a deep wedge between faith and reason and resulted in the domination of an authoritarian fideism. It also meant the Scriptures were interpreted not in their 'direct meaning' but in an elaboration of their 'indirect meaning' through the application of

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[126] Schreiner, "The Spiritual Man Judges All Things," 190ff.

'terminist logic' to their statements.[127]

Though recent research in this contested area of scholarship has argued that it "is quite wrong to identify Nominalism with any sort of school [transmitting programme] of Ockham,"[128] Torrance's identification of the logical consequences of denying the reality of extramental universals, remains accurate.[129] Humanists such as Erasmus were horrified at "the arid sophistry and the barbaric divorce of language from culture that this development involved."[130] Calvin likewise opposed the abstract knowledge of the scholastics particularly in its nominalist form.[131] His use of *experientia* suggested that he viewed knowledge to be intuitive, practical and *affective*. Affective knowledge was *effective* knowledge; "With this insight, itself close to the Biblical conception of knowing in which the act of knowing is inseparable from an active response to what is known, Calvin clarified and strengthened the instrumentalism of the Renaissance."[132]

Calvin also subscribed to the methods of humanist scholarship in historical and philological investigation (the "novel historicism of the Renaissance philologists"[133]). This enabled him to recognise that Scripture was addressed to particular audiences and that allowances had to be made for the differences between them and us. Nevertheless, Biblical and theological statements directed us to the realities they represent, and were not an end in themselves. Theological judgements were unavoidable in the light of the fact that the Bible was an ancient text. Though this realist position was a rational form of argument, the authority did not reside in the interpreter, but in the truth itself. Calvin would thus have been opposed to the wholly private and subjective manner in which the Biblical truth is dealt with in our day. In his context, he found himself in opposition to humanistic individualism, the private spirituality of the radicals, and Roman Catholic authoritarianism. He particularly opposed philosophical and abstract methods of knowing in favour of the practical and effective knowledge of faith which

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[127] T. F. Torrance, "Calvin and the Knowledge of God," *Christian Century* 81 (1964): 698.

[128] William of Ockham did however defend 'conceptualism' against the moderate realism of Duns Scotus. See Richard Cross, "Nominalism," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. T. Hart (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 401. Cross would object to Torrance's "Protestant bias" with which he labels late Scholasticism as a "decadent" period. *Ibid.*

[129] See his full-length study in which he also argues cogently that Calvin followed John Duns Scotus. (and John Major) in positing that 'being' was the prime object of (intuitive) understanding. T. F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), 5-12.

[130] Torrance, "Calvin and the Knowledge of God," 698.

[131] Calvin launched many criticisms against the 'scholastics' in the *Institutio*. In the French editions it was translated with *théologiens Sorbonniques* (a reference to the *via moderna* taught at the Sorbonne and not against all of scholasticism). See W. J. van Asselt and E. Dekker, "Medieval Scholasticism," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, 511. (Van Asselt and Dekker see a period of decadence in later scholasticism, contrary to Cross above.)

[132] Bouwsma, "Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," 205.

[133] *Ibid.*, 206.

was "more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than of the understanding" (*Inst.* 3.2.8).

2.3.1.4 Experientia *as Rational and Trinitarian*

So far we have uncovered the centrality of experience in Calvin's theology, and ascertained that "Calvin was a realist whose focus of interest lay not in the subjective appropriation of experience, but in the objective reality of that which was experienced."[134] The reality which is experienced is of course related to knowing God (the Father) in Christ, and being a recipient of the grace of Christ (including its benefits and effects) which is mediated through the secret working of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Inst.* 3.1). The substance of *experientia* is thus closely connected to the Triunity of God, and in this sense is "an act of God's grace beyond the natural capacity of the human mind."[135] Yet it is not irrational.

Though the mark of God's glory which is graven upon all his works is recognised intuitively by all believers (cf. *Inst.* 1.2.1; 1.5.9; 1.10.2), it is the encounter with God himself in Christ which facilitates true knowledge of God. In the *Institutio* 2.6.4 ('Faith in God is faith in Christ') Calvin put it like this:

> I subscribe to the common saying that God is the object of faith, yet it requires qualification. For Christ is not without reason called "the image of the invisible God" [Colossians 1:15]. This title warns us that, *unless God confronts us in Christ, we cannot come to know that we are saved. ... apart from Christ the saving knowledge of God does not stand.* From the beginning of the world he had consequently been set before all the elect that they should look unto him and put their trust in him. In this sense Irenaeus writes that the Father, himself infinite, becomes finite in the Son, for he has accommodated himself to our little measure lest our minds be overwhelmed by the immensity of his glory. Fanatics, not reflecting upon this, twist a useful statement into an impious fantasy, as if there were in Christ only a portion of divinity, outflowing from the whole perfection of God. Actually, *it means nothing else than that God is comprehended in Christ alone.* John's saying has always been true: "He that does not have the Son does not have the Father" [1 John 2:23]. For even if many men once boasted that they worshipped the Supreme Majesty, the Maker of heaven and earth, yet because they had no Mediator it was not possible for them truly to taste God's mercy, and thus be persuaded that he was their Father. (*Inst.* 2.6.4)[136]

The basic point is that there is no salvation without a Mediator and that "God is

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[134] Noble, "Scripture and Experience," 34.
[135] T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 129.
[136] [Emphasis added.]

comprehended in Christ alone." It is significant to note Calvin's 'economic-Trinitarian' emphasis (the Triune God as he is 'towards us' in the economy of redemption) in this context through his reference to Irenaeus. The incarnation and the full divinity of the Son were an absolute necessity for salvation and for a true encounter with God. (It is a particular understanding of God's Triunity which enabled Calvin to develop this position, which will be the subject of our next chapter.) Calvin however does not leave matters there. In Book Three, he continues with the argument by stating that "as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us" (*Inst.* 1.1). Christ must therefore be "made ours," must "indwell in our hearts" (*Inst.* 3.11.10), and through faith we in turn are to be "ingrafted into his body" (*Inst.* 3.2.24). Many have seen this 'union with Christ' as the focal point of Calvin's whole theology. It is however only through the "secret power of the Holy Spirit" (*Inst.* 3.11.5) that this union is affected and fellowship is restored with the Father through the mediating activity of the Son. Union with Christ is a Triune operation.

The rationality of this operation appears in that "Christ comes to us clothed with his gospel" (*Inst.* 3.2.6).[137] And, "to reject the gospel embodied in Scripture is to reject Christ himself, for Christ has no commerce with us, nor we with him apart from Scripture."[138] Our experience of Christ is thus mediated by Scripture which is the requisite for faith in Christ, because "faith needs the Word as much as fruit needs the living root of a tree" (*Inst.* 3.2.31). Yet, "without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word can do nothing" (*Inst.* 3.2.33).[139] This illuminative or intuitive knowledge of Christ is therefore not devoid of rationality for two reasons. First, "direct, first-hand *notitia intuitiva* ... of all real objects of experience is not only rational, but the basis of all rational knowledge," as Noble put it.[140] And secondly, as the encounter with the living Christ does not come to us as a "wordless, non-verbal, raw experience," but in the "verbal Word of gospel and Scripture,"[141] its rationality is grounded in a conceptual basis from the start. The Christian *experientia* of Christ is thus as fully rational as any other kind of knowledge, and, its rationality is grounded in the Triune God himself.[142] Balke

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[137] It goes on to read; "For just as he has been appointed as the goal of our faith, so we cannot take the right road to him unless the gospel goes before us. And there, surely, the treasures of grace are opened to us; for if they had been closed, Christ would have benefited us little." (*Inst.* 3.2.6)

[138] Cited in Noble, "Scripture and Experience," 34.

[139] Cf. *Inst.* 3.2.34: "Only the Holy Spirit leads us to Christ."

[140] Noble, "Scripture and Experience," 34.

[141] *Ibid.*, 35.

[142] Though some would want to maintain that this constitutes a circular form of argument in the same style as for the authority of Scripture (rooted in the Holy Spirit's speaking), the *logic* of it is not faulty. If anything, the argument

confirmed this conclusion in his essay on Calvin and *experientia*:

> *Experientia* is not an independent spiritual property of the human being, but is the working of the new-creating Spirit. It participates in objective reality. The Spirit testifies in both the Word and the heart. ... Thus for Calvin the question of experience never revolves around events or feelings as such, but around the witness of the Holy Spirit which is proven true in our hearts. This has its Christological foundation in that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Son continually drawing us to Christ and thus simultaneously to the Father. The centre of the faith experience is communion with Christ.[143]

God is thus the only Author of our knowledge of him. Anthropologically, how the human mind comprehends this experience is "ultimately a mystery of the Spirit, who creates in man the capacity to receive the Word with understanding, and forms the mind to know God."[144] Davies argued that Calvin moved in the direction of seeing that "true knowledge comes from the interaction of the knower, the known and the Spirit of God."[145] If so, it was on the basis of a thoroughly Trinitarian conception and operation. Nevertheless, Calvin was fond of putting it mainly in the following manner; "Let us willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself. For, as Hilary says [*On the Trinity*, 1.18], he is the one fit witness to himself, and is not known except through himself" (*Inst.* 1.13.21).

2.3.2. CERTITUDE

2.3.2.1 The Reformation, Certitude and Calvin

There is not much to separate our discussion of *experientia* from certitude, except that certitude designates the proof and conviction of what *experientia* dynamically delivers, and subsequently provides the necessary confidence to proclaim this conviction as the truth. The debate around theological certitude therefore propels us to the centre of the sixteenth-century conflicts in which the magisterial reformers found themselves battling a foe on each side; on the

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manages to overcome the polarity of object and subject, and both rationalistic foundationalism and existential subjectivity are overcome.

[143] Balke, "Revelation and Experience in Calvin's Theology," 359.

[144] Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 128.

[145] Rupert E. Davies, *The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers* (London: Epworth, 1946), 154. Davies felt that none of the Reformers (though Calvin least of them) were able to free themselves "from the medieval error that the source of authority is necessarily to be found in some place wholly outside the individual." In other words, he found their 'objectivity' problematical. *Ibid.*

one, the radicals, and on the other, the papists. "The Reformation began with the question of certainty," Balke stated,[146] and Schreiner likewise claimed that:

> … some of the most pitched battles in the Reformation centred on the scriptural passages concerning certitude. Indeed, it can be argued that *certainty was the fundamental theological locus of the sixteenth century.* That 'the Bible was on the lips of martyrs — Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Anabaptist — and on the lips of their executioners,' is nowhere more evident than in an examination of the anguished search for certitude.[147]

"Armed with the question of certainty, the historian of the late Middle Ages and the Reformation can examine almost any subject: the Hussites, the Catholic polemicists, the Scripture principle, the Radical Reformers, theologies of justification, the sacramental controversies, and the rise of scepticism."[148] Balke and Schreiner confirm then what we have stated at the outset of this chapter regarding the fact that the question of *knowing* (not just knowledge) was central to the sixteenth-century intellectual world which had so heavily been impacted upon by the rise of scepticism.

Calvin's approach to the question of knowing was a response to the general epistemological drift of his times, but was also concretely aimed at the polemics surrounding the exegetical debates about hermeneutical certitude. Like Luther and Zwingli, he was forced to justify the Protestant position against Catholicism, a debate which hinged on theological authority (but with social and political dimensions). This he did by means of his appeal to the Holy Spirit as God speaking in and through Scripture. Like Luther and Zwingli however, he was also compelled to justify the 'magisterial' position against the 'radicals,' who had made a similar appeal to the Spirit but in diverse fashion. Here Calvin responded by positing the inseparability or "inviolable bond" between Word and Spirit (cf. *Inst.* 1.7.4). This is of course a very simplistic explanation of a much more complex and intricate problem, especially as all parties appealed to either the Spirit or Scripture at some point in their argumentation. An inevitable decline of exegetical optimism followed on from this polemical period of early Protestantism, and Calvin inherited a debate well-worn and troubled. There were thus various ways in which he sought to strengthen his main arguments, either by an appeal to the church fathers or even to the visible church. In each case however, either in resistance to tyrannical institutional authority or to

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[146] Balke, "Revelation and Experience in Calvin's Theology," 350.
[147] Schreiner, "The Spiritual Man Judges All Things," 215. [Emphasis added.]
[148] *Ibid.*, 189.

unrestrained spiritualism, he fell back to "the ultimate clarity of Scripture and the persuasive power of good exegesis."[149] The question however, was the measurability of the persuasive power of good Scriptural exegesis, which pushed the argument back to *experientia* and the personal conviction which certitude brings. Here we agree with Schreiner (though we have taken issue with her overtly subjective understanding of certitude above) that "Calvin argues in such a way that the test of doctrine is not only Scripture but inner certitude."[150]

2.3.2.2 Calvin, Certitude and the Triune God

In the exegetical debates, Calvin argued that certainty was based on revelation and that it was a result of the inner testimony of the Spirit speaking in and through Scripture. However, as we have pointed out in our discussion on *experientia*, it sometimes happened that Calvin would argue *from* experience *to* doctrine (though not to Scripture directly). This gave certitude an auxiliary authoritative function next to the Holy Spirit and Scripture. Calvin was of course not entirely unique in making an appeal to experience and certitude, but the manner in which he gave objective credibility to it was unlike the way others had done. The reason for this, we would like to posit, is that he saw certitude as a function or sign of the reality of the believer being united with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and therefore, of certitude being under the order and governance of the Triune God.[151] There was in the sixteenth-century (like today), a multitude of claims to 'special' and individualistic works of the Spirit in isolation not only from Scripture, but from the work of Christ. For Calvin, certitude was indicative of the reality of the presence and testimony of the Holy Spirit *as* the Spirit of Christ (or God). In other words, what made his appeal to certainty different (besides emphasising the bond between Word and Spirit) from say the Anabaptists, was his understanding of the work and Person of the Holy Spirit in relation to the unity of the Godhead and in relation to the Person of the Father and the Person of the Son. The economic-Trinitarian emphasis which he gave, upheld both the operative distinction and unity of the Persons of the Godhead in historical redemptive perspective. In short, what made Calvin's claim to certitude unique and persuasive, was the maturity of his theological understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The uniqueness of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity is the subject of our next chapter, but we may note for the moment that Calvin unambiguously held to the deity and consubstantiality

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[149] *Ibid.* 212.

[150] *Ibid.* Balke also argued that "Experience can function as a hermeneutical key in the service of exegesis." "Revelation and Experience in Calvin's Theology," 354.

[151] Both Schreiner and Bouwsma miss this point entirely in their discussions of knowing and certitude.

of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.14f.). In other words, he saw the Holy Spirit as one in being and agency with God the Father and the Son. Furthermore, as God *was* Spirit (intrinsically), the Holy Spirit was not only a distinct *hypostasis* of the whole Being of God but was himself that Being (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.19ff.). In practice, what this meant was that the Spirit never acted 'outside' the Being of the Godhead, and that his activity was thus an indication of the immediate presence of God.[152] If this is not taken into account when noting Calvin's frequent appeal to the Holy Spirit in doctrinal formulation, especially where the presence of the Spirit is the hinge on which the doctrinal argument turns (as for example in the sacraments), Calvin is misunderstood and his doctrine misconstrued.[153] Calvin's understanding of the phrase "the spiritual man judges all things" (1 Corinthians 2:15), a key text in the exegetical debates on certainty, would be undermined if we understood the word "spiritual" to mean anything less than the communication of the presence of God himself. As Calvin put it in his commentary on this verse:

> *God is known only by his Spirit,* and it is his particular province to distinguish between his own things and those of others. … It is the spiritual man alone that has such a firm and solid acquaintance with the mysteries of God, as to distinguish without fail between truth and falsehood — between the doctrine of God and the contrivances of man, so as not to fall into mistake.[154]

Note the 'infallible' discernment which Calvin suggests the 'spiritual man' has. This could only be if Calvin (correctly in our belief) understood the Pauline use of 'spiritual' (πνευματικος) as having the Holy Spirit as its primary referent.[155] Only on the objective basis of this Biblical truth could he be so bold as to make such a claim.

Of the other five or six significant texts with which Calvin interacted in the exegetical debates on certainty, three refer to union with Christ through the Spirit (Romans 8:11; 11:17; 1 John 3:24), two to adoption (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:14-16; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22; 13:5), and

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[152] See T. F. Torrance's fine exposition in *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 25.

[153] In the Lord's Supper for example, it is often assumed that Calvin's position is simply a mediate between the views of Luther and Zwingli, while his is actually an independent position which is based upon his understanding of the Trinity. See *Institutio* 4.17, and Eugene Osterhaven's fine discussion of Calvin's position in *The Faith of the Church*, 132-138.

[154] *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 2:15. [Emphasis added.]

[155] "In the New Testament, spirituality is defined altogether in terms of the Spirit of God (or Christ). One is spiritual to the degree that one lives in and walks by the Spirit; in Scripture the word has no other meaning, and no other measurement." Gordon D. Fee, "Exegesis and Spirituality: Completing the Circle," in *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/ Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 5.

one to the inner testimony of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). It is most obvious then that Trinitarian doctrine undergirded his theological understanding of certitude. Though we are not able to investigate all these texts here in detail, it is worth our while looking at one or two. In his *Commentary on Galatians*, Calvin turned to the Trinitarian theme of *adoption* to contrast the certainty of the Christian with those who do not have the Spirit of Christ:

> *In venturing* [the Apostle Paul says], *to call God your Father, you have the advice and direction of the Spirit of Christ; therefore it is certain that you are the sons of God.* This agrees with what is elsewhere taught by him [in 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5], that the Spirit is the earnest and pledge of our adoption, and gives to us a well-founded belief that God regards us with a father's love. ... This argument can have no weight but in the case of believers, *for ungodly men have no experience of this certainty,* as our Lord himself declares [in John 14:17]. ... *The Spirit of his Son* is a title more strictly adapted to the present occasion than any other that could have been employed. *We are the sons of God, because we have received the same Spirit as his only Son.* Let it be observed, that Paul ascribes this universally to all Christians; for where this pledge of the Divine love towards us is wanting, there is assuredly no faith. Hence it is evident what sort of Christianity belongs to Popery, since any man who says, that he has the Spirit of God, is charged by them with impious presumption. *Neither the Spirit of God, nor certainty,* belongs to their notion of faith. This single tenet held by them is a remarkable proof that, in all the schools of the Papists, the devil, the father of unbelief, reigns. I acknowledge, indeed, that the scholastic divines, when they enjoin upon the consciences of men the agitation of perpetual doubt, are in perfect agreement with what the natural feelings of mankind would dictate. It is the more necessary to fix in our minds this doctrine of Paul, that *no man is a Christian who has not learned, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to call God his Father.*[156]

Adoption is a significant theme in Calvin's writings (cf. *Inst.* 3.1.3, 2.11-12, 15-16, 34, 37, 39), which once again underscores the maturity of his Trinity doctrine. It is also the theme which for him held the key to *experientia* and certitude, as his comments on Galatians 4:6 illustrate. Interestingly, the objective yet experiential certainty (contrasted against 'natural feelings') which comes through adoption, constituted in Calvin's mind a point of division between the reformers and the papists.

Like adoption, 'union with Christ' (cf. Romans 8:9-11; 1 John 3:24 cf. 4:12-12) also brought a certitude which was irrefutable, because "Christ's dwelling in us" was through the Spirit, and "wherever the Spirit is, he necessarily manifests his power and efficiency."[157] Union with Christ through the Spirit however, also prompted Calvin to give a simple but complete

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[156] *Commentary on Galatians* 4:6. [Some emphases mine, some in the original.]
[157] *Commentary on Romans* 8:10, and *1 John* 3:24.

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articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity from the perspective of the Spirit. In his *Commentary on Romans* 8:9-11 he stated:

> ... the Spirit is, without any distinction, called sometimes the Spirit of God the Father, and sometimes the Spirit of Christ; and thus called, not only because his whole fullness was poured on Christ as our Mediator and head, so that from him a portion might descend on each of us, but also because *he is equally the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, who have one essence, and the same eternal divinity.* ... by the Spirit he consecrates us as temples to himself, so by the same he dwells in us. ... the children of God are counted spiritual, not on the ground of a full and complete perfection, but only on account of the newness of life that is begun in them.[158]

Just further along in this *Commentary*, Calvin was willing to concede that the spiritual man may have "an occasion of doubt," but that such an occasion will not cause disturbance because "the power of quickening is in the Spirit of Christ" which will eventually "be effectual in swallowing up our mortality."[159] Calvin was fond of citing King David's certitude as an example for all Christians, which though under siege at times, was never defeated by doubt (cf. *Inst.* 3.2.17-21). Against his Catholic critics Calvin denied that such certitude was a presumptuous claim, replying that "unless one knows that Christ dwells in him, he is reprobate" (*Inst.* 3.2.15, 39-40).[160] The hermeneutical confidence gained through certitude was one of the main factors securing the Protestant cause during the Reformation.

2.3.2.3 Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, we discussed the crisis of knowing which had impacted the sixteenth-century so profoundly, and argued that Calvin was indeed representative of this crisis. However, we took issue with Bouwsma for positing a Calvin existentially poised between belief and doubt (even anxiety), and torn between Medieval certitude and Renaissance scepticism; and also for suggesting that the one thing no longer credible, was that "our theological knowledge [stemming from Medieval methods], could claim a certain *certitude* that reflected its divine origin."[161] Though Calvin took serious issue with Late Medieval epistemological claims to authoritative knowledge, our exposition has shown that he nevertheless sought to claim

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[158] *Ibid.* 8:9-11. [Emphasis added.]

[159] *Ibid.*

[160] Calvin did indeed tie election and predestination in with his understanding of certitude. But note that election and predestination were moved to Book Three in the 1559 *Institutio*, in order to fall under the work of the Holy Spirit applying the benefits of Christ to the believer through secret union. This subtle but significant move indicated an agenda more focused on the Trinity than on logic or decree (i.e., speculative).

[161] Bouwsma, "Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," 193.

certitude not only of divine origin, but of divine and Trinitarian mediation. In doing so, Calvin did not play into the hands of the Scholastics, the Humanists, or the philosophers. He was far too Biblically and exegetically orientated for that. When it came to philosophical epistemology, we find in him what Hoitenga called "an eloquent coalescence of belief, faith, knowledge, experience and certainty":

> The noetic states that philosophers from Plato and Aristotle down to Descartes, Locke, Kant and William James (as well as theologians like Augustine and Aquinas) have all tried diligently to sort out and distinguish from one another, have been fused together by Calvin *in the presence of the revelation of God*. Why, to put just one question in focus, did Calvin take faith to be a species of *knowledge*, and not, as Augustine and Aquinas had suggested, a species of *belief?* My own answer at this point is just a guess. It comes back to what I have called his quest — and discovery — of *certainty*. "Knowledge," as opposed to "belief," just struck Calvin — so goes my guess — as the appropriate way to capture the certainty of the Christian faith.[162]

Calvin's 'discovery of certainty' was a discovery of God's grace which extended to sinners being granted communion with him, the Triune God, through the Holy Spirit. The question is often asked how Calvin was able to have such a comprehensive understanding of Christian doctrine and the Christian faith. The answer must have to do with his soteriologically oriented and Scripturally faithful doctrine of God's Triunity.

2.4 Theological Significance:
Certitude in an Age of Scepticism

THE QUESTION to be addressed in the closing section of this chapter is that of the significance of Calvin's approach to knowing in his own time period, as well as for the periods following. We have noted that the certitude representative of Late Medieval theology was of an ecclesiastical-dogmatic nature, and the fortresses of its theological authority were virtually

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[162] Dewey J. Hoitenga, Jr., "Faith and Reason in Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God," in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition, ed.* H. Hart, J. van der Hoeven and N. Wolterstorff (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 37. [Emphases in the original and added.]

unchallengeable. Calvin is well-known for his intense dislike of the Sophists, the Sorbonnists and the Scholastics,[163] all of whom in their own ways contributed to the dominant status quo of Roman Catholicism. Following in the wake of Renaissance attempts at 'deconstructing' this knowledge-edifice, Calvin was willing to explore new ways of knowing, not because they were humanistic and intellectually engaging, but because he had been converted to Biblical Christianity, and Biblical knowing had something in common with the newly suggested experiential and instrumental methods of knowing. Renaissance Scepticism however, also introduced reasonable doubt into the (initially) epistemologically optimistic world of the sixteenth century. Montaigne, we observed, was the epitome of a man in doubt, and a man seeking to find a way of accommodating this new uncertainty into the equilibrium of human knowledge, especially in the light of a crumbling foundation of theological certitude. The appeal to external authority was lost on him as it is on most of our secular world today.

The growing crisis of doubt saw an attempt at appeasement only a century later. It is now understood that René Descartes' famous *cogito ergo sum*, was little more than a seventeenth-century attempt to conquer this enlarging problem. For Descartes, it was not only man who was in doubt, the whole universe had become the "sphere of doubt."[164] Doubt, in his epistemological system, was the catalyst for seeking assertions that were universally guaranteed as certain. In the appeal to the mind's own experience of certainty on the basis of doubting everything else ('I am the thinker,' is the only thing that cannot be doubted), Descartes finally conceived the basis for a new human knowledge structure. In the Cartesian conception however, "all fiduciary foundations" were removed from knowledge, and faith and reason were henceforth disassociated.[165] The great irony of the situation is that this kind of certitude (based on doubt) only managed to intensify the scepticism that was further induced by rationalism. It was not long before the new rational certainty of a growing scientific knowledge enforced ever greater scepticism onto religion, a process which reached its climax in the Enlightenment and the epistemology of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).[166] It is the rationalistic knowledge structure of

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[163] "Calvin shared with the humanist scholars a violent reaction against mediaeval scholasticism, especially against nominalism, whether in its terminist dialectics and logical hair-splitting or in its voluntarist stress upon merit and its Pelagianism. This dislike was conceived during his studies in the Sorbonne, and remained so intense throughout his life that he could hardly refrain from indulging in strongly emotive denunciation of the sophistry it produced." Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, 73.

[164] Houston, "Knowing God: The Transmission of Reformed Theology," 226.

[165] *Ibid.* Houston perceived that Descartes and Montaigne respectively, had "profoundly infected the intellectual life of the modern world, to be faithless and empirical."

[166] Just taking the title of one his later works, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), is sufficient to confirm our point. "It is not too much to say that all modern epistemology, metaphysics, and even ethics, is implicitly affected

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this period, known as Modernity, that is currently under fresh 'deconstructionist' siege. Like Medievalism, Modernity laid claim to certitude, not on the basis of religious authoritarianism, but on an individualistic, scientific, secular and rationalistic basis. The highly complex contemporary phenomenon called *Post*-modernism,[167] has ushered in an ethos which, though eager to retain much of the Modern accomplishment, is also deeply critical of its epistemological claims and foundations. As Tom Wright put it:

> The question that hangs over all contemporary intellectual discourse in the Western world concerns the very foundations of all knowing and being. The great project of the last two or three hundred years, sometimes known as "modernity," has given way in many quarters to "postmodernity." Modernism claimed to know things objectively, at least in principle; postmodernism applies a ruthlessly suspicious understanding to all such claims, showing in case after case that, as Nietzsche argued a century ago, claims to knowledge are in fact claims to power. The correlate of this was that modernism claimed that there was a real world independent of the knower. Postmodernism collapses this claim; all we are left with are the prejudices of the would-be-knower.[168]

The Postmodern knower therefore seeks to live in a realm of "chastened rationality,"[169] which rejects a realist view of truth and the world. Much like the mitigated scepticism of Renaissance Humanism, a chastened rationality is quite aware of the dangers of its own sceptical suppositions. Yet, it continues to harbour an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard)[170]

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by the architecture he created." Simon Blackburn, "Kant, Immanuel" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 206.

[167] Postmodernism is a notoriously difficult and elusive concept to define, and we will not attempt to give a definition here, but rather let the argument explain what we mean with it in the context of our debate. It may be helpful to distinguish between Postmodern*ism* (an esoterical and philosophical-intellectual debate of a high order) and Postmodern*ity* (its manifestation in the web of popular culture especially as expressed through the media and the arts). Both however, support a culture that condemns dogmatism and truth-claims of any kind.

[168] N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 221-222. Wright continued: "Likewise, modernism told a great story of progress, enlightenment, and development, and insisted that this story be imposed on the rest of the world ... Postmodernity declares that all such large stories — 'metanarratives' — are destructive and enslaving, and must be deconstructed. ... Modernity vaunted the great individual, the lonely and lofty "I" ... Postmodernity has deconstructed this figure too. Each of us, we are now reminded, is a sifting mass of impulses and feelings, without a stable centre that can be held up and inspected."

[169] The concept 'chastened rationality' is borrowed from Stanley J. Grenz, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. J. G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker Books/ Vancouver: Regent College Publishing/ Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 108.

[170] The manner in which Jean-Françoise Lyotard famously sought to delineate the contemporary sociological changes in his 1984 report, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Lyotard is responsible for first using the term "postmodern" outside of its initial reference in architecture. See James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Guide to World Views*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 174.

such as Scripture offers, and seeks to define truth in the words of Nietzsche (or a Sextus Empiricus?), merely as "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms."[171]

There is much that our transitional world has in common with the sixteenth-century.[172] The very designation of *post*-modernity signifies that it is an era which has not yet become what it will or may (it is defined in terms of what has come before), in the same way that the sixteenth century was no longer quite Medieval nor yet Modern. Both forms of scepticism, Renaissance and Postmodern, place suspicion on knowledge claims, and both move to deconstruct the existing knowledge edifice in favour of the prejudices of the knower. Whereas the humanists questioned the signification involved in Medieval philology, Postmodernism similarly "represents a situation in which the signifier (or signifying) has replaced the signified as the focus of orientation and value."[173] There is of course a danger in drawing out too strong a comparison between these two cultural movements, but it seems reasonable to us that there is sufficient symptomatic commonality between them in order for us to value not only Calvin's historical significance, but also his contemporary relevance.[174]

In this chapter we have noted the manner in which Calvin had prioritised the question of knowing (the very same question which is still prioritised today) in his theological scheme. He held that no branch of knowledge or knowing could ever be interpreted as autonomous, as all knowledge ultimately derived from God and his grace. It could only be "theonomous,"[175] and therefore experiential. Yet, experience was first and foremost objective in his thinking. Herein lies the reason that he portrayed faith as 'knowledge' (as opposed to 'belief').[176] As a second generation reformer, Calvin saw more clearly than did Luther "the wave of anthropocentric subjectivism and individualism already surging in the Renaissance."[177] Calvin was thus better

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[171] Cited in *Ibid.*, 179.

[172] The sharp edge of Postmodernism is its deconstruction of Truth in favour of 'situated truths,' which like reality, are linguistically manufactured. Renaissance Humanism equally emphasised the contingency of human knowledge and truth, and also had its sharp edge in the humanities and philology. The Renaissance saw a flowering of the arts, as does Postmodernism. Humanism was mostly secular in orientation, as is Postmodernism. Humanism was parasitic on the Classical period, Postmodernism is eclectically parasitic on previous periods. So one can go on to draw comparisons, in spite of the obvious chronological chasm.

[173] Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 244.

[174] This may indeed be a the reason for the great success Bouwsma has had with his works on Calvin.

[175] This term comes from Houston; "Knowing God: The Transmission of Reformed Theology," 238.

[176] Some may suppose that Calvin is in agreement with the philosophers by giving such value to reason. However, he shatters the formal anthropology of Aristotle by directing reason towards the higher end of fulfilling the purpose of human life, that is, to know God. And, "Knowledge of God is not a theory but a praxis: the praxis of trust and obedience, the praxis of life under God and his will. So it is essentially called in the *Institutes*: "all right knowledge of God is born of obedience" [*Inst.* 1.6.2]. See Hans-Joachim Kraus, "The Contemporary Relevance of Calvin's Theology," in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology*, 326-327.

[177] Balke, "Revelation and Experience in Calvin's Theology," 363.

prepared for the onslaught of modern humanism and rationalism. On the other hand, though the objectivity that Calvin claimed was rational, it was not rationalistic. For this reason, experience was also 'knowledge.' It was intuitive knowledge which came from an encounter with the Living God. The Holy Spirit testified concerning God himself by his indwelling presence through union with Christ. Yet, this encounter was mediated through the Word, God's Speech, in which Christ was found. Calvin was thus able to break the problematic antithesis between objectivism and subjectivism on the basis of a Trinitarian understanding of God.

What this meant was that it was possible to achieve certitude on a different basis from the Medieval Scholasticism discredited by Renaissance Humanism, or the Modern Foundationalism deconstructed by Postmodernism. It also meant that certainty did not need to be based on the authenticity of private religious experiences, as it had its own foundation in Word and Spirit. Church history presents a story which from one perspective can be seen as the perpetual oscillation of God's people between the two poles of the objective (rationalistic) and the subjective (experientialist) appropriation of God. Calvin seems to issue a challenge to both. The question is however, whether Calvin offers anything in defence against the contemporary challenge to knowing which rejects all claims to certitude and metanarratives, and relegates meaning to the 'signifier' (self) at the cost of the 'signified' (external reality)? Is it enough to say that Calvin was a realist and that he sought true security outside himself in Christ whom God revealed to us? Perhaps. Calvin knew that the Bible was concerned with truth, claims and counterclaims to knowledge (especially knowledge of God), and that its story moved from Christ to embrace the whole world as a grand overarching narrative. Above all, he knew that the gospel liberated us "to know God" (Galatians 4:9), or as Paul quickly modified it, "to be known by God." Calvin interpreted Paul's words to mean that:

> … the greater grace of God is *towards us*. … Paul reminds the Galatians *whence* they had derived the knowledge of God. He affirms that they did not obtain it by their own exertions, by the acuteness or industry of their own minds, but because, when they were at the farthest possible remove from thinking of him, God visited them in his mercy. What is said of the Galatians may be extended to all; for in all are fulfilled the words of Isaiah, "I am sought by them that asked not for me: I am found by them that sought me not" [Isaiah 65:1].[178]

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[178] *Commentary on Galatians* 4:9. [Emphasis added.] Cf. his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 8:3, where Calvin explains the idea of being known on the basis of adoption through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Following the Biblical truth that human beings are incapable of autonomous knowledge of God, the whole enterprise of certitude is placed in an entirely different perspective, that of God's sovereign grace to sinners. This is the perspective that Calvin held by virtue of his own personal faith in Christ, and which informed his opinion of knowing. Its consequences are brilliantly spelled out by Tom Wright's reflection on the same text:

> No longer is it [the idea of knowledge and truth] the brittle and arrogant knowledge of the post-Enlightenment world, making the hard sciences its primary paradigm and "relationships" simply a matter of "feeling." Nor is it the soft and fuzzy knowledge of the postmodern world, where "feeling" and "impression" are all that there is. The primary knowledge, declares Paul, is the knowledge of God — God's knowledge of you, and yours of God in grateful answer. This is a relationship, one that produces the deepest feelings ever known, but it is a true knowledge nonetheless — both in that it is knowledge of the truth and in that it constitutes the truest mode of knowing. All other knowing is first relativised and then, when and as appropriate, reaffirmed in new ways from that point. This is a knowing like no other, because it is knowledge of a reality like no other.[179]

It is especially the last sentence that brims with significance; God is 'a reality like no other.' Therefore the knowledge of him will be like no other. Christians universally affirm that their epistemology derives from God, yet they seldom portray the depth of understanding of his character that Calvin did. Moreover, if our mode of knowing is Scripturally governed, it will take on the character of God's unified yet Triune operation in redemptive history. Calvin's definition of faith (knowing God) beautifully presents this Biblical-Trinitarian understanding of salvation:

> Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed in our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit. (*Inst.* 3.2.7)

The theological significance of Calvin's approach to knowing in his own time and in ours, rests in the manner upon which he subordinated the human epistemological quest to revealed ontology.[180] And here he is profoundly helpful to us, for as Wright put it; "Most people

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[179] Wright, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology," 223.

[180] Bouwsma had sought to address the question of the capacity of the human mind to have any certain knowledge in relation to Calvin. As he never found recourse (as Calvin certainly did) in seeking to correlate epistemology to ontology (i.e., knowing must flow *from* and not *to* being), his conclusions were therefore not only incorrect (as far as Calvin goes), but unhelpful.

rooted in contemporary Western culture assume, unless they have been specifically shaken out of this way of thinking, that the word 'God' refers, more or less univocally, to a being who is detached from the world, living at some great ontological remove (most know that Christians and others do not believe in God as being literally 'up in the sky,' but most assume a similar detachment in some other mode of being)."[181] Or in Calvin's words; "What good is it to profess with Epicurus some sort of God who has cast aside the care of the world only to amuse himself in idleness? What help is it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do?" (*Inst.* 1.2.2). In our next chapter, we will look more closely at Calvin's doctrine of God, and discover that it was his particular understanding of God's Triune nature that enabled him to posit the eminent knowability of God, and therefore, of the reality and certitude of our knowledge of him.

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[181] Wright, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology," 227.

CHAPTER 3

... THE TRIUNE GOD:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CALVIN'S TRINITARIANISM

"WHETHER ONE CONSIDERS the doctrine of the Trinity as the capstone [*den Schlußstein*][1] of Christian dogmatics as did Schleiermacher or the necessary prolegomenon for its execution as did his modern critic, Karl Barth, the common presupposition ought to be that its truth pervades the very nature of Christian faith, life and worship."[2] This is to say that the Christian church not only bases its orthodoxy on the Nicene-Constantinopolitan formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, the so-called central dogma of classical theology, but that the deepest experience of the Christian faith is given expression through it. By God opening himself up to us in self-revelation, supremely in the person and work of Christ, the Word incarnate, Christians may have communion with God in his divine life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. T. F. Torrance suggested that this amounts to "the fundamental grammar of" and "the greatest revolution to" our knowledge of God.[3] Outside of the doctrine of the Trinity, God remains ultimately unknowable.

In the previous chapter, we offered a historical reconstruction of one of the most burning philosophical questions of the sixteenth century, that of *knowing*, and demonstrated Calvin's cognisance of it by means of the thematic weight he gave to *knowing God* in the *Institutio*. In this chapter we will note how his particular construction of the doctrine of the Trinity complemented the same theme. It is therefore necessary to re-examine Calvin's Trinitarian achievement in historical-theological perspective, and to unpack the implications of his Trinitarian vocabulary. As a result, we will discover that Calvin's reclamation of the doctrine of God's *Triunity* in its (Biblical) redemptive-historical matrix, and thus his achievement towards

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[1] I.e., a "coping-stone" which ensures that all the composite elements are held together. (Not an unnecessary "appendix" to his theology as is often assumed.)

[2] Ralph Del Colle, "The Triune God," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 122.

[3] T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1. Torrance has been criticised for favouring the *incarnation* above the *atonement* in God's self-revelation and acting toward humanity. Though this criticism cannot be assessed here, it remains important to affirm the inseparability of soteriology and epistemology in Biblical revelation.

God's *knowability*, is of considerable importance.

3.1 Historical-Theological Orientation

3.1.1 INTRODUCTION

In offering a brief historical survey of the doctrine of the Trinity, two factors which have bearing on our topic need to be highlighted. The first is the axiomatic position granted in its history to Calvin's orthodox yet unique articulation of the subject. This has seldom been recognised in studies of Calvin's theology, or in theological treatments of the subject in general. It is a bold claim, but we find ourselves in agreement with Gerald Bray who estimated that "it is the result of theologians' failure, or sheer inability, to perceive the uniqueness of what the Reformers taught about God," which brought about this neglect.[4] He went on to explain:

> It is often assumed that the Reformers accepted their ancient inheritance without quarrel, and had nothing original to contribute to it. Many people assume that Calvin's defence of the Trinity, for example, was intended mainly as a refutation of heretics like Servetus, and offers little that can be termed new. ... The great pillars of Reformation doctrine are not Scholastic shibboleths perpetuating an artificial divide in Western Christendom, but claims about the being of God which are of such vital importance that those who rejected them felt that they were no longer in spiritual fellowship with people who insisted on making them the heart of their religion.[5]

The fact that any doctrine should receive a more definitive expression as a result of the exegetical and soteriological priorities of the Reformation is in itself not surprising. That it should do so by independent articulation and through the incorporation and consolidation of two entirely different theological traditions, however is.

The second factor is the manner in which Calvin was able to articulate the relation

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[4] Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 198.
[5] *Ibid.* Benjamin B. Warfield had also earlier remarked that Calvin's Trinitarian formulation marked "an epoch in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity." See his "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1956), 230, 283.

between the *being* and the *knowing* of the Godhead. Exegetical fidelity and an aversion to Scholastic theology persuaded him to give primacy to the *persons* rather than the abstract *being* of God, to *Triunity* rather than 'threeness' or 'oneness,' with the result that God became knowable in a manner vastly different from what Medieval Western theology had previously suggested. These complex ideas will be unpacked in the sections below.

3.1.2 BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Though the discussion of the Biblical foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity will here for obvious reasons be severely truncated, some important points are necessary in order to facilitate the unfolding historical discussion. Perhaps the most foundational point to be made about any discussion of the Trinity, is that the naming of God as Triune — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — is not a philosophical or dogmatic-ecclesiological imposition on the Christian doctrine of God, but an earnest attempt to be faithful to the self-revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The driving force of the doctrine of the Trinity is therefore *soteriological*, and is grounded in the covenant history of Israel. This is no moot point, for the Christian confession of God, though it starts with the New Testament, is nevertheless rooted in the Old, as Christ's own affirmation of the *Shema* (Mark 12:29; cf. Deuteronomy 6:4) clearly illustrates. The oneness of God in the Old Testament was itself subject to diversified naming (conceptualisation) such as Wisdom, Word and Spirit, so that the mystery of the Trinity is in no way absent from Old Testament revelation, and at some places almost comes into view. Warfield's fine paragraph is apt:

> The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not there before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before.[6]

What we are dealing with is not so much a *correction* of revelation, as a *perfection* of it in the redemptive process focusing on the event of Christ and the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 1:17f.). An implicit Trinitarian consciousness therefore pervades the monotheistic

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[6] B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. S. G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1968), 30.

sensibility of all New Testament writing. The 'doctrine' may not be formally worked out in the New Testament, which explains the lack of uniformity in expression, but a Trinitarian conviction and consciousness, what Robert Jenson called a "primary trinitarianism," is persistent and pervasive.[7] Some aspects of this 'primary trinitarianism' are decisive for the debate, as they set the parameters for the discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity.[8]

The first, which is to state the obvious in terms of the New Testament, is that the identification between God (the Father) and Jesus Christ does not obliterate the distinction between them. On the other hand, their differentiation does not compromise Biblical and Apostolic monotheism; Jesus Christ is κύριος.[9] Likewise, the Holy Spirit in his personalised agency is distinct from, yet identified with the Son and the Father.[10] This basic Biblical attestation of *distinction* but not *separation*, between Father, Son and Spirit, already allows for charting a course clear of Modalistic and Tritheistic obstacles, both of which figure prominently in the later theological debates. Second, the fact remains that God is revealed in *Christ*-ian proclamation, in the preaching of and about Christ. The one cannot be known apart from the other. It takes the 'exegesis' (ἐξηγέομαι) of the μονογενής θεός to bring the Father to light (John 1:18), and it is the Holy Spirit who mediates and executes the activity of the exalted Christ who otherwise would remain unattestable and unknowable.[11] Or, as Calvin put it in more immediate language at the beginning of his section on the 'secret working of the Spirit' in the *Institutio* 3.1.1; "as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us."

This leaves the historical debate with the twin challenge of speaking about God in terms which serve to exclude the heresies on either perimeter, but also to explicate a knowledge of God in his being which is faithful to both the *person*-al (distinctive) and mutual (unitary) aspects of that revelation given in Scripture. A further factor which undergirds the historical discussion throughout, is the seemingly simple matter of correlating the way in which God is known through his self-revelation and the way in which he is *in* himself truly. This, the most basic

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[7] Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 40-48.

[8] See Del Colle, "The Triune God," 123ff., for a more detailed discussion of the related Biblical data.

[9] Θεός is the generic term for God in the New Testament, but note that κύριος is frequently used with reference to Christ, κύριος being the Greek rendering of the Hebrew יהוה — YHWH (or יְהֹוָה with the vowels of אֲדֹנָי — *adonai*, imposed) in the Septuagint (cf. Thomas' confession of Christ as κύριος and θεός in John 20:28).

[10] Note the many triadic references in the Pauline writings, the Paraclete sayings of John, as well as the Pneumatological grounding of Jesus' Sonship in the Gospels.

[11] Cf. John 14:16-21; 16:5-15.

motive of a Trinitarian understanding of God, has historically caused the greatest difficulty, especially in times when philosophical consciousness held the currency in theological thinking. It has also resulted in a dual manner of reference to God, first, as he is known through the differentiated agency of Father, Son and Spirit in the economy of creation and redemption, namely the *economic* (Gk. *οἰκονομία*, cf. Ephesians 1:10; 3:9) or revelational Trinity, and second, an investigation into his being before the creation of the world and apart from salvation history, the ontological or *immanent* Trinity (i.e., the eternal distinctions of persons within the being of God).[12] The real challenge of Trinitarian formulation lay in a Biblically credible integration of economic and immanent assertions, whilst keeping the soteriological emphasis paramount.

3.1.3 PATRISTIC DEVELOPMENTS

As the Trinitarian controversy which finally came to a head at Constantinople in 381 has been well chronicled elsewhere, our discussion will entail a broad sketch of the parameters of Trinitarian construal during the Patristic epoch.[13] In the period of the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists, the church expressed her Trinitarian faith mainly in economic terms, and Irenaeus of Lyons (d. *c.* 180) was the first to develop an explicit Trinitarian theology based upon the divine economy of salvation.[14] His contribution to Trinitarian theology is noteworthy in that he was able to indicate tri-unity, in other words, show the work of the three persons within the one activity of God and so avoid violating the divine unity by lapsing into Tritheism.[15] He did however bequeath a legacy of implicit subordinationism amongst the Greek fathers with his metaphor of the Word (Son) and Wisdom (Spirit) as the 'two hands of God,' which eventually spilled over into the Origenist line later to be contested in the Arian controversy.

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[12] Torrance helpfully suggests that the "economic Trinity may well be spoken of as the *evangelical* Trinity and the ontological Trinity as the *theological* Trinity." *Evangelical* refers to the truth content of God's being as revealed in the Gospel, and *theological* to the truth content of the eternal being of God. The key to Trinitarian formulation lies in showing that there is no disparateness between the two. See T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being in Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 7.

[13] See the bibliography for helpful and relevant texts.

[14] This 'economy' was sometimes seen as human history divided into three periods with its administration corresponding in each case to a different person in the Godhead. Economy in this sense unfortunately tied the Trinity to a time and space framework and also lent itself to modalism (itself a form of Monarchianism). Modalism was attributed somewhat unfairly to Sabellius, a 3rd century heretic, and is often known as Sabellianism. Economy should rather be seen in terms of appropriation, or ascribing a function to a person in the Godhead.

[15] He pointed to the fact that the Father 'plans and commands,' the Son 'executes and acts' (in creating), and the Spirit 'nourishes and increases' (*Against Heresies*, IV 38, 3). This pattern of appropriating to each person an activity, became well used by subsequent theologians (the so-called doctrine of *appropriationes* as later developed by Augustine).

In the West, the North African theologian Tertullian (*c.* 150-220), affirmed God's existence to be three persons of one substance. He defined *trinitas* (a term he coined) as *tres personae* in *una substantia* in opposition to the modalistic monarchian heresy, a definition which subsequently became the formula of Western Trinitarianism. Tertullian however also subscribed to a form of subordinationism ('the Son is somehow less than the Father'),[16] but did not move as far as Origen of Alexandria (d. *c.* 253) who, whilst affirming the eternal generation of the Son, referred to him as God by derivation only; the Son is 'God' or the 'second God,' while the Father is 'the God' (*ho theos*).[17] Arius (*c.* 250-336), priest in the Church of Alexandria, developed this Origenist strand to its logical conclusion by placing Christ squarely on the creaturely side, stating that 'there was a time when the Son was not.'[18] This necessitated the conciliar injunction of the term *homoousios* (of the same substance) by Athanasius (*c.* 295-373) to counter the Arian strategy, although its introduction took some convincing amongst the Greek theologians because of its vulnerability to modalistic corruption.[19] It did however maintain equality in being between Father and Son, as well as retaining a priority for the Father. In spite of its weaknesses, *homoousios* assured a major breakthrough in Trinitarian theology because an intra-divine rather than an external basis was established for the divinity of the Son and the Spirit.[20] Likewise, the soteriological principle of the Word becoming flesh was retained, and the Father was designated 'Father,' not now on the basis of his relationship with creation, but with the Son.

In the East, doctrinal formulation progressed along mostly parallel lines, and the achievements of Nicaea were complemented by the work of the Cappadocian Fathers; Basil of Caesarea (*c.* 330-379), Gregory of Nyssa (*c.* 335-394) and Gregory of Nazianzus (*c.* 330-*c.* 389). Their contribution to clarifying Trinitarian theology was significant because of the introduction of distinction between two terms which had hitherto been synonyms, namely *ousia* (essence or

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[16] Underlying Tertullian's dynamic and economic conception of the Trinity, was the Logos Christology inherited from earlier Apologists which was highly subordinationist. His most mature work on the Trinity was *Against Praxeas*.

[17] *Contra Celsum* 3.39. Note that Origen does however set the stage for the resolution of the Trinitarian question with his affirmation of the ingenerate nature of the Father and the eternal generation (begetting) of the Son. He is also important for his (Eastern) Trinitarian formulation of three *hypostaseis* of Father, Son and Spirit which were revealed to the same divine *ousia*. It is the hierarchical order starting with the Father as God-in-himself (*autotheos*) and the Son and Spirit God by derivation only, which introduced problems.

[18] Only fragments exist of Arius' letters, and what he argued can only be constructed from his opponents' writings. It is certain however, that he stressed that the Son was "begotten" (*gennetos*), meaning with this that Jesus had to have had a beginning in time, and therefore had to have been a creature. The strong reaction against him at Nicea was thus fully warranted.

[19] By some it was felt that distinction and priority (of the Father) in the Godhead were compromised.

[20] One may go so far as to say with Gunton, that *homoousios* established "a new ontological principle: that there can be a sharing in being." This ran contrary to sacred and traditional Greek ontology which means either total participation in the universal or material separation into an individual. See Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 8.

substance) and *hypostasis* (an individual instance of a given essence).[21] This ensured that the Greek formula *treis hypostaseis en mia ousia* was intentionally the same as the Latin, except that its language carried the conceptual capacity for allowing an adequate explanation of threeness with which to complement Nicaea's *homoousios*.[22] Lohse put it as follows: "the three Cappadocians actually made possible a true doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine, namely, which maintains both the unity and the difference of the Persons."[23] The transition from a nature-based theology to one which recognised the persons as theological principles in their own right, was thus well on its way. As we shall note later, part of Calvin's genius throughout his Trinitarian conflicts lay in his philological understanding of the conceptuality introduced by the Cappadocian terminology. The Cappadocians made yet another theological and terminological contribution which was ably employed by Calvin, namely that of 'coinherence.' In order to accentuate 'Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity,' they posited the *perichoresis* (Latin *circumincessio*) of each hypostasis in the other. In other words, the distinction of the persons in the Godhead by virtue of *perichoresis* did not compromise divine unity. It was a formulation which faithfully reflected the Biblical, soteriological and economic pattern of the Father working through the Son in or by the Holy Spirit. The Cappadocians thus were able to maintain a thorough pneumatology (against the so-called *Pneumatomachians*)[24] and accentuate the co-equality of all three persons in the Godhead. The primary basis for the *homoousios* of the Son and the Spirit with the Father was therefore soteriological. Calvin's exposition of the Trinity strongly underscored this truth which he in effect used to deny all subordination in ontological status (though not in relational order) between the persons of the Godhead.[25]

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[21] Both were normally translated as *substantia* in the West, which caused some problems for the Latin theologians. Gunton proposed that the "desynonymising of ousia and hypostasis, which previously had meant the same — being or substance — made possible the distinction and yet holding together of the unity and plurality of God. God is indeed one in being: there is only one God. But this very oneness is not a mathematical oneness, as Arius and Greek theology had taught, but a oneness consisting in the inseparable relation of Father, Son and Spirit, the three *hypostases*." Ibid., 9.

[22] The Western or Latin church accepted the Greek expression of the Trinity for its validity and orthodoxy, though differences lay between it and its own because of terminology. The Latin *substantia* was easily recognised to be the equivalent of *ousia* (oneness of divine essence); *persona* however, did not fit or agree with *hypostasis*, as it had prior to Cappadocian usage meant the same as *ousia* (and also translated as *substantia*). It required of the Western church to express the meaning of hypostasis by means of a new term, *subsistentia*, indicating an individual instance of *substantia*. However, *persona* remained most commonly in usage. This may appear to the outsider a matter of linguistic duplicity, but it is exactly on this matter that Calvin's debate with Caroli turned

[23] Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine*, trans. F. E. Stoeffler, Revised American Edition, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 63.

[24] The Pneumatomachians had gathered themselves around Macedonius (342-360), Bishop of Constantinople, who rejected the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

[25] Calvin never in fact used the term *perichoresis*, but ample evidence can be mounted to show that he self-consciously employed its meaning and principle. See the discussion below on Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity.

By the time of Athanasius and the Cappadocians, the Trinitarian problem of speaking about God-as-he-is-in-himself in conceptual terms contrary to speaking about God-as-he-is-toward-us, was mostly overcome. As God revealed himself in Christ, so he was *in* himself, and what he did on earth through his Son and Spirit revealed what he was like from eternity to eternity. In the East however, in spite of the *perichoresis* doctrine, the Father remained the *arche* of the Son's begetting and the Spirit's proceeding. The weight given to the monarchy of the Father is in actual fact the real flashpoint behind the so-called *filioque*-divide between East and West which proved to be so decisive in church and doctrinal history. The West's configuration of the relation of the Son and Spirit to the Father was on the basis of being, while the East posited it on the basis of person (*hypostasis*). In the West the emphasis was on the unity of the divine nature, and the *filioque* was required to maintain the Trinitarian distinctions.[26] In the East, the monarchy of the Father in conjunction with the *perichoresis* of the persons conveyed the unity of the Godhead. The different approaches has often been explained as the Greeks beginning with the Three and then moving to the One (*Trinitas in unitate*), and the Latins beginning with the One and then moving to the Three (*unitas in Trinitate*), in spite of the reality being obviously more complex.

The Western notion was classically put forth by St. Augustine (354-430) in his great essay *De Trinitate*, which took him around twenty years to complete. It is of some significance to note that the Cappadocian teachings had been translated into Latin by Hilary of Poitiers (*c.* 315-*c.* 368), who in turn had exercised great influence on Augustine with reference to the Trinity.[27] Hilary's writings facilitated for Augustine, whose Greek was rudimentary, some knowledge of the Cappadocian achievement, and he was able to accommodate some of their ideas. Nevertheless, in spite of some similarities in concern and categories of thinking between Augustine and the Cappadocians (they were almost contemporaries), their differences are most striking. As we noted above, they seemed to have worked on different principles altogether, and Calvin's perception of these differences (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.5) has been said to constitute an axiom in historical theology.[28] Thus we find Calvin acknowledging Augustine as the leading authority on

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[26] In Augustine's scheme for example, if the Spirit is not designated a person by virtue of origin/source in the Father (as in the East), he becomes 'unattached' and merely the 'love' (adhesive?) which keeps the person of the Father and Son joined together. In the Western scheme therefore, the *filioque* guarded the Spirit's personhood by means of mutual relation to Father and Son.

[27] As we have seen in the previous chapter, of particular significance was the principle that Calvin adopted from Hilary (and Irenaeus) that God is the "one fit witness to himself, and he is not known except through himself." *Institutio* 1.13.19, cf. Hilary's *De Trinitate* 1.18, 4.36.

[28] Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 156.

the Trinity and quoting from him frequently, whilst at the same time developing a different understanding of the doctrine.[29] (The reasons for this will become clear in the next section.)

Augustine sought to and indeed did advance Trinitarian understanding in a number of ways, many of them commendable while others (influenced by Neoplatonic ideas) can only be received with some misgiving. In terms of Trinitarian formulation, Tertullian's influence on him was the most consequential. Like Tertullian, Augustine thought of God primarily as a single being in whom there were three persons; *essence* was primary over persons, the *one* over the *three*.[30] This subsequently became, and still is, the main feature of Western Trinitarianism. Augustine also introduced the implicit notion of the divine persons as subsisting relations (an inherently necessary interior relationship), which was to become the major element of difference between his thought and that of the Cappadocians. This in turn, was developed into a 'psychological' framework, as for example by the analogical patterning of the three persons as memory, intellect and will.[31] The implications of this kind of thinking were manifold and extensive, especially by the time of Thomas Aquinas (*c.* 1225-1274), who eventually brought Augustine's ideas to maturity in what has been called "a virtual trinitarian metaphysics."[32] Thus, in spite of Augustine's elevated status in Western Trinitarian theology (cf. *Quicunque Vult, c.* 300-400), and Calvin's referential indebtedness to him notwithstanding,[33] the legacy he has bequeathed may not have been as illustrious as has often been perceived.

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[29] "For instance, Calvin does not follow Augustine's *speculatio* that the human soul reflects the Trinity (e.g. *Institutio* 1.15.4). Elsewhere, he contradicts Augustine's 'subtle reasoning' (*argutia*) ... Usually, however, and as regards the main doctrines, Calvin sees himself as a legitimate successor to Augustine's teachings. Even if he feels obliged to contradict the great Church Father, he sometimes makes mention of mitigating circumstances. ... As regards the Cappadocian Fathers, ... Calvin nearly always refers to them when discussing topics which were important to Western theology." Johannes van Oort, "John Calvin and the Church Fathers," in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, Vol. 2, ed. Irena Backus (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 690-691.

[30] Because of this legacy, and partly because of his occasionally poor choice of terminology (e.g., 'modes of being' for the persons), Augustine had been made vulnerable to the charge of Sabellianism.

[31] Another prominent analogy was that of love. Love discloses a lover (Father), an object loved (Son), and the bond of love between them (Holy Spirit). See Augustine *De Trinitate*, VIII.10; IX. This analogy immediately begs the question as to the personhood of the Spirit. Nevertheless, it must be granted that Augustine sought these analogies mainly on the basis that the human person was made in the image of the whole Trinity. It remains his most original contribution to Trinitarian theology, but also meant that he sought analogies for the Trinity everywhere he encountered the number three.

[32] Del Colle, "Triune God," 132. Thompson put it like this: "... the main criticism of Augustine must be that his beginning with Neo-Platonism and his failure fully to link the nature of God as triune with the economy of salvation gave him a framework which inhibited dynamic concreteness in thought and presentation, especially of the three persons. It is this, more than anything else, that made his positive Biblical insights take a rather abstract form and made his views less concrete and dynamic than those of the East." See John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 129.

[33] Torrance suggested that Calvin's appeal to Augustine was for two reasons; a. Augustine was the *magister theologiae* in the West and therefore had 'debating value' in the Reformation, and b. Augustine's expression essentially contained the teaching of Gregory of Nazianzen in Latin form. See his "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin," in *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 22.

3.1.4 AUGUSTINIAN SYNTHESIS AND MEDIEVAL CONSOLIDATIONS

In a provocative paper entitled "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West,"[34] Colin Gunton laid the blame for the 'Trinitarian problem' of the West, squarely at the feet of Augustine. This problem, he stated, relates to an Augustinian theological tradition which "encourages thought in the essential unknowability of God,"[35] and of a resulting tendency in Western theology to treat the doctrine of the Trinity as "a matter of mathematical conundrums and illogical attempts to square the circle."[36] It is not our aim here to either condemn or promote Gunton's thesis, but to highlight some relevant points which he and others have accurately made in relation to the history of Trinitarian thought.[37]

As mentioned, in the latter part of *De Trinitate*, Augustine set off on a quest for threefold analogical patterns in the human person to mirror Trinitarian relations. He sought them particularly in mental experience, and according to Gunton, three chief features resulted from this aspect of Augustine's approach and those who stood in his line of Western Trinitarian thinking.[38] The first is the approach of basing Trinitarian relations in *being* rather than in the economy of salvation, the work of Christ and the Spirit. By seeking patterns of threeness apart from soteriological revelation, Augustine introduced a tendency to philosophically rather than Biblically conceptualise the being of God.[39] Secondly, he introduced the well-known principle *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* (the outward actions of the Trinity are undivided) to state that

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[34] This paper was first presented by Colin Gunton at a seminar on the doctrine of the Trinity at King's College, London, on 26th January 1988, and has been published under the same title as a chapter in his book *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 31-57.

[35] *Ibid.*, 31.

[36] *Ibid.*, 2.

[37] A note of caution must be added. Gunton's thesis extends further than a pure critique of Augustine's Trinitarian formulation. He desires to lay the blame on Augustine for the displacement of God characteristic of modernity. His critique of the Christian problem in the West is thus purely epistemological (Augustine's doctrinal formulation), and his proposed solution amounts to establishing an alternative epistemology based on a scheme of (corrected) Trinitarian transcendentals (the Trinity is 'the idea of ideas'). The problem with his *philosophia christiana* is that it separates (ignores) soteriology from epistemology. It is our contention that the problem of God in modernity is as much a problem of soteriology (reconciliation), as it is a problem of epistemology. The problems of sin and grace, and divine reconciliation in history are paramount and a necessary part of our Trinitarian formulation. For a fascinating critique of Gunton's thesis, see Stephen N. Williams, *Revelation and Reconciliation: A Window on Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 164-174.

[38] Gunton tends to argue in favour of a distinctly Eastern approach to the doctrine of the Trinity. In doing so, he makes some extremely lucid comments. However, it is not our purpose or intention to do the same, and Gunton's points are therefore tempered towards being more relevant to Calvin's exposition. *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 3.

[39] Augustine replaced causality by pure relations, a metaphysical construct existent in the very being of God. Two important consequences follow. The Holy Spirit is but the fruit of the mutual love between Father and Son and so becomes the 'glue' which holds the Trinity together. This in turn necessitated the *filioque* on the basis on Augustine's construct, and not on the basis of Scripture alone. In terms of Trinitarian relations, for Augustine the *filioque* guaranteed the oneness of God as the threeness was posited by means of opposition.

everything that God does, he does in the unity of his being. Taken to mean only the above, the principle is a good one. However, if it is used to mean that there are no distinctive forms of action which can be attributed to Father, Son and Spirit, the Trinitarian distinctions become meaningless and a divine Monad serves the same purpose as would the Trinity. The third feature has to do with Augustine's and generally the West's inadequate understanding and connotation of the concept *personae*. In spite of Augustine's insistence on the full equality of each person in the Godhead, he appears not to have been able to grant the measure of identification afforded to each person the concept *hypostasis* allowed. This meant that God's personhood was located not so much in his Triunity as in his Oneness, and the way he really was in himself was to be understood differently from the way he has revealed himself as Father, Son and Spirit.[40] We will be demonstrating that Calvin, either by virtue of his theological acumen and exegetical priority, or by his basic aversion to philosophical theology, avoided these particular strands of the Augustinian legacy.

During the Middle Ages however, the West in general accepted Augustine's teaching without fault,[41] and the classical representation of the Trinity became that of Thomas Aquinas. In the East, Gregory of Palamas' (1296-1357) formulation set itself up as the standard against which all Trinitarian articulations were measured. When one observes the increased sophistication with which Scholasticism refined the doctrine into elaborate explications of the relations of the persons with their corresponding emanations, activities and operations (the so-called *opera Dei personalia*), one can understand the reluctance of the Reformers to proceed along the same lines. Their main complaint however, was not against the manner in which the formulation developed, but as argued by Gunton above, its final result. Both Palamite and Thomistic refinements it seemed, prohibited rather than promoted the redeemed human creature from actually knowing or participating in the being of God.[42] The Palamite model allowed for accessibility to God only through his energies (*energeia*), and not from or to his

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[40] The tendency was to treat God *unipersonally*. (God's undifferentiated being constituting the larger category under which the persons are subsumed.) But, a 'person' is neither an individual (defined by separation) nor indistinguishable from a whole (defined by irreducibility). "To think of persons is to think in terms of relations: Father, Son and Spirit are the particular persons they are by virtue of their relations with each other." Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 10-11.

[41] There were however a number of elaborations, as for example those of Richard of St. Victor (*c.* 1123-1173), whose views are receiving serious reconsideration in our time. He argued on the basis of the Trinity, that intra-Trinitarian relations were paradigmatic of human society and their relations on earth.

[42] This is ironic, as both Augustine (and by implication Aquinas) and Palamas sought to cement their thoughts into authentic Christian experience. Palamas' greatest concern was to affirm the reality of communion with God, and he rejected the Western conception in favour of the richer 'divinisation' (*theosis*) of the early Greek Fathers. The Christian 'becomes divine' in a very real sense through the presence of God's 'uncreated energies.' See E. J. Dobben, "Trinity," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. M. Collins et al (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 1058.

essence (*ousia*). The Thomistic model which the Reformers inherited, only allowed actual access to God through the illumination (*lumen gloria*) brought to the mind by the 'habit (*habitus*) of created grace,' which in turn resulted in a knowing encounter through the beatific vision (*visio beatifica*).[43] As the fundamental motivation of the Reformation agenda hinged on the question of personal salvation, and thus a knowing encounter with the living God, it is not surprising that the Reformers sought to steer matters in an entirely different direction.

3.1.5 THE REFORMATION

The complex of issues surrounding salvation in Reformation thought, such as justification by faith, sanctification, and assurance of salvation, can only be comprehended against the backdrop of Trinitarian theology.[44] Though it may appear that there was a relative dearth of discussion about the doctrine of the Trinity in this period, the debates which dictated the theological agenda were nonetheless never far from it. Jonker for example, argued cogently that the flashpoints of the Reformation were all related to the question of pneumatology, which in turn, was a thoroughly Trinitarian deliberation.[45] This fact is not readily acknowledged in the work of many Reformation scholars, who neglect to address the soteriological achievements of the Reformation with reference to the Trinity and to the history of Trinitarian formulation.[46] Most treatments of the doctrine of the Trinity similarly bypass the Reformation period in its entirety, which further serves to illustrate the point that we are making, that most scholars do not appreciate or understand the Reformation contribution to the debate. It is true however, that though the doctrine of Trinity was implicitly central to Reformation theology, Trinitarian doctrinal formulation was not externally the most obvious feature in the Reformation agenda.

The Reformers themselves sought to clarify their questions in the light of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and for the most part simply affirmed the traditional Western doctrine (minus its speculative apparatus)[47] without any apparent attempts at modification or

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[43] Del Colle, "The Triune God," 134.

[44] See Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 197-199.

[45] See W. D. Jonker, *Die Gees van Christus* (Pretoria: N. G. Kerkboekhandel, 1981), 50-68.

[46] It is perhaps safe to suggest that the reason for this is that too few scholars embrace the approach that the Reformation was essentially a religious event (*vis a vis* political, social and economic concerns), and that its most serious concerns were theological. See Timothy George, *The Theology of the Reformers* (Leicester: Apollos, 1988), 15-21.

[47] For an excellent discussion of the Medieval Trinitarian developments which brought 'every science to be concerned with the Trinity' (Bonaventure), see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 3: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 277-286.

rearticulation. The reason for this may simply be that the personal and practical implications of real access to a knowable God (the main benefit of the Reformers' soteriological emphasis) had such tremendous ramifications in the sixteenth century, that the appreciation and documentation of formal doctrinal formulations were simply temporarily eclipsed in favour of their practical benefits. This is especially true of the first generation of reformers.[48] When we reach Melanchthon (1497-1560) however, it is noticeable that he had occasion for theological reflection. Melanchthon reprioritised the Trinity related to soteriology in the first two sections of his *Loci Communes* (1555). Nevertheless, his articulation though simple and clear, did not approach what could be called a legitimate reformation of the doctrine itself.[49] It was up to the Genevan Reformer to begin "a new development of thought in the work of the different persons [of the Trinity],"[50] a work which Melanchthon himself later recognised as a noteworthy achievement.[51]

It is difficult to offer a brief synopsis of this 'new development' in Trinitarian thought, but its net result can be summarised as the believer's participation in the inner life of the Godhead through the persons of the Godhead. One must remember that participation in God's inner life, knowing his *essence*, was incomprehensible even to those scholastics who were occupied with working out the meaning of terms such as *ousia*, *dynamis* and *energeia*. In contrast, the mystical tradition, which had gained enormous popularity by the time of the sixteenth century, viewed God's nature as hidden in 'the cloud of unknowing,' yet at the same time laid claim to direct and ecstatic experiences of that hidden God. The Reformers naturally discounted the mystical imperative with its claims to ecstatic experiences (cf. Calvin's charge of presumption against Pseudo-Dionysius, *Inst.* 1.14.4), yet it seemed that they found commonality in opposing the Scholastic conundrum of an unknowable God.[52] They certainly enjoyed agreement in the claim that human beings can have direct and immediate access to God through

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[48] This is not to say that someone like Martin Luther was not acutely conscious of the Trinitarian nature of the Christian faith. In fact, the contrary. See the recent study by Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther: A study on the relationship between genre, language and the Trinity in Luther's Works (1523-1546)* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1999).

[49] His indebtedness to Augustine is clear, as is an inclination for philosophical categorisation. See Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1555*, trans. and ed. C. L. Manschreck, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), I-II, 3-37.

[50] Gerald Bray, "Trinity," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. S. B. Ferguson and D. F. Wright (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 694.

[51] Torrance claimed that Melanchthon had put forth the idea that Calvin should be entitled 'the theologian' because Calvin's connection with Gregory Nazianzen was obvious in terms of the inner workings of the Trinity. "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin," 22.

[52] Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 65, 199.

the indwelling of the Spirit.[53] However, unlike the Mystics, the Reformers did not accept the so-called 'transcendent union of the soul' with God. They believed that God may be known personally and directly, but that such a knowing experience was to be enjoyed strictly within the limits of God's self-revelation in Scripture. Scripture and Spirit stood in such a relation that the Spirit employed Scripture as the medium and parameters of his self-communication.[54]

If then the Scholastics were misguided in their philosophical and rationalistic preoccupation with God's essence, and the Mystics were confusing (irrational) in their ecstatic experiential claims, how was it that God achieved inherent knowability in the Reformers' minds? The answer lay of course in a Scripturally guided doctrine of God's Triune being, which allowed for an appropriate correlation of economic and ontological priorities. With the Reformers, and particularly with Calvin, we find that God's essence was of secondary importance, whilst the co-equality and co-eternity of the persons were paramount. This revealed Calvin's soteriological emphasis on the *evangelical* or economic Trinity, which was not simply a choosing of the one aspect above the other (soteriology and epistemology were held to be inseparable), but in actual fact a suggestion that the Trinity ought to be understood in a way which was modified from the understanding of both Augustine and the Cappadocians. Again, this is not to say that Calvin abandoned the orthodox position on God's transcendence,[55] for an emphasis on God's 'incomprehensibility' can be traced throughout his writings, especially in the *Sermons on Job*. For Calvin, the clue to a proper doctrine of God lay in the 'simplicity of God's being' and the premise that each person of the Triune being was *autotheos*. Knowledge of one of the persons thus always involved knowledge of the other two at the same time. Calvin similarly viewed the atoning work of Christ not in the undividedness of the works of the Trinity outside the Godhead (*ad extra*), but rather as an undivided work of the Godhead *inside* the Trinity (*ad intra*).[56] Christians could thus really get to know God as he was in himself through the Holy Spirit, by virtue of whom they were adopted as sons of the Father and became fellow heirs with Christ the Lord (cf. Galatians 4:6).

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[53] Cf. Jonker: "Die opvallendste punt van ooreenkoms tussen Reformasie en die mistiek is egter die aksent op die direktheid van die verhouding waarin die mens tot God staan deur die onmiddellike aanraking en inwoning van die Heilige Gees." *Die Gees van Christus*, 52.

[54] This stance in itself stems from a perspective which holds that soteriology and epistemology are inseparable, that the "Spirit enables the sinner to perceive that Scripture is objectively God's self-authenticating word." Graeme L. Goldsworthy, "'Thus Says the Lord': The Dogmatic Basis of Biblical Theology," in *God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays presented to D. B. Knox*, ed. P. T. O'Brien and D. G. Peterson (Homebush: Lancer Books, 1986), 26.

[55] Karl Rahner's famous dictum "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa" is not applicable to Calvin as some may suggest. Such modern sympathies are very far removed from Calvin's attitude to God. See our discussion below under *God Himself*.

[56] Calvin shows strong indebtedness to Anselm at this point. See Bray, *Doctrine of God.*, 694.

The ensuing Reformed tradition boldly seized upon the benefits of this viewpoint for a century or longer, and a vast proliferation of theological and popular works followed which dealt in an in-depth manner with the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit.[57] The distinctive of those who stood in this line of thinking was summed up in the title of one of John Owen's (1616-1683) works; *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost*. Without a doubt, Reformation theology modified Christian understanding at the most intimate level with God, and though Calvin in his own personality may not have appeared to be the best representative of this new theology of communion with God, he certainly was its most astute theological articulator.

3.1.6 CONCLUSION

It is tempting to continue our discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity into the Modern era. The period of Protestant rationalism which followed the Reformation is now said to have brought about as much negative consequence in Trinitarian thinking as would have been gained through its terminological clarification of the Augustinian heritage. The 'devil's whore' (Luther's term) in the guise of a revived Aristotle had found its way back in amongst the 'protesters.' Nothing however, could have prepared theology for the epistemological disruption which was to materialise as a consequence of the Enlightenment. The severe limits placed on all knowledge-claims (resulting from the influence of Immanuel Kant [1724-1804] in particular), ensured that it was only a matter of time and logic before Trinitarian doctrine was marginalised to the periphery of the Christian faith. Hegel's (1770-1831) ambitious attempt at 'Trinitarian dialecticism' failed to offer a metaphysical resolve, and Schleiermacher's (1768-1834) retreat into the subjective realms of religious affections (which meant that the Trinity received a less than adequate treatment in his *Der Christliche Glaube*) brought little in the way of epistemological gratification. The twentieth century issued forth its own cry for a Trinitarian renaissance (following Barth [1886-1968], Rahner [1904-1984] and others), but the truth remains that Trinitarian heresies which would have chilled the bones of anyone present at Nicaea, are shamelessly held by many of today's most respected Christian theologians. The Reformation achievement, untroubled by

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[57] Joel R. Beeke has for example chronicled more than a hundred years of this Reformation legacy, in his book *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and his Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999).

Modernity and yet by no means epistemologically naive, therefore still warrants our most careful consideration.

At the outset of this section we had stated that Calvin's position on the Trinity in historical theology was axiomatic because of his (selective) incorporation and modification of Augustinian *and* Cappadocian elements, a remarkable act of independent theologising from within the Western tradition. We had also stated that through his explication of God's Triunity, his achievement towards God's knowability was significant. In the section below we will note the distinctiveness of Calvin's approach, and conclude that to say with Alister McGrath, that Calvin's account of the Trinity is "orthodox precisely on account of its unoriginality,"[58] is in fact to do an injustice to the great Reformer and to misjudge the complexity of the historical-theological debate.

3.2 Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity

3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Considering the impressive body of literature on Calvin's theology, it is very surprising that his Trinity doctrine has received so little attention. The peculiarity of this phenomenon is only strengthened by the ostentation with which the Trinity imposes itself on the whole structure of the *Institutes*. Not only does it occupy a place of significance within the work both by its position and its exposition, but its credentials can be traced to Calvin's earliest theological writings and most bitter disputes.[59] At least ten entire monographs came from Calvin's pen as a result of direct disputes about the doctrine (see Appendix below),[60] and it is fair to say that it

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[58] Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 155.

[59] Take the Caroli and Servetus affairs as examples. Cf. the first edition (1536) of the *Institutio* (2.A.8) and Section 1 in Calvin's earliest *Catechism* (1537). Philip Walker Butin put it as follows: "By and large, sufficient attention has not been given in assessments of Calvin's thought to the prominence of Trinitarian concerns in the doctrinal controversies of this ministry, or to the profound contribution that these encounters made to the Trinitarian shape of his emerging Christian vision. As a consequence, Calvin scholarship has tended to underestimate the pervasiveness of his Trinitarian concern. The problem is only one facet of a broader inclination in Calvin studies to divorce consideration of his doctrine from examination of his life and ministry, and vice versa." *Revelation, Redemption and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 26.

[60] This is excluding the numerous letters and other correspondence he entered into, as well as the expositions included in the *Institutio*. For the monographs and letters, see Appendix 3.5.2 at the end of this chapter.

comprises the bulk of his doctrinal debates. Nevertheless, in spite of the attestation to its prominence, McGrath's label 'orthodox but unoriginal,'[61] continues to reflect the (superficial) scholarly consensus. Some scholars however, in noting the fierce and persistent conflicts which arose from Calvin's Trinitarian expression, have justifiably placed a question mark over Calvin's orthodoxy.[62] After all, why did he experience so much trouble over his Trinity doctrine? Upon re-examination of the facts and circumstances, most historians of theology pass the verdict in favour of the Genevan. Calvin is orthodox. This does however raise the seldom investigated question of *how* he arrived at his position and what makes his articulation unique. Could there have been something *un*-orthodox[63] or unusual in the way he approached and formulated his doctrine which caused him to be challenged so persistently? Calvin's conformity to conventional doctrinal formulation must therefore also be investigated, which in turn will illuminate the important issue of his Trinitarian orthodoxy.

In tracing the outlines of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity, we have noted with Bray that a general lack of theological acumen has contributed to neglect in this area of Calvin's theology.[64] Another reason may be that Calvin studies, like all other areas of theological research, have been impacted by the pervading lack of confidence in the 'Christ of faith' as against the 'Jesus of history.' Whenever the deity of Christ is under attack, so is the doctrine of the Trinity, and Church Historians are as perspectivally bound to correlate their investigations to contemporary issues as are their counterparts in Biblical Studies. The result is that few theological investigations have been carried out on this aspect of Calvin's thought in the last century.[65] There are only two noteworthy studies (both entitled "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity") which have offered full analyses of the doctrine on its own. The first was published by Benjamin B. Warfield in 1909,[66] and the second, close on a century later, was published by

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[61] See footnote above. McGrath's comment could also be interpreted as 'unoriginal and therefore orthodox,' in which case it reflects an entrenched view of orthodoxy by an author not normally associated with such a view. François Wendel, whom McGrath may be following, comes to the same conclusion: "... although devoid of originality, this trinitarian doctrine constitutes an essential part of the theology of Calvin." Wendel, *Calvin, Origins and Development of his Religious Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 169.

[62] See H. H. Esser, "Hat Calvin eine 'leise modalisierende Trinitätslehre'?", in *Calvinus Theologus*, ed. W. H. Neuser (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976), 122-126.

[63] Here we use the word provocatively, though not strictly in its theological sense. What we mean to say is that Calvin did not arrive at his position via the normal or merely inherited dogmatic pathway.

[64] In recent correspondence (Electronic Mail, 23 May 2001) with Professor Bray he reiterated this fact: "I am afraid that there is still almost nothing that I know of on Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity. I keep my eyes peeled for material, but have seen nothing."

[65] See the discussion in and bibliographies of Chapter One and Two. The works of Koopmans, Krusche and Van der Linde are important. (See Chapter 1 or footnotes below for details.)

[66] First published in *The Princeton Theological Review* vii. (1909): 553-652. Reprinted in *Calvin and Augustine*, 189-284. We will be using the latter edition as reference.

Thomas F. Torrance (1990).[67] More recently, Philip W. Butin has offered a comprehensive proposal of Calvin's Trinitarian understanding of the 'divine-human relationship,' but its main focus is constructive rather than historical in nature.[68] Bray's exceptionally good work has been mentioned already, though it was not his purpose to give a full treatment of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity.[69] Between Torrance and Warfield there is agreement in basic interpretation, the main difference being their separate and underlying motives for exposing Calvin's thought, with Torrance having laboured more self-consciously along a specific theme.[70] Warfield's study on the other hand, was an attempt to give a comprehensive overview of Calvin's treatment of the Trinity in the *Institutio* 1.13, and would be difficult to surpass. What follows in the exposition below is therefore not another attempt at a comprehensive overview, but a historical introduction and selective exposition of the themes introduced thus far. (The reader may want to refer to the Appendix below for an overview of the points covered by Calvin in the *Institutio* Book 1, Chapter 13.)

3.2.2 HISTORICAL OUTLINE

3.2.2.1 *The 1536 Institutio*

Calvin's earliest expression of the Trinity (and his theology in general) was most probably formulated in the tranquillity of Louis Du Tillet's expansive library in the south of France during the period 1534-1535. He conducted his labours under the pseudonym of Charles d'Espeville, and it was published the following year in Basel as the *Christianae Religionis Institutio*.[71]

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[67] In *Calvin Theological Journal* 25:3 (1990): 165-193. Reprinted four years later in *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 41-76. Again, we will be using the latter edition for reference. Also of importance is his earlier "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin," in *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 21-40.

[68] Though brilliantly showing the inadequacy of the dialectical approach favoured by many interpreters of Calvin, one cannot help but feel Calvin 'stretched' for a purpose quite foreign to the sixteenth century. This is not to negate the inevitability, even necessity, of reading Calvin in this 'fresh' way, but to say that there remain certain parameters for exposition as apart from application. Butin admits: "I have taken the liberty to draw an imaginative, and yet I trust historically responsible, construal of Calvin's thought, which is frankly motivated (in part) by certain more recent theological concerns." *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 4.

[69] Bray mainly follows Warfield, though he contributes many insights of his own.

[70] Warfield sought consistency in exposition along the classic Princeton line. Torrance on the other hand, had an ecumenical purpose in mind, and hence his more elaborate references to the Patristics in both East and West. A word of caution may also be apt at this point with regards to Torrance. In our opinion, Torrance overplays the ecumenical and therefore the Eastern aspects of Calvin's Trinity doctrine. More significantly, he, like Gunton, underplays the soteriological determinants in the debate. Even in his use of Athanasius, there is a tendency to locate reconciliation in the incarnation alone, somewhat overlooking the cross and its redemptive correlates of sin and grace.

[71] The full title reads considerable longer. For explanation and background, see Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 196.

The work consciously followed the design and sequence of Luther's *Der kleine Catechismus* (1529), especially the first four chapters.[72] As a result, the doctrine of the Trinity was not given a separate chapter by title. Calvin rather subsumed the doctrine into the chapter on Faith which expounded the Apostles' Creed (see especially section 2.A; *Faith and Faith in One God*), to which it gave structure, form and content. Many of the elements characteristic of Calvin's later and fuller expositions of the Trinity are already present and discernible in this early exposition.[73] Most notable in the *1536 Institutio*, is the way in which Christian belief is introduced (2.A.1) and expounded (2.B.10-20) under the rubric of God's *economy of redemption*. This can be seen, for example, in the section on the Holy Spirit which calls to mind a full economic-Trinitarian view of God:

> We are persuaded that there is for us no other guide and leader to the Father than the Holy Spirit, just as there is no other way than Christ; and that there is no grace from God, save through the Holy Spirit. Grace is itself the power and action of the Spirit: through grace God the Father, in the Son, accomplishes whatever good there is; through grace he justifies, sanctifies, and cleanses us, calls and draws us to himself, that we may attain salvation. ... Therefore, we believe in the Holy Spirit, acknowledging him, with the Father and the Son, to be our one God, holding as sure and firm that the work and power are his ... because we have received him in faith. (2.B.20)[74]

There is a similar economic-Trinitarian passage at the end of 2.A.9, which is repeated in all editions of the *Institutio* and which will receive our attention later. The point is, that Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity was inseparable from his understanding of salvation.[75] Herein also lies the clue to his vigorous defence of the *full divinity* of the Son and of the Spirit: "the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Spirit is God: and there can be only one God" (2.A.7). Calvin therefore conceded to the use of non-Biblical Patristic terms such as *ousia, hypostaseis, persona,* and *homoousios*, only for the sake of guarding the full equality of the persons of the Trinity, yet emphasising their distinction in the one God:[76]

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[72] Its intention was for the instruction of the common people (hence the catechetical formula), but it was strongly apologetical and confessional in flavour as can be seen from its dedicatory letter and its criticism of papal abuses.

[73] We are not of the view that there is no flux in Calvin's theological articulation throughout his life, and that what is contained in the 1559 *Institutio* is what he held to all his life. This is simply not true, as an analysis of the editions of the *Institutes* will bear out. We agree with Battles, that "great consistency there is throughout his literary expression of the faith, but also much movement, reconsideration and recasting of his thought." See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, translated and annotated by F. L. Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), xxi.

[74] All English quotations from the 1536 *Institutio* are from Battles' translation (*Ibid.*).

[75] And indeed from his understanding of redemptive history. See Chapter Four.

[76] If defending the Biblical doctrine implied a defence of the terminology, Calvin was willing to do so. But, for that reason alone. For the most part he took an ambiguous view of patristic terminology. See the discussion to follow.

If therefore, these terms were not rashly invented, they are rashly repudiated. Would that they had been buried, provided only among all men this faith were agreed on: that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, yet that the Son is not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit the Son; but that they have been differentiated by a peculiar quality. (2.A.9)

The simplicity of the language throughout belies the profundity of Calvin's understanding of the history of the doctrine. He used the Eastern conceptuality of *hypostasis* (an individual instance of a given essence) in order to explain 'Triunity' (distinction), and the Nicene terminology of *homoousios* (consubstantiality) to explain equality. The heretical extremes of Arianism and Sabellianism were thus decisively repudiated (cf. 2.A.9). Nevertheless, his principal intention was to express the doctrine with Biblical simplicity and clarity within the framework of salvation. This may have given rise to the assertiveness with which he stated the divine nature of Christ: "He [Christ] must therefore be the one eternal God" (2.A.7). It is however in the making of this kind of claim, certainly bold and unusual in regular Trinitarian formulation, that Calvin's troubles began.

3.2.2.2 The Catechism of 1537

Before we move on to the Caroli affair, which can perhaps be seen as the single greatest catalyst for Calvin becoming 'self-consciously Trinitarian,' the catechism of 1537 must briefly receive our attention. In February of that year, about a month after the recommendation of the *Articles Concerning the Organisation of the Church and of Worship at Geneva*, Calvin drafted the *Instruction et confession de foy*. It contained the following paragraph on the Trinity:

> When we name the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we do not imagine three Gods. But *the Scripture* and *the very experience of piety* show us, in the very simple essence of God, God the Father, his Son and his Spirit, in such a way that our intellect cannot conceive the Father without comprehending at the same time the Son (in whom brightly shines the vivid image of the Father) and the Spirit (in whom appear the power and virtue of the Father). Let us therefore hold ourselves firm with all the thought of our heart in only one God; yet, nevertheless, let us contemplate the Father with the Son and his Spirit.[77]

The reality of the Trinity was referenced to Scripture, but also to the experience of

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[77] *CO* 22:52. Cited according to the translation of P. T. Fuhrmann in *Instruction in Faith (1537)* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1949), 46. [Emphasis added.]

redemption (cf. Article 1: "All men are born in order to *know* God"). The latter was an unusual method of doctrinal verification, though as we have seen in the previous chapter, of great significance in Calvin's understanding. He laboured to affirm the soteriological and practical context within which he held his Trinity doctrine. The second unusual factor was Calvin's allusion to Gregory of Nazianzen's dictum: "No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One."[78] What was significant is that Calvin called on him at exactly the point in the *Orations* where Gregory had aimed to motivate Triunity on the basis of the absolute and full equality of the persons of the Godhead, *not* the monarchia of the Father. This was in contrast to the normal subordinationist consequences of the Eastern view. What it revealed was Calvin's perceptive reading of the church fathers, as well as his independent calling on an authority which was in fact on the periphery of the Western consensus, all of which on the church's most fundamental article of faith. Furthermore, it was clear that it was Calvin's intention to draw on Gregory's thought for a specific reason. He must have felt that Gregory had articulated the *Triunity* of God in the most simple and clear manner possible (as will also be seen in his sermonic treatment of the Trinity in the next chapter). Interestingly, the first set of questions sometimes attached to the *1537 Catechism* for admission to the Lord's Table, carried the same notion through, and gave due credence to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life:

Q.   *In whom do you believe?*
A.   In God the Father, and in Jesus Christ his Son, and in the Holy Spirit.
Q.   *The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are they more than one God?*
A.   No.
Q.   *Should we serve God according to his commandments or human commandments?*
A.   We should serve God according to his commandments and not human commandments.
Q.   *Are you able to accomplish the commandments of God by yourself?*
A.   No.
Q.   *Who then accomplishes them in you?*
A.   The Holy Spirit.
Q.   *And to whom do you pray?*
A.   God.
Q.   *In whose name do you pray?*
A.   In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who is our advocate and intercessor.[79]

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[78] Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Holy Baptism*, Oration xl. 41. Cf. *Institutio* 1.13.17.
[79] Cited in John H. Leith, "Foreword," in *Instruction in Faith*, 11.

Note again its deviation from the normal Western approach of starting with the one before moving to the three. Instead, it is the *Triunity* of God, explained in plain language, which served as the most fundamental article of faith. In his striving for clarity and simplicity however, Calvin's purposeful avoidance of the usual Patristic terminology became a point of contention almost instantaneously. Calvin's *epistula* to the Latin edition of the *Catechism* (Basel, March 1538) contained a defence of the reforming party's plain expression of the Trinity, as well as a veiled attack against Caroli (with whom the dispute unfolded):

> ... those who do not wish to judge most unfairly could easily have determined how unjust that one [Caroli] would be toward us, who attempted to belabour us before good men with suspicion no less obscure than devious; as if our opinion concerning the distinction of the persons in the one God disagreed somewhat with the orthodox consensus of the church. ... Surely we, by the Lord's grace, are not so badly trained nor so miserably versed in the Scriptures that we go about blindly in such bright light. For however involved, and yet not obscure, this proof may seem to others, we nevertheless know that there in the one essence of God the Trinity of persons is more clearly indicated.[80]

What Calvin's argument in the *epistula* implied, is that the *Catechism* now served as a confession of orthodoxy or "catholic attestation," hinging on the doctrine of the Trinity.[81] In a letter to Symon Grynaeus shortly after the Caroli incident, Calvin pertinently called the Trinity "that most important doctrine of the Christian religion," and sought to establish unity for the Protestant movement around this point.[82] Caroli's accusations nevertheless had a long-term influence on Calvin, and it is this matter we turn to next.

3.2.2.3 The Controversy with Caroli

Two aspects of Calvin's Trinitarian formulation came under attack almost immediately after the publication of the *Instruction*. The first had to do with the use of Patristic credal terminology, and the second, with Calvin's rather startling confession of Christ as *Yahweh* during the unfolding dispute. The confrontation with Pierre Caroli ensued in February 1537 when he was examined by Calvin and Pierre Viret for having defended the mass for the dead in a sermon in Lausanne. Caroli was a doctor of theology (of the Sorbonne), who due to his 'Protestant preaching' in Paris was eventually forced to seek refuge in Geneva in 1535. Causing unrest

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[80] John Calvin, *Catechism 1538*, trans. F. L. Battles, in I. J. Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 2.
[81] *Ibid.*, 2. See also De Greef's argument, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 124f.
[82] Cited in Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 31.

however, seemed to typify his ministry and it was not long before he came into conflict with Farel and Calvin, and eventually with his new colleague in Lausanne, Viret.[83] At Viret's request, Calvin had joined him in Caroli's examination. All seemed to fare well when suddenly, at the moment of acquiescence, Caroli had a change of heart and turned the tables on Calvin by accusing him (and Farel) of Arianism.[84] This he based on the fact that Farel had avoided Patristic terminology like 'Trinity' and 'person' in his *Summaire*. When Calvin offered a defence by quoting from his *Instruction* (itself devoid of the terminology), it sparked the debate out of proportion. Caroli rigidly insisted on the old formulas (Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian creeds) against all modern confessions, and Calvin refused to comply simply for the sake of compliance. As a result, a synod was requested in Lausanne at which Calvin had to deliver a major address (14 May 1537), and which later appeared in print as the *Confessio de Trinitate propter calumnias P. Caroli*.[85]

In the *Confessio*, Calvin reiterated his standpoint on Patristic terminology from the 1536 *Institutio* (2.A.8); that he was against the compulsory use of extra-Biblical words, but was willing to use them where necessary to safeguard the doctrine against heretical notions. Similarly, he stated that he did not reject the three creeds (Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian), but was against the 'tyranny' of obligatory subscription. Calvin thus refused to submit to Caroli's demand, and (only) in this sense, to the ancient catholic creeds. The matter has perplexed many historians.[86] Why was Calvin unwilling to submit to the creeds in this context, especially as he had done so already in the 1536 *Institutio*? The answer cannot lie elsewhere than in what Calvin felt compelled to defend with regards to the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity against Caroli. Caroli had demanded subscription to the Trinitarian formula, but for Calvin, mere subscription to a credal formula appeared to be arbitrary in comparison with safeguarding the Trinity's vital intrinsic role in Christian belief. Calvin's concerns were soteriological, and thus for the deity of Christ which secured redemption. As Butin put it:

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[83] For biographical details on Caroli and the chronology of the debate, see De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 171-173.

[84] That Caroli accused Calvin and Farel of *Arianism* seems rather ironic. His problem with Calvin was that he claimed that Christ was Yahweh and therefore in himself self-existent, i.e., the very opposite of Arianism. One can only presume that Caroli noted the manner in which Calvin differed from the Nicene and Post-Nicene theologians in his doctrinal formulation, and took issue with him on that basis. See Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 150-151.

[85] *CO* 9:703-10.

[86] Calvin's "attitude has variously been attributed to pride [Wendel], biblicism [Todd], commitment to 'liberty of conscience' [McNeill], resistance to the tyranny of individual demands for dogmatic conformity [MacKinnon], or disdain for church tradition [Ganoczy]." See Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 29.

... what was most at issue in the Caroli affair was neither the orthodoxy of Calvin's understanding of the Trinity, nor a pragmatic tactical victory for Calvin and his allies. It was the question of whether the doctrine of the Trinity should be allowed to function as a mere test of stagnant, historically evaluated "orthodoxy," or whether it must be acknowledged to constitute the vital intrinsic structure and the dynamic paradigm of present Christian belief, worship, and living.[87]

In spite of some hesitancy over Calvin's formulation, the result of the synod was a unanimous decision that Caroli immediately be deposed from his duties. Caroli subsequently fled to France and returned to the Roman Catholic Church, only to reappear later on a number of occasions to launch attacks on Calvin, Farel and the Reformation movement.[88] So adamant was Calvin in the *Confessio* about the deity of Christ however, that his bestowal on Christ of the name of Jehovah [*Yahweh*] continued to attract attention even from his own party.[89] In Bern he was asked to give reckoning for this in September 1537, and he presented an argument which was consciously anti-Arian and forcefully anti-subordinationist. He argued that within the unity of the Godhead, all aspects of deity which belonged to God also had to belong to Christ. It had to be conceded therefore that Christ was the only and eternal *Yahweh* from eternity (the name *Yahweh* being a predicate of the Godhead encompassing the Father and the Spirit and the Son). Aseity did not solely belong to the Father, but also to the Son and the Spirit.[90] Thus, in spite of his colleagues' hesitancy, Calvin gave a clear (though slightly unique) articulation of the mystery of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

But the Caroli matter continued to haunt Calvin,[91] and the 1539 *Institutio* saw the section on the Trinity expanded to almost twice its length whilst simultaneously revealing an increased knowledge of the Patristic and historical issues involved. In it Calvin attempted to clarify the doctrine in terms of the internal relations of the persons of the Godhead by emphasising the *perichoretic* relationship between the Father and the Son; "the Father is entirely in the Son and the Son entirely in the Father" (*Inst.* 1.13.19).[92] Gregory's dictum again came in useful as it was

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[87] *Ibid.*, 30.

[88] For further details, see De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 172-173.

[89] CR 9:706; *Nam antequam carnem indueret, verbum illud aeternum fuit ex patre ante saecula genitum, verus Deus unius cum patre essentiae, potentiae, maiestatis, adeoque Iehova, qui a se ipso semper habuit ut esset, et aliis subsistendi virtutem inspiravit.*

[90] J. Koopmans, *Het Oudkerkelijk Dogma in de Reformatie, bepaaldelijk bij Calvijn* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1938), 46.

[91] "Haunt" is not too strong a term to use. Cottret remarked that "the debate was not merely doctrinal; it raised a double question that would haunt Calvin for the rest of his days. Is the Trinity demonstrable from the sole standpoint of Scripture? Does the principle of *sola Scriptura*, of decisive recourse to the Bible as the fountainhead of authority, allow one to avoid ambiguity? ... It was a shaken man who emerged as victor from his confrontation with Caroli." Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. M. W. McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 126.

[92] In *De Christo Iehova* the following remarkable statement is found: "It is a certain fact that the distinction is based on nothing else but the secret of the Incarnation, which brings out the special relations of the Trinity" (CR 9:709). Cited

unfettered by the philosophical speculations imbedded in most Western dogma, and both the *Confessio* and 1539 *Institutio* contain the famous sentence: "This practical knowledge is doubtless more certain than any conceivable useless speculation" (as does the 1559 *Institutio*).[93] Calvin thus saw a proper understanding of the Trinity as an indispensable premise to the Christian faith.

Nevertheless, the public nature of the debate and the reforming party's orthodox reputation which hung in the balance, heavily impacted on Calvin. Caroli's unceasing attacks did not assist his peace of mind either. Even Farel came to the point where he felt it necessary to publish his own correspondence with Caroli in 1543, and Calvin likewise took up his pen to draft a pseudonymous treatise; *Pro Farrello et collegis eius adversus Petri Caroli calumnas defensio Nicolai Gallasii* in 1545,[94] an apologetic expansion and commentary on the earlier *Confessio*. The salient points of his argument are contained in the 1559 *Institutio*.

3.2.2.4 The Servetus Affair

The case and trial of Michael Servetus has received so much politicised attention in Calvin scholarship, that liberty can be taken to explore the still unresolved matter of the exact point of their Trinitarian disagreement.[95] From the outset the correspondence between Servetus and Calvin, which started as early as 1546, contained Servetus' questioning of Christ's 'Sonship.' Calvin took pains in responding to Servetus' queries, though it must be noted that Servetus had as early as 1531 and 1532 written two treatises on the Trinity in which he questioned Nicene orthodoxy.[96] Servetus' own conception of the Trinity was rather obscure, as on the one hand he displayed Arian (subordinationist) tendencies through his appeal to the "purer" pre-Nicene monarchian Trinitarianism of Irenaeus and Tertullian, and on the other, his construal of the incarnation within God's redemptive work lent itself to Sabellianism (modalism).[97] How he could have held to both heretical extremes at the same time, is a mystery. Bray has insightfully

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in Koopmans. *Het Oudkerkelijk Dogma in de Reformatie*, 60. It is also important to note that Calvin never used the word *perichoresis* in his explanations of the internal relations of the Godhead. The concept is however clearly present.

[93] Here it reads: "This practical knowledge is doubtless more certain and firmer than any idle speculation. There, indeed, does the pious mind perceive the very presence of God, and almost touches him, when it feels itself quickened, illumined, preserved, justified, and sanctified" (*Inst.* 1.13.13).

[94] *CO* 7:289-340.

[95] The most influential (but not necessarily correct) twentieth century study is that of Roland Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The life and death of Michael Servetus, 1511-1553* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960). See also Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Geneva, 1978). No Calvin biography or survey is complete without reference to Servetus, and most Church Histories however brief, cover the affair.

[96] *De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem* (1531) and *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri duo* (1532). Both were included in revised form in his *Christianismi restitutio* (1553), a work which may have been a direct attempt to counter Calvin's *Institutio*.

[97] Servetus, because of his Neoplatonic framework (opposition between form and matter, temporal and eternal) struggled to make sense of the human and divine relationship implied by the incarnation.

suggested that Servetus' Spanish background may have exposed him to forms of Arianism, a typical Eastern heresy, while his exposure to the Western Augustinian tradition which is susceptible to modalism at the hands of the theologically unskilled, may have swayed him in the Sabellian direction.[98] The puzzling question is why Calvin felt that such an illogical theological synthesis was worthy of his attention and refutation, especially at a time when so many other oppositional forces were at work against him. The answer, which most analysts of the Servetus affair fail to identify, is that what Servetus was trying to accomplish happened to be exactly the opposite of what Calvin himself was putting forth.[99] What Calvin was attempting, as we have noted before, was something of a synthesis of Eastern and Western Trinitarian elements into a principally Biblical framework. A task he held to be paramount. It was not merely that he had to uphold the Reformation identification with Nicene orthodoxy, he had already demonstrated a willingness to question the ancient authorities if the Biblical doctrines pertaining to salvation were at stake, but Servetus' heretical imperative appeared to touch directly on Calvin's own agenda of basing soteriology on a Biblical and Trinitarian foundation.

The technical burden of Calvin's opposition to Servetus lay in the belief that the persons of the Trinity were equal to one another in every respect. The Medieval tradition had qualified the Nicene and Athanasian credal equality between the persons of the Godhead, by designating the Father as the source of divinity and by making the Holy Spirit the 'bond' of unity between the Father and the Son. The Son was generated and the Spirit spirated from the Father (and the Son). Calvin did not directly deny this Augustinian construal as much as he insisted that each person of the Trinity was *autotheos*, God in own right and not merely by divine appointment or derivation. Warfield rightly recognised this as the key to Calvin's Trinitarian understanding, and it is easy to see how Calvin's anti-Origenist (anti-subordinationist) stance cut through its Servetan guise. Calvin explicitly identified the link between Origen and Servetus in the *Institutio* 1.13.23-29. Furthermore, the Sabellian element latent in the Western tradition similarly came under fire from Calvin, in that he held each person of the Trinity to be co-equal in their divinity and united with each other not through sharing an impersonal *essence*, but through their mutual fellowship and co-inherence applied at the level of *person* — the Cappadocian doctrine of *perichoresis*.[100] Calvin was thus able to affirm the true and eternal Sonship of Christ against

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[98] Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 200-201.

[99] Bray is the only one (to our knowledge) who picks up this point, which appears to be perfectly obvious once it has been highlighted. *Ibid.*, 201.

[100] *Ibid.*, 202.

Servetus' clumsy yet provocative question "how is the Godness that is in Christ, the Son?"[101] As early as 1553, Calvin had already asserted the full divinity of the Son in the context of redemption against Servetus' teaching in his *Commentary on John* 1:1:

> And this doctrine [of Christ's eternal divinity] is highly necessary to be known; for since apart from God we ought not at all to seek life and salvation, how could our faith rest on Christ, if we did not know with certainty what is here taught? By these words, therefore, the Evangelist assures us that we do not withdraw from the only and eternal God, when we believe in Christ, and likewise that life is now restored to the dead through the kindness of him who was the source and cause of life, when the nature of man was still uncorrupted. ... Servetus, a haughty scoundrel belonging to the Spanish nation, invents the statement, that this eternal *Speech* began to exist at that time when he was displayed in the creation of the world, as if he did not exist before his power was made known by external operation. Very differently does the Evangelist teach in this passage; for he does not ascribe to *the Speech* a *beginning* of time, but says that he was *from the beginning*, and thus rises beyond all ages. I am fully aware how this dog barks against us, and what cavils were formerly raised by the Arians ...

Immediately following the execution of Servetus on 27 October 1553, Calvin felt compelled to justify Servetus' condemnation. His *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate, contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani* appeared in February 1554 along with a French translation.[102] But it was not sufficient to quell the rising tide of unhappiness over the matter. Calvin was plagued by its consequences throughout his remaining days,[103] and disenchantment with the whole affair still surfaces from time to time in scholarly and popular literature.[104] A proper understanding of Calvin's concern for what he saw to be a direct attack on the Gospel however, will go a long way towards bringing perspective back into a frequently misunderstood and misconstrued debate.

3.2.2.5 The Italian Anti-Trinitarians

An aspect of Servetus' teaching which was not elaborated on above, was his denial of the *hypostatic union* of the two natures of Christ. Calvin correctly saw in Servetus' Christological

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[101] Cited in Koopmans, *Het Oudkerkelijk Dogma in de Reformatie*, 63. It is interesting to note that Servetus held firm to his beliefs right until the end. His last words were; "Jesus, Son of the eternal God, take pity on me." Cited in De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 176. With this implied that Jesus was not the eternal Son of God, but Son of the eternal God.

[102] *CO* 8:453-644.

[103] Sebastian Castellio seems to have been the main antagonist, with a number of works coming from his pen. Theodore Beza once replied on Calvin's behalf in 1554, and Calvin himself in 1557 and in 1558. For details on the publications, see De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 177-178.

[104] Bainton's *Hunted Heretic*, provides a fine example, and other works will no doubt follow.

teaching a denial of both the true divinity and the true humanity of Christ, and thus effectually of human redemption.[105] What is of interest here, is to note that the teachings of Servetus had come to influence amongst others, the Italian Francesco Stancaro, who was resident in Poland.[106] By holding to similar premises as Servetus, Stancaro claimed that Christ was mediator only according to his human nature. Stancaro thus set the stage for a form of unitarianism, which in turn generated a Polish anti-Nicene movement in the late 1550s of multiple expression. By its rationalistic intent, this movement seemed to prefer either Tritheism or Modalism as more logical alternatives to the mystery of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Three intellectuals associated with the Italian refugee congregation in Geneva, Matteo Gribaldi (a lawyer), Giorgio Blandrata (a physician), and Giovanni Valentino Gentilis (a church leader), embraced aspects of this anti-Trinitarianism and caused considerable trouble for Calvin.[107]

Gribaldi for example, held to Christ's divinity, but refused to talk about Christ being of one essence with the Father. Calvin correctly deduced therefore that he was not speaking of the one true God, but of two gods.[108] Blandrata had put a number of Trinity-related questions to Calvin in 1557, but simultaneously expounded his anti-Trinitarian ideas in the Italian congregation to great confusion of all. Calvin answered with his *Responsum as quaestiones Georgii Blandratae* in 1558,[109] but the seeds of confusion were by then thoroughly imbedded in the congregation. Finally, Gentilis, who initially subscribed to a confession which was drawn up to end the Italian confusion in May 1558, started voicing anti-Trinitarian ideas until he was imprisoned in July of the same year. After being released under strict conditions, he broke them in 1559 and challenged Calvin in his *Antidoto* (a challenge to the *Institutio* 1.13.20-29), to which Calvin replied in 1561 with his *Impietas Valentini Gentilis detecta et palam traducta, qui Christum non sine sacrilega blasphemia Deum essentiatum esse fingit* (*CO* 9:361-420). Gentilis eventually moved to Poland in 1563, but was expelled in 1566 because of his views and condemned to death the

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[105] See Butin's uncited quote and explanation in *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 34.

[106] Calvin became involved in the debate with the Polish Unitarians and wrote two treatises against Stancaro; *Responsum ad fratres Polonos, quomodo mediator sit Christus, ad refutandum Stancaro errorem* (*CO* 9:333-422) in June 1560, and *Ministrorum ecclesiae Genevensis responsio ad nobiles Polonos et Franciscum Stancarum Mantuanum de controversia mediatores* (*CO* 9:345-58) in March 1561. In 1563 he became involved again and wrote *Brevis admonitio Ioannis Calvini ad fratres Polonos, ne triplicem in Deo essentiam pro tribus personis imaginando, tres sibi deos fabricent* (*CO* 9:629-38), and *Epistola Ioannis Calvini qua fidem admonitionis ab eo nuper editae apud Polonos confirmat* (*CO* 9:641-50).

[107] On the subject of Calvin and the Italian Anti-Trinitarians, see Antonio Rotondò, *Calvin and the Italian Anti-Trinitarians*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (St Louis, 1969).

[108] Gribaldi appeared before the Consistory and Council in 1555, but was not charged as he lived in the territory of Bern. De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 178-179.

[109] *CO* 9:321-32. The 1559 *Institutio* contains a summary of these. For an English translation, see Joseph N. Tylenda, "The warning that went unheeded: John Calvin on Giorgio Biandrata," *Calvin Theological Journal*, 12 (1977): 24-62. Blandrata fled to Bern before he could be called to answer for his views.

same year in the district of Bern.[110]

Calvin's confrontation with the Italian anti-Nicenes is important not only because it again illustrated the centrality of the Trinitarian issue in his life, but also because it allowed him to clarify significant aspects of his Trinity doctrine. The encounter with Blandrata for instance, led Calvin to explain the concept of *persona* more carefully, a word which can be used in both a Christological and Trinitarian way. In Trinitarian usage Calvin carefully defined it as follows in the 1559 *Institutio*:

> *Personam igitur voco subsistentiam in Dei essentia, quae ad alios relata, proprietate incommunicabili distinguitur.* ["Person," therefore, I call a "subsistence" in God's essence, which, while related to the others, is distinguished by an incommunicable quality.] (*Inst.* 1.13.6)

As Koopmans and others have observed, "a shorter, more lucid and apt definition one cannot find in all of trinitarian history."[111] Note that *subsistentia* [*hypostasis*] is taken from Greek theology, and *relata ad* from Latin theology. *Incommunicabili* is appreciative of the medieval contribution, whilst *proprietate ... distinguitur* guards against the scholastic intention of investigating after God's 'being' or 'essence.' The explanation which unfolds in the *Institutio*, elucidates the notion of 'distinction but not separation' beautifully. Nonetheless, to remind his readers of the soteriological and redemptive aspect of Trinitarian revelation, Calvin referred to Tertullian's *oeconomia* concept:

> Nor am I displeased with Tertullian's definition, provided it be taken in the right sense, that there is a kind of distribution or economy in God which has no effect on the unity of essence. (*Inst.* 1.13.6)

At the point of the relationship between *persona* and *essentia*, Gentilis entered the debate. He was of the opinion that *aseitas* (aseity) belonged only to the Father, and that the Father was not a *hypostasis* within the one being of God, but that he was God himself.[112] Gentilis in this sense expressed a strong pre-Nicene subordinationism in order to posit a substantial difference between 'God' (seen as *essentiator*) and 'Logos.' Taking up Gentilis' argument Calvin remarked:

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[110] See De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 179-180.

[111] "Korter, helderder en juister kan men de rekening van de geschiedenis de Triniteitsleer niet opmaken." Koopmans, *Het Oudkerkelijk Dogma in de Reformatie*, 64.

[112] *"Solus pater est autotheos, id est, sine ullo principio aut origine inventus"* CR 9:374 th. 8; cf, th. 6: *"Pater non est hypostasis, sive persona, in uno Deo: sed teste apostolo, 'est unus ille Deus, a quo omnia."* Cited in *Ibid.*, 65.

... if Father and God were synonymous, thus would the Father be the deifier; nothing would be left in the Son but a shadow; and the Trinity would be nothing else but the conjunction of the one God with two created things. (*Inst.* 1.13.25)

It appeared that Gentilis' definition of *persona* was more in line with the medieval description of *individuum*, to which Calvin objected as it misconstrued the relationship between the Father and the Son. Subordination was by reason of order, not essence:

They object that Christ, if he be properly God, is wrongly called Son. To this I have replied that when a comparison of one Person is made with another, the name of God is not to be taken without particularisation, but restricted to the Father, seeing that he is the beginning of deity, not in the bestowing of essence, as fanatics babble, but by reason of order. ... Therefore to restrict the name "God" to the Father, to the exclusion of the Son, is neither lawful nor right. On this account, also, John indeed declares him to be the true God [John 1:1; 1 John 5:20] lest anyone think of placing him in a second rank of deity beneath the Father. Moreover, I wonder what these makers of new gods mean when, having confessed Christ as true God, they immediately exclude him from the deity of the Father. As if he could be true God and not be one God, and as if a divinity transfused were anything but a newfangled fiction! (*Inst.* 1.13.26)

Calvin's tone and manner of deriding his opponents (cf. the paragraph above and the *Institutio* 1.13.21-19), revealed that the Trinitarian debates lay very close to his own heart. They may indeed have been responsible for impacting Calvin's teaching in a similar manner to which Luther's circumstances contributed to the shape of his theological contribution. Butin highlighted this point:

By and large, sufficient attention has not been given in assessments of Calvin's thought to the prominence of the trinitarian concerns in the doctrinal controversies of his ministry, or to the profound contribution that these encounters made to the trinitarian shape of his emerging Christian vision. ... The problem is only one facet of a broader inclination in Calvin studies to divorce consideration of his doctrine from examination of his life and ministry, and *vice versa*.[113]

The 'historical outline' we offered above is therefore a necessary hermeneutical step in understanding the factors leading to Calvin's configuration of his Trinity doctrine. More significantly, it gives proof of the centrality of a Trinitarian-soteriological perspective in the

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[113] Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 26.

mind of Calvin, and the evolving paradigmatic position the doctrine came to have in his theological framework.

3.2.3 THEOLOGICAL OUTLINE (1559 *Institutio*)

We are now in the position to provide a brief summary outline of those features (mostly introduced above) which make Calvin's Trinity doctrine uniquely his own, as well as axiomatic in doctrinal history. The main (though not exclusive) basis for our discussion will be the 1559 *Institutio*, his most comprehensive exposition of the topic.

3.2.3.1 *God Himself*

As has been argued in the previous chapter, the nature of the *Institutio* is that of a treatise on the knowledge of God. The kind of knowledge which Calvin was primarily interested in, was not natural knowledge as held by all human beings on the basis of either the *sensus divinitatis* or the *semen reliogiones*, it was extra-ordinary knowledge which came from God's Word received in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, a knowing encounter initiated by God and a knowledge of God imparted by God himself. The thrust of the work therefore fell not only within the domain of epistemology and ontology, but also of *religio*. It is *knowing* God that focused Calvin's attention, and therefore an anti-speculative stance that determined his attitude toward the subject:

> ... we are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart. (*Inst.* 1.5.9)

The same anti-speculative intent informed his attitude towards the being of God, *God himself*. God was to be approached with *pietas*; "that reverence joined with the love of God which knowledge of his benefits brings about" (*Inst.* 1.2.1 cf. 1.2.2; 1.10.2). Inquiring after God's essence as the Scholastic theological method dictated was thus an illegitimate enterprise, and the appropriate question of knowing was *qualis sit Deus* not *quid sit Deus*.

> What is God [*quid sit Deus*]? Men who pose this question are merely toying with idle speculations. It is more important for us to know of what sort he is [*qualis sit*

Deus] and what is consistent with his nature. What good is it to profess with Epicurus some sort of God who has cast aside the care of the world only to amuse himself in idleness? What help is it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do? Rather, our knowledge should serve first to teach us fear and reverence; secondly, with it as our guide and teacher, we should learn to seek every good from him, and, having received it, to credit it to his account ... (*Inst.* 1.2.2)

Furthermore, the 'what is' question was futile as God's essence was "incomprehensible" (*Inst.* 1.5.1),[114] a critical concept for Calvin. *Incomprehensibility* he understood, following Irenaeus and Hilary, to be in accordance with the fact that since God alone knows himself, he can only be known to us through himself and his self-testimony:

Here, indeed, if anywhere in the secret mysteries of Scripture we ought to play the philosopher soberly and with great moderation; let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends. For how can the human mind measure off the measureless essence of God according to its own little measure, a mind as yet unable to establish for certain the nature of the sun's body, though men's eyes daily gaze upon it? Indeed, how can the mind by its own leading come to search out God's essence when it cannot even get to its own? *Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself.* For, as Hilary says, he is the one fit witness to himself, and is not known except through himself. But we shall be "leaving it to him" if we conceive him to be as he reveals himself to us, without inquiring about him elsewhere than from his Word. (*Inst.* 1.13.21)[115]

Does God's incomprehensibility however imply that one cannot really know God himself? For Calvin it certainly did not imply either scepticism or agnosticism as to the being of God. It simply meant that "God is comprehended in Christ alone" (*Inst.* 2.6.4), and that the limits and boundaries of inquiry were set by his sacred Word (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.21). Incomprehensibility was thus a technical term by which he expressed the Biblical truths of human sinfulness and necessity of divine revelation. He wanted to guard God's transcendence, and articulate his own eradicable sense of mystery about God. (From this perspective it is important to include in understanding Calvin's doctrine of God, the sections on idolatry in the *Institutio* 1.11-12, as well as his sermons on Job.)

Calvin thus introduced a distinction (though not a separation) between God as he is in himself and God as he is toward us. This distinction was not unique to Calvin, as it was already

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[114] Yet "upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory" (*Inst.* 1.5.1).
[115] [Emphasis added.]

anticipated in the Medieval period and earlier.[116] What was unique, was Calvin's simple Trinitarian solution to the problems it may have posed. So, for Calvin, in spite of the fact that God by virtue of being God was humanly incomprehensible in the way only he can comprehend himself, he did "designate himself by another special mark to distinguish himself more precisely from idols" ... :

> For he so proclaims himself the sole God as to offer himself to be contemplated clearly in three persons. Unless we grasp these, only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God. (*Inst.* 1.13.2)

Calvin thus bridged the speculative gulf between God-as-he-is-in-himself and God-as-he-is-toward-us through the persons of the Trinity. One of the 'systematic' ways in which he worked this out in the *Institutio*, was by placing the doctrine of the Trinity in the book on God the Creator, rather than under book two on the God the Redeemer. Calvin's doctrine of God *was* therefore his doctrine of the Trinity. This is not to posit in the sixteenth-century Calvin something comparable to the twentieth-century Karl Rahner; "The 'economic' trinity is the 'immanent' trinity and the 'immanent' trinity is the 'economic' trinity."[117] Rahner's dictum collapses the *being* of God into the *act* of God, and threatens the freedom of God at the level of ontology.[118] Calvin no doubt would have avoided such a 'necessitarian' move if it were to have cropped up in his day. His stance on the nature of God and his grace required the distinction to be upheld. Nevertheless, Calvin desired to be a 'minimalist' Trinitarian (as our discussion below will further illustrate) and vigorously held to the *simplicity* (cf. *Inst.* 1.13 throughout) of God's being understood through the persons of the Trinity. As a result, he steered clear of any major (philosophical and abstract) discussion of God's attributes, as if these somehow 'added up' to the divine being. The *Institutio* is devoid of an exposition of the *virtutes Dei* as contained in most Medieval treatises. The simplicity of God's being is paramount and best seen in an 'uncluttered' doctrine of God's Triunity:

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[116] See for example Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* 1.12.

[117] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oats, 1970), 22.

[118] In effect Rahner claims that 'God is what God does, and what God does is what God is.' In other words, God could not have done anything than what he did; if God is what he does, then the thought of God doing any other than what he did, would be to suppose that God is not God! Calvin saw distinction in this sense that the activities of the Trinity (redemption or creation) were free activities in that they might not have been undertaken. There is no necessity in creation or redemption; God could have done other than what he did. Calvin was doubly assertive of the fact that God was not only free in that he redeemed, but also free in whom he chose to be redeemed! (I am indebted to Paul Helm for these insights.) See Paul Helm, *Making Sense of John Calvin: An Introduction to his Ideas*, A Regent College Audio Initiative (Vancouver: Regent Publishing, 2001). Thompson also offers a thorough critique against Rahner's dictum in *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 26-30.

Therefore, let those who dearly love soberness, and who will be content with the measure of faith, receive in brief form what is useful to know: namely, that, when we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood *a single, simple essence*,[119] in which we comprehend three persons, or hypostases. (*Inst.* 1.13.20)

3.2.3.2 Trinitarian Language

Calvin's concern for formulating theology on the basis of the Word, that is, by means of Biblical exegesis, put him at odds with the Scholastic tendency of synthesising Biblical teaching with prior Patristic and philosophical notions. This had very interesting ramifications for his attitude towards Patristic terminology when it came to describing God's being. As we learnt from the debates above, he insisted that forms and thoughts of speech about God had to be kept within the limits set by the Scripture (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.5). But note Calvin's insistence on not being unnecessarily 'Biblicist' either:

> Yet some measure ought to be preserved: we ought to seek from Scripture a sure rule for both thinking and speaking, to which both the thoughts of our minds and the words of our mouths should be conformed. But what prevents us from explaining in clearer words those matters in Scripture which perplex and hinder our understanding, yet which conscientiously and faithfully serve the truth of Scripture itself, and are made use of sparingly and modestly and on due occasion? There are quite enough examples of this sort of thing. What is to be said, moreover, when it has been proved that the church is utterly compelled to make use of the words "Trinity" and "persons"? If anyone, then, finds fault with the novelty of the words, does he not deserve to be judged as bearing the light of truth unworthily, since he is finding fault only with what renders the truth plain and clear? (*Inst.* 1.13.3)

> However, the novelty of words of this sort (if such it must be called) becomes especially useful when the truth is to be asserted against false accusers, who evade it by their shifts. (*Inst.* 1.13.4)

This stance allowed him to cleverly steer a course between the Biblicism which avoided Patristic terminology altogether, and the formalistic orthodoxy which was disjoint from Scripture. Note in the following quotation his insistence on being able to articulate what the

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[119] Cf. *Institutio* 1.13.2: "For since *the essence of God is simple and undivided, and he contains all in himself, without portion or derivation, but in integral perfection,* the Son will be improperly, even foolishly, called his 'stamp'."

Scripture says in a simple manner, and his subsequent use of Patristic terms.

> If, therefore, these terms were not rashly invented, we ought to beware lest by repudiating them we be accused of overweening rashness. Indeed, I could wish they were buried, if only among all men this faith were agreed on: that Father and Son and Spirit are one God, yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but that they are differentiated by a peculiar quality. (*Inst.* 1.13.5)

If that is then the truth about God, there is Biblical evidence for using the concept *homoousios* and for positing three distinct *hypostases* [cf. 'peculiar quality' above] in God, accepting that there is a distinction between the *hypostasis* of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit. He was also willing to accept *persona* as the equivalent to *hypostasis*, and *subsistentia* as its literal translation. (See our discussion of Patristic Terminology [3.1.3] above.)

The peculiar thing which came out in the encounter with Caroli however, is that Calvin refused to submit to credal Trinitarian subscription for its own sake. The substance of the doctrine was far more significant than its formulation, and the realities the terms were meant to signify were more important than the terms themselves. He scoffed at the mere repetition of words or phrases which made no exegetical or Biblical contribution to our understanding of God. The Biblical revelation of the Triune God was primary, and as far as the orthodox dogma was a faithful expression of what the Scripture taught, he sought to uphold it.

Two very important implications spring from Calvin's Biblical and exegetical prioritising. The first is that speech about the mystery of God's Triune being, even if it is only for purposes of exclusion of heresy, necessarily commits the theological enterprise to the use of (some) extra-Biblical terminology. It is of little use to deny this necessity, and of great importance to ensure that it is done within the constraints of what the Word of God says. Secondly, Calvin's method of critical interaction with the already existing theological apparatus (and indeed *tradition*) is refreshing. Neither wholesale acceptance nor abandon is advocated. An appreciative yet discerning reading of the fathers and the creeds is correlated to the Biblical text. What one finds then in Calvin is a judicious subscription to Nicene Orthodoxy (and the history of dogma), as well as a revitalising (Biblical) manner of reforming orthodoxy.

3.2.3.3 The Deity of Christ

It was crystal clear to Calvin that the eternal deity of Christ was central to the doctrine of the Trinity, as was the distinguishing property which made him distinct from the Father and the

Spirit. When these two aspects were held together the whole Deity appeared and God was "more clearly disclosed" (*Inst.* 1.13.16). It follows therefore that the definition of *person* was critical to Calvin's understanding of the Trinity. But before examining it, it is necessary to be reminded of his radical claims with regards to Christ's eternal deity. Calvin vehemently defended this truth against a number of opponents, and in the *Institutio* 1.13.7-13 we find his developed and mature argument.

First (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.7-9), Christ was the incarnate or substantial Word (*verbum substantiale*) of God. He was not just a voice uttered by God but rather the eternal and essential Word of the Father. He was without beginning and from the beginning and was together with the Father the Creator of all things. Secondly (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.9-11), Biblical testimony showed that the name of God, *Yahweh* (God's substantive name), who proclaimed himself as 'I am who I am,' was applied to Christ in the New Testament under the translation 'Lord' (κύριος). Jesus was therefore to be recognised as the true *Yahweh*, the God whom the Jews worshipped now manifest in the flesh. There was thus oneness in being between the Father and the Son. But thirdly (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.12-13), there was also oneness in agency and power between them, as the saving work of the Son was continuous with the work of the Father from the beginning of creation. For, "if apart from God there is no salvation, no righteousness, no life, yet Christ contains all these in himself, God is certainly revealed" (*Inst.* 1.13.13). If Christ could therefore truly grant salvation on the basis of his own being, he had to be God. Finally, Christ was presented in the Gospel as the one in whom we are to believe and to pray to, as not only "by the Son's intercession do those things which the Heavenly Father bestows come to us," but "by mutual participation in power the Son himself is the author of them" (*Inst.* 1.13.13). Calvin went on to affirm in a notable experiential-authoritative statement that "this practical knowledge is doubtless more certain and firmer than any idle speculation," as the pious mind there perceives "the very presence of God, and almost touches him, when it feels itself quickened, illumined, preserved, justified, and sanctified" (*Inst.* 1.13.13). (The full significance of Calvin's explicit argumentation for Christ's deity in his Trinitarian formulation will become clearer under the next section.)

From this point onwards, Calvin employed basically the same form of argument to establish the deity of the Spirit, laying special stress on the identification of the activity of the Spirit within the activity of God (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.14f.). In the *Institutio* 1.13.16 he returned to God's unity with reference to Ephesians 5:5 and Matthew 28:19, understood in terms of God having made himself known more familiarly in three persons. The one God was truly knowable only

through knowledge of these three persons.

3.2.3.4 Triunity

(*Intra-Trinitarian Relations*)

We now return to Calvin's understanding of *person* as a clue to understanding God's Triunity. Because of its significance in elucidating Calvin's doctrinal position, we quote his explanation of *person* at length. (Calvin himself called this section "The meaning of the most important conception."):

> "Person," therefore, I call a "subsistence" in God's essence, which, while related to the others, is distinguished by an incommunicable quality. By the term "subsistence" we would understand something different from "essence." For if the Word were simply God, and yet possessed no other characteristic mark, John would wrongly have said that the Word was always with God [John 1:1]. When immediately after he adds that the Word was also God himself, he recalls us to the essence as a unity. But because he could not be with God without residing in the Father, hence emerges the idea of a subsistence, which, even though it has been joined with the essence by a common bond and cannot be separated from it, yet has a special mark whereby it is distinguished from it. Now, of the three subsistences I say that each one, while related to the others, is distinguished by a special quality. This "relation" is here distinctly expressed: because where simple and indefinite mention is made of God, this name pertains no less to the Son and the Spirit than to the Father. But as soon as the Father is compared with the Son, the character of each distinguishes the one from the other. Thirdly, whatever is proper to each individually, I maintain to be incommunicable because whatever is attributed to the Father as a distinguishing mark cannot agree with, or be transferred to, the Son. Nor am I displeased with Tertullian's definition, provided it be taken in the right sense, that there is a kind of distribution or economy in God which has no effect on the unity of essence. (*Inst.* 1.13.6)

The simplicity of this paragraph belies its profundity. In it Calvin brings together Gregory of Nazianzen's concept of Father, Son and Spirit as *eternal subsistent relations* in God and Richard St Victor's concept of *incommunicable subsistence* or *exsistence*, instead of the notion of *individual substance* developed by Boethius and later adopted by Thomas Aquinas.[120] What this signifies is an approach to the Trinity which sees the interrelations of the three persons not as detracting from God's unity of Being, but as constituting that unity. It is a true *Triune* conception of God's being. And, as Torrance also pointed out, it is an "essentially soteriological and ontological approach to the Trinity similar to that of Athanasius, one governed by the saving

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[120] Torrance, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 49-50.

significance of the consubstantial relation between the Incarnate Son and God the Father."[121]

On Biblical grounds then, Calvin gave a stronger account of the deity of the Son and of the Spirit both in their distinguishing properties and in their consubstantial relations with the Father than any of his theological predecessors. It represented a significant contribution to expounding the Triunity or intra-Trinitarian relations of God. However, Calvin was quick not to 'indulge' himself in intra-Trinitarian relations and so forfeit his sense of mystery and simplicity (again taking a cue from Gregory):

> Again, Scripture sets forth a distinction of the Father from the Word, and of the Word from the Spirit. Yet the greatness of the mystery warns us how much reverence and sobriety we ought to use in investigating this. And that passage in Gregory of Nazianzus vastly delights me: "I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendour of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one."[122] Let us not, then, be led to imagine a trinity of persons that keeps our thoughts distracted and does not at once lead them back to that unity. Indeed, the words "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" imply a real distinction — let no one think that these titles, whereby God is variously designated from his works, are empty — but a distinction, not a division. (*Inst.* 1.13.17)

The distinction of the persons Calvin sees as existing antecedently and inherently in the Godhead (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.17-21), and not as having their origin at the incarnation. But, if God was known through the persons of the Godhead, how was his indivisible unity to be understood in relation to the persons? Calvin asserted that the distinction of the persons did not contravene "the utterly simple unity of God," because "in each hypostasis the whole divine nature is understood, with this qualification — that to each belongs his own peculiar quality"; "The Father is wholly in the Son, the Son wholly in the Father, even as he himself declares: 'I am in the Father, and the Father in me' [John 14:10]" (*Inst.* 1.13.19). Appealing to Augustine, Calvin affirmed that the persons were not separated or distinguished from one another by any difference of essence. This was a clear affirmation of (Western) Nicene Orthodoxy, yet his (Eastern) emphasis on knowledge of God through the *persona*, was powerful and unique.

The question then naturally arises as to the attribution of *principium* or beginning to the

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[121] *Ibid.*, 50.

[122] Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oratio* 40.41. The passage continues: 'When I think of any One of the Three I think of him as a whole, and my vision is filled, and the greater part of what I conceive escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One so as to attribute a greater greatness to others. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one luminary, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.' Cited in Torrance, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 55. Compare Calvin's *Commentary on John* 1.1; *Epistula* 607; 1554 *Institutio* 6.17; and *Refutatio errorum M. Serveti.*

Father (the Eastern method/ problem of maintaining unity in the Godhead). Calvin addressed this matter in two ways. First, he had already asserted that "the observance of an *order* is not meaningless or superfluous":

> ... to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity. (*Inst.* 1.13.18)

Secondly, he vigorously denied all elements of ontological subordination. Against the apparent contradictions in the statements of the Fathers to this effect, he had to assert that "Christ with respect to himself is called God," and "with respect to the Father, Son"; and "the Father with respect to himself is called God, and with respect to the Son, Father" (*Inst.* 1.13.19).[123] The Son with respect to himself (*a se*), was *unicum principium*, and in relation to the Father *filii principium*. This was a rather circumspect way of eliminating all remnants of Origenist subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity. Calvin concluded:

> Therefore, let those who dearly love soberness, and who will be content with the measure of faith, receive in brief form what is useful to know: namely, that, when we profess to believe in one God, under the name of God is understood a single, simple essence [*unicum et simplicem essentiam*], in which we comprehend three persons, or *hypostases*. Therefore, whenever the name of God is mentioned without particularisation, there are designated no less the Son and the Spirit than the Father; but where the Son is joined to the Father, then the relation of the two enters in; and so we distinguish among the persons. But because the peculiar qualities in the persons carry an order within them, e.g., in the Father is the beginning and the source [*principium et origo*], so often as mention is made of the Father and the Son together, or the Spirit, the name of *God* is peculiarly applied to the Father. *In this way, unity of essence is retained, and a reasoned order is kept, which yet takes nothing away from the deity of the Son and the Spirit.* (*Inst.* 1.13.20)[124]

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[123] Torrance highlights that though Calvin attributed these statements to Augustine, Augustine in actual fact received them from Gregory of Nazianzen: "Thus in spite of his judicious deployment of citations from Augustine, the recognised *magister theologiae* in the West, Calvin's trinitarian convictions were actually rather close to those of the Greek Fathers, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen and Cyril of Alexandria. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Melanchthon should have given Calvin the designation '*Theologus*' with which the Greek East had distinguished Gregory Nazianzen as 'Gregory the Theologian'." *Ibid.*, 58.

[124] [Emphasis added.]

(*Autousia*)

Without a doubt, the crux of Calvin's Trinitarian argument revolved around the eternal deity of the Son apart from his particularising relation to the Father. Christ was αὐτόθεος, God in and from himself. In other words, with respect to *being* there was no difference between Christ and God. Christ shared the same being as the Father, even though he was distinct from him as his Son. This "undiluted conception of the Nicene *homoousios*"[125] which was hammered out in the fray of the Trinitarian conflicts,[126] is perhaps the most distinctive feature of Calvin's Trinity doctrine.

As the sixteenth century saw the first glimpses of the inauguration of a new period of intellectual liberty in rethinking old dogma (especially amongst Protestants of differing persuasions), a range of misconceptions grew around the accomplishment of Nicaea. Calvin it seemed, in his growing understanding of the fourth century Trinitarian achievement, took it upon himself to stamp out some of the delusions attributed to it, especially concerning the deity of the Son. The notion that divine origin belonged to the Father alone and that he was the *essentiator* of the Son, was particularly repugnant to him. He would have nothing to do with the notion of 'derived deity,' because a 'half-God' could not save (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.23). What developed was an interesting case of Calvin having to counter the notion set forth by the Cappadocians (to whom he was indebted for borrowing the concept *hypostasis*) of the oneness of the Godhead being derived from the *person* of the Father (rather than the *being* or *ousia* of the Godhead) who was the single principle or cause of deity for the Son and the Spirit.[127] As we shall see, Calvin countered this conception vigorously, as well as the latent subordinationism harboured by its Western counterpart. He did this by returning again and again to the eternal deity of the Son, and thus to unity at the level of *being* or *essence*:

> For whoever says that the Son has been given his essence from the Father denies that he has being from himself [*a se ipso*]. But the Holy Spirit gives the lie to this, naming him 'Jehovah' [*Yahweh*] ... If the distinction is in the essence, let them answer whether or not he has shared it with the Son. Indeed, this could not be done in part because it would be wicked to fashion a half-God. Besides, in this way they would basely tear apart the essence of God. It remains that the essence is wholly and perfectly common to Father and Son. If this is true, then there is indeed with respect to the essence no distinction of one from the other. (*Inst.* 1.13.23)

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[125] This useful phrase is borrowed from Torrance. *Ibid.*, 60.

[126] See the *Institutio* 1.13.21-29 which is a summary doctrinal constellation of the Trinitarian debates.

[127] Note that Gregory of Nazianzen also had the insight to call this account of the Trinity into question. See his *Oratio* 40.43; 43.30; cf. 29.15.

For Calvin, the deity and aseity (αυτοθεοτης) of the Son belonged inseparably together. To deny one or the other would be to deny the intrinsic consubstantiality of the Godhead. What was begotten by the Father was not the *deity* (essence) of the Son, but rather his *person*.[128]

> Therefore we say that deity in an absolute sense exists of itself; whence likewise we confess that the Son since he is God, exists of himself, but not in respect of his person; indeed, since he is the Son, we say that he exists from the Father. Thus his essence is without beginning; while the beginning of his person is God himself. (*Inst.* 1.13.25)

Yet the person of the Son eternally subsisted in the one being of God hypostatically. Calvin thus rejected the 'eternal generation' of the Son understood as an eternally ongoing communication of divine being from the Father to the Son; "Indeed it is foolish to imagine a continuous act of begetting, since it is clear that three persons have subsisted in God from eternity" (*Inst.* 1.13.29).[129] In the debate against Caroli Calvin maintained that "for the reason that Christ is rightly said to be the one eternal God, he is said to be self-existent."[130] Under the name of *Yahweh*, *autousia* (self-existence) is attributed to Christ. But, in regard to his person, as the Son to the Father, he is not from himself (*non esse a se ipso*). Both aspects have to be kept in mind when speaking of Christ; "I assert each to be true, both that Christ is from the Father, so that he is the second person, and that he is from himself, if we have regard to his divine Being *simpliciter*."[131] The *principium* of the Father is thus not applicable at the level of being, as if to suggest an ontological priority in the Godhead, but has to do with an order or arrangement of relations. Calvin is thus faithful to the ontological deity conferred to the Son (and the Spirit) in the New Testament, *and* to the normal three-fold order given to the persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). When Christ therefore stated that "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), it was not to be interpreted as attributing to Christ a subordinate divinity. It was to be understood economically and soteriologically in terms of Christ's mediatorial office (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.24, 26).

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[128] This must have been the way in which he understood the Nicene clauses about the Son being 'God of God' and 'begotten before all ages.'

[129] Cf. *Institutio* 1.13.6. Calvin takes issue with Peter Lombard's *Sentences* 1.9.10-15. It can be argued that Calvin took a mediating position between Nicea and a total rejection of the language of begottenness. Whichever way, he showed great sensitivity in finding a balance between God as he in himself and God as he is revealed to us. One must also take into consideration that what he said was both governed by the controversies and the constraints of the historical debate. For Calvin to have stepped away from either, would have been impossible. For an excellent discussion of the ramifications of Calvin's statements in later historical theology, see Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 256-258.

[130] *Adversus Calumnias P. Caroli*, CO 7:322. Cited in Torrance, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 64.

[131] CO 12:18. Cited in *Ibid.*, 65.

What Calvin was saying was not very different from the Cappadocians in terms of three mutually indwelling persons, except that he refused to concede to the *principium* of the Father.[132] This was an interesting position to occupy between Eastern and Western models of the Trinity. Essentially though, he was concerned about the deity of the Son, because salvation was compromised if the Son was not in any way fully divine.

A number of reactions came about as a result of Calvin's assertion that Christ 'from himself has both divinity and essence' (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.19). By applying to Christ the term αὐτόθεος Calvin had laid stress on the radical equality of the persons of the Godhead, and set himself in full opposition against any scheme which hinted at subordinationism. It is the peculiarity of ascribing to all three persons the status of αὐτόθεος which explains the widespread offence which was taken against Calvin's formulation. From Caroli onwards objections were raised and continued for centuries after Calvin's death. Even from within his own camp there were those who ventured to call it a novelty. Theologians who had grown accustomed to thinking about the Trinity in terms of *generation* and *procession* (the notions of perpetual communication of divine essence from the Father to the Son, and from the Father and the Son to the Spirit), could not but be challenged by Calvin's radical stress on the equality of the Father, Son and Spirit. Those within the Western tradition not used to such a radical consubstantial view of the persons would have raised the suspicion of Tritheism, while those within the Eastern tradition may have done the same because of the denial of the *principium* of the Father. Not surprisingly, Roman Catholic theologians from Genebrardus onwards attempted to bring against Calvin and his followers the stigma of heresy, labelling them the *Autotheanites*. Robert Bellarmine and Gregory of Valentia were more cautious in their criticism, but (erroneously) blamed Calvin for inaccuracy of phrase. Even the Lutheran theologians after Melanchthon, who was an ardent admirer Calvin's views, generally condemned it.[133] However, Calvin did nothing other than expose the latent subordinationism which was hidden beneath much of the thought of those who ardently claimed to stand in the Nicene tradition. By applying to Christ the designation of αὐτόθεος (and so to the Spirit) without reserve, Calvin "seemed violently revolutionary to men trained in the old forms of speech."[134] Yet, it would seem that Calvin faithfully continued the Church's efforts to appropriate the salvation that is in Christ, and the *homoousios* of the Nicene Fathers finally came to its full right by doing justice to the eternal deity of Christ.

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[132] If the being of God is simple and undivided and yet real distinctions eternally subsist in him (Father is different from the Son is different from the Spirit), then Arian, Sabellian and other errors were completely excluded.

[133] See Warfield's discussion. "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 252ff.

[134] *Ibid.*, 233.

(*Perichoretic Relations*)

For the Greek Fathers, the concept of *homoousios* incorporated the idea of the *coinherence* of the three persons in the being of the Godhead. Gregory of Nazianzen was responsible for the terminology of *perichoresis* which referred to "the way in which the Divine Persons mutually contain and interpenetrate one another while completely containing their incommunicable differences as Father, Son and Holy Spirit."[135] His classic perichoretic dictum "I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendour of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightaway being carried back to the one"[136] (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.17), is famously used by Calvin and included from the 1539 *Institutio* onwards. So, while Calvin never used the language or terminology of *perichoresis* (or its Latin equivalent *circumincessio*), he certainly developed an understanding of the Trinity which closely resembled it. Our discussion of intra-Trinitarian relations above proved that Calvin believed the whole divine nature was understood to be in each hypostasis, and that each hypostasis had its own subsistent property (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.18-20). In the communion of the Godhead, Father, Son and Spirit shared their *being* without ceasing to be distinct as *persons* in relation to one another. Using Cyprian's developed concept for the communal episcopate,[137] he stated that each of the persons *in solidium* were God (*Inst.* 1.13.2; *quorum quisque in solidum sit Deus*), so that there was no inequality in being amongst the divine persons. This implied that the whole being of God belonged to each person as it belonged to all three. Torrance went on to state that this makes God "intrinsically and completely *Personal* ... To say that God is 'Personal' does not mean that he *is* a Person in the relational sense ... but rather that the one God is a fullness of Personal Being within himself, for the whole God dwells in each Person and each Person is the whole God."[138] Calvin was thus very close to Gregory at this point. It must be said that in contrast to the Eastern view, Calvin upheld the notion of the *filioque* within the generally Western context within which he conducted his Trinitarian theologising. To say that he consciously intended to embrace an Eastern or Greek approach to the Trinity would be to push him beyond his cultural and historical horizon.[139] Nevertheless, his view of the double procession of the Holy Spirit was drawn into his

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[135] Gregory and Hilary had posited this notion of a Communion of Being. See Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin," 32-33.

[136] *On Holy Baptism*, oration xl.41.

[137] Cyprian, *De unitate ecclesiae*, 3, 5 & 6. Cf. *Institutio* 4.2.6 7 4.6.17.

[138] Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin," 37. Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio* 6.22; Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 7.6.11; 15.23.43; and Peter Lombard, *Sententiae*, 1.d.23.1ff.

[139] As Butin put it: "Speculation about explicit indebtedness to Eastern theologians is not necessary. It is the inductive exegetical method that governed the formulation of Calvin's trinitarian doctrine that led him at crucial points to parallel emphases with the Eastern tradition. While these similarities should not be overstated, they illustrate the

exposition of the consubstantiality of the persons in the Godhead (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.19), taking it "out of the orbit of the usual Western notion of the filioque added to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed."[140]

(*Triune Order*)

Working within the confines of Scripture and using non-Biblical terms sparingly, Calvin was able to speak of Father, Son and Spirit as distinct persons (*hypostases*) subsisting consubstantially within the one being of the Godhead. His detractors rallied against him by quoting Tertullian as counter-evidence. Calvin responded by showing that Tertullian's reference to dispensation in the Godhead did not affect God's oneness of *being*:

> In [Tertullian's] view, although God is one, his Word exists by dispensation or economy; God is one in unity of substance, and nonetheless the unity is disposed into a trinity by the mystery of dispensation. There are thus three, not in status, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in its manifestation. He says, indeed, that he retains the Son as second to the Father, but he understands him to be not different except by way of distinction. (*Inst.* 1.13.28; cf. 1.13.6)

Within the interrelations of the divine persons in the Trinity, there was thus a principle of order from the Father to the Son and then to the Spirit. This order did not however apply at the level of being, and the Father could not be granted priority in ontology. The Father was the fountain or beginning of deity, "not in the bestowing of essence, as fanatics babble, but by reason of order" (*Inst.* 1.13.26). In the first edition of the *Institutio* this was already clear in his own mind:

> And if they do not put up with these names, let them at least concede to us, what they cannot deny, even if they should burst, that when we hear 'one' we are to understand unity of substance; that when we hear 'three' we are to distinguish in this one essence, nevertheless three properties. Indeed Scripture so distinguishes these as to attribute to the Father the beginning of acting and the fountain and source of all things; to assign to the Son the wisdom and plan of acting; to refer to the Spirit the power and effective working of action. (*1536 Inst.* 2.9)

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significant independence Calvin in fact exercised over against the received Western tradition. This independence appears to be due primarily to his overarching concern to develop all theology, including the doctrine Trinity, in close relationship with the text of the New Testament." *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 45.

[140] Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin," 35.

Calvin in this fashion held firmly to the eternal deity of each person in the Godhead, yet was able to give weight to the order of relations set out in the Bible. The dispensation or economy of persons was primarily a matter of soteriology and the manner in which God dispensed his grace. Warfield recognised the significance of this step:

> [Calvin] expressly allows an 'order' of first, second and third in the Trinitarian relations. But he conceives more clearly and applies more purely than had ever previously been done the principle of equalisation in his thought of the relation of the persons to one another, and hereby, as we have already hinted, marks an epoch in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity.[141]

3.2.4 CONCLUSION: COMMUNION WITH GOD HIMSELF

In our discussion of Calvin's Trinity doctrine, we discovered that his anti-speculative posture led him to approach the doctrine with reverence in respect to God's incomprehensibility. Yet, under compulsion to defend and explain what he believed, he chose the route of simplicity and clarity in exposition, using a selection of Patristic terms and phrases necessary to hedge off error on the one hand, and positively explain Biblical truth on the other. What he produced was thus Biblical in *substance* and Patristic in *formula*. His commitment to the Biblical revelation of salvation in Christ compelled him to defend the eternal and full deity of the Son with more vigour than most theologians before him, and as such, he exposed all manner of Trinitarian constructions which had previously concealed elements of subordinationism. Consequently, he offered a Trinitarian doctrine faithful to both Scripture and Nicene Orthodoxy, incorporating ideas from Greek and Latin theology, and which can truly be said to be axiomatic in the history of dogma. Warfield, who correctly identified Calvin's contribution as marking an epoch in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity, summed up its distinctives as follows:

> If we look at the prime characteristics of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity, accordingly, we shall undoubtedly fix first upon its simplicity, then upon its lucidity, and finally upon its elimination of the last remnants of subordinationism, so as to do full justice to the deity of Christ. *Simplification, clarification, equalisation —*

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[141] Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 230.

these three terms are the notes of Calvin's conception of the Trinity.[142]

The question is, where does this technical exposition of Calvin's Trinity doctrine leave us in terms of the 'knowability of God'? The Historical-Theological Orientation at the outset of this chapter demonstrated that the Reformation achievement towards communion with God, was that it was neither mediated through his energies (leaving his being inaccessible), nor through mystical experience divorced from Scriptural truth. Furthermore, the apparatus of philosophical speculation was especially incapable of mediating real knowledge of the incomprehensible God. Calvin insisted with Hilary that true knowledge of God could only be derived from himself, and was therefore that which came through the Word and by the Holy Spirit. In other words, knowledge of the *being* of God was derived from the *persons* of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Calvin denounced as idol worship that which did not 'grasp and contemplate these.' Without the persons of the Trinity, "only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God" (*Inst.* 1.13.2). Technically speaking, it was thus only through the unqualified application of *homoousios* to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, and thus the designation of *autotheos* to each person of the Godhead, that real knowledge of God himself was possible. Only through the Son being fully divine could salvation be procured, and by the same token, only through the Spirit being fully divine could that salvation be appropriated. If the activity of the person of the Spirit was inherent in the divine being of God, then knowledge of God as he was towards us did not exclude knowledge of God as he was in himself. On this basis God could truly be known simply because he was truly revealed through the persons of the Godhead. This was a staggering truth, and a truth which was made plain through the clear and distinct Trinitarian articulation of Calvin. Bray correctly identified this achievement of fellowship and communion with the Triune God as the true heritage of the Reformation:

> The true heritage of the Reformation, and especially of Calvin, may therefore be defined as a theology of the divine persons, whose attributes express both their distinctiveness and their unity. The incommunicable attributes constitute the absolute, divine essence, which is his unity: the communicable attributes come together in the pattern of divine relations by which we see the model of the divine society, and experience, by our adoption as sons and daughters of God in the image of Christ, the reality of fellowship in the inner life of the Holy Trinity.[143]

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[142] *Ibid.* [Emphasis added.]
[143] Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 224.

3.3 Calvin's 'Trinitarianism'

WE MOVE now to a theme closely related to the exposition above, namely Calvin's Trinitarianism. The meaning we attach to 'Trinitarianism' is not that of its modern constructive theological usage, namely to denote a triadic theological methodology,[144] but rather the simple manner in which the knowledge of God as Triune governed Calvin's understanding and description of the Christian life. This concept will allow us to pass briefly over two areas of Calvin's thought, namely his Trinitarian understanding of grace, and his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the *Institutio* as the one to whom the power and efficacy of the Triune God is assigned.

3.3.1 TRINITARIAN GRACE

Very little has been written on how Calvin's view of the Trinity impacted his soteriology in general, and the area is still rich with potential for worthwhile research. Butin's work is an important contribution to this investigation, even though his constructive and schematised approach comes across as extrinsic to the more organic nature of Trinitarian thought in the *Institutio*. The well-known Calvin scholar Alexandre Ganoczy contributed an earlier essay, "Observations on Calvin's Trinitarian Doctrine of Grace,"[145] which first brought this aspect of Calvin's thought to the attention of Calvin scholarship, and because of the uncomplicated nature of its inquiry, it remains a valuable piece of work. It is worthwhile quoting its opening paragraphs at length:

> An investigation of the passages in the *Institutes* in which Calvin discusses the grace of God indicates that to a surprising extent these discussions are found in a Trinitarian context. I do not use the word "Trinitarian" here in the sense of speculation about the inner nature of the secrets of God's being, as, for example,

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[144] 'Trinitarianism' has become phenomenally popular in the last two decades amongst academic theologians. Constructive theological proposals abound which somehow capitulate on implications of the doctrine of the Trinity. The most popular by far has been the movement called 'Social Trinitarianism' which has been popularised by British, some American, European and even Eastern theologians. See Thompson's, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, for an analysis of these.

[145] Alexandre Ganoczy, "Observations on Calvin's Trinitarian Doctrine of Grace," trans. K. Crim, in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honour of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, ed. Elsie A. McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 96-107.

Augustine and Richard St. Victor used it. Rather, this adjective is used to indicate simply the explicit or implicit mention of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with the intention of showing that the reality of grace and the efficacy of grace are the common work of the Trinity.

I would even go so far as to say that to a certain degree the mystery of the activity of the triune God constitutes the comprehensive systematic framework of what Calvin says about God's will for salvation, and especially of the unfolding of this will in history. Thus we may assume that the eternal community of the three persons with one another is the condition for the possibility of, and the creative support for, all the human community in Christ which constitutes the essence of the relationship of grace.[146]

Ganoczy's understanding of grace is based upon the Trinitarian Creator-Redeemer's benevolence, his 'being present,' for humankind. Grace thus understood encompassed all God's saving acts as acts based in the Triune character of God. An interesting and immediate implication of this can be seen in the way Calvin thought about justification.[147] Though he concurred with Luther that it was the "main hinge on which religion turns" (*Inst.* 3.11.1), the extent (four chapters only) and positioning (following ten chapters on grace) of the doctrine in Book 3[148] of the *Institutio,* is telling. Justification, rather than taking the role of a dominant theological motif, was instead subsumed under Trinitarian grace and followed Calvin's discussion of "regeneration" and the "life of the Christian man." To counter the medieval misuse of 'scholastic causes,' Calvin taught justification by grace in terms of the Trinity. The free mercy and eternal love of the Father was the "efficient cause" of our salvation, the obedience and reconciling work of the Son the "material cause," and the power of granting faith by the Holy Spirit the "instrumental cause" (cf. *Inst.* 3.3.1). (A *final cause* was also included which was the demonstration of God's justice and goodness.) The second and third causes were particularly damaging to a position which granted *works* too much credence. Justification like regeneration Calvin argued, was thus exclusively the work of the Triune God.[149]

The arrangement of justification in Book Three of the *Institutio* has been the cause of

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[146] *Ibid.,* 96.

[147] See McGrath's good discussion. *A Life of John Calvin,* 165-166.

[148] It's title being; "The way in which we receive the grace of Christ; what benefits come to us from it, and what effects follow." Commentators have entitled this section accordingly; "Reflections on Life in the Presence of the Spirit"(Benjamin A. Reist, *A Reading of Calvin's Institutes* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991], 49.), "The Grace of Christ Within Us" (Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin,* trans. H. Knight [London: Lutterworth Press, 1956], 120.), and "The Hidden Work of the Holy Spirit" (Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development,* 233.). From these we may note that the discussion has progressed logically from the *grounds* of redemption to a treatment of the *actualisation* of redemption.

[149] As justification by *faith alone* had the potential to be a misleading concept if it was inferred that justification depended exclusively on faith, all the Reformers tried in different ways to counter such an inference. Calvin offered different safeguards, one of which was the prominence he gave to his analysis of the causes of justification.

much speculation,[150] but it has incidentally also allowed Calvin to resolve another difficulty, one that Luther, Melanchthon and Zwingli experienced, and which constituted somewhat of a 'structural defect' in early Protestantism, namely the antithesis between justification and sanctification, both aspects of grace. Calvin was able to resolve this antithesis by connecting these doctrines through the *insitio in Christium*, a thoroughly Trinitarian operation in which the believer not only shared in Christ's 'benefits,' but in 'himself' through the Holy Spirit (*Inst.* 3.2.24). McGrath summarised it well:

> If the believer has been united with Christ through faith, he or she is at one and the same time made acceptable in the sight of God (justification), and launched on the path to moral improvement (sanctification). By treating these two elements, which had hitherto been regarded as independent entities requiring correlation, as subordinate to the believer's union with Christ, Calvin [was] able to uphold both the total gratuitousness of our acceptance before God and the subsequent demands of obedience placed upon us.[151]

Calvin was thus able to resolve a key methodological question, because, as the historian Scott Clark put it, "his soteriology was the product of a more highly developed and theologically integrated doctrine of the Trinity."[152] Nothing however, spelled out more clearly Calvin's Trinitarian understanding of grace than the first few sections of Chapter 1 in Book 3 of the *Institutio*:

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[150] Justification had shifted further and further down in Calvin's discussion from the first edition of the *Institutio*. In the 1536 edition, it was under the first component (1.D; of 6 parts); in the 1539 edition it received new material and moved down to 6 (of 17 parts); in the 1543 and 1550 editions, it moved further down to 10 (of 21 parts); and finally in 1559, under a completely new arrangement, it was moved to Book 3. The arrangement of topics in Book 3 is rather surprising and have been a continuing source of puzzlement to Calvin scholarship. After encouragement 'to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits' (*Inst.* 3.1.1), Calvin speaks of faith, regeneration by faith, penitence and the Christian life. Then only, does he discuss justification by faith, Christian freedom, prayer and predestination. One would have thought that the relation of these entities in the order of salvation might have been treated in different order; with predestination *preceding* justification, and regeneration *following* on justification. Some scholars have argued that his purpose was a 'polemical animus' against the Roman doctrines (so Wendel), it would seem that his arrangement was primarily for theological-didactic purposes. It does not however mean that his argument lacks theological precision (as McGrath supposes, cf. *A Life of John Calvin*, 163-166), but that Calvin had a specific purpose in the arrangement.

[151] McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 166.

[152] R. Scott Clark, "The Catholic-Calvinist Trinitarianism of Caspar Olevian," *Westminster Theological Journal* 61:1 (1999): 24. Bray's pertinent remark is also worthwhile repeating: "It comes as something of a surprise to discover that the Protestant Reformers ... had a vision of God which was fundamentally different from anything which had gone before, or which had appeared since. The great issues of Reformation theology - justification by faith, election, assurance of salvation - can be properly understood only against the background of a trinitarian theology which gave these matters their peculiar importance and ensured that Protestantism, instead of becoming just another schism produced by a revolt against abuses in the medieval church, developed instead into a new type of Christianity." *The Doctrine of God*, 197-198.

We must now examine this question. How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son — not for Christ's own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? *First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.* Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. ... We also, in turn, are said to be "engrafted into him" [Romans 11:17], and to "put on Christ" [Galatians 3:27]; for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we obtain this by faith. *Yet since we see that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel, reason itself teaches us to climb higher and to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.* (*Inst.* 3.1.1)[153]

The "grace of God" was appropriately spoken of as the "grace of Christ" (*Inst.* 3.1.2; cf. 3.11.6) and as the "grace of the Holy Spirit" (*Inst.* 3.1.3). Calvin certainly did not lose sight of the fact that God was known through the persons of the Godhead, and closely knit the grace of God to the soteriological and Christological uniting function of the Holy Spirit:

God the Father gives us the Holy Spirit for his Son's sake, and yet has bestowed the whole fullness of the Spirit upon the Son to be minister and steward of his liberality. For this reason, the Spirit is sometimes called the "Spirit of the Father," sometimes the "Spirit of the Son." ... For there is nothing absurd in ascribing to the Father praise for those gifts of which he is the Author, and yet in ascribing the same powers to Christ, with whom were laid up the gifts of the Spirit to bestow upon his people. ... Also, we ought to know that he is called the "Spirit of Christ" not only because Christ, as eternal Word of God, is joined in the same Spirit with the Father, but also from his character as the Mediator. For he would have come to us in vain if he had not been furnished with this power. ... Likewise, he asks "the grace of Christ and the love of God" for believers, at the same time coupling with it "participation in the Spirit" [2 Corinthians 13:14], without whom no one can taste either the fatherly favour of God [*paternum Dei favorem*] or the beneficence [*benficentiam*] of Christ; just as he also says in another passage, "The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" [Romans 5:5]. (*Inst.* 3.1.2)

Underlying the quotation above is the carefully thought-through doctrine of the Trinity as we had outlined it in the previous section. Any hint of subordination in being was avoided, whilst the unity of the Godhead was affirmed. Yet the order of soteriological economy was spelled out in terms of the complementary nature of the sending of the Son and the Spirit. Both were said to be purifier and justifier on the basis of 1 Corinthians 6:11 (cf. *Inst.* 3.1.1), and while

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[153] [Emphasis added.]

the Spirit was the 'inner teacher' (*internus doctor*, cf. *Inst.* 3.1.4), the exalted Christ was the 'inner Schoolmaster' (*interior magister*, cf. *Inst.* 3.1.4). Nevertheless, only the Son became incarnate, was crucified, died and rose to be at the right side of the Father, whilst the Holy Spirit moved within us, testifying to and guaranteeing Christ's work. Calvin thus united closely the grace of God to pneumatology, because the Holy Spirit gave immediacy to the exalted Christ. So, whilst there was unity of being even in God's grace, there remained clear distinctions of person.

As Calvin went on to explain the titles of the Holy Spirit in Scripture (*Inst.* 3.1.3), the heart of Trinitarian grace, namely "adoption," became apparent:

> [The *Holy Spirit*] is called the "spirit of adoption" because he is the witness to us of the free benevolence of God with which God *the Father* has embraced us in his beloved only-begotten *Son* to become a Father to us; and he encourages us to have trust in prayer. (*Inst.* 3.1.3)[154]

As a result, believers may fearlessly cry, "Abba, Father!," "have life," be "safe in God's unfailing care," be "fruitful," have our "thirst quenched," be "purified," be "restored and nourished," be "enflamed with the love of God" and with "zealous devotion," and receive "heavenly riches" (cf. *Inst.* 3.1.3). Note the extent of the 'experiential' reality affirmed by Calvin's choice of language. The fullness of this experiential reality comes about when our minds "become intent on the Holy Spirit" and we are "united" to Christ ("a sacred wedlock") and "possess him" through the Holy Spirit alone (*Inst.* 3.1.3). When Calvin thus spoke about the Holy Spirit, he was in effect implicating the operation of all the persons of the Godhead, and affirming the reality of the Trinity by our experience.

Even in our short exposition above, it has become apparent that Calvin saw the Trinitarian grace of God as being accomplished through the all-embracing and comprehensive work of the Holy Spirit. Not departing from the fact that Calvin viewed each person in the Godhead to be active in all the external works of God, we must nevertheless make a few comments about Calvin's understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

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[154] [Emphasis added.]

3.3.2 THE HOLY SPIRIT: TRINITARIAN POWER AND EFFICACY

More than any other of the Reformers, Calvin was "the theologian of the Holy Spirit."[155] Though this statement has often been repeated by leading scholars, it still widely elicits surprise. No doubt, part of the reason is that only a small number of works have been written which feature Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit,[156] which in turn reveals something of the difficulty of the subject. While Calvin has only one short chapter dedicated to it in the *Institutio* (3.1),[157] almost too little to work from, his actual description of the work of the Holy Spirit covers virtually every doctrinal topic he touches, an overwhelming prospect. It forces the commentator to report on virtually all of his theology! The thoroughly integrative nature of Calvin's understanding of the Holy Spirit, especially concerning Trinitarian relations and the complex of salvation, places a high demand on those seeking to understand it.[158] Incidentally, it is on the basis of this integration, that the strongest argument can be made for Calvin's 'Trinitarianism' or what has been called a 'Trinitarian paradigm' (Butin) in the theology of Calvin. Here, we suggest three lines of inquiry only.

3.3.2.1 The Holy Spirit and Order

If we were to take the basic divisions of the 1559 *Institutio*; I- Creation, II- Redemption, III- Application of Redemption, IV- Church and Society, as a measure by which to gauge the

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[155] Warfield was the first to explicitly describe him as such ("Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 21-24, 107), even though Abraham Kuyper had earlier written that "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a gift from John Calvin to the Church of Christ" (*The Work of the Holy Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946]). This was repeated by many well-known Reformed scholars, as well as by Werner Krusche in his magisterial study; *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1957), 12.

[156] The best known works are those by Krusche (footnoted above) and Simon Van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943). Articles such as I. J. Hesselink's appendix "Calvin, Theologian of the Holy Spirit," in *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 177-187; M. Eugene Osterhaven's chapter on "John Calvin: Order and the Holy Spirit," in *The Faith of the Church: A Reformed Perspective on its Historical Development* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 162-193; H. J. T. Quistorp's article, "Calvin's Lehre vom Heiligen Geist," in *De Spiritu Sancto* (Utrecht: Keminck & Zoon N. V., 1964); and A. N. S. Lane's article, "John Calvin: The Witness of the Holy Spirit," *Faith and Ferment* (Westminster Conference, 1982), 1-17; are very helpful. The sixth colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society had as its topic *Calvin and the Holy Spirit*, and a range of articles have been collected (and edited by Peter De Klerk) in a book by the same title (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1989).

[157] In actual fact the whole of Book 3 and 4 deal with the application by the Holy Spirit of the truths of Book 1 and 2. The reason why Calvin only has one chapter on the Holy Spirit *per sae*, is two-fold. First of all, he has already treated the person of the Holy Spirit under the Trinity (*Inst.* 1.13.14-15), but secondly, the 'controversiality' of the Holy Spirit and his works, is a modern problem and not a sixteenth century one.

[158] This is particularly true in the area of church, church governance and the sacraments. Few theological commentators are able to expound on Calvin's view of the sacraments in a simple and systematised fashion. Calvin turns to the Holy Spirit whenever things in his mind involve the mystery of God and his salvation.

involvement of the Triune God in each, we would discover with Eugene Osterhaven that 'Order and the Holy Spirit' can be perceived as a major theme running throughout Calvin's theology. Osterhaven nevertheless saw it as a Trinitarian theme; "Calvin held that *the triune God* is the archetype of all *order* in the universe," and by order he meant "things as they ought to be — in a word, perfection, or, as we shall see, *the presence of the Holy Spirit*."[159] So, though the spotlight was cast on the Holy Spirit, Osterhaven was quick to affirm that "only a trinitarian interpretation of the Reformer, which takes into account the person and work of each person in the Godhead, does justice to him."[160]

If we follow this scheme, we will discover the following: (1) In *Creation*, all three persons of the Trinity are involved, the Son and the Spirit being active with the Father in all God's external works. Christ as the *eternal Word* of God (cf. *Commentary on John* 5:17), and the Spirit in the bestowal of beauty and order (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.22) as well as preserving what was formed (cf. *Commentary on Acts* 17:28). (2) In *Redemption* and its (3) *application*, while Jesus is the focus of salvation, it is the Holy Spirit who calls, regenerates, bestows faith, sanctifies, gives assurance, bestows gifts and brings about perseverance and its fruits. It is through both Jesus and the Spirit that access to the Father is given, and through Word and Spirit that the body is nurtured and edified (cf. *Commentary on John* 5:17; *Inst.* 1.6.1). (4) In *Church* and *Society*, the same emphases are found. The exalted Christ is the head of the church which is governed by Scripture through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Inst.* 4.3.1), while the State and its officials are governed by God and even receive their particular gifts from the Holy Spirit (*Inst.* 4.20.6, 22, 25). In Calvin's scheme, there was thus nothing in creation, re-creation and consummation which was not the work of the Holy Spirit. His was an 'all-encompassing' and 'all-consuming' work (Krusche),[161] more comprehensive even than that of the Messiah. Yet, we must be reminded that he is none other than the Spirit of Christ and of the Father. To get back to the theme of order and the Holy Spirit, Osterhaven put it in historical perspective:

> Appearing near the beginning of a new period in history, Calvin took up the concept of order, which had inspired and dominated medieval thought from Augustine to Bernard to Aquinas to late medieval humanism, and made it a

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[159] Osterhaven, *The Faith of the Church*, 164-165. [Emphasis added.]

[160] *Ibid.*, 170; "... Calvin read Scripture in a thoroughly trinitarian manner. He believed that each person of the Godhead is active in all the external works of God and must be honoured for who he is and what he does."

[161] Cited in Jonker, *Die Gees van Christus*, 51. Calvin's cosmic view of the work of the Spirit in nature, culture, politics and history stood in sharp contrast to most of the medieval conceptions of his work being purely on an individual salvational basis.

'fundamental category' of his system. Through sin the "whole order of creation was inverted" (*Commentary on Ephesians* 4:24); by the grace of the Holy Spirit order is restored. This, in sum, is Calvin's view of history.

Osterhaven's proposal thus fits in well with Ganoczy's suggestion that "the mystery of the activity of the triune God constitutes the *comprehensive systematic framework* of what Calvin says about God's will for salvation, and especially of *the unfolding of this will in history*."[162]

3.3.2.2 The Holy Spirit and the Word

Much has been written on Calvin's view of the inseparable relation ('indissoluble bond' [*individuo nexu*], *Inst.* 4.8.13; or 'mutual bond' [*mutuo nexu*], *Inst.* 1.9.3) between the Word and the Spirit. The fact that Scripture has its authority through the 'inward testimony of the Spirit' (*testimonium Spiritus sancti internum*; *Inst.* 1.7.4), is one of Calvin's few truly original contributions to the history of Christian thought, a "dogma-historical novum."[163] What we meet in Scripture is *Dei loquentis Persona*, the 'Person of the speaking God.' Without elaborating on this momentous aspect of Calvin's theology at this point,[164] it is significant for our purposes to simply note two things. First, the bond between the Word — Scripture, and the Spirit is as inseparable as it is between the Spirit and the Word — Christ. Secondly, the reality of communion with God through the Word — Christ, and the Spirit, is as real as it is through the Word — Scripture, and the Spirit. The implications of this for the Christian life and for the community of the Church are far-reaching, and it bears specifically on the issues of Christian certainty[165] (or personal assurance) and Biblical and expository preaching. These aspects are dealt with in the previous and following chapters, but we may note that through this reality, the Holy Spirit was for the first time in church history given his proper place in the complex work of human redemption,[166] which in itself is an actualisation of the reality of God's Triunity.

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[162] Ganoczy, "Observations on Calvin's Trinitarian Doctrine of Grace," 96. [Emphasis added.]

[163] H. W. Rossouw. Cited in Jonker, *Die Gees van Christus*, 55. Calvin abhorred the notion of introducing 'novelties,' Biblical fidelity was all that counted.

[164] A significant amount has been written on this topic. See for example H. J. Forstman, *Word and Spirit: Calvin's Doctrine of Biblical Authority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), and R. C. Gamble, "Word and Spirit in Calvin," in *Calvin and the Holy Spirit*.

[165] Hesselink notes four facets to the one testimony of the Spirit: (1) the certainty of Scripture, (2) the certainty of salvation, (3) the certainty of our divine adoption, and (4) the certainty of the divine authority of Scripture, which offers the promise of adoption. He goes on to cite Krusche: "Calvin has not separated the certainty of Scripture from the certainty of salvation as it happened in orthodoxy. The *testimonium* does not first convince us of the divine origin of Scripture apart from its content as promise, and then convince us of its content. Both belong inseparably together [*beides fällt untrennbar in eins*]. *Calvin's First Catechism*, 183.

[166] Jonker, *Die Gees van Christus*, 55.

3.3.2.3 *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life*

We now return to the themes of grace and salvation. As we noted above, the Christian life was made possible by God's grace and was experienced by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Book 3 and 4 of the *Institutio*, give a description of the Spirit in relation to Faith and Regeneration, and to the Church and Sacraments respectively. The opening chapter of Book 3 was covered above, and it remains to discuss the closing section of that chapter (*Inst.* 3.1.4) on "Faith as the work of the Spirit," and the following monumental chapter (*Inst.* 3.2.[1-43]) on "Faith: Its definition set forth and its properties explained." In both, faith appears as the 'principle' (*Inst.* 3.1.4) and 'peculiar' (*Inst.* 3.2.39) work of the Holy Spirit.

In Calvin's thought, Word and Spirit were connected, but there was also a further connection with faith. Faith was grounded in the Word and its promises of God's grace in Christ, but "without the illumination of the Spirit, the Word can do nothing" (*Inst.* 3.2.33). In other words, faith was the chief work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was "the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon the ears" (*Inst.* 3.1.4). Note then Calvin's carefully theologically crafted, yet eminently practical definition of faith:

> Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed in our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit. (*Inst.* 3.2.7)

This definition of faith is perhaps the finest in all of Christian theologising, and begs exposition. We will however restrict ourselves to two comments. The first and most obvious is that it represented a superb example of Calvin's Trinitarianism.[167] A simple comparison with his economic-Trinitarian understanding of God's redemptive plan in history, will make the point explicit:

> To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things [*principium agendi*]; to the Son, wisdom, counsel and the ordered disposition of all things [*sapientia agendi*]; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of action [*virtus, efficatio actionis (Dei)*]. (*Inst.* 1.13.18)[168]

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[167] Though most commentators note the presence of the Trinity in it, few go on to develop this aspect. What we offer in terms of a comparison with 1.13.18, has to our knowledge not been done.

[168] In Latin: "*Patri principium agendi, rerumque omnium fons et scaturigo attribuitur, Filio sapientia, consilium, ipsaque in rebus agendis dispensatio, at Spiritu virtus et effecacia assignatur actionis.*"

The Father's benevolence is therefore correlated to his originating activity (source and fount of all that God does); the freely given promise in Christ is correlated to his wisdom and ordering (divine design and ordered execution of God's grace); and the actualisation (revealing and sealing in our hearts — divine enablement) of the Father's benevolence in Christ, is correlated to the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Beintker put it as follows; "*Virtus* and *efficacia* of what the *one* God does as the Father and the Son characterise the singularity of the Holy Spirit within the secret of the Trinity."[169] The Spirit had in this sense, an all-encompassing task, because without him neither the benevolence of the Father nor the accomplishment of the Son could be realised.

Secondly, it followed that the 'certain knowledge' which was faith, was therefore neither self-gained nor in any way only academic in intention. The knowledge of faith was not only a matter of 'revelation to the mind,' it was also a 'sealing upon the heart.' Calvin clarified this point in an unusual manner:

> When we call faith "knowledge" we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man's mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. ... From this we conclude that the knowledge [intelligence] of faith consists in assurance [certitude] rather than in comprehension [apprehension]. (*Inst.* 3.2.14)

Though we may sceptically infer from that statement a subjectivist decent in Calvin's thought, the truth is that Calvin did not turn inward but upward in his appeal. A 'higher authority' than human understanding was the prerequisite for faith. It was thus not even enough for the mind to be illumined by the Spirit, the heart had to be strengthened by his power (cf. *Inst.* 3.2.33, 34):

> It is harder for the heart to be furnished with assurance than for the mind to be endowed with thought. The Spirit accordingly serves as a seal, to seal up in our hearts those very promises the certainty of which it has previously impressed upon our minds; and takes the place of a guarantee to confirm and establish them. (*Inst.* 3.2.36)

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[169] Michael Beintker, "Calvin's Thinking in Relations." Unpublished paper delivered at the 1998 *International Calvin Congress* in Seoul, Korea, pp. 8-9. In this sense, Butin accurately refers to Calvin's understanding of the Trinity as the "divine dynamic of the divine-human relationship." *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 53.

We may accordingly say that there was ample evidence of 'experiential religion' in Calvin, but not of the kind we have become familiar with in the previous century. Calvin was concerned with real "confidence," and "an assurance that renders the conscience calm and peaceful" (*Inst.* 3.2.16). The value of faith lay in what it mediated, namely the promises and presence of Christ within the believer. Through faith "he [Christ] makes us, ingrafted into his body, participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself" (*Inst.* 3.2.24). Calvin posited an astonishing reality through faith, that of Christ in us. He even used the phrase 'mystical union' to describe this close relationship with Christ, though being quite careful not to suggest any kind of mystical absorption into the divine being. His position was made clear against the teaching of Andreas Osiander (c. 1496-1552):

> I confess that we are deprived of this utterly incomparable good until Christ is made ours. Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union —are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him. ... But Osiander, by spurning this spiritual bond, forces a gross mingling of Christ with believers. (*Inst.* 3.11.10)

3.3.3 CONCLUSION

As we saw, it was the 'secret power of the Spirit' (cf. *Inst.* 3.11.5) which affected the union with Christ. Consequently, the Holy Spirit brought forth the fruits of regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification and ultimately glorification. The Holy Spirit was also responsible for leading and guiding the Christian through life (cf. *Inst.* 2.3.10) and in bringing the believer before Christ (through 'secret union') in the sacraments (cf. *Inst.* 4.17.1, 2, 10, 12). One may note that at almost every crucial point in discussing the nature of the church and the sacraments, Calvin emphasised the role of the Holy Spirit. His view of the church has even been described by some as a "pneumatocracy,"[170] and his conviction about the "visible signs" of the sacraments were

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[170] Joseph Bohatec. Cited in I. John Hesselink, *On Being Reformed: Distinctive Characteristics and Common Misunderstandings* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1983), 76.

that they were only efficacious through the "invisible grace of the Holy Spirit" (*Inst.* 4.14.18).[171] It is little wonder upon reflection of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life and church as described by Calvin, that John Dillenberger called the Spirit "the pivot upon which everything turns":

> For Calvin every apprehension of God depends upon the activity of the Spirit, upon the way in which God becomes alive and lively to the depths of man. At the edges and limits of Calvin's thought, the Spirit takes over. The Spirit is so self-evidently the pivot of his apprehension that it frequently operates as a *deus ex machina*.[172]

It thus has been made clear that Calvin viewed the Holy Spirit as the *virtus* or *efficatio actionis Dei* within the economy of redemption. Yet, we concur with Osterhaven that "against those who would favour an overweighted pneumatological orientation, it must be said that a correct understanding does justice to Calvin's appreciation of the persons and work of the Father and the Son as well as the Holy Spirit."[173] We must also be reminded that the doctrine of the Trinity was in Calvin's mind a practical doctrine, a source of strength, comfort and assurance. For Calvin, "the doctrine of the Trinity did not stand out of relation to his religious conscientiousness but was a postulate of his profoundest religious emotions; was given, indeed, in his experience of salvation itself."[174] Houston's remark neatly summarised the Trinitarian accomplishment of Calvin:

> [For Calvin], the self-revelatory character of God in his triune Being has opened up for us a way of communion with himself that is the source of ceaseless worship and of meditation upon his Word, through his Spirit. Indeed, we can say that the greatest impact made upon the Christianisation of the world of the fourth century, as upon the sixteenth century, is the recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity.[175]

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[171] The sacraments were not *ministries* of the Spirit as much as they were ministries of the *Spirit*, i.e., of Triune significance, especially when taken in conjunction with their relation to the Word. It is interesting to note that with regards to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Calvin was able to expound them on a Trinitarian basis and as such resolve a number of difficulties represented by the different reforming parties. The difference between Calvin, Luther and Zwingli on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a classic case in point. Calvin's Trinitarian theology of the Holy Spirit allowed him to resolve fundamental problems in Reformation and Christian theology. See also Butin's discussion of the Church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper as exemplifying and falling within Calvin's Trinitarian paradigm. *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 107-121.

[172] Cited in Osterhaven, *The Faith of the Church*, 193.

[173] *Ibid.*, 170.

[174] Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 195.

[175] James M. Houston, "Knowing God: The Transmission of Reformed Theology," in *Doing Theology for the People of God; Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer*, ed. Donald Lewis and Alister E. McGrath (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 236-237.

3.4 Theological Significance: *The Knowability of God*

AS THE heading suggests, the last section of this chapter has its primary aim to revisit the 'knowability' of God as advanced through Calvin's particular Trinitarian formulation. By necessity this implies incorporating some of the findings from the previous chapter into the present. It also begs reminding that 'knowability' from Calvin's perspective was an aspect of his soteriology (redemption and thus *religio*) rather than of philosophical epistemology, and it would be appropriate therefore to favour the doxological benefits of knowing the Triune God above the metaphysical mathematics of intra-Trinitarian speculation. It is necessary however, to start with a short assessment of the catholicity of Calvin's Trinity doctrine.

3.4.1 CALVIN AND TRINITARIAN CATHOLICITY

3.4.1.1 *Reforming the Nicene Conception*

The question of Calvin's Trinitarian catholicity is a question of his Nicene orthodoxy. We will be reminded that the first accusation against him in this regard was from Pierre Caroli, who claimed that Calvin was in discordance with the Nicene doctrine of God because of his refusal to subscribe to its terminology. Caroli's accusations were followed by those of Servetus and the Italian anti-Trinitarians, though they themselves clearly desired a revision of Nicaea. In 1593 Aegidius Hunnius published a work with the derogatory title *Calvinus Judaizans* in which he, like Caroli, charged Calvin with Arianism,[176] and more recently, the tendency has been to see in Calvin's economic-Trinitarian emphasis a form of Modalism.[177] In the last decade or so however, no-one has charged Calvin with either heresy, as it has been made sufficiently clear that he self-consciously avoided both by a fair margin (cf. his own statements in this regard; *Inst.* 1.13.22). Nevertheless, the matter of his apparent ambiguity regarding the *eternal generation of the*

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[176] Hunnius' argument rested on the fact that Calvin rejected many of the traditional (allegorical) Christological texts. See Warfield's discussion in "Calvin and Augustine," 248.

[177] So for example Krusche, *Das Wirken des heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 8f.; Ernst Wolf, "Die Christologie Calvins," in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, hrg. A. Grillmeyer, H. Bacht (Würzburg: Exhter, 1954), 450f.; and even to a degree, Jill Raitt, "The Person of the Mediator: Calvin's Christology and Beza's Fidelity," in *Occasional Papers of the American Society for Reformation Research*, Vol. 1 (December 1977), ed. R. C. Walton, et al (St. Louis: American Society for Reformation Research, 1977), 54ff.

Son (as taught by Nicaea), has recently raised a small storm within the Reformed community,[178] and yet again, a question hangs over Calvin's Trinitarian and Nicene orthodoxy.

The Nicene phrase under question is that Christ was "begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence [reality] of the Father, [*ek tes ousias tou Patros*], God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created [*poiethenta*]."[179] It has been claimed by Robert Reymond and Paul Helm (both avowed Calvinists), that Calvin saw these phrases as useless speculation, and more significantly, as harbouring an Origenist subordinationist strand which was an offence to the deity of Christ. Reymond understood there to be discontinuity between Calvin and Nicaea, and he urged upon his readers to choose 'the Reformation view of the Trinity.' He saw it as being "distinctly different in some respects from the 'Niceno-Constantinopolitan' representation of that doctrine which held sway within Christendom for over thirteen hundred years before it was challenged by John Calvin and which, regrettably, is still espoused unwittingly by too many of his followers."[180] Helm likewise made a plea (purporting to follow Calvin) "for the removal from our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity of certain concepts [e.g. eternal generation] which derive not from the New Testament but from pagan philosophy."[181] These ideas led to a response by Paul Owen who stated against Reymond that "there *had been* no mistaken affirmations in the theological pronouncements of Nicaea,"[182] and that Calvin and the Protestant confessions were in substantial agreement with it. Roger Beckwith similarly viewed "the doubt cast by some later Calvinists [like Helm] on the eternal impartation of the divine being and nature by one Person to another," as, "a regrettable development and, insofar as Calvin was responsible for it, he has had a negative influence also."[183]

What are we to make of Calvin's catholicity in the light of this issue, which is a mere

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[178] This involves for example the position taken by the Presbyterian Robert L. Reymond (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998]); which was criticised by Paul Owen, "Calvin and Catholic Trinitarianism: An Examination of Robert Reymond's Understanding of the Trinity and His Appeal to John Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 35 (2000): 262-281. In Reformed Evangelical Anglican circles, Roger Beckwith ("The Calvinist Doctrine of the Trinity," *Churchman* 115:4 [2001]: 308-315); has challenged Paul Helm in a lecture to which he responded ("Of God, and the Holy Trinity: A Response to Dr. Beckwith," *Ibid.*, 350-357). Earlier John Murray had expressed himself on the matter (*Collected Writings* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982], 4), and recently also the Reformed Baptist Millard J. Erickson (*God in Three Persons* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 309). Murray, Erickson, Reymond and Helm suggested Calvin's separation from the idea of eternal generation, while Owen and Beckwith have taken a more mediating stance, as did Warfield, Torrance and Bray in their works earlier mentioned.

[179] "The Creed of Nicaea (325)," in *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith, 3rd ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 30-31.

[180] Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, xxi.

[181] Helm, "Of God, and the Holy Trinity," 357.

[182] Owen, "Calvin and Catholic Trinitarianism," 281. [Emphasis original.]

[183] Beckwith, "The Calvinist Doctrine of the Trinity," 315.

microcosm of what has been an ongoing debate on his Trinitarian orthodoxy for over four hundred years? Without exploring the matter in great detail, it is possible to gain from it a glimpse of Calvin's instructive stance towards the church catholic, and therefore also his attitude towards church *tradition* in relation to the Protestant impulse of *sola Scriptura*. In terms of Nicene doctrine, the first thing to note is that Calvin had taken great exegetical pains to affirm that the Son was 'begotten before time' as the basic teaching of Scripture (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.4, 7, 23, 24). On the other hand however, he made statements of the following nature, which again appeared to be in straight contradiction to Nicaea:

> What is the point in disputing whether the Father always begets? Indeed, it is foolish to imagine a continuous act of begetting, since it is clear that three persons have subsisted in God from eternity. (*Inst.* 1.13.29)[184]

This manifest contradiction is not easy to resolve, but it would seem that Calvin in the quotation above, was rejecting the notion of picturing 'eternal generation' as an eternally *ongoing* (continuous and endless) act, as opposed to an eternally completed act, or an act which was complete from eternity.[185] We must be reminded that Calvin saw each person of the Trinity as *autotheos*, God in own right. The Son's divine essence therefore could not have had an origination, yet in relation to his person, he could be spoken of as being generatively caused by the Father. As he put it: "When we speak simply of the Son without regard to the Father, we well and properly declare him to be of himself; and for this reason we call him the sole beginning. But when we mark the relation that he has with the Father, we rightly make the Father the beginning of the Son" (*Inst.* 1.13.19; cf. 1.13.20). And again, "The essence of the Son and of the Spirit is unbegotten; but inasmuch as the Father is first in order, and from himself begot his wisdom ... he is rightly deemed the beginning and fountainhead of the whole divinity" (*Inst.* 1.13.25). Finally, and most clearly, Calvin put it in the following way:

> Therefore we say that deity in an absolute sense exists of itself; whence likewise we confess that the Son since he is God, exists of himself, but not in respect of

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[184] Note that these were the last words of his chapter on the Trinity which he introduced with the following paragraph: "Finally, I trust that the whole sum of this doctrine has been faithfully explained, if my readers will impose a limit upon their curiosity, and not seek out for themselves more eagerly than is proper troublesome and perplexed disputations ... I felt that I would be better advised not to touch upon many things that would profit but little, and would burden my readers with useless trouble."

[185] Torrance put it as follows: "Calvin rejects the interpretation of the 'eternal generation of the Son' as an eternally on-going communication of divine being to the Son, that is, as a kind of continuous emanation from the Father." Torrance, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 63 n. 102.

his Person; indeed, since he is the Son, we say that he exists from the Father. Thus his essence is without beginning; while the beginning of his person is God himself. (*Inst.* 1.13.25)

Calvin, in line with the teaching of Augustine, Gregory Nazianzen and Athanasius, was thus in agreement with the Nicene formula (especially the *homoousion* clause which safeguarded salvation), yet at the same time, he laboured to remove from the language of 'begottenness' an interpretation he detected as being unscriptural and speculative (and which was indeed to a degree present in its original formulation).[186] This was also the case in his original disagreement with Caroli. Perhaps Owen came closest in assessing the situation correctly when he suggested that Calvin saw himself "not as *improving* upon earlier trinitarian dogma, but rather *defending it* in all its pristine purity."[187] Yet, Beckwith assessed that Calvin's "independence of mind was bound to result in some unusual features in his theology,"[188] as his theological manoeuvre in order to maintain Christ's inherent deity illustrated. The way that Calvin saw the relation of the persons of the Godhead in terms of the distinctiveness of their roles in the activity of God (in the order of redemption), and not necessarily on the basis of begottenness and procession (eternal relations), was unusual, even though he sought precedence in Irenaeus and Tertullian. The fact of the matter is, that Calvin was not as tied to the credal formula as some would have liked him to be.[189]

Calvin's primary concern was for formulating theology on the basis of Biblical exegesis. Yet, as we shall discover in the next chapter, his exegesis was always conducted in consultation with the foregone theological and catholic tradition. It was imperative that the Protestant cause was in broad continuity with the "Great Tradition" as McGrath called it.[190] The Reformers advocated a 'critical affirmation' of tradition, a *reformation*, not a *restoration* as was the desire of the radical contingent.[191] Hence we saw Calvin counter the Biblicist efforts of the anti-Nicene

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[186] See the discussion by Warfield who reaches the same conclusion. "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 247-252: "If this is the meaning of his remark [in 1.13.29], it is a definite rejection of the Nicene speculation of 'eternal generation.' But this is very far from saying that it is a rejection of the Nicene Creed — or even of the assertion in this Creed to the effect that the Son is 'God of God'" (248). In relation to Warfield's first assertion, both Reymond and Helm have valid points to make, though neither of them have taken sufficient care in understanding Calvin's position in order to understand Warfield's second assertion.

[187] Owen, "Calvin and Catholic Trinitarianism," 273. [Emphasis original.]

[188] Beckwith, "The Calvinist Doctrine of the Trinity," 308.

[189] So Beckwith, who sees the Creeds as more faithful to his understanding of Scripture than Calvin. *Ibid.*, 310.

[190] See Alister E. McGrath, "Engaging the Great Tradition: Evangelical Theology and the Role of Tradition," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation of Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/ Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press/ Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 139-158. McGrath cites Calvin as the best example of how Christianity should be engaging with tradition. He also sets him up as the forerunner to modern-day (Reformed) Evangelicalism in this regard.

[191] *Ibid.*, 144-145.

radicals to postulate what would have been a purely rationalistic doctrine of the Trinity. He did so by relying on and employing the catholic tradition. On the other hand, he showed no hesitancy in opposing the Scholastic 'orthodox' consensus where and when it was out of step with Biblical teaching. This he did frequently by appealing to Scripture as the norm and to good exegesis. It is fair to say that the motivating factor in Calvin's critical affirmation of Nicene orthodoxy was the desire to maintain the redemptive focus of Trinitarian doctrine. As Butin correctly indicated, it was his "commitment to New Testament economic-trinitarian soteriology" which enabled him to give "wholehearted support for the more developed authoritative trinitarian formulations of the early church."[192]

3.4.1.2 Broadening the Western Consensus

A final aspect of Calvin's catholicity has to do with his understanding of the distinctive viewpoints of the Western and Eastern conceptions of the Trinity. We have breached this topic a number of times in this chapter already, but a few final statements are in order. Warfield had suggested that "if distinctions must be drawn, [Calvin] is unmistakably Western rather than Eastern in his conception of the doctrine."[193] This is certainly true, especially with regards to the most conspicuous difference between the two traditions, the *filioque* clause (and its function within intra-Trinitarian relations). Calvin had no use for allowing the *font of divinity* to be located in the Father alone, and sided with Athanasius and Augustine in "understanding the con-substantiality of the divine Persons in terms of numerical identity of substance" (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.5, 19, 20).[194] Yet, as Warfield, Bray, Butin and others have also demonstrated, Calvin's exegetical method governed his formulation of Trinitarian doctrine at critical points to such an extent, that parallel emphases with the Eastern tradition could be discerned, rather than the West.[195] His general indebtedness to the Cappadocians and to Gregory Nazianzus in particular, has been amply demonstrated, as well as the many points of similarity his formulation had with the Eastern view (and subsequent dissimilarity with the West). As Butin put it; "While these similarities should not be overstated, they illustrate the significant independence Calvin in fact

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[192] Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 40.

[193] Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," 229.

[194] Owen, "Calvin and Catholic Trinitarianism," 272. *Numerical identity of substance* refers to the reality that the three persons of the Godhead not only share identical divine properties, but "a common spiritual identity, life and eternal existence."

[195] One should not detect in Calvin here a desire to be 'ecumenical' (as some have attempted to use him at this point), but rather an unwavering desire to be Biblical.

exercised over against the received Western tradition."[196] This remarkable "independence" can mainly be ascribed to Calvin's unwavering commitment to be 'Biblical' in his theology, and to critically interact with the broader orthodox tradition.

3.4.2 CALVIN AND THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

3.4.2.1 The Problem of 'Objectifying' God

"The Christian Church confesses on the one hand that God is the Incomprehensible One, but also on the other hand, that He can be known and that knowledge of Him is an absolute requisite unto salvation."[197] In other words, alongside the *unknowability* of God (a *caveat* against presumption in theologising), his *knowability* is soteriologically imperative. We need to be reminded however, in the words of Gunton, that:

> Speaking about God is the most perilous of all theological enterprises, and should not be entered upon lightly. The chief reason for caution, however, is not the modern claim that we cannot penetrate the veil of phenomena or of 'experience' to the realities which may or may not underlie, but the *theological* peril that we may violate the unknowableness of God by essaying a speculative construction of what we suppose God to be. To use the modern idiom, we run the risk of 'objectifying' God: of turning him into a static and impersonal object to be subjected to our unfettered intellectual control, or into an abstraction, the object of pure speculation and the projection on to eternity of conceptual patterns from the merely finite world.[198]

Calvin held firmly to the 'unknowableness' of God in exactly the sense that Gunton implied, especially as contrasted against the 'objectification' characteristic of the periods preceding and succeeding him. The history of this 'objectification' parallels the account of 'knowing' we gave in the previous chapter. If we reach back as far as the fourteenth century, and follow the trail of the reintroduction of Aristotelian thinking into Western Christendom,[199] we discover that some penetrating challenges were presented to Biblical ways of thought by the new

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[196] Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 45.

[197] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 29

[198] Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 162. [Emphasis original.]

[199] The classical tradition, especially as represented by Aristotle, found its way into Arabic and into Muslim theology by the end of the first millennium. From there it came back into Latin (via Hebrew) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with profound effect on Western Christendom. See Lesslie Newbigin, "The Trinity as Public Truth," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 3.

rationalism. Particularly significant was the *duality* in knowing which came as a result of the Thomistic assimilation of Aristotelian method. Aquinas had made a distinction between what was knowable through human reason (unaided by divine revelation) and that which could only be known through faith and on the basis of divine revelation. In the former category was found among other things, the existence of God; and in the latter, the Biblical doctrines of the incarnation, atonement and the Trinity. Newbigin summarised the situation well: "One can say therefore, that what Augustine had held together [through *credo ut intelligam*] Aquinas put asunder. Faith is no longer *the* way to knowledge; it is one of two alternative ways: there are things that we can know by the use of reason, other things that we can know only by faith."[200] One of the devastating consequences of this dualism was that the God who's existence was 'reasonably' conceivable, was no longer immediately recognisable as the same God who encountered humanity in the Bible. This 'Feuerbachian' problem created by natural theology still plagues us today. Newbigin again put his finger on it: "Insofar as the word 'God' makes its occasional entry into the discourse of the public square, it is certainly not the triune God,"[201] i.e., God as distinctive to the Biblical revelation granted through the person of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

When scepticism became the dominant intellectual mood in Western Europe around the fifteenth and sixteenth century, its assessment and exploitation of the faith-reason dichotomy was devastating. Since divine revelation was no longer a sufficient basis for certitude (even amongst some believers and in 'the church'), it became necessary to 'validate' the Scriptural teaching about God by means of the so-called 'proofs.' In effect, human reason was called in 'aid' of waning Scriptural certitude, with the result that certainty was toppled from its Biblical basis, and perched on a far more precarious foundation. (We must be reminded that Calvin did not see it fit to call reason in aid of Biblical authority, but appealed to the higher 'proof' of the Holy Spirit.) Unfortunately it did not take long for human reason to demonstrate that the 'proofs,' though they were of some use (primarily to believers), were not all that incontrovertible. Subsequently, sceptical intellectualism gained a foothold in exploiting Christian credibility. It is ironic that in the midst of this situation, Descartes received a "commission to use his philosophical method to provide an *irrefutable* proof for the existence of God."[202] The

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[200] *Ibid.*, 4. [Emphasis original.]

[201] *Ibid.*

[202] *Ibid.*, 5. [Emphasis added.] Interestingly, this fact was brought to Newbigin's attention through the work of the Roman Catholic scholar of intellectual history, Michael Buckley (S. J.), in his work *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 71-73.

result can be described as the 'canonisation of *doubt*' in the West. The rest of the Enlightenment thinkers wasted little time in working through the consequences of the new Deistic conception of God, and by the time of Kant, scepticism about the possibility of proving an ontology for God had eclipsed the doctrine of the Trinity totally. What started off as a dual process of knowing with divine revelation being primary, was turned on its head to the virtual exclusion of faith as a route to knowledge. The Trinity came to be seen as nothing more than an indefensible example of the excesses of speculative Christian doctrine, or at the very least, as a marginalised and irrelevant dogma inherited from the forebears of the church.[203] For Modern theologians, the Trinity had become a problem, and their circumventious comments on it are there to prove it.[204]

The Postmodern situation after Nietzsche understandably has little place for the God of Biblical revelation. When the notion of "God" is entertained, it is mostly as a 'democratically elected' inclusivist deity, and the conceptualisation of God as Triune continues to be a major problem.[205] (This problem extends to African theology.)[206] For example, it is presumed that Hebraic and Classical thought could only accommodate the concept of *Triunity* by means of some philosophical 'engineering.' The Hebrews had to adjust to something entirely foreign (plurality in unity), while the Greeks were the ones who engineered the adjustment (keeping one and three together) by means of their philosophical apparatus. In stark contrast to this commonly held hypothesis, it has been demonstrated that the doctrine of the Trinity "was not

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[203] See Grenz's short discussion. Stanley J. Grenz, "Articulating the Christian Belief-Mosaic: Theological Method after the Demise of Foundationalism," in *Evangelical Futures*, 130.

[204] Other than the many spurious analogies and diagrammatic proposals forwarded (to solve the 'problem'), the most obvious and conspicuous way in which this is evidenced, is the manner in which Systematic theologies from the eighteenth-century onwards tended to treat the Triune nature of God as a matter secondary to the many other aspects of the doctrine of God. It is normally the very last aspect treated under the doctrine. On the basis of the revelation of Christ through the Holy Spirit, this could and should not be the case. The Protestant Confessions afforded a right place for the Trinity, with the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571) having it as its very first article of faith.

[205] Wolfhart Pannenberg sees continuing validity in using the philosophical concept and generic term "God" as a minimal identifying description, even though he affirms that it "is not identical with the essence of God which reveals itself in the historical facts." *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 394. Against Pannenberg we prefer to affirm the Trinity as the only Christian answer to the identity of God.

[206] For example, the only essay in a recent publication containing *bona fide* indigenous essays on a spectra of standard theological topics in African theology, commits exactly the same (Modern Western) error that we have been discussing. See Sam Oleka's "The Living God: Reflections on Acts 17 and African Traditional Religion," in *Issues in African Christian Theology*, ed. Samuel Ngewa et al. (Nairobi/Kampala/Dar es Salaam: East African Educational Publishers, 1998), 104-132. This is a pity, as Acts 17 advances the Lordship of Christ in relation to the Father in a pluralistic religious context in a most startling manner. A similar methodological error seems to undermine the study of James O. Kombo (*The Doctrine of God in African Christian Thought: An Assessment of African Inculturation Theology from a Trinitarian Perspective* [D.Th. Dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, December 2000]). Even though he has extended the concept of God to the Trinity because he "finds inadequate the notion of a simple identity between the African concepts of God and the Christian understanding of God," he still uses "existing native metaphysics" as a "vehicle for indigenisation and reception" (3). Is this not in some respects exactly what the Enlightenment has done in the West by steering us away from the parameters of revelation towards the parameters of our own 'native' metaphysics?

the result of any kind of theological speculation within the tradition of classical thought," but simply "the result of a new fact (in the original sense of the word *factum*, something done)" which required a radical rethinking of the meaning of the word 'God.'[207] The doctrine was therefore not a problem, but a solution to some of the insurmountable dualisms of Classical thought,[208] and the *homoousios* of the Father with the Son brought about a revision in Greek thinking by establishing a new ontological principle for 'shared being.'[209] Similarly, Bauckham has argued that a fully divine Christology (according to him the earliest Christology of the New Testament) was entirely compatible with the Jewish monotheistic understanding of God: "once we understand Jewish monotheism properly, we can see that the New Testament writers are already, in a deliberate and sophisticated way, expressing a fully divine Christology *by including Jesus in the unique identity of God* as defined by Second Temple Judaism."[210] There are thus very few legitimate reasons for positing Triunity as a problem in God, other than the Enlightenment predisposition towards 'objectifying' him. The way back to a proper conceptualisation of God is by knowing him 'personally' on the basis of Scriptural revelation.

3.4.2.2 Knowing God 'Personally'

In our brief survey above we laid the blame for the problem the West experiences with the Trinity at the door of a pattern of thought which started with Aquinas and stretched through Descartes to the Enlightenment. It has become quite prevalent however, to locate the root of the problem even earlier with Augustine. (See also our allusion to this matter earlier in the chapter.) The argument is that the ontological priority that Augustine gave to oneness over the persons of the Godhead, has made it difficult to conceive of them as distinct centres of consciousness, thought and action. The persons were mere relations, which undermined their distinctive roles and personal characteristics as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (especially as the external works of the Trinity were indivisible). The Eastern view on the other hand, allowed for a divine community in which each person was fully divine, and, as it purported to start more closely in line with revelation, there was a greater appreciation for the economic aspects of

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[207] Newbigin, "The Trinity as Public Truth," 2-3. Newbigin is here indebted to the work of Charles Norris Cochrane (*Christianity and Classical Culture* [1940]).

[208] *Ibid.*

[209] Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 8.

[210] "Once we recognise the theological categories with which they are working, it is clear that there is nothing embryonic or tentative about this. In its own terms, it is an adequate expression of a fully divine Christology. It is as I have called it, a Christology of divine identity." Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 77-78. [Emphasis added.]

God's Trinitarian activity. Furthermore, while the Western church had given primary emphasis to a *psychological* analogy of the divine life (following Augustine), the Eastern church had opted for a *social* analogy.[211] In the judgement of many, the social analogy is far richer in terms of comprehending the whole mystery of God (God is a 'community of Being,' or a 'Being in communion'), as well as the communal aspects of the Christian life. Many Western theologians today therefore favour the Cappadocian fathers to Augustine, as did the influential *British Council of Churches Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (1991).[212] But, as Thompson put it; "That the objections to the Western view have some merit is unmistakable, though in turn the East is not without its difficulties in opting for a Trinity viewed primarily from the perspective of persons with the Father predominant. This has the danger of a form of hierarchy in God and even of tritheistic tendencies."[213] Simon Chan, writing from an Asian perspective, likewise warned that an overreaction against the Augustinian view will distort Trinitarian doctrine in two ways; "first by an overemphasis on the threeness of God at the expense of his unity, and second by collapsing the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity."[214] The overall effect he feared, will be a weakened doctrine of God's divine transcendence.[215] What would be a more suitable option for the West therefore, is a Trinitarian conception that has the most problematical aspects of the Augustinian formulation weeded from it (in favour of some Cappadocian advantages), without forfeiting its obvious strengths (unity, transcendence, and equality of the persons) by opting for a wholesale acceptance of the Eastern view. It is perhaps not surprising then to find that scholars like Gunton and Torrance who are critical of Augustine and generally favourable towards the Eastern view, nevertheless have expressed great appreciation for Calvin's discerning stance within the Western tradition.

One of the accusations against Augustine which in a sense summarises the general critique against him, is that in his schema the divine essence could be regarded as a fourth hypostasis in the divine being.[216] Calvin was also accused of this, but denied it vehemently (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.25). He argued that the persons were not separable from the divine essence. In fact, as

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[211] See Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 69-70.

[212] Published as *The Forgotten Trinity: A Selection of Papers Presented to the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today*, ed. Alisdair I. Heron (London: BCC/CCBI, 1991).

[213] Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, 5.

[214] Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 41.

[215] "A proper trinitarian spirituality can only be developed from a doctrine that gives equal place to unity and plurality in God, both to transcendence and to immanence." *Ibid.*, 45.

[216] Diagrammatically, Augustine's schema can be represented by a large circle (of unity) encompassing three smaller circles for the persons. The essence of God would then appear to be the matrix of the big circle within which the smaller circles are imbedded. Depicted in such a manner, its problems become visible and obvious.

Bray put it; "the heart of Calvin's teaching was that the essence of God is *not* perceivable as such, but can be discerned only as a predicate of each of the three persons. In this, Calvin followed the Cappadocian tradition, except that he argued that not only the Father, but also the Son and the Holy Spirit, manifest this essence in its fullness and must therefore be regarded as *autotheos*."[217] Or, as he summarised it elsewhere, the critical difference between Augustine and Calvin is that "Calvin held to a doctrine which said that the three persons were *co-equal in their divinity* and united with each other, not by sharing an impersonal essence, but by their mutual fellowship and co-inherence — the Cappadocian doctrine of *perichoresis* in God, applied at the level of person, not essence."[218] Calvin thus afforded *true* equality and co-inherence to all three persons, so that each person of the Godhead possessed all the (incommunicable) attributes of God's essence, as well as the particular (communicable) attributes that defined their personhood. His was truly "a theology of divine persons, whose attributes express both their distinctiveness and their unity,"[219] and which was able to counter all forms of subordinationism (Origenism) and modalism (Sabellianism).[220] Calvin's formulation thus circumvented aspects of the Augustinian legacy by incorporating some typically Eastern notions without having to succumb to its problems. Surely Calvin's achievement must therefore stand out as an axiom of historical theology, particularly because he derived this position not from speculation,[221] but from earnest reflection upon the Biblical text in the context of serious exegetical debate around the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity.

Other than solving a number of complex questions on the relation between the economic and ontological Trinity, and coming to grips with the epistemological impact inadequate formulations of the Trinity have had on the Western notion of God, one may well inquire if there are any practical and soteriological benefits which flow from viewing God in this Triune, as opposed to a Monistic way? What does it mean to know God 'personally' (i.e., through the persons)? Much has been written on this aspect of Trinitarianism, especially from

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[217] Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 223.

[218] *Ibid.*, 202.

[219] Since God is one, their shared attributes were the substance of numerical identity, while the attributes of personhood came together "in the pattern of divine relations by which we see the model of the divine society, and experience, by our adoption as sons and daughters of God in the image of Christ, the reality of fellowship in the inner life of the Holy Trinity." *Ibid.*, 224.

[220] Sabellianism does hold to the equality of the persons, but only because none of them was equal to the divine essence itself.

[221] Perhaps a *caveat* is in order at this point. Though the context of Calvin's Trinitarian debates were undoubtedly exegetical, it has been suggested by at least one theologian, Paul Helm, that Calvin's Trinitarian construction may indeed include *some* speculation. *Making Sense of John Calvin*, Audio Tape 3102B.

the 'social' and Eastern perspective,[222] while very few scholars have appreciated the rich inheritance of Calvin. Broughton Knox was one scholar who did, and who stated quite unambiguously that "The most ultimate thing that can be said of God is that he is Trinity."[223] The implications of this, according to him, were the following:

> (1.) There is nothing more ultimate than personal relationships. Being, considered in itself, is an abstraction. Ultimate, true and real being, is and always has been being-in-personal-relationship. (2.) It follows that metaphysics of the Absolute or a theology of an impersonal God, such as Aristotle's, and any theology of Being which is not thought of as being-in-relationship has an error at its centre. (3.) It follows that the subject matter of theology is not God, but God in His relationship, for the essence of God is in eternal relationship. Relationship with God and with one another is the subject matter of scripture.[224]

In other words, the Christian faith had friendship with God at its centre; *"knowing God or, rather, being known by Him*, indwelling Him and He indwelling us, through the Spirit."[225] The Christian life was therefore thoroughly Trinitarian, and if in the Trinity there was complete mutual *other-person-centeredness*, then other-person-centeredness was the most real thing in any person.[226] Knox was here expressing in simple terms what the social Trinitarians more fully develop in terms of the concept 'person.'[227] J. B. Torrance summarised their position by indicating that "What is needed today is a better understanding of the person not just as an individual but as someone who finds his or her true being-in-communion with God and with others, the counterpart of a Trinitarian doctrine of God."[228] This is indeed a much needed corrective to Western culture. A person is not to be defined as *individua substantia rationabilis natura* (an individual substance with a rational nature; Boethius [*c.* 480-526]), or 'an individual

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[222] A very extended bibliography can easily be attached here, but the most significant writers from different traditions are: Walter Kasper, Kasper Hill and Catherine Mowry LaCugna (Roman Catholic); John D. Zizioulas and Boris Bobrinskoy (Orthodox); Robert W. Jenson (Lutheran); T. F. Torrance and Jürgen Moltmann (Reformed); and David Brown and Colin Gunton (Anglican). The impetus for these studies was received from Barth (1932), Rahner (1967) and Vladimir Lossky (1944). Not all of them are social Trinitarians *per sae*, but all are somewhat critical of Western 'theism' and see the Trinity as the constitutive centre of Christian theology. There are of course numerous other works which explore the benefits of the more Eastern approach.

[223] D. B. Knox, *The Everlasting God: A Character Study of God in the Old and New Testaments* (Homebush West: Lancer Books, 1988), 133.

[224] *Ibid.*, 130.

[225] *Ibid.*, 133. [Emphasis added.]

[226] *Ibid.*, 131f.

[227] Both Barth and Rahner made attempts to redefine the concept of person, or to use different terminology to describe the 'personal self-distinctions' (Louis Berkhof) in the Godhead. Neither of them were successful. J. I. Packer has advised that the terminology rather be kept and explained, especially as it retained the idea of God as person. See his "Theism for Our Time," in *God Who is Rich in Mercy*, 20.

[228] James B. Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in Our Contemporary Situation," in *The Forgotten Trinity*, 15.

thinking being' (Descartes), or even 'a self-determining individual with a sovereign moral reason' (Kant).[229] These are the *individualist* and *intellectualist* notions deeply imbedded in the West, and which are often projected on to God. Rather, a person is to be viewed in the manner of being-in-relationship for which the Trinity provides the ultimate example. Only in this relationship context can true *freedom, faith* and *self-knowledge* be gained. Calvin's definition of person as a 'subsistence' within the divine essence (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.6),[230] his economic-Trinitarian expression of faith (cf. *Inst.* 3.2.7), and his famous introduction to the *Institutio* by means of the knowledge complex of God-and-self (cf. *Inst.* 1.1.1), are all helpful aids in correcting wrong notions of being-in-relationship.

From a dogmatic standpoint, Calvin's doctrine of God (the Trinity) is also important in that he brought about a reversal of the Nature-Grace model in which the order was the following; first to ask if God exists (*an sit*), then to ask what we mean with 'God' (*quid sit*) and finally to inquire after his revealed nature (*qualis sit*). In the *Institutio*, Calvin bypassed the first two steps by concentrating exclusively on *qualis sit Deus* (cf. *Inst.* 1.2.2), a significant departure from the Medieval order, though after him the Scholastic Protestants returned to it.[231] One major implication of this Calvinian approach was that doctrine could no longer be divorced from doxology. The question of the revealed nature of God was simultaneously an inquiry into (and often a declaration of) redemption. On this basis Calvin could appeal to "the very experience of godliness"[232] as a source of knowledge of the Trinity, and state that the "practical knowledge of the Trinity is more certain and firmer than any idle speculation" (*Inst.* 1.13.13).[233] The Trinity was therefore not only of interest to theologians, but critical to the faith of every believer, as salvation was safeguarded and procured by it. It also called forth worship like no other doctrine, as the Triune God was not only the *object* of worship, but the *agent* of worship through human participation in Christ's communion with the Father through the Holy Spirit. The Trinity was a Gospel-truth, and it mattered to know God 'personally.' As James Packer put

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[229] We are indebted to Jeremy Begbie for these facts given in a public lecture entitled "Enjoying the Trinity" at Regent College in Vancouver (25 September 1996).

[230] Gunton suggested that this definition is "an indication of what must conceptually be done in order to secure all the dimensions of a doctrine of the one God who exists only in the communion of the three: the interrelatedness of the persons and the unique individuality-in-relation of each." *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 170.

[231] See J. B. Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in Our Contemporary Situation," 13.

[232] *Catechism* (1538), Article 20.

[233] Cf. *Institutio* 1.10.2: "Here [Exodus 34:6-7] let us observe that his eternity and his self-existence are announced by that wonderful name twice repeated. Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us *not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us*: so that this recognition of him consists more in *living experience* than in vain and high-flown speculation. ... Indeed, with experience as our teacher [*experientia magistra*] we find God just as he declares himself in his Word." [Emphasis added.]

it; "The practical importance of the doctrine of the Trinity is that it requires us to pay equal attention, and give equal honour, to all three persons in the unity of their gracious ministry [of the Gospel] to us."[234]

In closing we take up again the words of T. F. Torrance with which we introduced this chapter:

> In Christ Jesus God has drawn us near to himself through the blood of Christ, thereby breaking down the barriers of enmity between us through the Cross of Christ, so that 'through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father' [Ephesians 2:18]. This means that owing to the reconciliation which God has worked out in Jesus Christ he has established an intimate two-way relation between himself and us and us and himself, making himself accessible to us and giving us entry into the inner fellowship of God's Life by allowing us to share in God's own eternal Spirit. That amounts to the greatest *revolution in our knowledge of God*.[235]

Calvin would have concurred. His own theological configuration of God's Triunity gave doctrinal substance to his emphasis on knowing, and brought a personal dimension to our knowledge of God somewhat revolutionary in doctrinal history.

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[234] James I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 44.
[235] Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 1. [Emphasis original.]

3.5 Appendixes
3.5.1 OVERVIEW, *INSTITUTES* 1.13

Book 1. Chapter 13: IN SCRIPTURE, FROM THE CREATION ONWARD, WE ARE TAUGHT ONE ESSENCE OF GOD, WHICH CONTAINS THREE PERSONS

1-6:   Terms used in the doctrine of the Trinity by the Orthodox Fathers
1.   God's nature is immeasurable and spiritual
2.   The three 'Persons' in God
3.   The expressions 'Trinity' and 'Person' aid the interpretation of Scripture and is therefore admissible
4.   The church has regarded expressions like 'Trinity,' 'Person' etc., as necessary to unmask false teachers
5.   Limits and necessity of theological terms
6.   The meaning of the most important conception

7-13:   The eternal deity of the Son
7.   The deity of the Word
8.   The eternity of the Word
9.   The deity of Christ in the Old Testament
10.   The 'Angel of the Eternal God'
11.   The divinity of Christ in the New Testament: witness of the apostles
12.   The divinity of Christ is demonstrated in his works
13.   The divinity of Christ is demonstrated by his miracles

14-15:   The eternal deity of the Spirit
14.   The divinity of the Spirit is demonstrated in his work
15.   Express testimonies for the deity of the Spirit

16-20:   Distinction and unity of the three Persons
16.   Oneness
17.   Threeness
18.   Difference of Father, Son and Spirit
19.   The relationship of Father, Son and Spirit
20.   The Triune God

21-29:   Refutation of anti-Trinitarian heresies
21.   The ground of all heresy: a warning to all
22.   Servetus' contention against the Trinity
23.   The Son is God even as the Father
24.   The name 'God' in Scripture does not refer to the Father alone
25.   The divine nature is common to all three Persons
26.   The subordination of the incarnate Word to the Father is no counter-evidence
27.   Our adversaries falsely appeal to Irenaeus
28.   The appeal to Tertullian also is of no avail
29.   All acknowledged doctors of the church confirm the doctrine of the Trinity

3.5.2 CORRESPONDENCE AND PUBLICATIONS IN THE TRINITARIAN DEBATE

1537 —	**Pierre Caroli**
14 May 1537,	Address. Published as *Confessio de Trinitate propter calumnias P. Caroli* (*CO* 9:703-10)
10 August 1540,	Letter appealing for reconciliation (*CO* 11:72-75)
1545,	Pseudonymous Defence: *Pro Farello et collegis eius adversus Petri Caroli calumnus defensio Nicolai Gallasii* (*CO* 7:289-340)

1543	**Jean Courtois**
28 May 1543,	Letter to Ministers in Neuchâtel (*CO* 11:559-62)
November 1543,	Letter to Ministers in Neuchâtel (*CO* 11:652-54)

1545	**Jean Chaponneau**
21 January 1545,	Letter to Ministers in Neuchâtel (*CO* 12:13-20)

1546 —	**Michael Servetus**
1546 —	Various letters and correspondence
Feb. 1554,	*Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate, contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani, ubi ostenditur haereticos iure gladii coercendos esse, et nominatim de homine hoc tam impio iuste et merito sumptum Genevae fuisse supplicium* [with a French translation] (*CO* 8:453-644)

1554 —	**Sebastian Castellio**
September 1554,	Beza on Calvin's behalf: *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis*
1557,	*Responses à certaines calomnies et blasphèmes.* (lost)
1557,	*Brevis responsio Io. Calvini as diluendas nebulonis cuiusdam calumnias quibus doctrinam de aeterna Dei praedestinatione foedare conatus est.* (*CO* 9:257-66)
1558,	*Calumniae nebulonis cuiusdam, quibus odio et invidia gravare conatus est doctrinam Ioh. Calvini de occulta Deo providentia. Ionnis Calvini ad easdem responsio.* (*CO* 9:269-318)

1555 —	**Matteo Gribaldi**
29 June 1555,	Consistory meeting
June 1555,	Letter to Melchior Wolmar (*CO* 15:644)
2 May 1557,	Letter to Count Georg von Württemberg (*CO* 16:463-66)

1558	**Giorgio Blandrata**
4 July 1558,	Letter to Nikolaus Zurkinden, (*CO* 17:235-39)
19 July 1558,	Letter to Galeazzo Caraccioli di Vico (*CO* 17:255-59)
1558,	*Responsum ad quaestiones Georgii Blandratae* (*CO* 9:321-32)

1558 —	**Giovanni Valentino Gentilis**
1561,	*Impietas Valentini Gentilis detecta et palam traducta, qui Christum non sine sacrilega blasphemia Deum essentiatum esse fingit* (*CO* 9:361-420)

1560	**Francesco Stancaro**
June 1560,	*Responsum as fratres Polonos, quomodo mediator sit Christus, ad refutandum Stancaro errorem* (*CO* 9:333-42)
February 1561,	Letter to Stancaro (*CO* 19:230-31)
	Letter to Stanislaus Stadnitski (*CO* 18:378-80)
March 1561,	*Ministrorum ecclesiae Genevensis responsio as nobiles Polonos et Franciscum Stancarum Mantuanum de controversia mediators* (*CO* 9:345-58)

1563	**Polish Unitarians**
1563,	*Brevis admonitio Ioannis Calvini as fratres Polonos, ne triplicem in Deo essentiam pro tribus personis imaginando, tres sibi deos fabricent* (*CO* 9:629-38)
1563,	*Epistola Ioannis Calvini qua fidem admonitionis ab eo nuper editae apud Polonos confirmat* (*CO* 9:641-50)

1558	**Menno Simons (via Martin Micron)**
1558,	Letter to Martin Micron: *Contra Mennonem* (*CO* 10a:167-76)

CHAPTER 4

HEARING THE TRIUNE GOD:
CALVIN'S THEO-*LOGICAL HERMENEUTICS*[1]

IN THE PREVIOUS two chapters we came to the conclusion that *knowing (the Triune) God* was a prominent and significant theme in Calvin's theology. This being the case, one would expect such a theme to be both the result of Calvin's hermeneutics, and in turn, to exert a major influence on his method and practice of Biblical interpretation. It has for example been demonstrated that Calvin's notion of God's Triunity has had a profound impact on his doctrinal formulation of the sacraments.[2] However, if the church in the mind of Calvin existed only where "the Word of God [was] purely preached" and where "the sacraments [were] administered according to Christ's institution" (*Inst.* 4.1.9), it raises the question as to the impact Calvin's Trinitarian view of God had on his preaching. This investigation gains significance when one considers the pre-eminent place preaching held in the life of the Reformer, as well as the surprising neglect it (and by implication the *Commentaries*) has experienced at the hands of those who sought to comprehensively understand his theology. The *telos* of *doctrina* was after all not its preservation in the *Institutio*, but its exposition and practice in the church. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to explore Calvin's understanding of God's Triune self-communication under the rubric of his hermeneutics and especially through the practice of preaching.

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[1] The material in this chapter is loosely based on a paper first delivered at the Sixth South African Congress for Calvin Research held in Potchefstroom in August 2000, and which was subsequently published. See James B. Krohn, "The Triune God Who Speaks: Calvin's Theological Hermeneutics," *KOERS* 66:1&2 (2001): 53-70.

[2] A number of excellent treatments of Calvin's '*Spirit*-ual' view of the sacraments already exist. See especially Philip W. Butin's discussion in *Revelation, Redemption and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 97-121.

4.1 Preamble: *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*

GERHARD EBELING is reported to have stated that Church History is nothing but "the history of the interpretation of Scripture."[3] Speaking from the perspective of the so-called 'new hermeneutic,'[4] one of the many ways in which modern critical study of the Bible has led to the loss of a unitary (historical) reading of the Biblical text, his remark nonetheless contains an obvious truth, namely the centrality of Biblical interpretation in the history of the church. Going back as far as the second century when the main lines of the New Testament were just in view, the Christian Bible was conceived by Irenaeus (*c.* 180) as both theological achievement and hermeneutical programme. Irenaeus' Biblical theology (*Against Heresies*) was an expression of the unity of creation and redemption in the Biblical history of salvation, and therefore a theological interpretation of Scripture.[5] If with 'theological interpretation' we include "that practice whereby theological concerns and interests inform and are informed by a reading of [S]cripture," then it has been the norm for Christians throughout Christian history to read the Bible 'theologically.'[6] However, since the ascendancy of Modern Biblical criticism and the domestication of interpretative science in the academy, that situation has been radically altered. For the first time in Christian history the public reading of the Bible had been wrested from the hands of its rightful heir, the church, and the theological programme within which Scriptural interpretation previously had a fairly clear role, became fragmented.[7] What remained of Scriptural interpretation in the church, was privatised. Yet the church's identity, mission and survival depends largely on a theological engagement with Scripture. There is no other coherent way forward on the basis of God's Word. In the words of Peter Jensen; "Unless we can say to the church and the world what the bible says, Christian faith becomes mystical and superstitious

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[3] Cited in Robert Morgan, "The Bible and Christian Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 123.

[4] "One feature of this theological programme was its willingness to employ a radical historical criticism which sought to strip away 'inessentials' such as the bodily resurrection of Jesus in order to attain a supposedly more fundamental understanding of the divine-human relationship." Present meaningfulness was what it sought to attain in the light of the problem of historical distance. See Francis Watson, "The Scope of Hermeneutics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 66.

[5] Morgan, "The Bible and Christian Theology," 118-119.

[6] Stephen E. Fowl, "Introduction," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), xiii.

[7] It is true that were large periods in the history of the church that the Bible was not in the hands of the church, that is, God's people at congregational level. However, since the ascendancy of historical-criticism, the Bible has been interpreted in a secular and fragmented environment. For an overview of the factors leading to this situation, see *Ibid.*, xiii-xvi.

and the clear statement of the gospel is lost."[8] One of the considerations in what follows below will be to reflect on the manner in which Calvin's exegetically driven, unitary theological interpretation of Scripture can be an aid to the church during the current crisis in Biblical interpretation.[9]

The main consideration of the investigation however, besides disclosing the desirability of incorporating *doctrina* into the hermeneutical process, will be to draw out the significance Calvin attached to the integration of preaching into the same process. In the Reformation era, the mirror of Biblical *exegesis* was its expression in Biblical commentary,[10] while Biblical *interpretation*[11] was most notably realised through confessional declaration. Yet the picture remains starkly incomplete and wholly inaccurate if the enormous hermeneutical significance of the pulpit in the life of the sixteenth-century church is neglected, particularly for Protestantism. Calvin's preaching was such a significant aspect of his life as Reformer, that it stands as an accomplishment on its own. Herein lies the challenge for contemporary Calvin interpreters, as there is a tendency to treat his preaching (if it is treated at all)[12] as an activity only marginally related to the rest of his theological activity, via the commentaries. This is a grave mistake, as according to Gerald Bray, one of the most consequential hermeneutical principles held by Calvin was that Biblical interpretation had to realise its goal in preaching.[13] In order for hermeneutics to be complete in Calvin's schema, it had to pass through three distinct but related phases; *exegesis* (represented by his commentaries), *dogmatics* (represented by the *Institutio*), and

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[8] Peter F. Jensen, "Preface," in *Interpreting God's Plan: Biblical Theology and the Pastor*, ed. R. J. Gibson (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), x.

[9] Though others may find occasion for optimism because of the pluralistic ethos of the current hermeneutical situation, we believe that unless we follow our Lord in a coherent and unitary reading of the Scriptures (cf. Luke 24:27), we have failed to understand (and be obedient to) the revelation which the Lord has granted us.

[10] See Richard A Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 3ff.

[11] Though *exegesis*, *interpretation* and *hermeneutics* are often used interchangeably, we would like to introduce the following distinctions for the purpose of our discussion. With *exegesis* we refer to what the text originally meant, and therefore the *science* related to working with the elements present in the text. With *hermeneutics*, we refer to the general *principles* which govern and guide the broader interpretational task, including its contextualisation (application). Hermeneutics thus includes a large exegetical component. *Interpretation* we use as a mid-way term between exegesis and hermeneutics, and particularly to describe the normal and non-technical manner in which all human beings attempt to make sense of things, events and texts.

[12] Ironically, with the exception of the works of T. H. L. Parker, very few other independent treatments exist of Calvin's preaching. See his *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (London: Lutterworth, 1947); and *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1992). Related to this are his other works; *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986); and *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (London, SCM Press, 1971).

[13] Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 203.

preaching (represented by his sermons).[14] If any of these phases were omitted, the text would and could not have been properly interpreted, as the message of Scripture had not rightly been applied to the life of the church, the beneficiary of God's blessings in Christ. It must be remembered that Calvin was not primarily a Biblical scholar in the modern sense of the word. He was first and foremost a pastor and a *Verbi Divini minister*.

4.2 Calvin as Preacher and Theologian

4.2.1 PREACHING: THE SPIRITUAL SWORD OF GOD'S WORD

In a letter written on the 22nd October 1548 to Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford and Duke of Somerset,[15] John Calvin somewhat surprisingly staked the entire success of the achievement of an open and complete reformation of the church in England on *preaching*:

> There is some danger that you may see no great profit from all the reformation which you shall have brought about, however sound and godly it may have been, unless this powerful instrument of preaching be developed more and more. It is not said without a meaning, that *Jesus Christ shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked* [Isaiah 11:4]. ... Even so, albeit the edicts and statutes of princes are good helps for advancing and upholding the state of Christianity, yet God is pleased to declare His sovereign power by this spiritual sword of His Word, when it is made known by the pastors.[16]

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[14] Bray lists things in this order though in reality the *Institutio* preceded the Commentaries. This is no moot point. It suggests that doctrine was also viewed by the reformers as an exegetical activity, but with a different focus and outcome. Later on, these two forms of exegesis, the one thematical and the other topical, achieved a complementary and harmonious relationship. (Preaching also preceded the Commentaries, though the exegesis involved preceded both.)

[15] Though October 1548 appears on the masthead (Bonnet's insertion), there is some uncertainty as to the exact date of this letter written to Edward Seymour who was Regent of England under the minority of King Edward VI. It may have been written a year or two later, at which Seymour would have been in prison, and Calvin unaware of the fact. Under Seymour's administration the reformation was established in England, and Calvin had earlier dedicated his *Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy* to him (July 1548). Of the three things Calvin mentions in this letter necessary for reforming the church (right instruction; abolition of abuses; fight against sin), it is the instruction (preaching and teaching) which stands out in the recommendation.

[16] John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin: Selected from the Bonnet Edition* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1980), 96.

It is clear from these lines that Calvin held preaching to be the most powerful instrument of God on earth, more so than the governance of earthly rulers. Naturally then, reformation could only be achieved by means of preaching, a stance which Calvin modelled in his own life. The reason why preaching was held to be so important, was as Parker put it, "not educational or social but *theological.*"[17] Amongst the many other ways in which the reformers could have (and did in many cases) spread their propaganda, they chose preaching because of what they understood 'the Word of God' to be. To them it meant "the Word that God himself speaks."[18] We will be returning to this significant point again in some detail, but may for the moment note this as the reason why Calvin held pastors to be more privileged than rulers in bringing about God's causes. As it stated in the *Institutio*:

> For, among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them. (*Inst.* 4.1.5)

The only condition which applied to the pastors in order that 'God's voice may resound in them,' was simply that they had to be faithful interpreters of the Word. This was much easier said than done, but Calvin hinted at its necessary prerequisite in the same letter to Seymour. It was fine for preachers to be "lively" and "good trumpets" he said, but "in the first place there ought to be an explicit *summary of the doctrine* which all ought to preach, which all prelates and curates swear to follow, and no one should be received to any ecclesiastic charge who does not promise to preserve such agreement."[19] Or, as he put it in his *Commentary on Titus*, "the first thing required in a pastor is that he be well instructed in *the knowledge of sound doctrine.*"[20] What Calvin had in mind with sound doctrine was 'an interpretation and teaching based on Scripture alone' (*sola Scriptura*). His use of the concept *doctrina* has been shown to be inextricably linked to a unitary and theological reading and proclamation of the message of Scripture.[21] In other words, Calvin held to a *single-source* theory of doctrine, as opposed to the prevailing Late

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[17] T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin* (London: Lion Publishing, 1975), 106. [Emphasis added.]

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Letters of John Calvin: Selected from the Bonnet Edition*, 95. [Emphasis added.]

[20] He continued: "... the second is, that, with unwavering firmness of courage, he hold by the confession of it to the last; and third is, that he make his manner of teaching tend to edification, and ... not through motives of ambition, fly about through the subtleties of frivolous curiosity, but seek only the solid advantage of the Church." *Commentary on Titus* 1:9. Cf. 2:1. Sound doctrine is *wholesome* doctrine, that which feeds the soul.

[21] See the study of Victor E. d'Assonville (Jr.), "The Ministry of the Word — The Concept of *Doctrina* as used by Calvin in his first *Institutes* (1536)," *KOERS* 66:1&2 (2001): 84-85.

Medieval *dual-source* theory of Scripture aided by unwritten tradition.[22] Unlike the radical wing of the Reformation who rejected tradition in totality, the Magisterial Reformers did not exclude the rightful use of tradition or of Biblically-oriented confessions and summaries such as Calvin's own *Institutio*. Nevertheless, *doctrina* was not to consist of a body of teaching supplementary (or even complementary) to Scripture, but intended to convey the teaching of the Bible itself. The Reformation was too much of a true Biblical revival (i.e., a revival of the Bible) to equate *doctrina* with *dogma* and *dogmatics*,[23] and therefore to suppose that Calvin was trying to impose his 'theological system' on others. Such a notion was foreign to the sixteenth century in any case,[24] especially for someone steeped in humanistic philology. The Protestant cause was an attempt to cut loose the Roman ecclesiological shackles which held the Bible captive, and one of its primary motivations was to let the Word of God speak for itself, and so to allow *God himself* to speak. Incidentally, herein lies the difference between many well-meaning attempts at expository preaching and Calvin's own view of the subject. Some contemporary exponents of Biblical preaching (especially in the post-critical Reformed tradition) regularly refer to what 'the Bible itself says,' while Calvin, preaching from the text would regularly refer to what 'God himself says.' Though a desire to instil new confidence in the Bible, theirs is an inadvertent expression of fading conviction regarding the God who himself speaks through the Biblical text. In particular, it suggests a loss of conviction about the third Person of the Trinity's activity in the inspiration of the Bible and the illumination of the human heart and mind. As Calvin put it to the Duke of Somerset; "God is pleased to declare His sovereign power by this *[S]piritual sword of His Word*."[25]

Calvin was himself a prolific preacher. It is said that he preached an estimated four thousand sermons in Geneva alone,[26] at periods preaching as often as six times per week. Most remarkable is the fact that he preached extemporaneously while reading the Biblical text in either Hebrew or Greek (and possibly in Latin) and simultaneously translating into French. His

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[22] This is not to say that tradition had no role to play for the Reformers. The *single-source* theory of doctrine included tradition in the sense of 'the traditional way of interpreting Scripture.' See Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 182.

[23] "The Reformation did not express its faith in dogmas but in credal statements, fallible human summaries of the Word of God. ... It is remarkable therefore that the word *dogmatics* arose in a Protestant climate. It was first used by L. F. Reinhart in his *Synopsis theologiae dogmaticae* (1659)." Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. S. Woudstra, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 33.

[24] 'System' imposition is a Modern problem which gave birth to the notion of 'metanarratives.' Sixteenth-century system was a matter of philosophical abstractions more distantly related to the text, i.e., *besides* it and not *in* it. (Its claims were mostly extra-textual even though the exegetical debates were intra-textual.)

[25] *Letters of John Calvin*, 95. [Emphasis added.]

[26] Pieter Potgieter, "John Calvin – *Verbi Divini Minister*," *KOERS* 66:1&2 (2001): 88.

knowledge of the Bible is said to have been concordance-like and his references and allusions to other passages than the one in hand were so woven into the sermon that they were hardly traceable. He put into practice his absolute commitment to the principle that Scripture was self-interpreting, and thus would not shy away from using one Biblical text to illuminate another. For example, as Kathryn Greene-McCreight has demonstrated, sections of his sermon on Isaiah 53:11 have at points a closer affinity with the argument of Romans.[27] What these aspects of his preaching suggest, is that he had a very strong idea of the *doctrina* of the Bible, or, at the very least as Bray suggested, was able to integrate thematical and topical aspects of Biblical teaching flawlessly into his sermonic exposition. His sermons are therefore superb examples of his theology and theological method, even if they are the least read and most often overlooked portion of his writings.[28]

4.2.2 THE MAKING OF A THEOLOGIAN

In Calvin's hermeneutical scheme, good preachers were to be good Biblical exegetes and therefore good theologians. But, was that all that was necessary to make a theologian? Martin Luther suggested in his stirring tract based on Psalm 119, that the study of theology (becoming a good theologian) comprised not only of *oratio* (prayer) and *meditatio* (Scriptural study and meditation), but also of *tentatio* (trial).[29] It was especially *tentatio* or *Anfechtung*, which Luther saw as the touchstone for creating 'understanding through experience,' and therefore of a theologian. That was certainly the case in his own life, but could the same have been said of Calvin? Bouwsma creatively suggested that Calvin was plagued by his own *Anfechtung*, namely his inner 'anxieties and doubts' which were at war with his 'obsession for certitude.'[30] However, one need not go to such depths of psychological speculation in order to find the making of Calvin as theologian. Calvin's trials and triumphs were as many and various as Luther's, all of which had a profound effect on his life and theology. He was also not the cool and detached theo-logician many suppose, as both warm and heated passages in his writings reveal.

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[27] See Greene-McCreight's introduction in "Selections from John Calvin's Sermons on Isaiah: Translated and Introduced by Kathryn Greene-McCreight," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 187-188.
[28] Greene-McCreight reckons we cannot know "either Calvin the biblical interpreter or Calvin the theologian" outside of his sermons. *Ibid.*, 186.
[29] See Martin Luther's "Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings" (1939), trans. R. R. Heitner, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 34 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 285-288.
[30] See our discussion in Chapter 2.

In the previous chapter we uncovered the extent of the Trinitarian debates throughout his ministry, and something of the effect it had on him. Virtually from the moment Calvin had set foot in Geneva, and for the remainder of his life, he found himself obliged to battle anti-Trinitarians such as Caroli, Courtois, Servetus, Castellio, the Italian anti-Nicenes (Gribaldi, Blandrata and Gentilis) and the Polish Unitarians.[31] These conflicts not only exerted him mentally and emotionally, they also challenged the theological pillars of his leadership in Geneva. Cottret in his recent biography on Calvin remarked on the Caroli-affair that "the debate was not merely doctrinal; it raised a double question that would haunt Calvin for the rest of his days. Is the Trinity demonstrable from the sole standpoint of Scripture? Does the principle of *sola Scriptura*, of decisive recourse to the Bible as the fountainhead of authority, allow one to avoid ambiguity?" Cottret concluded that it was "a shaken man who emerged as victor from his confrontation with Caroli."[32]

Luther could therefore justifiably have called Calvin a true theologian with reference to his *trials* surrounding the Trinity. Melanchthon on the other hand, referred to Calvin as "the theologian" on the basis of his *doctrine* of the Trinity. He had, according to Torrance, estimated that Calvin's deep grasp of the Trinity resembled that of Gregory Nazianzen in the late fourth century, and that he therefore ought to be referred to by the same title as had Gregory.[33] However significant this designation may or may not have been, it is remarkable that the matter of Trinitarian dogma and its Scriptural-hermeneutical legitimacy could have impacted Calvin's life in such a concentrated manner. The *Institutio* as well as the commentaries and sermons bear witness to this, especially where Calvin's rhetoric is aimed at an anti-Trinitarian antagonist. The name of Servetus for example, appears in the most unlikely places in Calvin's writings (particularly in the sermons), and is almost always referred to in a manner reserved for a 'traitor of the faith.'[34] For Calvin, theological orthodoxy and godliness went hand in hand, as with Athanasius,[35] and where the one was absent, he presumed the other to be also. In the following

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[31] See Chapter 3 for details.

[32] Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. M. W. McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 126.

[33] T. F. Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin," in *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 21-40.

[34] One example will suffice. In his sermons on Isaiah, Calvin takes issue with Servetus because of the prophecy concerning Cyrus the Persian. Calvin opted for the traditional view, that it was a reference to Christ, and says of Servetus, that "This is a terrible falsification of this beautiful prophecy, and in fact the sense that this unfortunate [Servetus] dreamed up was never before thought of by a human creature. *For although many heretics set out to pervert the teaching of Holy Scripture, they never went this far*" (CR 656). Cited in Greene-McCreight, "Selections from John Calvin's Sermons on Isaiah," 197. [Emphasis added.]

[35] Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin," 21-40. Athanasius' battle with the Arians was in his own mind, alongside being a doctrinal debate, also a struggle around Christian integrity and godliness.

sections, we will investigate the relation between Calvin's doctrine and exegesis, and attempt to grapple with some of the broader theological and exegetical issues relevant to the hermeneutical process.

4.3 Calvin as Theological Exegete

ONE OF the great failures in the recent history of Calvin scholarship has been its inability to produce a single comprehensive study which adequately demonstrates the integration of theology and exegesis in Calvin's writings.[36] When Gamble first articulated the problem in 1988, he was also able to pinpoint the reason for this lacuna; Calvin's "exegetical or rhetorical methodology [was] simpler to apprehend than his theological methodology," and "surprisingly little consensus" existed on the foundations of his theology.[37] No doubt, part of the problem lies in not being able to agree on a basic (theological) theme for the *Institutio*, or the rejection of the idea altogether.[38] McKee on the other hand, identified the problem of integrating Calvin's theology and exegesis to be the result of too much reading of the *Institutio*, and too little use of the commentaries, a 'problem' of bifurcation for which she ultimately held Calvin himself responsible.[39] Ironically, neither of these problems, including the one Gamble identified, exist outside of the academy where the commentaries are regularly in use by preachers, and readers of the *Institutio* do not fail to get a sense of a unified theology (if not a specific dogma) in Calvin's writing. There is however another problem in relating Calvin's theology to his exegesis, namely the contemporary view of Biblical interpretation which sees it as undesirable to allow

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[36] Though the problem was first articulated some fifteen years ago, such a study is still being waited upon, even though many excellent shorter essays do exist.

[37] Richard C. Gamble, "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23:2 (November 1988): 193.

[38] Gamble suggested that the search for either an 'all-encompassing theme,' or a 'centrally important dogma' is misguided and futile. Yet, he himself in the same essay proposed a 'controlling principle,' namely the *duplex cognitio Dei* (knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer). We fail to see how he could draw such a neat distinction by rejecting the one and accepting the other. Though the *duplex cognitio Dei* cannot be called a 'dogma,' it is without a doubt a 'theme' with immense theological-exegetical implications. *Ibid.*, 180, 186-187.

[39] Elsie A. McKee, "Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin's *Institutio*: A Methodological Suggestion," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honour of Edward A., Jr.*, ed. Elsie A. McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1989), 154.

too much theological input into the hermeneutical process. We hope to show by means of Calvin's accomplishment, that this view is neither plausible nor possible.

4.3.1 RELATING THEOLOGY TO EXEGESIS

Putting his preaching aside for the moment, the other two pillars of Calvin's lifework, his Biblical exposition of the Old and New Testaments in the commentaries, and his principle work the *Institutio*, were distinguished by himself as publications *in Scripturae expositione* (exegesis) and *in Dogmatibus* (doctrine).[40] The relationship between the two is what is exciting and what according to Kraus requires a twofold description:

> ... first, exegetical research and commentary continually revealed new aspects of biblical proclamation and continued to complete, form, organise, and correct the work on the *Institutes* (from 1536 to 1559, in the various new versions and editions); second, biblical theology shaped the dogmatic *Institutes* so profoundly that Calvin could call the systematic, principle work a "summary of gospel teaching" [cf. *Institutio* 3.19.1]. In other places it means that the task of the *Institutes* consists in finding the sum total of that which God wanted to teach us in his Word. [41]

The reasons why Calvin had chosen to work in a bifurcated fashion are complex. His inauguration into the Protestant cause initially saw him imitating the catechetical/ apologetical work done by Luther, and the *Institutio* was born and continued to develop. Somewhat later, just before he launched into producing his own commentaries,[42] Calvin did careful research into the manner of writing these exegetical works at a critical and creative time in exegetical history. As Muller and Thompson put it; "By all accounts, the sixteenth century marked an epoch in the history of exegesis, for the combined force of the philological and textual interests of Renaissance humanism and the theologically critical, scriptural demands of the Reformation led to a flowering of editions, translations, and interpretations of the biblical text."[43] However, the

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[40] Hans-Joachim Kraus, "The Contemporary Relevance of Calvin's Theology," in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, ed. D. Willis and M. Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 325.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] His first commentary was on the *Epistle to the Romans*, which was published in March 1540 in Strasbourg. For many reasons, this commentary and the exegetical method by which it was conceived, is of cardinal importance in understanding Calvin's theology. See our discussion of his sermons on Isaiah below.

[43] Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, "The Significance of Precritical Exegesis: Retrospect and Prospect," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, 343.

development of the methods of interpretation during the Reformation is a highly complex phenomenon which relates to issues of continuity and discontinuity with Medieval interpretational methods, and of which we cannot offer an account here.[44] The basic result of Calvin's research was that he criticised Bucer's massive commentaries — which attempted to incorporate paraphrased text, running theological commentary, topical analysis and topical explanations — for being unwieldy; Bullinger's method of inserting standard theological *loci* at unrelated places in the text, he found out of place; and Melanchthon's treatment of only the problematical theological topics (*loci*) resident in the text, obscure and confusing.[45] He interacted with all of them, but under the rubric of *perspicua brevitas* (clear conciseness) and honouring the *mens scriptorus* (authorial intention), he achieved a product which was unique in its time, and which many have seen as the inauguration of modern Biblical scholarship.[46] As he put it himself in 1539 (in the dedicatory preface to Simon Grynaeus in his *Commentary on Romans*):

> ... the chief excellency of an expounder consists in lucid brevity. And, indeed, since it is almost his only work to lay open the mind of the writer whom he undertakes to explain, the degree in which he leads away his readers from it, in that degree he goes away from his purpose, and in a manner wanders from his own boundaries. ... but still I cannot be drawn away from the love of what is compendious.[47]

However much this goal ensured that the commentaries were concise and 'to the text,' it increased the necessity for the user to have prior familiarity with his Biblical interpretative guide, the *Institutio*. The two were thus not to be isolated from each other, and in spite of the desire by some contemporary scholars to give the exegetical works priority,[48] one suspects that it was the *Institutio* which featured more prominently in Calvin's mind as well as within the framework of sixteenth-century religious needs. As a theological handbook, the *Institutio* was only one of a few 'ordered' theologies produced in the sixteenth-century,[49] and was as

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[44] See the stimulating essay by Muller already mentioned; "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation." See also T. H. L. Parker, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans, 1532-1542* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986).

[45] Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation," 15-16.

[46] See for example Hans-Joachim Kraus, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles," *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 9-18. Kraus has come in for much praise but also some justified criticism for neglecting aspects of Medieval continuity in Calvin's exegesis. Kraus makes Calvin out to be an early forerunner of higher-criticism.

[47] Dedicatory Epistle, *Commentary on Romans* (*CO* 10:2:402-3).

[48] This seems to us to be reactionary against the older view which neglected the commentaries in favour of seeing Calvin as a person of one book, the *Institutio* only.

[49] We purposefully avoid using the designation "systematic" when applied to the *Institutio*, as that terminology raises notions of doing theology in a manner alien to Calvin's intent. Other than the *Institutio*, Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* was published in 1521, Zwingli's *Commentary on the True and False Religion* in 1525, and Farel's *Sommaire* also in 1525.

indispensable to the Reformation cause as it was in aiding the commentary reader to achieve a unified understanding of Biblical *doctrina*.

But, the relationship between theology and exegesis was not static or one way. As McKee put it; "Although undoubtedly theological (as well as social, political, and other) convictions influenced Calvin's interpretation of scripture, setting the biblical passages he cites in the *Institutes* in historical context demonstrates the rich exegetical justification for Calvin's claim to be a faithful interpreter of God's Word. It also reveals the Genevan reformer's gifts as a consummate master of biblical commonplaces [*loci communes*]."[50] His exegesis influenced his theology and his theology influenced his exegesis. The two were meant to complement each other, and they did, as their development and relationship were always symbiotic in nature. Nevertheless, organising exegesis into a coherent framework was unavoidable and indispensable. Therefore, as McKee accurately concluded:

> ... Calvin's genius lay in his *theological perspective* on exegesis. Very little in the content of Calvin's interpretation is new. What is novel is the vision which informed the way the Protestant biblical scholar read scripture in the light of other scripture, and his drive to provide a coherent and practicable view of biblical teaching. It is undoubtedly this coherence as an exegete which contributed in good measure to the impact of the *Institutes* on the biblically oriented world of the sixteenth century.[51]

Though the relation between the *Institutio* (theology) and the commentaries (exegesis) has been noted to be complex (and by some problematic), their complementary nature is what made Calvin's exegetical achievement so significant. Yet, it must be conceded (cf. McKee), that it is as *theological* exegete that Calvin made his impact. It follows necessarily that Calvin scholars cannot afford to abandon their efforts to understand Calvin's theology comprehensively (i.e., as expressed in the *Institutio*) simply because agreement cannot be found on a central dogma or a controlling principle. Secondly, it is only a matter of course that Calvin's coherent, comparative and comprehensive understanding of the Biblical teaching concerning its primary subject, the Triune God, would have been informing and in return constantly be informed by, his exegesis. Later on in this chapter, we will have opportunity to show how this is expressed by means of reference to his sermons. Before we do so however, we have to briefly point out the value and

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[50] McKee, "Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin's *Institutio*," 155-156.
[51] *Ibid.*, 168. [Emphasis added.]

inevitability of theological hermeneutics and make reference to Calvin's general interpretational principles.

4.3.2 THE VALUE OF THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

4.3.2.1 *The* Theo-*logical Dimension of All Interpretation*

Theology has always been centred on the Biblical text, and the current status of exegetical knowledge could not have come about without the centuries of preceding interpretation of Scripture. The *interpretative* dimension of theology is therefore a determined factor in its ongoing existence. It is however more difficult to recognise the counter-truth, that (all) interpretation has an equally determined *theological* dimension.[52] What we mean with the theological dimension of interpretation, is not just the fact that all interpreters bring to the text the make-shifts of a prior formed theology, but that all human search for understanding, meaning and knowing, is inherently *theo*-logical. There is a God-dimension, a reference to him, in all human quests. (In this sense, even *a*-theism is defined by means of reference to God.). Calvin demonstrated this superbly in the *Institutio* by stating from the outset that the sum of *all wisdom* (*sacred doctrine* in the 1536 *Institutio*) lies in knowing God and knowing self, and that "all men are born and live to the end that they may know God" (cf. *Inst.* 1.1.1-3). The thematic importance of this declaration for the whole of the *Institutio* can hardly be overstated.

It follows that all hermeneutical schemes reflect underlying notions about God and humanity. The effects of erroneous notions of God on Biblical interpretation are well documented in the annals of the church. In the late Middle Ages, *theologia* had the "being of God" as foundational principle, and was defined as *sermo vel ratio de Deo*, a word or rational discourse concerning God.[53] Its goal (*praxis*), was the union of the believer with God. However, it was accepted amongst scholastic practitioners of *theologia*, to have a philosophical rather than an expressly Biblical notion of God occupying this position of epistemological privilege. The result was that when Luther presented alongside *justification by faith* his *theologia crucis* as a new paradigm for *theologia*, an upset was caused which saw epistemology put aside in favour of

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[52] See the excellent discussion on this by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?: The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), 29ff.
[53] See Richard A. Muller, *The Study of Theology: From Biblical Interpretation to Contemporary Formulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 45.

soteriology. Calvin on the other hand, was able to re-prioritise the doctrine of God without forfeiting the newly gained emphasis on soteriology. He achieved this by means of the Trinity. Stephen Williams explains:

> In the *Institutes*, biblical doctrine is organised in accordance with trinitarian belief, following the pattern of the Apostles' Creed. It begins and pursues its course with the epistemological question of the knowledge of God. But engagement with epistemology immediately reveals the tragedy of the human condition, so that we await in the *Institutes* the announcement of the gospel that will do something about humanity which has, by disobedience, forfeited a part of the knowledge of God and made what remains salvifically, impotent. It is with the discussion of Christ the Redeemer, in the second book of the *Institutes*, that the burden is lifted and dogmatics becomes Good News.[54]

In this way, Calvin's theology was no less a *theologia crucis* than Luther's, the difference being that Calvin's exposition of sin and grace was conceived along distinctly Trinitarian lines. The Triune God revealed through Christ and the Holy Spirit, not a philosophical conception of God, governed his hermeneutics. Remarking on the same pattern which unfolds in Calvin's *Institutes*, Goldsworthy commented that "This logical order of matters in the *Institutes* should not obscure the fact that *soteriology and epistemology are inseparable*, so that our knowledge of God as Trinity is an epistemological spin-off of being saved by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. This point is crucial to the question of theological method."[55] What it means is that Christian theology has as its ultimate presupposition the self-revealing and self-authenticating Triune God. When we come to Calvin's basic hermeneutical principles, we will see how this *theo*-logical dimension governed his reading of Scripture. For Calvin, no genuine interpretation of the Bible could take place without a personal encounter with the Triune God.

4.3.2.2 *The Benefits of Theological Commitment*

In his essay "The Case for Calvinistic Hermeneutics," Moisés Silva shrewdly pointed out that the notion of approaching any text "free from prejudice" and without any theological predispositions, is at best "naive."[56] He went on to suggest that it is inevitable and even preferable that one's theology should guide one's exegesis. The reasons for this were the

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[54] Stephen N. Williams, *Revelation and Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 173.
[55] Graeme L. Goldsworthy, "'Thus Says the Lord': The Dogmatic Basis of Biblical Theology," in *God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays presented to D. B. Knox*, ed. P. T. O'Brien and D. G. Peterson (Homebush: Lancer Books, 1986), 26. [Emphasis added.]
[56] See Moisés Silva, "The Case for Calvinistic Hermeneutics," in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 260-261.

following; first, theology was a necessary exercise in contextualising Scriptural teaching; second, the unity of Scripture demanded that the whole be seen as the context of any one part; and third, the text will be read through theological presuppositions anyway.[57] There was thus no way that theological commitments would not impact the exegetical process. As Goldsworthy put it, "the question is not whether there is a dogmatic basis for biblical theology, but rather what is the right dogmatic basis."[58] It was therefore necessary to be self-consciously aware of one's theological presuppositions when approaching the text, as well as of the theological framework which supported these presuppositions. For the Reformers this included, amongst other things, holding self-consciously to the view that the Bible was God's authoritative Speech, and that the 'spiritual man' alone was able to interpret the Bible properly. In terms of a theological framework, they inherited a whole body of orthodox theology which would have been unthinkable for them to discard except for very good exegetical warrant. In many instances they did reject the teaching they inherited, but for the most part they were intent on drawing out the soteriological perspective of what the church had always 'believed, taught and confessed on the basis of the Word of God.'[59] Sound hermeneutics involved a more complex process than simply executing fine exegesis. It hinged on demonstrating adequate integration of (existing) theology and (ongoing) exegesis.

We must be reminded that Calvin was not an inventor of theological novelties. The development of the *Institutio* provides ample evidence of Calvin's consultation with historical theology in order to solve a growing number of theological problems. References to the Fathers and Medieval theologians increased sharply as the *Institutio* grew, with an improved overall and final result. Calvin's achievement in commentary and *Institutio* was such a fine example of integration between theology and exegesis, that it made his contribution in both areas remarkable. Both were superb exactly because they were so intimately related.[60] It should therefore not be surprising to discover that "Calvin is the one Reformer whose commentaries

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[57] *Ibid.*, 261-263.

[58] Goldsworthy, "Thus Says the Lord," 37.

[59] Christian doctrine has been defined by Pelikan as "What the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches and confesses on the basis of the word of God." Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1.

[60] Silva demonstrated his point by means of examining Calvin's understanding of God's sovereignty, and how that understanding was an aid in his exegesis. See "The Case for Calvinistic Hermeneutics," 264-269. In our article, we attempted to give an indication of this by means of Calvin's Trinitarian understanding of Assurance, and of Predestination and Election. See Krohn, "The Triune God who Speaks," 60-61.

still stand in comparison with what is produced today," and that his output was "overwhelmingly Biblical" even though it was "anchored" in the *Institutes*.[61]

4.3.2.3 Biblical-Theological Hermeneutics

The integration of theology and exegesis created another significant achievement, namely that of keeping theological unity and historical progression in the Bible together. "Calvin [knew] nothing of any fundamental methodological distinction between Biblical exposition and Systematic Theology which would become characteristic of later Reformed thought."[62] To him it was all the Bible's theology, or *Biblical Theology*,[63] and by integrating the continuous-expository method of the commentaries with the topical-expository method of the *Institutio*, he provided the necessary (Biblical) foundation for the Reformation.[64] In doing so, he also laid the foundation for later *redemptive-historical* approaches to the Bible.[65]

Fundamentally, what Calvin was recognising was that redemption was an activity of God unfolding over time and in history. His notion of the economic Trinity had a key role to play in this. As we noted above, an attempt to savingly know God apart from his Trinitarian self-revelation was futile.[66] The unfolding of Biblical history revealed God himself by his own appointment, and theology could therefore not be an anachronistic discussion of redemption, but only of redemption in God's οἰκονομία and in its historical matrix. The significance of this point for Biblical interpretation is easily missed. Calvin's literary-historical method had sensitised him towards reading the Bible in a typological and Christological fashion. Hence, the fullness of God's self-revelation was to be found in Christ (cf. John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-3), and in both redemptive history and God's personal self-revelation, the focus or structural locus was offered by Christ. Calvin could write as if the Jews knew and understood, albeit imperfectly, the doctrine of Christ (cf. *Inst.* 2.6.4), and, as he stated in his *Commentary on John* 5:39, "we ought to

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[61] Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 177.

[62] Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 148, 209.

[63] The self-defining of the recent movement by the same title (cf. the work of Brevard Childs) notwithstanding, it can be argued that "the real impetus for biblical theology comes from the Reformation, for there lie the presuppositional roots of a truly biblical theology." Goldsworthy, "Thus Says the Lord," 25.

[64] Cf. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 26-48.

[65] For example, Covenant Theology, though it must be noted that Calvin could not singularly be held responsible for this development. See Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 204-208. The work done by John Bright (*The Kingdom of God* [1955]), Geerhardus Vos (*Biblical Theology Old and New Testaments* [1948]), Edmund Clowney (*Preaching and Biblical Theology* [1961]), Willem VanGemeren (*The Progress of Redemption* [1988]), and most recently Graham Goldsworthy (*According to Plan* [1991]), perhaps lays more legitimate claim to being the true heir of Calvin's foundations.

[66] Dowey's scheme which we covered in the previous chapter falls short at this point, because redemption lies not in recognising God as Redeemer (as opposed to Creator), but in recognising that he is the Triune Creator-Redeemer. See both Williams and Goldsworthy quotations above.

read the Scriptures with the express design of finding Christ in them. Whoever shall turn aside from this object, though he may weary himself throughout his whole life in learning, will never attain to the knowledge of the truth; for what wisdom can we have without the wisdom of God?"[67] Though he was thoroughly opposed to any unhistorical or allegorical reading of the text, Christ still represented the hermeneutical key to the Scriptures. The incarnation gave fullest expression to God's gracious saving initiative in the Father revealing, the Son redeeming and the Spirit transforming his people (cf. *Inst.* 2.12-14). "It is on this Christological and therefore Trinitarian basis that the biblical theologian must deal with all Scripture,"[68] and which allowed Calvin to achieve "a balance between the text, its meaning and its application which has seldom if ever been equalled in the life of the church."[69]

4.3.3 CALVIN'S HERMENEUTICAL DISTINCTIVES

We will not attempt to discuss or demonstrate Calvin's hermeneutical principles here in any detail, as there are a number of works which already attempt to do so.[70] Nonetheless, it is important to lay down a few guidelines before we proceed with our discussion.

Exegesis in the Reformation-era is said to have conformed to the following ten principles (David Steinmetz's well-known "Ten Theses"):[71]

1. The meaning of a biblical text is not exhausted by the original intention of the author.
2. The most primitive layer of biblical tradition is not necessarily the most authoritative.
3. The importance of the Old Testament for the church is predicated upon the continuity of the people of God in history, a continuity which persists in spite of discontinuity between Israel and the church.
4. The Old Testament is the hermeneutical key which unlocks the meaning of the New Testament and apart from which it will be misunderstood.
5. The church and not human experience as such is the middle term between the Christian interpreter and the biblical text.

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[67] The sentence which follows is equally important: "Next, as we are commanded to seek Christ in the Scriptures, so he declares in this passage that our labours shall not be fruitless; for the Father testifies in them concerning his Son in such a manner that He will manifest him to us beyond all doubt."

[68] Goldsworthy, "Thus Says the Lord," 33.

[69] Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 204.

[70] See Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 49-68; and Part 2 of T. F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988).

[71] David C. Steinmetz. "Theology and Exegesis: Ten Theses," *Historie de l'exégèse au XVIe siècle*, 382. Cited by Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation," 7.

6. The gospel and not the law is the central message of the biblical text.
7. One cannot lose the tension between the gospel and the law without losing both law and gospel.
8. The church which is restricted in its preaching to the original intention of the author is a church which must reject the Old Testament as an exclusively Jewish book.
9. The church which is restricted in its preaching to the most primitive layer of biblical tradition as the most authoritative is a church which can no longer preach from the New Testament.
10. Knowledge of the exegetical tradition of the church is an indispensable aid for the interpretation of Scripture.

Though the theses appear to be dressed up in the perspectival language of the contemporary hermeneutical debate (with an anti-modernist slant), they do suggest a certain sophistication in exegesis already present by the time of the Reformation, and accurately reflect the way in which the Bible was assimilated into the culture of the time. It is thus possible to reconcile Calvin's hermeneutics to Steinmetz's "ten theses." However, Calvin held some other more foundational and arguably more significant principles omitted by Steinmetz, some of which will become immediately evident by means of Bray's list of his hermeneutical distinctives:[72]

1. In the Bible, believers have a personal encounter with God which convinces them of the truth of the message contained in it.
2. The chief virtues of a good commentary are clarity and brevity.
3. The author's intention must be the guiding principle of interpretation.
4. The literal sense of interpretation is paramount, but we are not expected to follow it slavishly.
5. The Christological interpretation of Scripture must be historical as well as theological.
6. Biblical interpretation passes through three distinct but related phases. If one of these phases is omitted, the text will not be interpreted properly.

In what follows below, we want to elaborate briefly on Bray's first and fifth principles, and return in the next section to include principles three and six. (Having briefly dealt with the second principle in the previous section, and viewing the fourth as the one Steinmetz's scheme expanded upon above.)

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[72] Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 201-204.

4.3.3.1 Meeting God in the Text

On the first principle, it is important to note the obvious manner in which it reflects Calvin's line of argument in the *Institutio*. Once the *Institutio* had been introduced as a treatise on knowing (*Inst.* 1.1), and knowledge of God was set before the reader as humanity's ultimate and highest end (*Inst.* 1.1-2), Calvin pointed out the futility of perceiving God truly by any other means than Scripture (*Inst.* 1.3ff.). However, his epistemology not being rationalist but soteriological and 'Spiritual,' Calvin immediately moved to base the certitude and authority concerning the truth about God found in Scripture, not upon rational grounds, but upon the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit (*Inst.* 1.7). And, Word and Spirit being inextricably bound together, Scripture thus served the purpose of bringing humankind to a knowing encounter with the Triune God as against all other false notions of God (*Inst.* 1.10-14). Subsequently, as Bray put it; "To lose the sense of God's presence, and of his voice speaking when the text was being read, was to lose the text itself."[73] True interpretation of Scripture was thus to be accompanied with the attitude of *pietas*, and of trusting God to edify his church (Scripture is God's Word to the church) and individual believers (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). All of this may appear to be stating the obvious in terms of Calvin's stance towards the Bible, but it is remarkable how quickly this attitude was lost even amongst Calvin's immediate successors.[74] For Calvin, Holy Scripture was primarily aimed at 'true religion' which consisted in the relationship of the soul with "the living God" and the discernment of "who God truly is,"[75] that is, *Deus erga nos*, God as he has turned and directed himself toward us.[76]

4.3.3.2 Christ, the Scopus of the Text

In terms of "the Christological interpretation of Scripture being historical as well as theological" (principle 5), we have already noted the origins of what we have called a Biblical-Theological method in Calvin. What is of significance, is that with this principle Calvin made a definite break from the spiritual interpretations of the past, and even from Luther's idea of

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[73] *Ibid.*, 201-202. Or, in the words of Torrance; "In biblical interpretation and theological knowledge alike, then, we start from the actual situation where God stands before man and where he stands man before himself." Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, 164.

[74] See James M. Houston's argument; "Knowing God: The Transmission of Reformed Theology," in *Doing Theology for the People of God; Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer*, ed. D. Lewis and A. E. McGrath (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 239-242.

[75] *Inst.* 2.8.6: "... in Deum viventem ..." *CR* 55:148: "... nisi discernas quisnam verus sit Deus."

[76] See also the fine article by H. W. Rossouw, "Calvin's Hermeneutics of Holy Scripture," in *Calvinus Reformator: His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society* (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1982), 154-156.

'Christ in all the Scriptures.'[77] In Calvin's mind, the Bible was a historical document that ought not to be read anachronistically; the Old Testament preceded and led to the New. However, the nature of the unfolding of Biblical revelation predicated that the Old Testament had to be read in terms of its fulfilment in the New. Christ was the fullness of revelation and therefore the *scopus* of the Scripture. Yet, this did not suggest to Calvin, as it did in the minds of many of his contemporaries, that every verse concealed a hidden reference to Christ. For example, it was customary (from the time of the Church Fathers) to argue on the basis of the difference in participles attached to "image" and "likeness" in Genesis 1:26, that "*in* the image of God" (as opposed to "*after* his likeness") meant "in Christ." It had been intended as an argument against the Arians that Christ alone was God's image (cf. Colossians 1:15), and Calvin recognised it as such. Yet, he would have nothing of it; "I do not think that anything of the kind entered the mind of Moses," he said, and "the words of Moses do not bear [that] interpretation."[78] Numerous similar examples can be cited. In the following instance (on the doctrine of the Trinity in Isaiah 6:3) Calvin's style of dealing with unhistorical methods of interpretation is beautifully portrayed. We quote him at length:

> *Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts.* The ancients quoted this passage when they wished to prove that there are three persons in one essence of the Godhead. I do not disagree with their opinion; but if I had to contend with heretics, I would rather choose to employ stronger proofs; for they become more obstinate, and assume an air of triumph, when inconclusive arguments are brought against them; and they might easily and readily maintain that, in this passage, as in other parts of Scripture, the number "three" denotes perfection. Although, therefore, I have no doubt that the angels here describe One God in Three Persons, (and, indeed, it is impossible to praise God without also uttering the praises of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit,) yet I think that it would be better to employ more conclusive passages, lest, in proving an article of our faith, we should expose ourselves to the scorn of heretics. And, indeed, this repetition rather points out unwearied perseverance, as if the Prophet had said, that the angels never cease from their melody in singing the praises of God, as the holiness of God supplies us with inexhaustible reasons for them.[79]

As can be seen from both examples, the principle of adhering to the author's intention was at the forefront of Calvin's mind. Yet, the meaning of the text was clearly not exhausted by

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[77] Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 203.

[78] *Commentary on Genesis* 1:26.

[79] *Commentary on Isaiah* 6:3.

it. In his sermons on Isaiah, which reflect his mature exegesis,[80] Calvin had no hesitation in plainly (not allegorically or mystically) identifying the "suffering servant" as Christ. He did not do damage to Isaiah's historical context, but saw the prophecy as necessary for reshaping Jewish expectations of the Messiah. Isaiah thus spoke to different audiences in the same voice. He even spoke directly to Calvin's sixteenth-century audience. As Calvin exhorted his congregation: "This is why the Prophet calls here to each of us and says 'You poor people, look at what you are until God declared his mercy to you in our Lord Jesus Christ His Son. For we all have erred, you all are lost animals.'"[81]

Theological and doctrinal concerns were thus allowed to interact with the exegetical particulars at hand in terms of finding a contextualised application. In the end however, Calvin always strove towards preserving clarity and credibility in exegesis, not willing to forfeit it for the sake of making a theological point which did not fit the overall Biblical context. In the following section, we will examine more closely Calvin's 'theological managing' of the exegetical process by means of one of his sermons on The Gospel of John.

4.4 The God who Speaks

THE HERMENEUTICAL legitimacy of the doctrine of the Trinity presented an excellent test case for Calvin's theological method, especially as expressed through his preaching. It was one thing to be able to build an exegetical foundation for a doctrine such as the Trinity from a selected textual basis, but quite another to explain the doctrine exegetically and expositionally from a single text in location. As we have seen from the example of Isaiah 6:3 above, Calvin was not favourably disposed towards developing a doctrine from texts which do not allow it exegetically, simply for the sake of maintaining the orthodox cause. Given that we have perhaps chosen the most obvious textual basis to exemplify our claim that Calvin's

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[80] Calvin's sermons from Isaiah reflects his mature preaching, as the 343 sermons he preached from this book only commenced on 16 July 1556. He had lectured on Isaiah before (1549) and a commentary was compiled from the lectures which appeared in 1551. Calvin revised this compilation substantially in order for a totally new work to appear in 1559. His sermons therefore fit in-between his early lectures and his full commentary. For chronological and other details on the sermons and commentaries on Isaiah, see Wulfert De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, trans. L. D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 101-104, 110-117.

[81] Cited in Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Selections from John Calvin's Sermons on Isaiah," 188.

theological method is indeed *exegetical* and his exegetical method *theological*, namely John 1:1, it is still surprising to see both the amount of theological background he brought to the text as well as the exegetical sustainability of his theological position. But before we turn to his sermon, a few comments are in order with regards to the range of meaning of Calvin's use of the "Word of God."

4.4.1 THE WORD OF GOD

Calvin's use of the term *Verbum Dei* is fairly nuanced in his writings, and offers a range of meaning, from Scripture itself, to Christ (and preaching him), to the Spirit's testimony in the hearts of believers. The Protestant orthodox, drawing deeply from Calvin (and the other Reformers), distinguished four basic and interrelated meanings of the term *Verbum Dei*.[82] First, it referred to the *eternal* Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son; second, to the *incarnate* Word, Jesus Christ, the divine-human Mediator of salvation; third, to the *inspired* Word of the Holy Scripture, which is the Wisdom of God given in a form accessible to man; and fourth, to the *internal* Word of the Spirit, which testifies to the human heart concerning the truth of the written or external Word. All these meanings, somewhere or other, can be traced to Calvin. Note however, what Calvin says concerning the *Logos* of John 1:1 specifically:

> John spoke most clearly of all when he declared that that Word, God from the beginning with God, was at the same time the cause of all things, together with God the Father [John 1:1-3]. For John at once attributes to the Word a solid and abiding essence, and ascribes something uniquely His own, and clearly shows how God, by speaking, was Creator of the universe. Therefore, inasmuch as all divinely uttered revelations are correctly designated by the term "word of God," so this substantial Word is properly placed at the highest level, as the wellspring of all oracles. Unchangeable, the Word abides everlastingly one and the same with God, and is God himself. (*Inst.* 1.13.7)

The Word has a Trinitarian and revelatory (also governing; cf. Hebrews 1:3) association, and both are soteriologically oriented within the context of John 1. John 1:1ff. is thus an important passage from a Biblical-theological and Trinitarian perspective, as by clear allusion to

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[82] See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 324. See also Richard Gamble, "Calvin's Theological Method: Word and Spirit, A Case Study," in *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin*, ed. Robert V. Schnucker (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Essay and Studies, 1988), 63-75.

Genesis 1:1ff., a link is established between Creation and Redemption and between Creator and Redeemer. (This does not answer the question of how Calvin saw God's Word, Scripture, as encapsulating God's Speech and speaking. We will return to that difficult question in the very last section of this chapter. However, the discussion below will cast some light on the topic in the interim.)

4.4.2 "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE SPEECH ..." (JOHN 1:1)

Calvin's first sustained exegetical encounter with the Gospel of John appears to have occurred shortly after his appointment as 'Lecturer in New Testament Interpretation' (Feb. 1539) at the gymnasium in Strasbourg.[83] At the *Praelectiones*, he worked his way through the Gospel of John and the First Epistle to the Corinthians, but it was not until 1553 that his Commentary on John appeared. The only existent sermon on the Gospel of John comes from a collection of sermons entitled *Plusieurs sermons de Iehan Calvin touchant la divinité, humanité, et nativité de nostre Seigneur Iésus Christ* (1558).[84] The first of these sermons (or lectures) was a study of John 1:1-5, called "The Deity [*divinité*] of Jesus Christ."[85] The sermon, much like its counterpart in commentary (material was usually supplied from the one to the other), was introduced with the explanation of the word "Gospel," though notably for the sake of the audience, its description was made explicit and repetitive. Note the redemptive-historical (and economic-Trinitarian) focus on Christ and the adoption which the Father had promised and secured through the incarnation:

> The word 'Gospel' indicates that God in sending our Lord Jesus Christ His Son declares Himself Father to all the world. ... The Ancient Fathers ... were well assured that God would be their Father. But they did not have the Guarantee for the love of God and for their adoption. For when Jesus Christ came into the world, God signed and sealed His fatherly love. ... [The Son of God] took human

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[83] The Strasbourg years (1538-41) were in some sense the fullest of Calvin's life and of great significance to his later years in Geneva. He gained invaluable pastoral, exegetical and life experience while there.

[84] *CO* 47:461-84. First published in Geneva in 1558.

[85] It appears to have been delivered at a Friday gathering (1550) of the weekly *Congrégations*, which were Bible Studies mainly for the ministers, but open to all citizens of Geneva. It could also have been preached (or lectured upon) on another occasion, which will date it after the conflict with Caroli (1537) and before the Commentary (1553). See De Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 117-118. We will be using Leroy Nixon's English translation of the French text; John Calvin, "Sermons on the Deity of Christ," trans. Leroy Nixon in *The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection* (Albany: AGES Digital Library Vs. 1.0, 1998). Hereafter simply referred to in parentheses; (*Serm.* 1. followed by the page number in the AGES Library).

flesh ... and God perfected and accomplished everything which was required for the salvation of men ... Now when we say that the substance of the Gospel is comprehended in the Person of the Son of God, that is not only to say that Jesus Christ has come into the world, but that we may know also His office ... (*Serm.* 1.10-11)

Indeed the substance of the Gospel is given through the Person and the office (work) of Christ. No wonder Calvin saw John as holding "the key to understanding the other Gospels," and therefore *the* Gospel (*Serm.* 1.12). In the introductory argument to his *Commentary on John*, Calvin had stated that Matthew, Mark and Luke exhibited Christ's *body*, but that John exhibited his *soul*. The reason was that in John, Christ's Deity (the keystone of Trinitarian doctrine) and the virtues which came from his office were superbly demonstrated. John thus taught us 'more' about Jesus than discovered elsewhere. Calvin's ensuing comments on the Word (John 1:1), were remarkably similar to his discussion of the Trinity in the *Institutio* (1.13.7). Christ is the *eternal* and the *incarnate* Word, "for He already was, from all time and before all time" (*Serm.* 1.13), and, "St. John here wishes to show that when Jesus Christ came into the world, it was our Eternal God Who came, Who redeemed us to Himself" (*Serm.* 1.14).

The Word was also "the Wisdom which was always in God" (the *inspired* Word), though John did not expound upon it, the Spirit accommodating himself to us ("since we are carnal, He must stutter"; *Serm.* 1.14). This gave Calvin occasion to deplore the "foolish imagination, vain speculation, and diabolical audacity" of the Papacy and the Sophists who inquired into the eternal *essence* of God, "as if they were disputing about a flock of goats" (*Serm.* 1.14-15).[86] The now familiar theme of avoiding useless speculation when it came to God was substantiated through an admonition to be content with what the Holy Spirit has shown with regard to the "eternal plan of God." This being so because "God's plan is really God." In other words, the incarnation was the focus of God's historical redemption of mankind (*Serm.* 1.15).

It is very surprising to find that Calvin included in his sermon a full Trinitarian defence against the Arian position which he linked with an intricate exposition of the meaning of "In the beginning ..." (John 1:1a). But, once we are reminded that he and Farel had been maliciously accused of Arianism by Caroli, and if we take the exegetical origins of the sermon to come from the Strasbourg period, it becomes understandable that Nicene Orthodoxy was so self-consciously on the agenda. No doubt his hearers received more than what they came for. The

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[86] "[The Papists] have no more reverence for God than for a beast. We need not seek better testimony against the teaching of the Sophists of the Sorbonne in order to know that the devil reigns there and always has reigned there."

complementary phrases "The Word was with God" (John 1:1b) and "the Word was God" (John 1:1c), similarly allowed Calvin to employ the rudiments of his later frequently used Christologically grounded formula, *distinctio sed non separatio*. The Word was *distinct but not separate* from the Father. In order to explain this distinction between God and His Word, Calvin resorted to using Patristic language, much like his detailed discussion of the Trinity in the *Institutio*. One may again wonder how even a theologically educated congregation assimilated such technical information, though he did make an attempt to simplify it to; "it is not improperly to say, 'God was with Himself'" (*Serm.* 1.18).

The climax of Calvin's exposition focused on "an ancient teacher's [Gregory of Nazianzen] sentence," which he exhorted his congregation to remember (memorise?). (Note the interesting variation of this familiar dictum [cf. *Institutio* 1.13.7] as brought out by the translated French rendition):

> 'I cannot think upon these three properties which are shown me in God unless immediately my mind reduces them to one. On the other hand, it is impossible for me to know one only God unless I regard all the three properties, and I see them distinguished by my sense according to the clarity that is given me in Holy Scripture.' *That is how believers will know God.*[87] Knowing the Father, they will know His wisdom, which is this Word which is here spoken of. ... When they have known these three, they will no longer go astray ... they will come to his sole essence – to know that there is only one God [who] has omitted nothing of all that was required to accomplish our redemption. (*Serm.* 1.18)[88]

It is hard to conceive of a more breathtaking passage to exhibit Calvin's Trinitarian emphasis on redemptive knowledge of the Triune God. Note also that his exposition included both Cappadocian and Augustinian Trinitarian elements (cf. our discussion in chapter 3). His reason for using the dictum was simple: "when we remember this exposition [of the Trinity], *it will suffice to instruct us for our salvation*. Surely it is all we need to know about it" (*Serm.* 1.19).[89] The sermon then concluded with an explicitly Trinitarian paragraph:

> ... it is only reasonable that we should learn to cling to this Word and to know in general, the benefits God has given to mankind, in order that the light [clarity, French *clarte*] He has poured upon us by His grace may not be extinguished by our wickedness, but that *Jesus Christ* may so dwell in the midst of us that, being led

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[87] Cf. *Serm.* 1.21: "God has descended to us, even God with His Word, in such a way that we can know Him ... to know that this Word is really God."
[88] [Emphasis added.]
[89] [Emphasis added.]

by the *Holy Spirit*, we may be able to have such access to the *Father* that He may introduce us into His heavenly glory. (*Serm.* 1.27)[90]

One may perhaps have expected Calvin's sermon on John 1:1-5 to be vastly different from the *Institutio* and the Commentary, but if it was true that the sermon signified the completion of the hermeneutical process (in terms of reaching its goal), then the same exegetical (and in this case Trinitarian) trajectory should be evident in all three. If anything dominated the exposition, it was Calvin's theological perspective on Christ the Word incarnate, though by no means could it be said that the text was manipulated in order to accommodate his Trinitarian doctrine.

4.4.3 THE WORD AND DIVINE COMMUNICATION

In the closing section of the sermon an interesting statement by Calvin appeared, one which requires further comment:

> Now I have treated things as briefly as was possible for me, always hoping to attain the object which was before the Gospel-writer. However, if I have omitted something because I could not remember everything, *let each one of you say what God has revealed him about it.* (*Serm.* 1.27)[91]

Calvin seemed to suggest in this clause and by his choice of the word 'revealed,' that not only was there *content* which he may or may not have omitted, but that there was *communication* by God to the hearer which transcended his own explanation. It parallels somewhat with what he had said about the witness of Scripture elsewhere; "For as God alone is a fit witness of Himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in human hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit" (*Inst.* 1.7.4). (This statement itself may have been an allusion to Hilary of Poitier's dictum on the Trinity: "For He whom we can know only through his own utterances is a fitting witness concerning himself."[92]) Calvin thus allowed room for the Spirit's self-authentication through the preaching of the Word and through the Word itself. It was perhaps not without reason that Calvin had translated *Logos* as *Speech*, rather than Word or

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[90] [Emphasis added.]
[91] [Emphasis added.]
[92] *On the Trinity* I.xviii.

Reason. The definitive Word – Christ, was mediated via the Spirit (cf. *Serm.* 1.27) into Speech, as was the verbal Word – Scripture:

> Nothing is accomplished by preaching [Christ] if the Spirit, as our inner teacher, does not show our minds the way. Only those men, therefore, who have heard and have been taught by the Father come to him. What kind of learning and hearing is this? Surely, where the Spirit by a wonderful and singular power forms our ears to hear and our minds to understand. (*Inst.* 2.2.20)

Earlier we had stated that Calvin saw the hermeneutical process as finding its completion in expository preaching. Preaching as expositing God's Word, confirmed the Trinitarian character of revelation in that the Father was the "beginning and fountain" of revelation, the Speaker of God's Word in Scripture; the Son was the divine Word spoken in Scripture, according to whom was "the ordered disposition of all things"; and the Spirit, to whom was assigned "the power and efficacy of that activity," was the divine enabler of the human reception and response to that Word (cf. *Inst.* 1.13.18). We may justly call this a Trinitarian hermeneutic, or a Trinitarian paradigm for hermeneutics. What is instructive, is that it offers a meaningful way through the current crisis of hermeneutics which has since the Enlightenment located meaning first in the author, then in the text itself, and finally in the recipient of the text, with the end-result the loss of determinable meaning in divine communication.[93] Vanhoozer remarked:

> From a Christian perspective, God is first and foremost a communicative agent, one who relates to humankind through words and the Word. Indeed, God's very being is a self-communicative act that both constitutes and enacts the covenant of discourse: speaker (Father), Word (Son), and reception (Spirit) are all interrelated.[94]

In this 'Trinitarian way' two important hermeneutical principles are guarded, that of *authorial intention* (the historical and epistemological aspect), and that of *authorial encounter* (the personal and soteriological aspect), for Biblical hermeneutics is concerned not only with the fact

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[93] Hermeneutics has gone through three ages; that of the author (what is the author's human or divine *intention?*), that of the text (the question of the *epistemology* of meaning) and that of the reader (the *ethics* of meaning). The question then rightly becomes; 'is there any meaning in the text?'; See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, 25-28.

[94] *Ibid.*, 456.; See also Vern S. Poythress, *God-Centred Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1999), 13-16.

that God *has* spoken, but with God *speaking*.[95] The most important hermeneutical gift from God to his people is thus not only the unity and wholeness of his revelation to us, but his giving of himself in every step of the communicative process. Preaching had a vital role to play in God's articulate Presence. As Calvin stated in his *Commentary on John* 7:33; "As often as Christ calls us to the hope of salvation by the preaching of the gospel, he is present with us. For not without reason is the preaching of the gospel called Christ's descent to us." Parker explained the process as Calvin viewed it:

> According to Calvin, then, preaching so to say 'borrows' its status of 'Word of God' from Scripture. It is the Word of God inasmuch as it delivers the Biblical message, which is God's message or Word. But 'God's Word' means, for Calvin, that which is spoken by God; not simply in its first giving but in its every repetition. ... If the teaching is faithful to Scripture, then it is God who is speaking, and that precisely because his teaching remains his teaching irrespective of the purveyor of the teaching.[96]

Preaching was none other than the Triune God calling and summoning men through the Word, which was "the voice of God speaking." Parker suggested that it constituted "a scene of divine activity, and of human activity drawn into the divine."[97] It is of no little significance that in the New Testament the only occurrences of the ἑρμηνεύω word group (apart from theologically less significant uses such as in John 1:38, 42), associate interpretation either with Jesus (Luke 24:27) or with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:26, 28).[98] The fact that God is his own interpreter (revealer), is something that Calvin grasped fully from his understanding of the character and nature of the Triune God.

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[95] Cf. Douglas Farrow's statement: "Christian thinking is first and foremost an answer, however stumbling, *to direct address*, to the triune God who brings men, however haltingly in the wraps of their spiritual grave clothes, into the majestic Light and Sound of his very Presence. This he truly grants to us in and through his humanity and articulates in the words of his messengers, without in the least compromising the divine, self-evidencing Lordship of his own Speech. For God, whose Act and Being cannot be abstracted from his Word (as Barth laboured to make clear again in the modern confusion), discovers his very Self to us in the Christ-Word calling us forth from the tomb, as the Spirit of Life makes the Father known to us in the Son. His articulate Presence thus becomes the foundation of our faith-response."; *The Word of Truth and Disputes about Words* (Winona Lake: Carpenter Books, 1987), 24.

[96] Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 23-24.

[97] *Ibid.*, 31-32

[98] We were enlightened to this fact by a footnote in Barry Webb, "Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation," in *Interpreting God's Plan: Biblical Theology and the Pastor*, 72n37.

4.4.4 A RESPONSE OF HUMILITY AND CONVICTION

It follows that the human preacher is confronted with a unique challenge. As the Bible is not unable to 'speak for itself' (in the mind of Calvin the Bible is *intrinsically* God's Word, not merely *instrumentally*),[99] the preacher's challenge is not to speak for it, but to place himself in such a position under it, that his very style of relaying it models a response to the Word. Packer put it well; "Since the triune God – the Father and the Son, through the Spirit – already preaches to us in every part of the Bible, the human preacher's task resolves into becoming a mouthpiece and sounding board for the divine message that meets him in the text."[100] Efficacy thus depended on fidelity, not expertise, and the authority of the pulpit lay not in human eloquence but in God speaking in Scripture. As Parker put it; "Whenever Calvin writes of the *auctoritas, autorité*, authority of Scripture, he has in mind the thought of its *auctor, auteur*, author from whom the authority stems."[101]

All of this placed the minister in a very privileged position. Calvin would have concurred with Packer that "the preacher, rather than the critical commentator or the academic theologian, is the true interpreter of Scripture."[102] Two of the most important aspects of Calvin's whole hermeneutical scheme converge at this point, namely the proper attitude of the exegete toward the Bible (as it is God's Word, and the Holy Spirit speaks in it) and the fact that it is God's Word to his church, the Christian community. Scripture demanded "pure eyes and sound minds" (*Inst.* 1.7.4), and therefore reverence and humility. Similarly, the exegete had to realise the communitarian aspect of interpretation. Not only was God's Word directed to his people, the interpreter himself was obligated to do his interpretative task in the midst of "a community of brothers" in which mutual engagement in the task led to correction and "better understanding."[103]

Calvin's unique correlative view of Scripture and preaching had to issue forth in a response of humility and conviction. Humility, because the interpreter or preacher came before God's Speech as a receiver (and not a maker) of truth; conviction, because it was God speaking and he caused his own Speech to be heard (cf. Isaiah 55:11). The congregation were to respond

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[99] I.e., it does not *become* His Word at a particular operational point, because "Word and the Spirit are joined by a mutual bond [*mutuo nexu*]" (*Inst.* 1.9.3). See 1.7 and 1.9 in the *Institutio*.

[100] James I. Packer, *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 124.

[101] Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 2.

[102] Packer, *Truth and Power*, 125.

[103] See the Dedicatory Epistle to Grynaeus in Calvin's *Commentary on Romans*.

to the preaching of the Word in the same way. Those who refused to "submit to the yoke of being taught by human word and ministry," were guilty of "blotting out the face of God which shines in his teaching" (*Inst.* 4.1.5), as "there is nothing more notable or glorious in the church than the ministry of the gospel" (*Inst.* 4.3.3). Parker put it as follows:

> God is sovereign Lord over his Church. It is by the preaching of his Word, which is the declaration of his will, that he governs his church and consequently guides his people in his way. This is why Calvin calls the pulpit the throne of God: "*voila* the pulpit, which is the throne (*le siege*) of God, from which he wills to govern our souls. The seat of justice (*le siege de justice*) is certainly honourable, but when it is a question of this spiritual role, God wishes to lead us even to the kingdom of heaven."[104]

Granting preacher and preaching the authority of God can be very dangerous. Yet, Calvin was convinced that this was the way God had ordained it, and that through expository preaching God himself would be the Shepherd of his flock.

4.4.5 A 'Vision' for Preaching

It is often said that Calvin's influence on the city of Geneva, and subsequently the whole of Christendom, was marked by two factors; that his ministry was beset by constant opposition almost right to the end, and that the manner of his influence was essentially exercised by the preaching of God's Word. Commitment and perseverance through hardship, and zeal and confidence in preaching, must however flow from an adequate 'vision' or doctrine of God. The bigger the vision, the more truthful the ministry:

> Isaiah the prophet was turned into a preacher by a vision. So too was Paul, who told Agrippa that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. In both cases of course the vision was a vision of God accompanied by the divine commissioning for service. In both cases the fulfilment of the mission involved hardship and opposition.[105]

We have noted with regards to opposition, the impact conflict about the doctrine of the Trinity had on Calvin's theologising, and subsequently how his 'Trinitarian vision' gave structure

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[104] 1 Tim. 5:20, Sermon XLIII. *CO* 53.520.; As cited in Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 42.
[105] Peter F. Jensen, "A Vision for Preachers," in *Doing Theology for the People of God*, 220.

to his theological thought. When it came to Biblical hermeneutics in general, and the preaching of God's Word specifically, again, the doctrine of God as Triune played a crucial role in Calvin's thinking. That the Triune God had spoken and continued to speak was of singular importance, because it was through his Speech that knowledge of him was imparted. Thus, as Carson put it; "teachers and preachers in seminaries and churches must be people 'for whom the great issue is the knowledge of God,' whatever their area of specialisation might be. Preachers and teachers who do not see this point and passionately hold to it are worse than useless: they are dangerous, because they are diverting."[106] Calvin would have agreed wholeheartedly. As he reminded his hearers often; "to know God is man's chief end, and justifies his existence," and "even if a hundred lives were ours, this one aim would be sufficient for them all."[107] To know God, is to know him as he has revealed and continues to reveal himself in his Speech, as the magnificent and incomparable Triune Lord.

4.5 Theological Significance: *Hearing the Triune God*

IN THE last section of this chapter it is our intention to briefly revisit the notion of divine discourse as an integral aspect of Calvin's understanding of the doctrine of God's Triunity. This implies that the issue we breached at the outset of the chapter, namely the value of theological interpretation of Scripture, must receive another mention, as well as the impasse reached by current Biblical hermeneutics. (None of these topics will receive an exhaustive treatment below, as they are auxiliary to our main argument. We merely hope to make a few helpful suggestions towards further investigation.)

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[106] D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 489.
[107] Calvin, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 9:23-24.

4.5.1 RECOVERING THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

In what has become something of a celebrated essay, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,"[108] David Steinmetz challenged the status of modern higher-criticism in favour of the older pre-modern exegesis. Though we find ourselves by no means in agreement with everything Steinmetz proposed,[109] his desire to see pre-modern interpretation re-introduced as a *conversation partner* in present-day hermeneutics, is commendable. A mere repetition of pre-modern exegetical results will for obvious reasons not be adequate. What the suggestion implies is that the practice of developing a theologically significant reading of the text (such as Calvin, Aquinas and others accomplished) is as important as gaining the (elusive) historical reconstruction desired by higher-criticism. Many Biblical scholars for example, view the development of the doctrine of the Trinity as discontinuous with the concerns of the New Testament. It is worth quoting David Yeago's assessment of the situation here at length:

> One of the consequences of the Western Church's two centuries of fumbling with the implications of the historical-critical method is a loss of any sense of the connection between the classical doctrines of the Church and the text of scripture. It is assumed that a truly scholarly interpretation of the scriptural texts methodologically excludes any reference to Christian doctrine as a hermeneutical touchstone, and as a matter of historical fact, though not of logical necessity, the historical-critical enterprise has often been understood as the liberation of rational intelligence and religious experience from the dead hand of dogma. The doctrines in such a context, come to seem a superstructure overlaid on the texts by theological speculation, at best a time-conditioned expression of spiritual experience somehow distantly responsive to the scriptural witness, at worst the token of the 'Hellenised' Church's cultural alienation from that witness.[110]

Yet, this radically undermines the exegetical primacy of pre-modern interpretation. After all, the disciplinary boundaries which are currently held in the theological curriculum were not shared by pre-modern theologians.[111] Yeago in his essay for example, was able to argue cogently

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[108] David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37:1 (1980): 27-38. Reprinted in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 26-38. We will be using the latter edition.

[109] For example, Steinmetz's sanction of (an unchecked?) plurality in meaning for the Biblical text, as long as it "meets the needs of the Christian Community," is something which the Reformers, and particularly Calvin, strove against. Steinmetz also suggests that an author does not know the layers of meaning his own story may take on, but can that truly be said of God as an Author? *Ibid.*, 37, 35.

[110] David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 87.

[111] "As Werner Jeanrond has written, 'It simply does not make sense that theologians today are not actively engaged in studying the primary texts of their traditions, while their biblical colleagues are on the whole not involved in

that "the Nicene *homoousion* is neither imposed *on* the New Testament texts, nor distantly deduced *from* the texts, but rather, describes a pattern of judgements present *in* the texts, in the texture of scriptural discourse concerning Jesus and the God of Israel."[112] In doing so, he did exactly what Calvin intentionally accomplished through his own exegetical labours and theological conflicts with the anti-Trinitarians. The motivation which informed pre-modern exegesis was that God himself would shed light on the understanding when reading the text (Psalm 36:9), and the Biblically normative posture was modelled for the church in the Apostle Paul's self-presentation: "my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4; ESV).

Unfortunately, much of Western Christianity does not share in this motivation anymore. The fragmentation which exists amongst theological disciplines is nowhere more clearly seen than in the disparity between "Biblical Studies" and "Systematic Theology." Yet both disciplines have been known to claim their *raison d'être* from Calvin. In our investigation we laboured to point out the fact that it was Calvin's *theological coherence* as an exegete which made his work so significant. We therefore propose that the achievement of Calvin in Commentary, *Institutio* and Sermon, though not without its inherent problems, is worthwhile revisiting as an example of exegetical and theological symbiosis.

4.5.2 LOCATING MEANING

"Traditionally, hermeneutics — the reflection on the principles that undergird correct textual interpretation — was a matter for exegetes and philologists. More recently, however, hermeneutics has become the concern of philosophers, who wish to know not what such and such a text means, but what it means to understand."[113] The latter is especially a theme of European philosophy, but the matter has progressed even further. Contemporary philosophy has moved beyond reflecting on the principles of interpretation to suggest that "philosophy

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discussing the intellectual, cultural, political, social and ecclesial context in which the textual objects of their study could play a transformative role.'" Cited in Watson, "The Scope of Hermeneutics," 74.

[112] Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma," 88. See also the New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham's brilliant recent study, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), in which he sets out to prove that the earliest Christology was also the highest.

[113] Vanhoozer, *Is there a Meaning in this Text?*, 19.

itself is only a kind of interpretation."[114] It is not our concern here to interact with this complex aspect of Postmodern thinking, but to observe the manner in which these philosophical reflections on meaning have impacted on Biblical hermeneutics.

The current crisis in hermeneutics has to do with where and how to locate meaning. In broad terms, we can say that three foci of meaning have emerged in recent hermeneutics; a focus on the *author* of the text; a focus on the *text* itself; and a focus on the *reader*. (It would be overly simplistic to equate these three foci with *pre-modern*, *modern* and *postmodern* readings of the text alternatively, though there is a measure of justification to do so as we shall see below.[115] There are also other ways of explaining the same basic schema, but we have found the typology used by Christopher Wright the most useful for our present purposes.[116]) The *author-centred* approach has as its goal the determination of the author's original intention, and has produced a number of hermeneutical methods ranging from the classical grammatico-historical method to modern variants of historical-criticism. It is helpful to think of this approach as treating the text like a *window* which attempts to provide a view into the world of the author, and simultaneously allows the Biblical world to speak into the present.[117] The *text-centred* approach on the other hand, looks at the constructed world of literary craft and views the text as a *painting*, the product of human ingenuity, skill and art.[118] All the tools necessary to explore the nature of the literary craft involved in having produced the text, are applied here, and meaning is extracted by virtue of the investigative process. Finally, the *reader-centred* approach sees the text as a *mirror* that reflects whatever is put in front of it. Meaning is therefore not to be viewed as an objective or

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[114] The "deconstructionist" Jacques Derrida has perhaps been primarily responsible for having blurred the lines between philosophy and literature. *Ibid.* See also Loren Wilkinson, "Hermeneutics and the Postmodern Reaction against 'Truth,'" in *The Act of Bible Reading: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. E. Dyck (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 115-145.

[115] "Modern biblical scholars read the Bible 'like any other book,' using historical tools to dig up the historical meaning. Postmoderns, by contrast, read the Bible suspicious of any interpretation that claims to have gotten it right. For moderns, reading the Bible is valuable for what it tells us about what lies *behind* the text (history). For postmoderns, reading the Bible is valuable for what it tells us about the reader in front of the text (ideology). The question that both ask is whether it is possible to read the Bible as God's Word, and if so, how." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books/ Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press/ Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 66.

[116] See Christopher J. H. Wright, "Interpreting the Bible Among the World Religions," *Themelios* 25:3 (2000): 35-54.

[117] What is useful to remember, is that "the purpose of a window is also to let light through, as well as let us see out, and the purpose of the text of course — on a Christian understanding — is that through that text God speaks into our world, as well as us having access to the Biblical world." *Ibid.*, 38.

[118] *Ibid.*, 42. Some kinds of Postmodern readings of the text exploit the pluri-vocal aspect of this method, whilst certain kind of Modern readings are convinced that meaning is scientifically extractable from the text by means of the correct literary technique.

fixed reality that can be discovered, but in actual fact "only arises, only happens, in the act of reading."[119]

It should be clear to all involved in Christian theology, that in the wake of Postmodern philology and philosophy, the shift in Biblical hermeneutics has been dramatically oriented towards the third focus in the last few decades. Many examples of this can be cited, some which push at the margins of Christian sensibility and faith.[120] Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the Postmodern paradigm for interpretation has destroyed the myth of the so-called 'objective neutral observer,' and has staked its claim that no fixed meaning can be located in the text. How are we to respond to this hermeneutical impasse, as clearly the Christian faith is a Truth-claim at heart, and Truth without determinable meaning is redundant? Earlier in the chapter we have already hinted at the fact that Calvin's Trinitarian hermeneutic (more accurately, his *theo*-logical and *theo*-centric hermeneutic in which his view of *Theos* is thoroughly Trinitarian) allowed a way through the current impasse by means of the interrelated communicative act of the Father as speaker (author-orientation), the Son as the Word spoken (text-orientation) and the Spirit as the reception of the message (reader-orientation). Though such a scheme is largely philosophical in its construction, at the very least it establishes a credible ontological ground for the intention, formulation and recipience of the Biblical text. Authorial intention particularly gains renewed credibility when one considers that the divine Author by virtue of his Triune nature is involved in orchestrating validity in all three of the meaning-loci. For Calvin, who saw knowledge of God as the goal of all hermeneutics by means of Word and Spirit, this Trinitarian scheme may indeed be less speculative than it appears at first glance. And for a culture that views reader-response as the most useful method of locating meaning, what can be more helpful than to be reminded of Calvin's tremendous emphasis on the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit in the light of the fact that the sum of all wisdom resides in knowledge of God and self (cf. *Inst.* 1.1.1)?[121] As Torrance put it:

> What is particularly distinctive of [Calvin's] thought is the way in which the *personal* and *objective* come together under the pressure of the activity and majesty of God upon the knowing subject. Knowledge of God takes place in his presence as we are given a co-knowledge of him with ourselves, and as there arises in us an

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[119] *Ibid.*, 48.
[120] Peter Toon lists a number of these in his book, *The End of Liberal Theology: Contemporary Challenges to Evangelical Orthodoxy* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1995), 191-202.
[121] This pushes us back to the debate on certainty and valid knowing, and we must remind ourselves of the inseparability of Word and Spirit. See chapter 2.

interior awareness (*interior sensus*) in which God's own speaking resounds within us.[122]

However, the critical question in the debate remains: Does the text point to a reality outside of itself, or does reality (meaning) reside in the construction of the words, or, is reality discovered through personal interaction with the textual configuration? However much we draw hypothetical solutions to our problem from Calvin, this we know for sure, that he viewed God as an objective though incomprehensible reality above and beyond the Biblical text, yet as the Triune Lord who condescended to humanity by means of his Word and the testimony of his Spirit. This was sufficient for him.

4.5.3 DIVINE DISCOURSE

In the Reformation, the Word of God was never seen as a mere collection of propositional religious truths, but as the living Word of God spoken to mankind. The reason was, that in the Word we encountered (according to Calvin) *Dei loquentis Persona*, the Person of the speaking God.[123] And when the Word was preached, it became a most powerful instrument of the Holy Spirit. The question however, that has plagued post-Enlightenment theology, relates to *how* the Word acted as God's Speech.

Karl Barth, of all contemporary theologians, wrote most expansively and insistently about God speaking. Yet, there is much less in Barth on God speaking than first appears (as Wolterstorff in a recent study has shown).[124] Barth's well-known "three-fold form" of the Word of God; as preached in the church, written in Scripture, and revealed in Jesus Christ, belies the fact that in his mind there was really only one mode of divine discourse (or *revelation* as he called it), namely Jesus Christ, the Son of God.[125] Scripture and proclamation were not intrinsically God's speech as was Jesus Christ, but had to *become* it by means of witnessing to Christ.[126] Scripture as God's speech could only be called *presentational* speech rather than *authorial* speech,

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[122] Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, 163.

[123] W. D. Jonker, *Die Gees van Christus* (Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1981), 54-55.

[124] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See especially chapter 4: "Divine discourse in the hands of theologians."

[125] See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 13 vols., trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1975), 1/1:137.

[126] "[W]e cannot regard the presence of God's Word in the Bible as an attribute inhering once for all in this book as such and what we see before of books and chapters and verses. Of the book as we have it, we can only say: we recollect that we have heard in this book the Word of God." *Ibid.*, 1/2:530.

and divine discourse in Scripture was therefore given over to a relentless "eventism"; a perpetual 'witnessing-of and witnessing-to of the witnesses.'[127] The reason for this was Barth's determination to accommodate the idea that the human authors of Scripture could no longer be held to be "inerrant," and thus his refusal of the notion that anyone could speak 'in the name of God.' All this is very surprising in the light of the fact that Barth is seen to be the great theologian of the Word of God. As Wolterstorff put it; "One gets the impression upon first reading him that many are the episodes of human speech which are media of divine discourse. But close scrutiny proves that not to be true."[128]

When we come to Calvin we encounter a very different situation. For Calvin the Bible was supremely an instrument or *medium* of divine discourse. Scripture (as contrasted with creation) was "a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips" (*Inst.* 1.6.1). Clearly, reflecting on this passage (and there are many others which make the same point) leads to a very different position from that of Barth. The reason for Calvin's difference lies in his view of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* (*Inst.* 1.7.4); "Credibility of doctrine is not established until we are persuaded beyond doubt that God is its Author." Therefore, the "highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it," through the "secret testimony of the Spirit." Nevertheless, "as God alone is a fit witness of Himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in human hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit." In Calvin there is thus an intrinsic and instrumental aspect to the Bible as medium of divine discourse which is linked to the Holy Spirit, rather than to Christ as in Barth. The significance of this does not seem like much until we realise with David Kelsey that theologians typically formulate their doctrines of God and Scripture together.[129] A judgement on the manner of Scriptural authority (for example, Barth's *Christological* versus Calvin's *Pneumatological* foundation) is at the same time a judgement on God's involvement not only with Scripture, but also in the believing community.[130] Though Barth's doctrinal thinking on the Trinity was of the highest order, and gave rise to a revival of Trinitarian thinking, he did not according to Bray do justice to the full co-inherence of the Persons (according to which each Person manifests the fullness of God, as well as of the other

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[127] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 71, 69.

[128] *Ibid.*, 73.

[129] See David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

[130] For example, Barth "never attains the depth of insight we find in Calvin's discussions" when it came to discussing the sacraments. The reason being his focus on the Son to the neglect of the work of the Spirit as in Calvin. See Alan Torrance, "The Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82-83.

two Persons), except perhaps in the case of the Son.[131] This is the reason why his theology has often been accused of Christomonism,[132] and why in the case of the divine discourse related to Scripture, he can justly be charged with "deverbalising" the Word of God.[133] Calvin's Trinitarian theology on the other hand, was "a theology of divine persons,"[134] and his perichoretic understanding of the Spirit's involvement included the other two Persons of the Godhead. It is thus fair to say that Calvin's understanding of God's Triunity enabled him to hold a different view from Barth when it came to the matter of God's Speech (i.e. divine *discourse*, not just divine *revelation*). In Calvin's thought there was the presence of a more dynamic understanding of God's ongoing self-disclosure which was theologically sustainable only through the doctrine of the Trinity.

The theological implications of this are many and varied. Primarily it suggests a return to *theo*-logical hermeneutics which will keep *the knowledge of God* as its most important theological and hermeneutical principle. Above everything else, the Bible communicates the saving knowledge of the Triune God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost and fallen humanity. As Vanhoozer put it; "The gospel is a word *about* God in Jesus Christ *from* God the Holy Spirit. Revelation is thus not merely the disclosure of information about God but an act of God himself":[135]

> The operative concept for doing so is communicative action: God does things in speaking and *thereby* reveals himself. ... From a theological perspective, the most important fact about the Bible is that it is the voice of God addressing the people of God. From this theological indicative follows the prime hermeneutical imperative: Let God's Word accomplish the purpose for which it was sent (see Isaiah 55:11). The point is that God interacts with contemporary readers through the Scriptures. The Bible — the Word of God — is simultaneously an instrument of divine *action*. ... God's Word *does* things, and what God does also *communicates*. Divine revelation, we may conclude, is God in communicative action. ... Authority in theology, I believe, is a matter of the Triune God in self-communicative action.[136]

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[131] See Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 224.

[132] Barth opened up an entirely new dimension in the doctrine of the Trinity by allowing Christ to occupy the centre position in terms of the revelational explication and unity of the Godhead. It thus has the merits of giving Biblical Christology its proper place. Yet, it must be asked if it is possible to concentrate the divine nature of the Trinity in a single Person of the Godhead? Bray suggested that the Protestant Reformers offered a far better solution. See his critique of Barth. *Ibid.*, 189-196.

[133] So Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," 70.

[134] Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 224.

[135] Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor," 70.

[136] *Ibid.*, 70-74.

4.5.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have sought to draw together many of the complex ideas which surface when one attempts to relate divine self-communication, i.e. *knowing the Triune God*, to the hermeneutical process as expressed through preaching. Yet, the convergence of Speech, Act and Word proceeds in a simple manner from the Triune God himself. John Stott, who self-consciously modelled his life-long preaching ministry on that of Calvin, put it well:

> Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. ... [God's] self-revelation has been given by the most straightforward means of communication known to us, namely by a word and words ... First, God spoke through the prophets, interpreting to them the significance of his actions in the history of Israel, and simultaneously instructing them to convey his message to his people either by speech or by writing or by both. Next, and supremely, he spoke in his Son, his 'Word ... made flesh,' and in his Word's words, whether spoken directly or through his apostles. Thirdly, he speaks through his Spirit, who himself bears witness to Christ and to Scripture, and makes both living to the people of God today. *This Trinitarian statement of a speaking Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and so of a Word of God that is Scriptural, incarnate and contemporary, is fundamental to the Christian religion. And it is God's speech which makes our speech necessary. We must speak what is spoken.*[137]

Calvin would certainly have concurred with Stott's sentiments, especially the final sentence, as can be deduced from his *Commentary on John* 15:27:

> We now see how faith is by hearing and yet derives its certainty from the seal and earnest of the Spirit. Those who are not sufficiently aware of the darkness of the human mind think that faith is formed naturally by preaching alone. On the other hand, there are many fanatics who disdain outward preaching and sublimely breathe secret revelations and *enthousiasmous*. But we see that Christ joins these two things together. Therefore, although there is no faith until God's Spirit enlightens our minds and seals our hearts, yet we must not seek after visions and oracles from the clouds; but the Word, which is near us, in our mouth and heart and must keep all our senses bound and fixed on itself.

As we stated at the outset, Calvin was first and foremost a *Verbi Divini minister*.

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[137] John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 15. [Emphasis added.]

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: KNOWING THE TRIUNE GOD *AND THE TRANSMISSION OF REFORMED THEOLOGY*

IN WHAT WAY is *Knowing the Triune God* as an integrative motif for understanding the theology of John Calvin of wider significance to the Reformed community? Bearing in mind that far-reaching conclusions have already been presented at the close of each preceding chapter (*Certitude in an Age of Scepticism*, *The Significance of Calvin's Trinitarianism* and *Calvin's* Theo-*logical Hermeneutics*), this final chapter seeks to stimulate discussion in the direction of the transmission of Reformed theology by bringing into focus the implications of the study for three areas of significance: God's knowability (the significance of Calvin's Trinitarian *doctrina*); knowing as communion with God (epistemology, *experientia* and certitude in Calvin); and the interpreting and interpretation of Calvin (a comprehensive-thematic approach to Calvin's thought).[1]

5.1 A Knowable God:
The Significance of Calvin's Trinitarian Doctrina

IN THE SCHOLARLY literature, it is oftentimes presumed that "classical Reformed theologians made no substantive contributions to traditional formulae of the patristic era,"[2] and in terms of Calvin, that his doctrine of the Trinity was "traditional" and "devoid of originality."[3] In Chapter 3 we addressed this question in some detail, commencing with a historical-theological orientation to the doctrine leading into contextual-historical and systematic

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[1] It is our intention, without explicitly using the categories, to show in each case that the study has implications for *Calvin scholarship* in general, for the ongoing assessment of *historical-theology*, and for the constructive task of *theological formulation*.

[2] Cynthia Campbell cited in Philip Walker Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 128.

[3] So for example, François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (1950, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 165, 169.

expositions of Calvin's unique sixteenth-century Trinitarian formulation. The result of our investigation signalled not only an agreement with Warfield's earlier estimation that Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity marked an epoch in the history of the doctrine,[4] but that God in the doctrinal articulation of Calvin was intrinsically *knowable*. Calvin's Trinity doctrine translated into an exposition of God, which in contrast to the medieval consensus and other possible Trinitarian constructions, was of such a nature as to make fellowship and communion with God himself (literally *in* himself) necessary and possible. The knowability of God was predicated by intra-Trinitarian perichoretic *Triunity*, and found authentication in Calvin's distinct 'Trinitarianism,' that is, his implicitly Trinitarian conception and explication of the Gospel and of Christian faith and life. Unfortunately, only a handful of scholars appear to have recognised Calvin's precocity in this regard, and the question remains whether Calvin's Trinitarian doctrine has thus sufficiently permeated the Reformed theological tradition that looks to him as progenitor. In this light, we suggest three preliminary avenues for further reflection on the basis of the results of our investigation.

5.1.1 THE TRINITY *AS* THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

In our *Introduction* (Chapter 1.3.2), we suggested that the doctrine of God was a particular problem in the West, especially because of the fusion of philosophical and exegetical ideas, the former creating the framework within which the latter found its expression. This was confirmed in a surprising manner by Gunton's critique of the Augustinian synthesis (Chapter 3.1.4; cf. 3.4.2.2),[5] and consequently spelled out under the rubric of the problem of "objectifying God" (see Chapter 3.4.2.1). Reformed theology has not been immune to this problem, as the methodology of many of its historical and standard texts have testified.[6] In contrast to this, we

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[4] B. B. Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1956), 230.

[5] In the most recent Reformed literature, there is a growing confirmation of Gunton's thesis. See for example Robert Letham's excellent "The Trinity — Yesterday, Today and the Future," *Themelios* 28:1 (Autumn 2002): 26-36. See also http://www.berith.org/essays/pt/pt03.html for a critical discussion of the views of Cornelius Van Til, Alvin Plantinga, Barth and Kuyper on this matter.

[6] Three examples will suffice. Francis Turretin (1623-87), whose *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (Geneva, 1679-85) was the main teaching text within the English (American) Reformed community until the 1870s, employed the methodology of the scholastics (particularly that of Aquinas) and prioritised philosophical categories over the Biblical doctrine in spite of his strong emphasis on Scripture as principle. Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836-1921), Calvinist theologian and author of the influential *Systematic Theology* (1907), has three chapters on the Existence of God even prior to developing his doctrine of Revelation, which is followed by The Nature, Decrees and Works of God under which the doctrine of the Trinity is subsumed towards the end. It is clear in his case that the Trinity is 'made to fit' the prior

found in Calvin apart from positing God's necessary essential incomprehensibility, an aversion to any hint of speculative and philosophical theologising. His doctrine of the Trinity which he explicated with Biblical-exegetical fidelity, *was* therefore his doctrine of God. This is one of the most surprising and distinctive aspects of Calvin's theology. In the *Institutio*, there is no other *locus* for discussing the doctrine of God other than the chapter on the Trinity (*Inst.* 1.13), which stands in sharp contrast to the received Western doctrinal and scholastic heritage.[7]

Protestant and Roman Catholic thought in the West ever since Aquinas has inherently displayed a tendency to separate the treatise of *de Deo uno* ('on the one God') from the treatise of *de Deo trino* ('on the Triune God').[8] God was habitually defined first in terms of a framework of abstract characteristics or attributes, to which was added an ensuing discussion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Charles Hodge (1797-1878) for example, the nineteenth-century Reformed theological standard-bearer, wrote more than two hundred pages on the existence and attributes of God before he turned his attention to the Trinity.[9] Needless to say, in spite of the philosophical clarity and systematical logic gained by this ordering,[10] it simply does not do justice to Scriptural Theology, nor to the hermeneutical priority demanded by the Gospel in the finality and fullness of revelation in Christ (i.e., God is known through Christ alone). The legacy of a "Theism" that separates the 'One' from the 'Three' will perhaps continue to plague Western theology for years to come, not least through '*A*-theism' which makes use of the same philosophical method, but towards the achievement of an equal and opposite goal. In conversation with other world religions,[11] and even in the reception of Christianity into Africa,[12]

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established categories. Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) whose *Systematic Theology* (1941) was the standard twentieth century Reformed theology text, also has a separate locus for the doctrine of the Trinity, though commendably, his whole discussion of God is introduced by a chapter on The Knowability of God.

[7] This does not imply that Calvin was entirely without historical precedent. He may for example have found in Peter Lombard's *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum* (*Four Books of Sentences*), the standard theological work of the Middle Ages, a precedent for basing doctrine on an exegetical foundation as well as for prioritising the Trinity. (Lombard is not sufficiently credited for his vast exegetical output, and mostly known via the *Sentences*.)

[8] Aquinas separates his doctrine of God (book 1 of *Summa Contra Gentilis*) from his doctrine of the Trinity (book 4 of *Summa Contra Gentilis*). This became the norm in theological discussion in the West. See also Karl Rahner's argument in *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns and Oats, 1970), 15-20.

[9] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 1:191-441 on existence and attributes; 1:442-82 on the Trinity.

[10] One must of course concede that the intellectual context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century demanded a rational apologetical response to its own unbelief. Yet, it appears to us that Calvin had done something quite different in like circumstances.

[11] See the fine sample of essays in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997). Letham in "The Trinity — Yesterday, Today and the Future" (34) for example states: "I find it had to see how Islam, o any religion based on belief in a unitary god, can possibly account for human personality, or explain the *diversity*-in-unity of the world. Is it surprising that Islamic areas are associated with monolithic and dictatorial political systems?"

[12] Africa's theological troubles hinge on its doctrine of God, and is in dire need of Biblical revision. In particular, the conception that African Traditional Religion is a suitable receptacle for the Gospel of Jesus Christ (in lieu of the Old

the detrimental effect of a theology motivated conceptually by philosophical rather than Biblical categories, are multiple (cf. Chapter 3.4.2.2). In each case we can safely say that it can only lead to 'pre-Christology,' or alternatively, a complete Christological compromise. In contrast, the unqualified uniqueness of Christianity is founded upon the incorporation of Jesus *into* the divine identity of the one exclusive God YHWH,[13] a point repeatedly made explicit by Calvin particularly in the doctrinal debates against Caroli and Servetus (cf. Chapter 3.2.2.3-4).

Dogmatically then, Calvin has much to offer us in terms of the contemporary problem of God in the West, its relation to world religions, and to the question of religious pluralism.[14] Similarly, Calvin can be seen as historical precedent for those earnestly seeking to address these problems and maintaining a thoroughly Trinitarian view of God not merely by virtue of bowing to Nicene Orthodoxy, but on the basis of Scripture itself.

5.1.2 THE TRINITY AS UNIFYING THEOLOGICAL THEME

From time to time the question arises within the Reformed community as to its own theological distinction, and particularly, its unifying theological theme.[15] As can be expected, *sola* and *tota Scriptura* inevitably surfaces as the main *methodological* principle,[16] while the debate around a *unifying* principle continues.[17] It is helpful in this regard to observe certain formal aspects of Calvin's theology in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Testament) has allowed for variations of 'Ancestral Christology' in which Christ can be seen as "Proto-Ancestor" rather than in terms of his identification with YHWH. Tite Tiénou's critique of the famous Kenyan theologian John S. Mbiti needs to be noted in this regard. See the second chapter of his *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa* (1982, Achimota, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 1992).

[13] As Richard Bauckham put it: "... in Christ God both demonstrates his deity to the world as the same unique God his people Israel had always known, and also, in doing so, identifies himself afresh. As the God who includes the humiliated and the exalted Jesus in his identity he is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that is, the Father of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Spirit of the Father given to the Son." See *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 76-77. For a similar argument for "Christological Monotheism," see N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 125-132.

[14] It would seem from the New Testament perspective, that no 'knowing-notion' of God other than a Trinitarian one, can legitimately lay claim to eternal life (cf. John 17:3).

[15] See for example Fred Klooster, "The Uniqueness of Reformed Theology: A Preliminary Attempt at Description," *Calvin Theological Journal* 14 (1979): 32-54.

[16] *Ibid.*, 39.

[17] Here examples abound. We will cite only one. John Bolt in his *Christian and Reformed Today* (Jordan Station, ON: Paideia, 1984), argued for a "Trinitarian Framework" (32-37), to which George Vandervelde responded with the "creation-fall-redemption triad" in "A Trinitarian Framework and Reformed Distinctiveness: A Critical Assessment of *Christian and Reformed Today*" *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 95-109. Bolt replied with "The Trinity as a Unifying Theme in Reformed Thought: A Response to Dr. George Vandervelde," *Calvin Theological Journal* 22:1 (1987): 91-104. No final consensus was reached.

An important feature of Calvin's Trinitarianism was the manner in which it influenced the structure and organisation of his theology, both externally and internally. Externally, it has been noted that the *Institutio* matured into its 1559 Trinitarian form (based on the Apostles' Creed; see our discussion in Chapters 2.2.2.1; 4.2.1) through successive editions and via exegetical and doctrinal reflection of a symbiotic nature. Internally on the other hand, Calvin was able to resolve structural defects inherent in early Protestant theology (e.g., the bifurcation of justification and sanctification; discussed in Chapter 3.3.1), by virtue of a well-developed Trinitarian soteriology.[18] Through the Trinity, Calvin was thus able to reorganise Protestantism evangelically along soteriological lines, without formally departing from Catholic and Apostolic orthodoxy.

In our argument we were also able to show how Calvin through his exegetical priority 'broadened' the Western Trinitarian consensus by incorporating Cappadocian conceptuality, and 'reformed' the Nicene conception where it had led to a misunderstanding or denigration of the divine co-equality of Christ (see Chapter 3.4.1). In other words, instead of ascribing to the *ontological* Trinity as unifying principle as in Roman Catholic theology, Calvin emphasised the *economic* Trinity, a soteriological emphasis he justified church-historically with reference to Irenaeus and Athanasius. The Trinity was not to be obscured by scholastification, as it safeguarded the divinity of Christ, and therefore salvation in him. Throughout the broad spectrum of Calvin's writings traces of this principle are found, suggesting that he never lost sight of the soteriological and therefore theological incipience of the Trinity. Reformed theology can rightfully claim its orthodox status only if it is able like Bavinck (closely echoing Calvin) to state that "in the confession of the Trinity throbs the heart of the Christian religion; every error results from, or upon deep reflection may be traced to, a wrong view of this doctrine"[19]

5.1.3 THE TRINITY AS PREMISE FOR KNOWING GOD

A regular remark made about John Calvin is that he was primarily a *Biblical* theologian. In a time when the doctrine of the Trinity is viewed sceptically as a post-New Testament construction and a "Greek" innovation, it is useful for our contemporary doctrinal

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[18] R. Scott Clark, "The Catholic-Calvinist Trinitarianism of Caspar Olevian," *Westminster Theological Journal* 61:1 (1999): 23-24.

[19] Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendrickson (1951, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 285.

consideration to note that Calvin formulated the doctrine primarily on the basis of disciplined Biblical exegesis. At the same time however, we must not forget that he also recovered certain crucial Patristic insights because it reflected the Biblical teaching so accurately, such as the economic-Trinitarian basis for true knowledge of God and the 'perichoretic' model of hypostatic relations within the Godhead (including *homoousios* and *autotheos*). These Calvinian distinctives were carefully discussed in Chapter 3.2.3.4 (under God's *Triunity*) and are enormously important in the current climate of renewed constructive thought on the doctrine of the Trinity.[20] Calvin's particular comprehension of the Being of God resulted in a theology of *Person*-al knowledge of God (cf. Chapter 3.4.2.2), that is, true knowledge of God via the Persons of the Godhead. This Gerald Bray perceptively claimed, was "the true heritage of the Reformation, and especially of Calvin,"[21] even though much of Reformed theology remains unwitting about it.[22]

From an epistemological perspective, Calvin thus introduced a foundation for knowledge of God not based upon natural reason (as did much of scholasticism), but upon Trinitarian self-revelation. His startling Spiritual realism makes him profoundly interesting to a post-Kantian world which either suffers despair over its own hopes regarding the power of natural reason to gain knowledge of God, or has opted for the murky waters of subjectivism. For Calvin, the conjunction between divine revelation (knowledge of God on the basis of *Scripture*) and Trinitarian self-communication, was so intimate that God himself was revealed in the Word.[23] Divine self-communication which is at the heart of the Christian faith, is based on God's Triunity, and is the substantive premise for knowledge of God.

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[20] In Chapter 3.4.2.2, we argued for example that Calvin's formulation was superior to both that of Augustine *and* the Cappadocians. Furthermore, in the current swing of favouring the Eastern above the Western formulation, Calvin is going to become increasingly important as a Western alternative once the East's problems start overtaking its new converts from the West.

[21] Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 224.

[22] Much is being made by the so-called "social Trinitarians" regarding the loss of true personhood and community in contemporary Western society because of individualism. The doctrine of the Trinity as a 'Being-in-Community' thus has much to offer Christians in this 'sociological' area from a doctrinal standpoint. This is not to mention the potential of a proper Trinitarian doctrine to restore rightful Christian worship, a proper doctrine of Creation, of social justice and for evangelism and missions. See Letham for a brief discussion of these and other 'benefits'; "The Trinity — Yesterday, Today and the Future," 32-35.

[23] For Calvin, Scripture was *intrinsically* God's Word, not just *instrumentally*, as for Barth.

5.2 Knowing as Communion with God:

Epistemology, Experientia *and Certitude in Calvin*

IT IS VIRTUALLY impossible to rehearse again the richness and variety of the discoveries made on 'Calvin and knowing' in Chapter 2, which also in many ways constitute the most exciting and current part of the study. What follows is therefore a sketch of some of the salient points with application to the Reformed tradition.

5.2.1 CALVIN AND THE QUEST FOR KNOWING

In spite of the many legitimate objections raised against William Bouwsma's "sixteenth-century Calvin"[24] (cf. our own in Chapter 2.1.3), the scholarly world remains indebted to him for uncovering the epistemological undercurrent of Calvin's time, or, as he chose to call it, "the Renaissance crisis of knowing."[25] The revival of scepticism which found expression in Michel de la Montaigne, a contemporary of Calvin, exercised enormous pressure on the Reformers, leading to a preoccupation with *knowing* and *certitude.* However, it was Calvin, who more than the others because of his humanistic background, chose to interact with the new ways of knowing which were shaping the intellectual world of the sixteenth-century. Gaining an understanding into the epistemological challenges faced by Calvin makes it possible to understand more fully how and why the *Institutes* were presented in the way it was from its first edition to its last, as *a discourse on knowing.* Calvin's opening lines had firmly set its trajectory, and the fitting habitation of the *Institutio* within its intellectual milieu is perhaps only fully recognised when we observe for example that Descartes almost a century later echoed Calvin's language in an important letter to Father Marin Mersenne: "I hold that all those to whom God has given the use of [human] reason are bound to employ it in the effort to know him and to know themselves."[26] With the

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[24] William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[25] Bouwsma, "Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing," *Calvin Theological Journal* 17:2 (November 1982): 190-211. Bouwsma reckoned that 'a preoccupation with *knowing*' was evident everywhere in Calvin's work (201, 190).

[26] The letter to Mersenne is dated April 15, 1630, and is compiled in *Oeuvres de Descartes* (ed. C. Adam and P. Tannery, I.144) cited in J. T. McNeill (ed.), *Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XX; Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 37 ft. 3. Similarly, in his *Discourse on Method* (1637) and his *Meditations in Prime Philosophy* (1641), Descartes aimed like Calvin to "demonstrate the existence of God and the soul." Even George Berkeley in 1710 in his *Treatise on the Principles of Human Knowledge* held that existence could only be predicated on God and the soul. *Ibid.*

Institutio, Calvin had thus established an engaging encounter with his world along the lines of the age-old philosophical quest for knowing, and which would indeed 'shape' Western Culture. It is to his credit, and to the enormous advantage of the Reformed community, that Christianity retains such an articulate apologetical and epistemological point of contact with the world. The lasting relevance of the *Institutio* testifies to this.

Calvin's enterprise was however not exhausted at that point. The manner in which knowledge of God and self were intertwined predicated a God not only knowable on the basis of the historical unfolding of redemption culminating in Christ, but his living and engaging presence through the Spirit based upon the Word. The rest of the *Institutio* is therefore an exposition of knowledge of God on the basis of Scripture set along a Trinitarian course.[27] Though it is well-known that the inviolable bond between Word and Spirit introduced by Calvin is a Reformed distinctive, the less frequently understood emphasis on communion with the Trinity (for which Augustinian precedent was found; see Chapter 2.2.2.3) is equally important. Knowledge of God was never only *scientia* (expert knowledge), but *cognitio* (true knowledge) and *scientia experimentalis* (experimental knowledge). It was in *experientia* and certitude that the dynamic and proof of Calvin's conviction concerning knowledge of God lay (cf. Chapter 2.3), a much misunderstood and suppressed aspect of the Reformed theological heritage.

5.2.2 Certitude in an Age of Scepticism

Recent scholarly consensus suggests that the Reformation "began with the question of certainty,"[28] and that certainty was "the fundamental *theological* locus of the sixteenth century."[29] This analysis ties in well with the resurgence of scepticism in the sixteenth century noted above. Thus Calvin the humanist *and* Calvin the Biblical scholar was forced to concentrate on the issue of certitude. The most interesting consequence of this was in the area of hermeneutics, where experience and certitude functioned as key qualifiers in defining good exegesis (see our

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[27] In the *Institutio* 1.1.1, Calvin immediately went on to point out human sinfulness before returning to God (and the cross) as focus for redemption. The epistemological significance of total depravity (not that humanity is as sinful as it can be, but that nothing in humanity is left untainted by it) must not be negated whilst pontificating about Trinitarian knowledge. The Gospel is necessary for salvation!

[28] Willem Balke, "Revelation and Experience in Calvin's Theology," in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, ed. D. Willis and M. Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 350.

[29] Susan E. Schreiner, "'The Spiritual Man Judges All Things': Calvin and the Exegetical Debates about Certainty in the Reformation," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 215. [Emphasis added.]

discussion in Chapter 2.3.2.1). Calvin gave Spiritual certainty on the basis of Scripture an objective quality, as this *experientia* was attributed to the Holy Spirit and the reality of the believer's union with Christ. Experience thus consummated in affective and effective knowledge (as opposed to other kinds of knowledge), and in the mind of Calvin was a rational consequence of the Triune God's self-revealing and self-giving action (cf. Chapter 2.3.1.3-4). Belief, faith, knowledge, experience and certainty all coalesced in the knowing relationship that the believer had with the Father, through Christ in and by the Holy Spirit. On the basis of Word and Spirit, Calvin therefore not only steered a course between the extremes of objectivism and subjectivism, but did not hesitate to insist that certitude was the legitimate privilege of the Christian.

In our conclusion of Chapter 2 (2.4), we attempted to pursue the issue of *knowing* through the Enlightenment into what has been called the Postmodern era, and noted its many express parallels with sixteenth-century scepticism. Subsequently, we came to the conclusion that Calvin may have something relevant to contribute to our age, even though the "post-Copernican double bind" (the Cartesian-Kantian epistemological crisis)[30] seems an impossible bridge for a pre-modern thinker to cross. In many ways this is undoubtedly true. The Copernican shift of perspective in which the condition of the subject determined the apparent but not the real condition of the objective world, marked "*the* epochal shift of the modern age," while Descartes' articulation of the emerging "autonomous modern self" (fundamental doubt vis-à-vis the world) set in motion a chain of reasoning which culminated in Kant's "epistemological schism."[31] After Kant, no human mind could continue to claim direct knowledge of things-in-themselves as in pre-modern times, and all human knowledge was seen at best to be limited and interpretative. Yet, as we laboured to point out in Chapter 2, the roots of the 'modern mind' were already present in the sixteenth-century in seminal form, and to Calvin's credit, he appeared to have been well aware of it. The manner in which Calvin went about his hermeneutical task indicated the presence of critical subtlety and linguistic proficiency not found in many other sixteenth-century Biblical expositors. This is one of the reasons his work has retained a place on the shelf of modern Biblical scholarship. However, the intention and outcome of his exegetical labours remained an expression of supreme confidence in God and his truth.

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[30] This description is borrowed from Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have Shaped our World* (London: Pimlico, 1991), 416ff.
[31] *Ibid.*

With regards to future epistemology, it is of interest to note that many contemporary thinkers and philosophers have begun to advocate a return to intuitive and 'holistic' (pre-modern) views of knowledge.[32] Perhaps Calvin's 'holistic' insistence on disallowing a wedge to be driven between ontology, epistemology and soteriology, is a point of theological departure the Reformed community may well be able to revitalise and re-employ. As we stated in Chapter 2, it is ultimately because the Triune Redeemer is a 'reality' like none other, that knowing him (rather, *being known by him*, cf. Galatians 4:9) is a reality like no other.

5.2.3 REVIVING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

It can be said that the genius of Calvin's theological impact lay in the manner in which he articulated the knowledge of God into his own context and made it a doctrinal priority. As we noted however, since the Cartesian-Kantian crisis the very notion of knowledge of God (like the doctrine of the Trinity; cf. Chapter 3.4.2.1)[33] has become a near insurmountable problem in the West. Dogmatic theology in the twentieth-century reflects this crisis, in spite of attempts to overcome it.[34] For example, formal dogmatics has tended to delimitate the treatment of *revelation* from the treatment of *faith*, and both from the treatment of *God*. Depending on whether Kantian epistemology was accepted or rejected, human knowledge of God was either expressed as rationalist scepticism or as extreme fideism. It is heartening to see that in the most recent scholarly literature there are signs of an attempt to breach this polarisation through the use of Calvin's category of knowledge of God. Peter Jensen's *The Revelation of God* (2002),[35] makes use of Calvin's Gospel-oriented 'knowledge of God in Christ' in order to cast new light on key Reformed debates around Scriptural inerrancy and authority, and Van der Kooi's *Als In Een*

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[32] Tarnas for example, states that there is a "growing collective impetus in the Western mind to articulate a holistic and participatory world view," and it is currently "in the grip of a powerful archetypal dynamic in which the long-alienated modern mind is breaking through ... to rediscover its intimate relationship with nature and the larger cosmos." This may simply be a pretext for justifying a return to paganism, yet it does contain an attempt to deal with the major epistemological obstacles. *Ibid.*, 440.

[33] Rahner famously remarked that "should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged." *The Trinity*, 10-11.

[34] Karl Barth for example, sought to overcome this problem by setting out the doctrine of the Trinity as the necessary prolegomenon for revelation. For him, the doctrine of the Trinity undergirded and guaranteed the actuality of divine revelation to a sinful humanity. There are however, a few problems that have been noted with his articulation (see our discussion in Chapter 4.4.3). See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 13 vols., trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1975), 1/1.

[35] Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002). Unfortunately, Jensen and Van der Kooi (see footnote below) came out at the conclusion of our study, and we have thus not been able to incorporate them into our argument or findings.

Spiegel (2002)[36] makes an attempt to revive the older categories of "godskennis" and "omgangskennis" on the basis of a theological-historical study of Calvin and Barth. Calvin's focus on knowing the Triune God as ruling paradigm for Gospel-thinking in a sceptical era, may therefore be of contemporary help and significance in turning Reformed dogmatics towards its proper centre.

Reviving knowledge of God as a dogmatic category will also have the benefit of reclaiming knowledge in terms of its Biblical connotations of loving, intimate fellowship and communion in the way Calvin's characterisation clearly suggested.[37] Taking him seriously when he stated that we truly know ourselves only as we know God (cf. *Inst.* 1.1.1), Calvin could not possibly have been misconstrued for suggesting that knowledge merely equals knowing *that* or knowing *how*. By his own definition, faith was knowledge that perceived God as both object and subject of that knowledge (cf. his superb Trinitarian definition of faith in *Inst.* 3.2.7), in other words, knowing God as God makes *himself* known. Following Hilary (in *De Trinitate*), Calvin stated unambiguously that God "is the one fit witness to himself and is not known except through himself" (*Inst.* 1.13.21). Knowledge was thus a matter of relationship which involved the whole person, and personhood was understood in terms of relation not isolation (cf. Calvin's paradigmatic definition of 'Person' in the Trinitarian relations in *Inst.* 1.13.6). An economic-Trinitarian or Biblical understanding of knowing has much to offer us in our time. As John Shortt and David Smith put it:

> Embracing a more Hebrew view of knowing ... places us in an interesting position in relation to the contemporary 'paradigm shift' from modernity to postmodernity. ... The emperors of rationalism and scientism [have been] dethroned ... in spite of their claims to be the best-dressed rulers in all of history ... At such a time, when the temptation is to conclude that there is no knowing and that all is meaningless, a rediscovery of a more relational, personal and

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[36] C. van der Kooi, *Als in Een Spiegel: God kennen volgens Calvijn en Barth* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2002), 10-21. There is a remarkable correlation between what Van der Kooi attempted through his book and what we have tried to do in our study (though of course there are marked differences). This comes as confirmation of the fact that what we have put on the agenda is indeed relevant and of contemporary interest.

[37] Though we have presumed rather than pursued the Biblical correlation of Calvin's notion of knowing, a brief look at a few articles on "knowledge" and "know" (cf. the Hebrew root יָדַע [*yāda'*], and the Greek verbs οἶδα and γινώσκω) in standard Biblical Theological works will bear Calvin's general use of the concepts out. See for example P. R. Gilchrist's entrance on the root *yāda'*, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., and B. K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:366-67; Carl Schultz's "Know, Knowledge," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter E. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 457-458; T. R. Phillips, "Knowledge of God," *Ibid.*, 458-459; and J. I. Packer's chapter on "Knowledge" in *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1993), 19-20.

intuitive way of knowing may be very timely.[38]

Calvin knew that self-saving and self-illuminating epistemology was not a post-fall reality. He therefore believed in the absolute necessity of seeking true knowledge of self and saving knowledge of God on the basis of revelation alone. The Biblical revelation focusing on Christ and the cross was itself a revelation of the Triune God's love for humanity, and through the Holy Spirit, was an encounter with God himself.

In the chronology of the study, we allowed our discussion of the epistemological world which Calvin inhabited to precede the exposition of his Trinity doctrine in order to sketch the historical background for our investigation. Here in the *Conclusion*, we have reversed that sequence to demonstrate that epistemology logically (at least in the mind of Calvin) ensued from ontology and soteriology. Human knowledge of God originates from the Triune Redeemer himself.

5.3 The Interpreting and Interpretation of Calvin:
A Comprehensive-Thematic Approach to Calvin's Thought

THE RULING perspective in Calvin scholarship is that there is no ordering systematic *principle* or central logical axiom (in the nineteenth-century German sense) in Calvin's thought.[39] According to Bauke who had initiated this perspective, one should not however disclaim the presence of coherent *form* in his work.[40] Charles Partee also suggested that Calvin could not

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[38] John Shortt and David Smith, "Editorial: Knowing as a Kind of Loving," *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 6:2 (Autumn 2002): 93-94. Or, as Moltmann put it: "The motive that impels modern reason *to know* must be described as the desire to conquer and to dominate. For the Greek philosophers and the Fathers of the church, knowing meant something different: it meant knowing in wonder. By knowing or perceiving one participates in the life of the other. Here knowing does not transform the counterpart into the property of the knower; the knower does not appropriate what he knows. On the contrary, he is transformed through sympathy, becoming a participant in what he perceives. Knowledge confers fellowship. That is why knowing, perception, only goes as far as love, sympathy and participation reach. Where the theological perception of God and his history is concerned, there will be a modern discovery of Trinitarian thinking when there is at the same time a fundamental change in modern reason — a change from lordship to fellowship, from conquest to participation, from production to receptivity." Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 9.

[39] Unfortunately, this has contributed to a large-scale abandonment of all attempts to understand Calvin comprehensively. See our discussion in Chapter 1.

[40] Hermann Bauke, *Die Probleme der Theologie Calvins* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'schen, 1922), 11-20.

possibly be exposited without a comprehensive point of view, thus indicating that a clarifying 'root metaphor' or 'central theological theme' may be discovered without the reader necessarily having to prove that the author deliberately placed it there.[41] We have taken the position that Calvin's own consistent and comprehensive approach to Biblical theology, predicates that he in turn should be read in a similar manner. For example, if Calvin suggested to his sixteenth-century *Institutio* readers that his theology is an authentic statement of the apostolic faith by virtue of its Trinitarian form (cf. Chapter 2.2.2.1), and that knowledge of this Triune God has thematic priority (cf. Chapter 2.2.2.2), then that proposition ought to be taken seriously and his work examined accordingly (albeit critically). An approach of this nature is not therefore an attempt to scholastically impose logical tidiness onto Calvin's thought, and so remove or gloss over the tensions inherent in his work. Rather, it is an attempt to reconcile the author's intention with the form of his work and response generated by the work.[42] In this light, Calvin's preaching, polemical debates, commentaries and other writings lie very close to the *Institutio*, and the matter of the *transmission* of his ideas becomes crucial.

5.3.1 CALVIN'S THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

In Chapters 2 and 4, it became apparent that Calvin lived in a hermeneutically charged era. His world was one in flux, as the reigning ideas and set interpretations of the time were under siege by new ideas, particularly on knowing. The Reformation itself was perceived to be a challenge to the *status quo*, and nowhere was this new 'culture of hermeneutics' felt more acutely than in the area of Biblical interpretation. Calvin however, because of his view of the indissoluble bond between Word and Spirit (cf. Chapter 2.3.2.2), was quite willing to explore the use of new methods of interpretation without forfeiting or giving up the doctrinal inheritance of the church. As Rossouw put it; "For Calvin, the historical-grammatical inquiry into the literal sense of the scriptural text was essentially the same as the dogmatic-systematic quest for the one *doctrina Dei* which is communicated to us in the canon of Scripture, and which should be purely preached by the church."[43] The whole interpretational task found its purpose in focusing on

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[41] Charles Partee, "Calvin's Central Dogma Again," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18:2 (1987): 192-93.

[42] At this point we take issue with Philip Butin's overtly 'systematic' study *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, even though we are greatly indebted to him at many points for his Trinitarian reading of Calvin.

[43] H. W. Rossouw, "Calvin's Hermeneutics of Holy Scripture," in *Calvinus Reformator: His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society* (Potchefstroom: PUCHE Institute for Reformational Studies, 1982), 175.

knowing God. This explains the symbiotic relationship between Commentary and *Institutio* (both were servants of a common Biblical goal), and also the reason why both diachronic and synchronic approaches to the Bible were submitted so readily in service of *preaching* (cf. Calvin as 'theological exegete' in Chapter 4.2). Preaching was simultaneously doctrinal *and* expository. In Calvin's schema, the preacher was the hermeneutical gatekeeper of God's Word (see Chapter 4.3.4),[44] the purpose of which was to facilitate an encounter with the Triune God (see Chapters 4.2.3.1; 4.3.3; 4.4.3).

In Chapter 4.4, we also noted that against the legacy of the modern critical method, the new interest in 'theological hermeneutics' (reconciling Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology) has been stimulated in part by a recovery of pre-modern exegesis.[45] Thus, contrary to John Leith who suggested that "it is futile to find answers in Calvin's writings to new questions raised by modern historical consciousness,"[46] it would appear that Calvin may have a potential revitalising influence particularly in the matter of hermeneutical consistency and coherence. Calvin conceived all of the hermeneutical task to be the presentation of a single *doctrina*. Ironically, Reformed theology frequently attracts criticism exactly because of this characteristic, as many perceive its theological coherence to be a disguised form of dogmatism.[47] However, in the current fractured hermeneutical climate, a theology that recognises the interdependence of hermeneutical categories (such as ontology and economy) in formulating a single discourse concerning God, may have a remarkable cohesive effect.[48]

This means however (if we are to take Calvin seriously), that the proclamation of the Word is to be included in the hermeneutical process, and not denigrated as a 'pastoral extra.' The Reformers had great confidence in 'God's unerring Speech,' and for Calvin, preaching was "a scene of divine activity, and of human activity drawn into the divine."[49] A high regard for

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[44] Calvin believed that God's voice literally resounded in their mouths and through their tongues (cf. *Inst.* 4.1.5).

[45] See for example Francis Watson's *Text, Church and World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1-14; and *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 2-9. Watson attempts to address the separation that has come about between Theology and Biblical Studies in the modern era. David Steinmetz's famous article "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis" (*Theology Today* 37:1 [1980]: 27-38) has also been responsible for stimulating a number of studies on this topic.

[46] Cited in Rossouw, "Calvin's Hermeneutics of Holy Scripture," 175n102. We find this comment unusual when compared to his article "Calvin's Theological Realism and the Lasting Influence of his Theology," in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*.

[47] Unfortunately, one must concede that in many cases it has turned out to be exactly that, and history abounds with examples of 'abuse by theology.' Yet, to simply denounce all Reformed doctrine in blanket fashion, is itself a dogmatic form of *ab*-use.

[48] For a stirring argument on this issue, see Graeme Goldsworthy's "Ontology and Biblical Theology. A Response to Carl Trueman's Editorial: *A Revolutionary Balancing Act*," *Themelios* 28:1 (Autumn 2002): 37-45. See also Joel B. Green and Max Turner (ed.) *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids/ Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000).

[49] T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1992), 31-32.

preaching thus has a more substantial base than tradition, as current communication studies and the application of linguistic science (speech-act theory in particular) to hermeneutics have shown.[50] In the words of Vanhoozer, the Bible is an instrument of "divine *action*," and "a matter of the Triune God in self-communicative action."[51] Calvin, who integrated exegesis (*Commentary*), doctrine (*Institutio*) and exposition (*Sermon*) into a comprehensive presentation of the Christian faith, may still be able to inform the Reformed community in the current hermeneutical debate.

5.3.2 CALVIN AND THE TRANSMISSION OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

Anyone surveying the literature cannot fail to notice the remarkable amount of energy that has been poured into interpreting John Calvin over the last three hundred years. However, as John McNeill observed, it is only the recent history of that interpretation that has struggled more with the nature of Calvin's message than with its demands.[52] As we pointed out in Chapter 1, some of the recent anti-interpretations are based on presuppositions that are impossible to counterbalance with *any* argument or evidence.[53] These works are seldom of lasting value. In the history of the interpretation of Calvin the most fascinating and vigorous debate has been amongst those who lay claim to true heirship of Calvin, but who either reject aspects of what can be called 'Calvinism' (itself a flexible term) or accept the Reformed Scholastic (Protestant Orthodox) development of his ideas as a true interpretation of the original Calvin. This is a wide-ranging debate, covering aspects of Confessional Calvinism (Puritanism and the

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[50] See D. F. du Plessis, "Calvin in Word and Deed: A Communicological Appreciation," *KOERS* 66:1&2 (2001): 101-114; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?: The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[51] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books/ Leicester: InterVarsity Press/ Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 70-74. [Emphasis original.]

[52] He put it as follows; "Calvin formerly stirred debate because people agreed or disagreed with his teaching. Recently, men have been in disagreement over what that teaching was." John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 202.

[53] We think here for example of the provocative work by Suzanne Selinger; *Calvin Against Himself* (Hamden: Archon, 1984). The title is an accurate explanation of the radical nature of her thesis. Other critical works more subtly fall into the category C. S. Lewis once humorously described as those who "claim to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight." "These men," he said, "ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves." C. S. Lewis, *Fern-seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity* (Glasgow: Collins, 1975), 111.

Westminster Confession in the English-speaking world)[54] as well as the fascinating and complex issue of continuity and discontinuity between the Reformation and Post-Reformation Protestant Orthodoxy.[55]

It is impossible here to even sketch the background of this ongoing and complex historical debate, and though the matter is not frequently framed in this language, one could suggest that its crux revolves around uncovering the 'historical Calvin.'[56] Many Calvin interpreters fail to locate him *historically* in any real sense, and subsequently make no legitimate contribution to the debate from the standpoint of his authentic teaching.[57] Others associate Calvin either too closely with the Middle Ages or alternatively with the Modern period.[58] The 'real Calvin' however, stands at the critical juncture *between* the Medieval and Modern worlds, which explains in part the reason for the struggle to comprehend his thought by means of contemporary categories.[59] The second chapter of our study was an attempt to portray some of the intellectual properties of the changing world Calvin inhabited, and may therefore provide a stimulus for further research in this area, thus contributing to the larger debate on Calvin and Calvinism.

Pursuing the matter from the perspective of *transmission*, it has become commonplace in some scholarly circles to suggest that "the intellectual and religious climate of Calvin's thought

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[54] There are a number of other studies and articles. We will only mention a few. The classic studies are R. T. Kendall's *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) [summarised in his "The Puritan Modifications of Calvin's Theology," in W. S. Reid (ed.), *John Calvin. His Influence in the Western World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).] to which Paul Helm responded in his "Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of Doctrinal Development," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981): 179-85; and *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982). Early significant works include Basil Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. Gervase Duffield (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966); and Holmes Rolston III, *John Calvin versus the Westminster Confession* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1972). J. B. Torrance has pursued this matter vigorously in a number of articles including "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology," in *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, ed. Alasdair I. C. Heron (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1982); and "Calvin and Puritanism in England and Scotland — Some Basic Concepts in the Development of 'Federal Theology'," in *Calvinus Reformator*.

[55] Again, the literature is voluminous. The most recent volume in the *Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought* series under the general editorship of Richard Muller is called *Reformation and Scholasticism* (ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001]). It introduces the "New" School or position on the debate concerning continuity and discontinuity. See also R. A. Muller's "Calvin and the Calvinists: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between Reformation and Orthodoxy," parts 1 and 2, *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 345-75; 31 (1996): 125-60; and his earlier classic *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Theological Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

[56] Tony Lane is the only one we have come across using this manner of typology. See his appropriately titled essay "The Quest for the Historical Calvin," *Evangelical Quarterly* LV:2 (1983): 95-113. (The overtones to the "Quest for the Historical Jesus" are obvious.)

[57] Popular and political Calvinism is an obvious culprit.

[58] Perhaps David Steinmetz and his followers have tended to stress the former, while most of nineteenth-century Calvin interpretation on the Continent fell into the latter category.

[59] Calvin can appear to be as complex as his times, and irreconcilable tensions are traceable in his writings (even though in most cases they would simply be a reflection of the 'tensions' inherent in the Biblical text). This does not suggest however, that Calvin cannot be comprehensively understood.

was strongly different from that of his immediate successor, Theodore Beza (1519-1605)."[60] Among other 'perversions' of Calvin's thought, his theological 'congeniality' is said to have been corrupted by Beza into an 'austere double predestinarianism,' a fact which is substantiated by their respective theological location of God's decrees.[61] Again, we cannot analyse this important aspect of the larger debate here,[62] but it does serve to highlight the significance and precarious nature of transmitting seminal ideas from one generation to the next. In the Reformed tradition which boasts the motto *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* ('the church that has been reformed needs always to be reformed'),[63] this is especially important.

James Houston has made an intriguing argument based on Calvin (contrasted with his contemporaries and successors), that the Christian spirit of transmission is one which ought to be *personal* as opposed to *institutional*.[64] According to him, Calvin understood theology to be "vital and experiential, demanding constant daily openness to the Word of God and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit," in other words, something that could not be transmitted institutionally, or through the normal processes of "Christianisation."[65] In fact, Christianisation has proven itself to be a stepping-stone towards Christian failure, and Constantinian success was an indication of impending spiritual tragedy. Though it is easy to take this argument too far, Houston does make an important point:

> *There can be no human substitute for 'knowing God.'* Yet the natural desires for clarification, rationalisation, organisation, moralisation are all confronted there, by a mystery — the central mystery of God in Christ — realised in us by the Holy

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[60] Paul Helm, "Calvin and Calvinism: The Anatomy of a Controversy," *Evangel* (January 1984): 7.

[61] This is especially the territory of J. B. Torrance's writings aimed against Federal Calvinism. See the articles mentioned above, and his "The Concept of Federal Theology — Was Calvin a Federal Theologian?," in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor. Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*, ed. W. H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). On the doctrine of election, we may note that Calvin did indeed move his discussion to the end of Book 3, while Beza put it at the beginning of his work.

[62] It would appear that both sides have strong presuppositions informed by other theological directives that are brought to the debate. Nevertheless, it does seem to us that J. B. Torrance's case lacks the necessary integration required for a discussion of this nature.

[63] James Packer defines it as such, and noticeably not 'the church Reformed and always reforming.' This suggests not automatic or externalised reform, but constant "renewal of inward spiritual life." See J. I. Packer, *Laid-Back Religion?* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 156-157.

[64] James M. Houston, "Knowing God: The Transmission of Reformed Theology," in *Doing Theology for the People of God; Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer*, ed. Donald Lewis and Alister E. McGrath (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 239-242.

[65] *Ibid.*, 239. There are in fact a number of ways in which his argument can be countered. For one, Calvin himself included 'institutionalisation' both in his programme and vision for Christian transmission. See H. A. Speelman's argument in *Calvijn en de zelfstandigheid van de Kerk* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1994). "[Calvin's] vision was not fundamentally different from Zwingli's, for example, who in 1531 articulated his view of the church in this way: 'A Christian person is nothing other than a trustworthy and good citizen and a Christian city is nothing other than a Christian church'" (238).

Spirit. Transmission of reform requires us to live trustingly, to live in, through and by the Mystery of God.[66]

Though this is not often the way we view Calvin through the glasses of more than 400 years of Reformed tradition, it is indeed the agenda he set against the reigning philosophical-theological and ecclesiastical structures of his own day (albeit in such a coherent manner as to lend itself immediately to a new form of Christianity). *Knowing the Triune God* may therefore at first seem like a simplistic 'Christian formula,' but in the hands of Calvin, it turned out to be as weighty a theological theme as was ever employed in the history of the church. Combining Calvin's understanding of God's Triunity and certainty in knowing him on the basis of Word and Spirit, not only offers us a window into Calvin's theology, but presents itself as a comprehensive summary of the Reformed vision.

In closing, Calvin's comments on Jeremiah 9:23-24 are as fitting today as when he first penned them:

> Today, all sorts of subjects are eagerly pursued; but the knowledge of God is neglected ... Yet to know God is man's chief end, and justifies his existence. Even if a hundred lives were ours, this one aim would be sufficient for them all.[67]

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[66] "Knowing God: The Transmission of Reformed Theology," 242. [Emphasis added.]

[67] *Commentary on Jeremiah* 9:23-24. Jeremiah 9:24 reads: "But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight declares the LORD" (NIV).

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