

Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the
Word and its Significance for Today
in the Light of Recent Research
by
John H. Leith

Imbart de la Tour once wrote, "The first work of Calvin was a book: the Institutes; the second was a city: Geneva. The book and the city complement each other. The one is doctrine formulated; the other is doctrine applied."¹ This judgment is now challenged; the study of Calvin's sermons indicates that Imbart de la Tour underestimated the role of preaching,² which alone enabled the dogmatician to fashion the face of the city.

The sheer volume of Calvin's preaching justifies his being remembered as a preacher. Yet he was not only a preacher. He united in his life the functions of preaching, of teaching, and of pastoral care both of the congregation in Geneva and of the Reformed community in western Europe with an integrity that has seldom been realized. He carried on these functions as a theologian and as an interpreter of Scripture without any disjuncture between the work of the scholar and the work of the churchman. Hence, it would be wrong to single out the task of preaching. Yet there can be no doubt of its importance for Calvin and no doubt that the work of teaching, of pastoral care, and of the theologian comes to a sharp focus in it.

Calvin also thought of preaching as the primary means by which God's presence becomes actual to us and by which God's work is accomplished in individual life and in the community. As a churchman, Calvin relied upon preaching to create a godly public opinion in the community and to be a means of grace in the life of the church. Preaching for Calvin took priority over discipline as a means of social change as well as of strengthening the life of the church.³ No quantifiable data is available on the effectiveness of preaching, either the preaching of Calvin or preaching in general. Precise, "scientific" measurements, if not impossible, are probably inferior to the judgment of wise observers who have lived with the data. Hence the conclusion of a modern historian, Herbert Butterfield, may be appropriately noted.

The ordinary historian, when he comes, shall we say, to the year 1800 does not think to point out to his readers that in this year, still, as in so many previous years, thousands and thousands of priests and ministers were preaching the Gospel

¹ Imbart de la Tour: Les Origins de la Réforme (Paris: Finmin-Didot Cie, Editeurs) Vol. IV, p. 117.

² Cf. Richard Stauffer: "Un Calvin méconnu; le predicateur de Genève" in Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du Protestantisme Français (1977), pp. 184ff.

³ cf IV, 1, 9-29. Calvin never made discipline a necessary mark of the Church.

week in and week out, constantly reminding the farmer and the shopkeeper of charity and humility, persuading them to think for a moment about the great issues of life, and inducing them to confess their sins. Yet this was a phenomenon calculated greatly to alter the quality of life and the very texture of human history; and it has been the standing work of the Church throughout the ages--even under the worst of popes here was a light that never went out. And in another respect the Church never failed; for, amongst all peoples, whether lettered or unlettered, there have always been those who reached the highest peaks of the spiritual life; and as Professor Powicke once pointed out, we can all call to mind any number of people who needed to wait for no millennium. As it only needs a comparatively small number of communists to upset a state--because of their intent purposefulness--so it only needs a comparatively small number of these kinds of Christians to operate as a leaven that leavens the whole lump. It is impossible to measure the vast difference that ordinary Christian piety has made to the last two thousand years of European history . . ."⁴

Insofar as Calvin created a "new civilization" or a "new man," he did so in large measure by preaching.⁵ The sheer volume of Calvin's preaching is impressive. At first (after his return to Geneva in 1541) he apparently preached twice on Sunday and then on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. In 1542, in response to demand, he preached more frequently; but this proved too much and the Council released him. In 1549 he preached twice on Sunday and every work day, every second week.^{5a}

Calvin's sermons were recorded after 1549 by an excellent group of secretaries, headed by Denis de Raguénier, who sought to record them just as Calvin preached them. This service was supported by the Company of Refugees.⁶ In Raguénier's catalogue (1549-1560) 2,042 sermons are listed. An additional 263 were recorded later. Today we know the texts of 1,460 sermons, which means that about 1,000 have been lost. At the time of Calvin's death, or shortly thereafter, 780 sermons had been printed. Eight hundred seventy two were printed in the Corpus Reformatorum, and four volumes of sermons have been printed since 1961, containing 206 sermons, in the excellently edited editions of the Supplementa Calviniana. Stauffer estimates that the known sermons constitute about one-third of the Calvin corpus. The addition of the

⁴Herbert Butterfield: Christianity and History (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1954) p. 131.

⁵Emile G. Léonard: A History of Protestantism. Translated by Joyce M. H. Reid (London: Nelson, 1965) Vol. I, p. 292.

^{5a}Richard Stauffer, "Un Calvin méconnu: le prédicateur de Genève" in Bulletin de la Société du Protestantisme Français, 1977, p. 189.

⁶Bernard Gagnebin, "L'histoire des manuscrits des sermons de Calvin" in Supplementa Calviniana, Vol. I.

lost sermons would make the sermons one-half of Calvin's total writing.⁷ Even this estimate does not include sermons which were preached without any record.⁸

Calvin's work as a preacher has always attracted the attention of scholars.⁹ In recent years the publication of manuscript sermons in the critical edition of the Supplementa Calviniana has stimulated new studies on Calvin the preacher.¹⁰ More recently Professor Rudolph Peter of the University of Strasbourg, who has edited the sermons on Jeremiah and Lamentations, has written out of an extensive knowledge of the sermons about Calvin the homiletician.¹¹ In 1978 Richard Stauffer published Dieu, la création et la providence dans la prédication de Calvin.¹² Stauffer finds that Calvin's sermons are a significant supplement to the theology of the Institutes and a corrective to the traditional as well as the Barthian interpretations of Calvin. They are also a primary source for his theology, answering such questions as whether Calvin knew about Copernicus.¹³ Stauffer's interpretation has aroused the protest of Pierre Marcel, the editor of La Revue Reformée, who differs with Stauffer on a wide variety of themes, from the nature of Calvin's theology to the question of Calvin's knowledge of

⁷Richard Stauffer, Dieu, la création et la providence dans la prédication de Calvin (Bern: Peter Lang, 1978), p. 10.

⁸These would include sermons before Beneva, Geneva 1536-1528, Strasbourg, and in the first years after his return to Geneva in 1541.

⁹For example: Emile Doumergue: Calvin, le prédicateur de Genève, 1910;

Erwin Mulhaupt: Die Predigt Calvins: ihre Geschichte, ihre Form, und ihr religiösen. Grundgedanken, 1931.

¹⁰Bernard Gagnebin: L'histoire des manuscrits des sermons de Calvin in Supplementa Calviniana, 2. 1961.

William Niesel: "Der theologische Gehalt der jüngst veröffentlichten Predigten Calvins" in Regards contemporains sur Jean Calvin, 1965.

Georges A. Barrios: "Calvin und die Genfer" in Der Prediger Johannes Calvin, 1966.

¹¹Rodolphe Peter: "Jean Calvin prédicateur" in Revue de l'histoire et de philosophie religieuses, 1972.

"Rhétorique et prédication selon Calvin" in Revue de l'histoire et de philosophie religieuses, 1975.

¹²Richard Stauffer. Dieu, la création et la providence dans la prédication de Calvin. Berne: Peter Lang, 1978).

¹³Ibid., p. 188.

Copernicus.¹⁴ In this country John R. Walchenbach, under the supervision of Ford Lewis Battles, wrote a significant dissertation of the influence of Chrysostom on Calvin's exegesis.¹⁵ More recently Benjamin W. Farley has published a new translation of Calvin's sermons on the Ten Commandments.¹⁶

The new interest in Calvin the preacher, the appearance of critical editions of Calvin's sermons, the excellent studies of Calvin the homiletician justify an assessment of the significance of Calvin's preaching for today. Another justification is the plight of preaching in most churches today.

This paper proposes to review and to respond to recent studies of Calvin's preaching and of his sermons. The response will be from the perspective of a knowledge of Calvin that is based primarily upon the Institutes and tracts and less intensively from a comprehensive study of the sermons. The paper also proposes to ask what is the significance of Calvin's preaching for preaching today.

Any appraisal of Calvin's preaching must begin with the context out of which and in which Calvin preached.

We can begin with the fact of Christendom. Calvin lived in a society that was in its official commitments Christian. Heresy was not simply doctrinal deviation but also the subversion of the civil order as well as the ecclesiastical order. This does not mean that everyone in this society was Christian. It does mean that the commitments were. Christian theology in some broad sense was the frame of reference in which people thought and lived. Neither Calvin nor the city council rejected the idea of a Christian society. Rather they endeavored to make this idea a reality.¹⁷

Second, John Calvin preached out of the background and context of Christian humanism. Humanist education left a lasting imprint upon Calvin's thinking and upon his style, as is clear in any analysis of his writings or his preaching.¹⁸ It also determined what counted for Calvin and many of his hearers as evidences of truth and reality. When we put together the Christian society in which Calvin lived with his humanist

¹⁴"Une Lecture Non-Calviniste de Calvin" in Supplement a la Revue Reformée, 1979, IV.

¹⁵John R. Walchenbach. John Calvin as Biblical Interpreter: An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Chrysostom as an Exegetical Tutor (University of Pittsburgh dissertation, 1974).

¹⁶Benjamin Farley, Editor and translator. John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980).

¹⁷Leonard, op. cit. 348ff.

¹⁸Ford Lewis Battles and Andre Malan Hugo. Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's de Clementia (Leiden: The Renaissance Society of America (E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 72ff.

education and commitments, it becomes clear that a wide gulf separates the signs of reality, truth,¹⁹ intelligibility for Calvin and for post-Enlightenment persons.

Third, Calvin preached in a community in which preacher and congregation shared a common context of intelligibility, a common "apperceptive mass" of biblical knowledge, symbols, images, visions of human life and society. This shared way of looking at things and understanding them rooted in the homogeneity of the society and its history. It made the task of communication much simpler for the preacher and the congregation.

Fourth, Calvin and his hearers shared an awareness of the holy. The sense of the reality of the Creator and Source of all things, the feeling of the objective presence of God, a sensitivity to the activity of God in life in general and in worship in particular, left an imprint on everything Calvin did or wrote. The conviction that not a drop of rain falls or a wind blows without the command of God was a matter of piety as well as doctrine.²⁰ While predestination is not a central doctrine from which the whole of Calvin's theology is deduced, the emphasis on God's immediate activity and initiative influences the entire range of Calvin's activity and thought.

The church was for Calvin the people of God who live in the presence of God, a presence both fascinating and frightening. In the church and in preaching, believers have to do with the Creator and the Lord who holds their destiny in his hands.

It is very difficult in our society to understand this sense of the holy that is so vivid and alive with Calvin. We know much better than Calvin, perhaps, the perils of being representatives of God. Yet the absence of this compelling sense of the presence of God may be the source of an attempt to compensate by an increasing proclivity to use the signs of the office, robes, vestments, titles and even jewelry. With Calvin there was an austerity and simplicity, perhaps in part because he was so sure that in preaching God himself is present, the God who declares, "I, even I, am he and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive" (Deuteronomy 32:39).

II

We do not have much information on how John Calvin learned to preach. The tradition of his preaching at Bourges perhaps as early as 1529 is reported by Calvin's friends and biographers, Theodore Beza and Colladon, but the information from the point of view of the historian is

¹⁹Cf. Peter Berger and T. Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966).

²⁰Cf. David Wiley, Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination: His Principal Soteriological and Polemical Doctrine. Unpublished dissertation, Duke University, 1971.

not reliably elaborated. We know he came to Geneva in 1536 with the ability to preach.²¹

Calvin learned to preach out of the Christian tradition, in particular from the practice of the ancient church and the Christian humanists. The Christian humanists taught him to return to the sources and trained him in the skills of interpretation and communication. They also taught him and the early reformers to preach. Jacob Wimpfeling, John Geiler in Kaisersberg, and Johann Ulrich Surgant of Basel are preeminent examples of preaching in the style that became common in Zurich, Strasbourg and Geneva.²² A second source of guidance in the art of preaching was the ancient church. Augustine, whom Calvin prized above all others as a theologian, wrote a standard homiletic guide, Christian Doctrine.²³ It was from John Chrysostom, whom Calvin judged a poorer theologian than Augustine but a better exegete, that Calvin and the others learned much about preaching.²⁴ Yet Calvin's doctrine of preaching and his practice of the art of preaching can best be studied from his own writings.

Calvin's famous letter to Protector Somerset in 1548 concerning the reformation of the church in England contains as good an introduction as any to Calvin's general understanding of the preacher's task.

I speak thus, Monseigneur, because it appears to me that there is very little preaching of a lively kind in the kingdom, but that the greater part deliver it by way of reading from a written discourse. I see very well the necessity which constrains you to that; for in the first place you have not, as I believe, such well-approved and competent pastors as you desire. Wherefore, you need forthwith to supply this want. Secondly, there may very likely be among them many flighty persons who would go beyond all bounds, sowing their own silly fancies, as often happens on occasion of a change. But all these considerations ought not to hinder the ordinance of Jesus Christ from having free course in the preaching of the Gospel.

²¹Theodore Beza: Life of Calvin: Tracts and Treatises on Reformation of the Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958). Vol. I, pp. lxi, lxvii;

Nicholas Colladon: Vie de Calvin, Corpus Reformatorum, Calvini Opera, Vol. XXI, p. 55.

²²E. Jane Douglass Dempsey: Justification in Late Medieval Preaching (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966). Chapters I and II;

Hughes Oliphant Old: The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship (Zurich, 197), pp. 3ff;

Quirinus Breen: Christianity and Humanism, Studies in the History of Ideas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968).

²³Calvin was familiar with Christian Doctrine. See Luchesius Smits, Saint Augustin dans l'oeuvre de Jean Calvin (Louvain, 1958).

²⁴Walchenbach. op. cit.

Now, this preaching ought not to be lifeless but lively, to teach, to exhort, to reprove, as Saint Paul says in speaking thereof to Timothy (2 Tim. iii.) So indeed, that if an unbeliever enter, he may be so effectually arrested and convinced, as to give glory to God, as Paul says in another passage, (1 Cor. xiv.) You are also aware, Monseigneur, how he speaks of the lively power and energy with which they ought to speak, who would approve themselves as good and faithful ministers of God, who must not make a parade of rhetoric, only to gain esteem for themselves; but that the Spirit of God ought to sound forth by their voice, so as to work with mighty energy. Whatever may be the amount of danger to be feared, that ought not to hinder the Spirit of God from having liberty and free course, in those to whom he has given grace for the edifying of the Church.²⁵

A. Doctrine of Preaching

First, Calvin understood preaching to be the will of God for his church. The justification for preaching is not in its effectiveness for education or reform. It is not a practice for which other practices may be substituted should they prove to be more popular or more useful. Preaching is rooted in the will and the intention of God. The preacher, Calvin dared to say, was the mouth of God,²⁶ God does not wish to be heard but by the voice of his ministers.²⁷

Calvin had no illusions about the impact of preaching. He knew, as he said, in one sermon, there were as many people in the tavern as at the sermon.²⁸ He knew that preaching would create problems and difficulties. It kills as well as makes alive; it hardens as well as renews.²⁹ The validity of preaching does not depend upon the response it elicits. It is a witness or a testimony that God wills to be made in his world even if all reject it.

This emphasis upon the foundation of preaching in the will of God should not obscure Calvin's practical concern for edification. He wanted preaching to edify, to convince. Certainly on the human level he had confidence in its power. On a deeper level, however, he found the justification for preaching not in its edification, in its power under

²⁵October 22, 1548.

²⁶Commentary on Isaiah 55:11.

²⁷Commentary on Isaiah 50:10.

²⁸"If there be one day in the week reserved for religious instruction when they have spent six days in their own business, they are apt to spend the day which is set apart for worship, in play and pastime; some rove about the fields, others go to taverns to quaff; and there are undoubtedly at this time as many at the last mentioned place, as we here assembled in the name of God." Sermon on I Timothy 3:16.

²⁹Commentary on II Corinthians 2:15; Commentary on Isaiah 6:10.

the Holy Spirit to create the Christian man and a Christian society, but in the intention of God.

Second, Calvin understood preaching to be a sacrament of the saving presence of God. Stauffer suggests that preaching for Calvin was not only a moment of worship, not only a task of the church, but it was also something of a divine epiphany.³⁰ "When the Gospel is preached in the name of God, it is as if God himself spoke in person."³¹ In the Institutes (IV, 14, 26) he quotes Augustine, who spoke of words as signs. In preaching, the Holy Spirit uses the words of the preacher as an occasion for the presence of God in grace and in mercy. In this sense, the actual words of the sermon are comparable to the element in the Sacraments.^{31a} The Word in preaching accomplishes nothing apart from the work of the Holy Spirit who illuminates the mind.^{31b} (For Calvin, preaching is sacramental in context of the order of salvation and as a means of grace and not in the more general sense by which all creation may be sacramental. The distinction is important for Calvin, though he never explicated the meaning. The sense in which "common grace" may be saving is a modern question, not an issue in which Calvin was interested.)

The power of preaching as the Word of God does not reside in the sound of the words themselves or even in their meaning. The power of preaching is the act of the Holy Spirit which makes the words, their sound and their meaning, the occasion of the voice of God. "If the same sermon is preached, say to a hundred people, twenty receive it with ready obedience of faith, while the rest hold it valueless, or laugh, or hiss, or loathe it."³² Yet the ultimate difference in the response does not reside in the sermon, the sound of the words, the rhetoric or the meaning, but in the electing grace of God.

³⁰Richard Stauffer, "Les Discours à la première personne dans les sermons de Calvin" in Regards contemporains sur Jean Calvin (Paris, 1965).

³¹The following paragraph from the third sermon of Calvin on Jacob and Esau states a basic element in his doctrine of preaching:

When the Gospel is preached in the name of God, this is as much as if he himself did speak in his own person: and yet all come not to Jesus Christ. There are a great many that go back the more when they have heard the Gospel; for then the devil kindles them in such a rage, that they are more outrageous than ever before, and this comes to pass, because there is a two fold hearing: the one is preaching; For the voice of a man will not enter into the hearts of his hearers. I speak, but it behooves that I hear myself being taught by the Spirit of God: For otherwise the word which proceeds from my mouth should profit me no more than it does all others, except it be given me from above, and not out of mine own head. Therefore the voice of man is nothing but a sound that vanishes in the air, and notwithstanding it is the power of God to salvation to all believers (saith Saint Paul). When then God speaketh unto us, by the mouth of men, then he adjoins the inward grace of his Holy Spirit, to the end, that the doctrine be not unprofitable, but that

it may bring forth fruit. See then how we hear the heavenly father: that is to say when he speaketh secretly unto us by his Holy Spirit; and then we come unto our Lord Jesus Christ.

31a. The Holy Spirit seems to have the same relation to the Word, both in Scripture and in preaching, as it does to elements in the Sacraments, cf IV, 1, 6; IV 14, 9-19. Compare also the following statements from commentaries which, while applying primarily to the Word in Scripture, are also applicable to preaching.

EZEKIEL 2:2. "This work of the Spirit, then, is joined with the word of God. But a distinction is made, that we may know that the eternal word is of no avail by itself, unless animated by the power of the Spirit. If anyone should object, that the word was useless, because not efficacious by itself, the solution is at hand, that if God takes this method of acting there is no reason why we should object to it. But we have a still clearer reply: since God always works in the hearts of men by the Spirit, yet his word is not without fruit; because, as God enlightens us by the sun, and yet he alone is the Father of Lights, and the splendour of the sun is profitless except as God uses it as an instrument, so we must conclude concerning his word, because the Holy Spirit penetrates our hearts, and thus enlightens our minds. All power of action, then, resides in the Spirit himself, and thus all praise ought to be entirely referred to God alone. Meanwhile, what objection is there to the Spirit of God using instruments? We hold, therefore, that when God speaks, he adds the efficacy of his Spirit, since his word without it would be fruitless, and yet the work is effectual because the instrument ought to be united with the author of the action. This doctrine, thus briefly expounded, may suffice to refute foolish objections, which are always in the mouths of many who fret about man's free-will: they say, that we can either attend to the word which is offered to us or reject it: but we see what the Prophet says. If any of us is fit for rendering obedience to God, the Prophet certainly excelled in this disposition, and yet the word of God had no efficacy in his case, until the Spirit gave him strength to RISE UPON HIS FEET. Hence, we collect, that it is not in our power to obey what God commands us, except this power proceeds from him."

JAMES 1:21. "It is a high eulogy on heavenly truth, that we obtain through it a sure salvation; and this is added, that we may learn to seek and love and magnify the word as a treasure that is incomparable. It is then a sharp goad to chastise our idleness, when he says that the word which we are-wont to hear so negligently is the means of our salvation, though for this purpose the power of saving is not ascribed to the word, as if salvation is conveyed by the external sound of the word, or as if the office of saving is taken away from God and transferred elsewhere; for James speaks of the word which by faith penetrates into the hearts of men, and only intimates that God, the author of salvation, conveys it by his Gospel."

31b_I, 7, 4.

32_{IV}, 24, 12.

Calvin's sacramental doctrine of preaching enabled him on one hand to understand preaching as a very human work and, on the other hand, as the work of God. The characteristic perspective that pervades all of Calvin's theology, which on the one hand emphasizes the transcendence of God and refuses to identify the transcendent God with any finite and determinant object, and which on the other hand asserts the immanence of God in creation, and more particularly in the means of grace, has particular application to preaching. The sermon is a human work. From one perspective the human work of the sermon is critically important. The sermon's fidelity to Scripture, the skill of the syntax and rhetoric, the liveliness of the delivery are of a fundamental importance that ought not to be minimized. From another perspective a sermon is a work of the Spirit of God which may make a "poor" sermon the occasion of God's presence and a brilliant sermon barren of power. Calvin unites the work of God and the work of man in the sacrament and in preaching without separation, without change, and without confusion. In practice he may have claimed too much for the minister and for the words of the sermon. Yet in doctrine he knew that the words of the sermon are at best frail, human words, but words which can by the power of the Holy Spirit become the occasion of the presence of God.^{32a} For Calvin as for Luther (Lectures on Hebrews) "The ears alone are the organ of the Christian man." Hearing the Word of God makes one worthy of the name Christian.

B. Method of Preaching

Let us now turn more specifically to Calvin's understanding of the art of preaching, to Calvin's work as a homiletician.

First of all, Calvin understood preaching to be the explication of Scripture. The words of Scripture are the source and content of preaching. As an expositor, Calvin brought to the task of preaching all the skills of a humanist scholar. As an interpreter, Calvin explicated the text, seeking its natural, its true, its scriptural meaning. In the classic passage in the Galatians commentary, he wrote, "The true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely. Let us . . . boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions which lead us away from the natural meaning."³³

Calvin, according to Ford Lewis Battles, was a superb explicator of Scripture, because he was a master of paraphrase.³⁴ In this most critical task he could paraphrase Scripture with precision and clarity, translating it into the language of the common human discourse in his own time. This skill was based upon his humanist learning and also upon his theological and spiritual depth and insight. Professor Brevard

^{32a} Commentary on John 14:26, Com. on Ezekiel 2:2, Com. on Isaiah 29:11.

³³ Commentary on Galatians 4:22.

³⁴ Ford Lewis Battles. *op. cit.*, p. 79.

Childs of Yale University Divinity School has asked why it is that Calvin, without access to modern critical knowledge, is able to explicate scriptural passages with a depth and meaning that eludes modern commentators.^{34a} The answer must be in Calvin's own spiritual and theological resonance with the text, a skill which cannot be learned in schools. Calvin himself gave a characteristic answer to Professor Childs' question in his commentary on I Corinthians 2:12. Understanding and confidence concerning the things of Christ are "not acquired in a natural way" and are "not attained by mental capacity but [depend] entirely on the revelation of the Spirit." This judgment, like much that Calvin wrote, presupposes his own ardent efforts to use natural ways and mental labor to ascertain the meaning of the text.

Calvin's emphasis upon preaching as explication of Scripture is accentuated in the manner in which he chose his text. Following the practice that Zwingli had instituted in Zurich, Calvin generally preached through a book. He expressly rejected the method of those who would comment upon selectively chosen passages of Scripture.

What order must pastors then keep in teaching? First, let them not esteem at their pleasure what is profitable to be uttered and what to be omitted; but let them leave that to God alone to be ordered at his pleasure. So shall it come to pass that the inventions of men shall have none entrance into the Church of God. Again, mortal man shall not be so bold as to mangle the Scripture and to pull it in pieces, that he may diminish this or that at his pleasure, that he may obscure something and suppress many things; but shall deliver whatsoever is revealed in the Scripture, though wisely and seasonably for the edifying of the people, yet plainly and without guile, as becometh a faithful and true interpreter of God. I said that wisdom must be used, because we must always have respect unto profit, so there be no subtilty used, wherein many take too great delight, when as they turn and wrest the word of God into their methods, and forge to us a certain kind of philosophy mixed of the gospel and their own inventions; namely, because this mixture is more delectable. Thence have we free-will, thence the deserts of works, thence the denial of the providence and free election of God. And that which we said even now is to be noted, that the counsel of God whereof Paul maketh mention, is included in his word, and that it is to be sought no where else.³⁵

Thus Calvin substituted the "Lectio continua," the continuous preaching through a book, for the selections of the lectionary or for the individual choices of the minister. Following this method, for example, he preached 200 sermons on Deuteronomy from March 20, 1555, to July 15, 1556, and 159 on Job from February 26, 1554, to March 1555.

^{34a} Comment made in a discussion at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.

³⁵ Commentary on Acts 20:26.

Calvin did preach sermons celebrating the nativity and the passion of Christ, as well as Pentecost. Yet he attempted to do this in the course of preaching through Scripture or on Sunday. When Calvin came to Geneva in 1536, no festivals were celebrated. In 1538 four festivals (the circumcision, the annunciation, the ascension, and Christmas Day) were reinstated in the same edict which expelled Calvin and Farel. These festivals were abolished again in 1550 without Calvin's knowledge. Calvin was not unhappy with the abolition of festivals, though this was an issue which he did not consider of such critical importance to do battle.³⁶ On Wednesday, December 25, 1550, when preaching through Micah, Calvin took note of the large number of people present because it was a feast day. He declared that while it was good to remember that Jesus Christ came into the world, to recite the history of the nativity, this would be done on Sunday. It was nonsense to prefer one day to another. In creating a festival, an idol, the product of human fantasy, was forged in the name of God. While Calvin was willing to compromise to maintain peace and freedom of practice, there is no reason to be surprised that some thought he wished to do away with Sunday also, except as a means of ordering the life and worship of the Christian community.³⁷ For Calvin substance and reality always took precedence over form or rhetoric.

Calvin also established the practice of preaching from the New Testament on Sunday and the Old Testament on work days. On Sunday afternoons he also preached on texts from the Psalms. Stauffer has observed that this practice reflects Calvin's doctrine of Scripture.³⁸

Calvin's purpose in preaching was to render transparent the text of Scripture itself. For this reason, as Richard Stauffer points out, Calvin made little use of the fathers of the church in his preaching. Likewise, he found little need for secondary aids to confirm the meaning and significance of Scripture. Hence, he is content with an analytical method which interprets and evaluates verse after verse, word after word.

Calvin, to my knowledge, never formally summarized his hermeneutical principles beyond his various statements on the need for brevity and clarity, on the importance of the natural sense of Scripture. From his writings other distinctive principles become clear, such as Calvin's emphasis on the unity of the Old and New Testaments and God's accommodation of himself to the human situation in revelation. Calvin had a deep awareness that Scripture has an integrity and a coherence of its own. His insistence that Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture enabled him to integrate problematic texts into his preaching and into his theology.

³⁶ Letter to Berthold Haller, January 2, 1551. Cf. Jean Daniel Benoit, "Weihnachten in Genf im Jahre des Heils 1550" in Regards contemporains sur Jean Calvin.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Richard Stauffer: "Un Calvin méconnu," p. 188-189.

For the Reformers, generally, method grew out of the reality of what they were doing. Bullinger's summary in his sermon on the "Sense and Right Exposition of the Word of God" is an exception to this silence concerning method. His principles were (1) the rule of faith, (2) love of God and neighbor, (3) the historical situation, (4) Scripture interpreted in the context of Scripture, (5) a heart that loves God and continually prays to God for his Holy Spirit. From what has been said and from what follows this would seem to be a fair summary of Calvin's own hermeneutical principles.

Preaching is not only the explication of Scripture, but it is also the application of Scripture. Just as Calvin explicated Scripture word by word, so he applied the Scripture sentence by sentence to the life and experience of his congregation. Hence, his sermons always have a strong note of reality. They move directly from Scripture to the concrete, actual situation in Geneva. Calvin spoke vigorously concerning issues from the dress and cosmetic concerns of women to international issues, including war. Fred Graham has pointed out that Calvin lived and worked in his world.

He approved of the city and its activities. He was not instinctively disgusted with business and trade, as were medieval churchmen and Brother Martin. And he had the sure instinct to perceive the place of religion within this new age, and to curb the worse instincts of the age by the Word of God and godly discipline.

Here are three examples, which Stauffer chose from Calvin's own preaching, as indicative of the manner in which Calvin applied the explication quite specifically to life.⁴⁰

The first is from a sermon preached in 1562 when the religious wars were just beginning in France.

Let's note that when swords shall be drawn or rather being armed to enter into battle not everyone will always behave as it were to be hoped, and that there will be many excesses; so let us therefore detest that it should be possible to have these wars and conflicts which come [in the name of] religion. . . . We shall have to be careful to pray that God may rule the hearts of his own, because even today we see that, with the army being raised in the name of Jesus Christ and the Gospel, there are many undesirables who have weasled their way amongst [the others in the army], some to rob and steal, some to betray, others for their desire for vengeance, others for an excuse to murder without regard to the "how," and others so that they shall

³⁹W. Fred Graham: The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1971), p. 198.

⁴⁰Richard Stauffer: "Un Calvin méconnu."

be talked of [and renowned]. Thus we come to pray to God that he not permit the arms which have been taken up in his name to be sullied either by our evil desires [feelings], or by our [desire] for revenge, or by anything similar. And if the enemies of truth ask no more than to bathe themselves in blood, may we, for our part, try to save them as much as is possible [for us to do]. And even if they make a game of killing, may we always consider it a detestable thing to ruin and erase the image of God which shines in his creatures, inasmuch as all men are created in his image.⁴¹

Concerning refugees who had come to Geneva, Calvin declared:

Those who have come from afar should set themselves to behave in a holy manner as in the house of God. They could have stayed elsewhere to live in such debauchery; it was not necessary that they move from Catholicism to live such a dissolute life. And, in fact, there are some for whom it would have been better[?] to have divorced themselves from the collar than to have ever set foot in this church to have behaved so badly. Some align themselves with "gaudisseurs" to harden them in their malice; others are gluttons and drunkards; others are undisciplined and quarrelsome. There are households where husband and wife are like cat and dog; there are some who try to "heighten" their own importance and imitate the lords without [?] reason, and have given themselves to pomp and worldly superfluity. Others become so "delicate" that they don't know how to work any more, and [?] are no longer content with any foods. There are some gossipers and "bad mouthers" who would find something to say against the angel of paradise; and in spite of the fact they are "bursting" with vices, they want to put all their "holiness" into controlling ("blessing") their neighbors. Nevertheless, it seems to them all that God must be pleased with the fact that they made the voyage from Geneva, as if it would not have been better for them to stay on their manure⁴² than to come to commit such scandalous acts in the church of God.

Concerning the life style of the women of Geneva, he declared:

God requires of women a modesty such as that which they know their sex demands, and that there be no women who act like soldiers, such as one sees firing an arquebuse just as boldly as a man. . . . When one sees such things as that, (you realize that) they are such monstrous, villainous acts, that not only are you compelled to spit upon meeting [these women], but you have to throw mud on these villains when they are so audacious as to pervert thus the order of nature. Here, then, is the first thing God requires of a woman, and that is to have modesty, to conduct herself in all politeness, elegance ("bonnetete")⁴³

⁴¹Fifth sermon on II Samuel, June 4, 1562.

⁴²Third sermon, "Treating Matters of Great Usefulness for our Times," CR VIII, C422.

⁴³143rd sermon on Deuteronomy.

A fourth illustration of the concreteness of Calvin's preaching is found in a sermon on a text from Job.

We should not indeed encourage unnecessary scruples, but we should be vigilant and guarded to avoid surprise. Let us therefore when we sit at table, pray God to preserve us intemperance by his grace, so that the food which we take may not be for luxury, but for nourishment and to strengthen us in the service of God. Let us pray that he may grant us grace to look beyond the things of this transitory life to those of eternity to which he invites us by his Word; seeing that it is not that we may live for a day or ten days or fifty years, ⁴⁴ that He has given existence, but that we may attain to eternal glory.

Calvin's emphasis on preaching as the explication and application of Scripture gave to his sermons their particular form. He did not fashion his sermons according to a logical outline drawn from a particular theme. His sermons were homilies, not lectures. There was no introduction in the usual sense. He began his sermon with a few sentences, recapitulating the previous sermon, and/or introducing the main ideas of the sermon that was to follow, thus contributing to its clarity. His first sermon on the book of Job, for example, gave an introduction to the whole book.

While the main body of Calvin's sermons is an analysis of the text, this does not mean, as Professor Peter has pointed out, that the sermon is disjointed.⁴⁵ The sermon respects the order of the text and develops rather than tears it apart. The preacher gives the intention of the text, presents and refutes objection to the text. The sermon develops idea or clause on idea or clause, or beside each other. More or less fixed formulas mark the passing from one theme to another (so much for that point, so you see what the prophet meant to say, this is what we have to note, now for greater confirmation, et al). When the time is used, Calvin stops. Within the fairly fixed formula of the closing prayer Calvin included a summary of the sermon.

It has been said that John Calvin did not prepare for his sermons. This is true in the sense that he did not bring to the pulpit a finished manuscript that had been written and perhaps edited by a secretary. He probably would have agreed with Reinhold Niebuhr's early decision that he would not be a pretty preacher. Yet, Calvin's whole life was preparation in another sense for preaching. He was a continual student of Scripture and of Christian faith. He walked to his pulpit from his study in which he prepared with an intensity and skill few have ever matched. Hence, he felt free to scold those who preached without preparation and declared without qualification that only a scholar can be a preacher of the Word of God.⁴⁶ As Calvin himself puts it,

⁴⁴Sermon on Job.

⁴⁵Rodolphe Peter, "Rhétoric et Prédication selon Calvin," p. 258.

⁴⁶Sermon on Deuteronomy 5:23-27.

If I should enter the pulpit without deigning to look at a book and should frivolously think to myself, "Oh, well, when I preach, God will give me enough to say," and come here without troubling to read or think what I ought to declare, and do not carefully consider how I must apply Holy Scripture to the edification of the people, then I should be an arrogant upstart.⁴⁷

Calvin's preaching, the explication and application of Scripture in the sermon, was carried out in the framework of an explicit theology. Calvin deliberately wrote the Institutes as a guide for those who study the Scripture and presumably for those who preach. He also wrote the Institutes to relieve himself of the need for full doctrinal explication in the commentaries. Presumably this same relationship holds for preaching.

Having noted the biblicism of Calvin's sermons, it is important to note now their theological content. Stauffer has argued that the sermons have a theological originality of their own and provide a guide as to how Calvin's theology should be read today.⁴⁸ On the basis of a meticulous study of the sermons, he demonstrates how the sermons supplement the Institutes in their reflection on the attributes of God, the ideas of the twofold wisdom of God, the twofold justice of God, the power of God, the critique of the partisans of Copernicus, the manner of the soul's creation, belief in demons. On the other hand, Stauffer notes, some theological ideas in the Institutes do not appear in the sermons. The addition and omission of theological material in the sermons establishes their value for understanding Calvin's theology. And a comparison of the sermons with the Institutes also is an indication of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of writing a theology that includes all the material of the Bible. Calvin's theology was not, Stauffer argues, on the basis of the sermons, wholly homogenous.

All of us are indebted to Stauffer for his careful study of the theological content of the sermons, as it is to be hoped this paper demonstrates. Yet it seems that while the sermons illuminate and supplement the Institutes, they do not basically alter what is clear from the Institutes, though they add weight to certain arguments, as, for example, the rejection of the Barthian interpretation of Calvin on general revelation. When allowance is made for the context and purpose of the sermon, the claim for theological originality of the sermons diminishes. Nothing in Stauffer's study justifies any revision of the importance that Calvin himself gave to the Institutes. The sermons clarify and apply the theology of the Institutes to human experience as it is lived in the church. Hence the sermons cannot be properly understood apart from the Institutes, and the Institutes are illuminated by the sermons. The Institutes were written for the sake of the sermons, not the sermons for the sake of the Institutes.

⁴⁷ Sermon on Deuteronomy 6:13-15.

⁴⁸ Richard Stauffer: Dieu, la Création et la Providence dans la Prédication de Calvin, p. 305.

The sermons ought not to be used as a sourcebook for systematic theology. Calvin's declared intention in writing the Institutes rules out this method, as well as the nature and context of preaching. The sermons do give concreteness and relevance to the theology in terms of human experience. They arouse interest in the theology and also illuminate and clarify its meaning, as Stauffer's study documents:

The point that needs to be made here, however, is not that the sermons have theological content, but rather that they fit into a theological framework with certain unifying perspectives that influence all doctrines. Calvin's theology may lack homogeneity but not unity. For example, the way Calvin understands the transcendence and the immanence of God, the distinction between Creator and creature, gives a unity to his doctrines of the person of Jesus Christ, of the presence of Jesus Christ in the sacraments, of the church as a human work and a divine work. Or again there is a unifying perspective relating and holding together Calvin's understanding of revelation in Jesus Christ and general revelation, of grace and nature, of the gospel and law, of church and society. There is a unifying theme, preeminently expressed in the doctrine of predestination and permeating everything Calvin said, emphasizing the immediacy of the divine activity and the initiative of divine grace. On a still deeper level there is the unity created by Calvin's conviction that knowledge of God involves knowledge of man and knowledge of man involves knowledge of God, and that the whole of theology inheres in the explication of this relationship between God and man. The way Calvin treats these doctrines shows that his theology is an organic whole, not a machine put together with different parts. Calvin's theology had a clear frame of reference, certain unifying perspectives, and therefore a unity of purpose and intention for human life and society. This basic unity in the vision of human life and in the understanding of its meaning comes to expression in Calvin's preaching. There can be no doubt that Calvin had given this framework the most careful statement in the Institutes. On the occasion of the publication of the final Latin edition of the Institutes, so rewritten and altered as to be almost a new work, Calvin declared that it held the "principal and far most conspicuous place among all my lucubrations" (Letter to Count d'Erbach, July 1, 1559). Calvin's method of text selection and the method of his preaching have to be interpreted and understood today in the light of this theological unity. There is new, supplementary, illuminating material in the sermons, but no surprises. It also is important to note that the congregation which heard Calvin shared this theological unity with Calvin.

Finally, Calvin's preaching took place in the context of a vision of the holy community. Calvin rejected neither the concept of the parish church nor the vision of Christendom, though he spoke of the latter in the more existential terms of the relationship of the believer to God, the Creator of heaven and earth. This does not mean that Calvin had some kind of blueprint that he was seeking to impose, or that Calvin envisioned some totalitarian or even authoritarian society. When account is taken of the tendency of Calvin's theology to become legalistic or even theocratic, his actual vision of the Christian community was much more existential, the living obedience of the people of God to the living Lord. Furthermore, as Calvin clearly knew, this obedience has to be worked out in the context of the given political,

social, and economic facts of human existence. Fred Graham has stated this very well.

Calvin was not a socialist, nor doctrinaire at all in his social, political, or economic theories. If we can use a modern term to describe a sixteenth-century theologian--he was a pragmatist, trying to see how the rule of charity could be applied and the common good promoted and protected in the existent situation. The church, Calvin at its head, saw the world as the place where God's people received His blessings and shared it with their brothers. Thus the pastors regarded the world as God's and therefore their field. The line which marked the distinction of church and state was acknowledged, but a line between sacred and secular, never.⁴⁹

In his preaching Calvin sought "to draw the world to God and to build up the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ that he may rule among us."⁵⁰ He did this in terms of a comprehensive vision of the holy community.

The argument here is that Calvin's preaching cannot be interpreted simply in terms of the explication and application of a biblical text. The explication and application alike took place within a comprehensive framework. Calvin preaches from almost every text content that does not come specifically from that text alone but from that text in the larger framework. This is possible because the theological framework was fashioned, at least in intention, from the Scripture. Stauffer was impressed by the theological consistency of Calvin's preaching over the span of many years, a consistency that would not have been possible apart from the theology of the Institutes.⁵¹

C. Style of Preaching

What were the characteristics of Calvin's preaching?

First of all, Calvin's style was consistently marked by his emphasis upon simplicity, brevity, clarity.⁵² For Calvin, simplicity was very close to sincerity, to the sense of reality. The pretentious, the ostentatious, the pompous, the contrived all cover up reality. The simple is that which exposes reality. This concern pervades Calvin's preaching. As a humanist, Calvin was concerned with rhetoric. Yet, the rhetoric which he sought was appropriate to the material and to the occasion. The purpose of preaching is to communicate thought. The rhetoric which is appropriate for the communication of the thought and which is congruent with that message is the true rhetoric. Calvin could appreciate the elegance of an Isaiah. There was a harmony between the

⁴⁹W. Fred Graham, op. cit. p. 144.

⁵⁰Sermon on II Timothy 2:16-18.

⁵¹Richard Stauffer, Dieu, la création et la providence dans la Prédication de Calvin, p. 304.

⁵²See Calvin's preface of Commentary on I Corinthians 1:18ff.

dignity of Isaiah's prose and what Isaiah was saying. Calvin insisted upon a harmony between the message and the medium by which it is expressed.⁵³ In some real sense, for Calvin the message was and is the medium. In any case, the medium must not distort the message.

Professor Peter⁵⁴ has pointed out that the Bible was the model for Calvin's preaching. Certainly this is true. Professor Auerbach (*Mimesis*) has argued that the Bible has had similar influence on art and literature as is reflected in Calvin's writings.⁵⁵ Yet it may also be argued that Calvin's theology as well as his humanist training and even his own personality in which simplicity and clarity were pervasive qualities had similar influence. Hence, it appears too simple to attribute Calvin's style wholly to the Bible.

Calvin did not use illustrations in the modern sense. Yet his sermons are replete with metaphors, comparisons, and proverbial images and wisdom which appeal to the imagination.⁵⁶ He made use of drama, of personal address, of antithesis, of gradation of emphasis, of exclamations, of appeals to the absurd and irony. Calvin provided the craftsmanship that established a relationship between the sermon and the congregation.

Secondly, Calvin's sermons are marked by a didactic quality.⁵⁷ He intended to instruct. On the publication of a series of sermons Calvin wrote, "See our style or ordinary mode of teaching."⁵⁸ This concern for instruction explains and justifies, as Professor Peter has noted, the repetitions. It also is the basis for Calvin's constant use of the interrogative in which he engages his congregation.⁵⁹ C. H. Dodd's distinction between preaching and teaching did not hold for Calvin. Yet Calvin's preaching is distinguished from teaching by the emphasis on application. In Dodd's use of the word, teaching for Calvin, as well as preaching, is kerygmatic.

⁵³Cf. I, 8, 2.

⁵⁴Rodolphe Peter: "Rhétorique et prédication selon Calvin," p. 254.

⁵⁵Eric Auerbach: *Mimesis, the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957, Anchor Edition), pp. 35ff.

⁵⁶Francis M. Higman: *The Style of John Calvin in his French Polemical Treatises* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 123ff.

Léon Wencelius: *L'esthétique de Calvin* (Paris), pp. 344ff.

⁵⁷The sermons have to be seen in context of Calvin's general emphasis on teaching.

⁵⁸

⁵⁹For example, sermon on II Timothy 1:8-9.

A third quality of Calvin's sermons is liveliness. They are frequently dramatic, placing God and the devil in opposition to each other, the antagonist and the protagonist. He dramatized the battles and crises with which his hearers were familiar.⁶⁰ This lively concern also is seen in the intrusion of his own personality into the sermons as well as his challenge⁶¹ of his hearers with interrogations. He insisted upon a lively delivery.

Professor David Willis has pointed out that rhetoric takes two forms: the rhetoric which simply seeks to persuade and the rhetoric which opens up the truth so that the truth itself can persuade.⁶² Professor Willis has argued that Calvin sought to make the biblical message clear so that under the power of the Holy Spirit it could make hearers alive to God's presence. Calvin sought to persuade in the most lively way possible. Surely there is evidence that Geneva changed in the direction Calvin intended and that preaching was the primary means by which he thought he did his work. He was so confident of preaching that he felt that if there was freedom for preaching, the church's existence was secure.

A fourth quality of Calvin's sermons, Professor Stauffer notes, is their polemical stance.⁶³ He attacked the Muslims, the Nicodemites, the fanciful who substituted their own inspirations for the revelation of God. His greatest polemic is directed toward the Roman Catholic Church, a polemic that he carried on to the end. Calvin was the advocate of Christian faith, of what he believed to be God's word, and thus he was an adversary. Even in sermons he could speak of his opponents as these "barking dogs, these vile goats, these ravenous wolves."⁶⁴ While Calvin understood his struggle in global terms, his polemical stance came to a sharp focus in the congregation. In a sermon on Titus 1:10-12, he characteristically exclaims, "If these vain talkers and deceivers be let alone, if we take no notice of them, what will become of the church? Will not the devil win all? . . . It (is) the duty of those who are called to preach the Word of God to use plainness, and point out the errors of the faithful." Calvin was a person with a mission to accomplish, and this sense of mission, of responsibility to build up the Christian community, and to fulfill the purposes of God in human history comes through in most of his sermons. He thought of the world as a battlefield, and he found military metaphors appropriate for the Christian life.

⁶⁰For example, sermon on Job 14:13-15.

⁶¹Letter to Somerset. October 22, 1548.

⁶²E. David Willis: 'Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin's Theology' in Context, Alexander J. McKelway and E. David Willis, editors. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974).

⁶³Richard Stauffer: Dieu, la creation et la providence dans la prédication de Calvin, p. 305.

⁶⁴Sermon on II Timothy 2:16-18.

Fifth, Calvin's preaching was serious and solid. "We come together in the name of the Lord. It is not to hear merry songs, to be fed with wind, that is with a vain and unprofitable curiosity, but to receive spiritual nourishment. For God will have nothing preached in his name but that which will profit and edify."^{64a} Our nature, Calvin believed, is such that we take great pleasure in novelty and speculations that seem subtle.⁶⁵ The sermon is not entertainment. Calvin spoke against those "who make a pastime of the Word of God and recreate themselves thereby."⁶⁶ Preaching inhered in substance, not in the rhetoric, the subtlety, or the entertainment quality of the sermon.

III

What can we learn from Calvin's doctrine of the proclamation of the Word for preaching today?

Positively stated, there is much that we can learn.

First of all, we can learn from Calvin's doctrine and practice the importance of Scripture. As Calvin returned to the sources of the faith, so must we. When the reality and mission of the church is found in what is derivative from the sources, as has frequently been the case in recent decades, the church as well as its mission will eventually collapse.

Furthermore, the church as a community, as a people, is dependent upon a common memory, a common body of images, metaphors, symbols, and language. The loss of this common vocabulary and memory has endangered the life of the community itself.

Preaching is, as Calvin understood and practiced, the interpretation and application of Scripture. The minister is the minister of the Word. Otherwise, the church is just another therapy center or agency for social and political change. And the minister is just another therapist without as good credentials as a psychiatrist or just another change agent without as much influence as a ward politician.

At this point it is necessary to note the character of Calvin's knowledge of the Bible. While Calvin was a humanist scholar, his critical knowledge was far inferior to that of vast numbers of persons today. In fact, it is possible to discover factual errors in Calvin's Scripture quotations and references. Yet the contemporary reader can only be impressed by Calvin's extensive and intensive knowledge of Scripture. Much of it he knew virtually by memory, and most of it was available to him as quick and effective reference. Furthermore, he had assimilated the biblical metaphors and images, its concepts and its nuances into his own life and thinking. Professor Wilhelm Neuser has

^{64a} Sermon on II Timothy 2:16-18.

⁶⁵ Sermon, *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Sermon, *ibid.*

pointed out in this meeting of the Calvin Studies Society that Calvin explicated the Lord's Prayer seven times. The repeated grappling with particular passages of Scripture in Institutes, catechisms, commentaries, sermons, and sometimes in additional writing surely had its impact on Calvin's theology. He knew the Bible in his person, in his quick memory, in his mind.

Second, Calvin's doctrine and practice can teach us the importance of congruence between style and content. Yet, it is important to note, Calvin never made style an end in itself or the object of search or study. Style for him was determined by content. Simplicity and clarity were the hallmarks of his theology, his life, his preaching, but they were by-products of his theology.

The whole matter can be summarized in the integrity of Calvin as a person and as a theologian. As a theologian and as a churchman he united in his own existence the work of preacher, teacher, and pastor. He was competent. He was committed. He subjected his self-interests to his commitment. Pope Pius IV is quoted as saying that the strength of Calvin lay in his refusal to succumb to the charm of money.⁶⁷ Pierre Bayle wrote:

Calvin has left imitators in so far as regards activity of life, zeal and affection for the interest of his party; they employ their eloquence, their pens, their endeavors, their solicitations in the advancement of the kingdom of God; but they do not forget themselves, and they are, generally speaking, an exemplification of the maxim that the church is a good mother, in whose service nothing is lost.⁶⁸

Third, Calvin's doctrine and practice can teach us the importance of a vision of the Christian life in the light of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, or to put it more prosaically, the importance of the theological framework of the Catechism and the Institutes. We must resist the attempt to minimize the Institutes, I think, however much they may be supplemented by the sermons. The sermons are powerful precisely because Calvin explicated and applied the Scriptures word by word, verse by verse within the framework of a vision of the Christian faith as a whole. The importance of this comprehensive framework must not be minimized in our day when it is so hard to come by. No vision of the Christian faith is ever adequate, but without some comprehensive statement of faith no preaching can stand in succession to Calvin.

Fourth, we can learn from Calvin's doctrine and practice the importance of a comprehensive vision of Christian practice and society. As has been indicated, Calvin was a pragmatist, yet he operated not only within the framework of vision of the common life. He was not blown about by either every wind of doctrine or every wind of social and

⁶⁷ Philip Schaff: The History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1910), Vol. VII., p. 839.

⁶⁸ Pierre Bayle: Dictionnaire historique et critique.

political change. In the tradition of Augustine, he could take seriously the positive achievements of society without identifying them with the Kingdom of God, and with the knowledge that our final security is in God.

Fifth, we learn from Calvin what it means to have to do with the living God. He lived with a sense of the presence of the Holy and of the immediate activity of God. We also know from Calvin the perils and temptations of this awareness, but first we need to learn the reality of the awareness.

The fundamental thesis which this paper is designed to present is this: It is not enough to speak of Calvin as a biblical preacher. He was that. He also was a theological preacher who understood human existence in the light of a clearly conceived theological framework and who had a vision of a holy community which fulfilled God's purposes in history. Apart from this theology and this vision, which were not only concepts of his mind but the passion of his life, his preaching would have been vastly different from what it was.

All of this we can learn from Calvin. Yet all of this is challenged by our social and cultural history. Unlike Calvin, we live in a voluntary, free, pluralistic, secular, mobile, mass-media-dominated society. Unlike Calvin, we live on this side of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century.

Calvin's biblicism has to come to terms with critical historical studies.

Calvin's theology has to seek intelligibility in a radically new context, and it has to maintain itself without the support of Christendom.

Calvin's homiletical methods have to be related to new knowledge of the nature of Scripture and to the demands of communication in a secular culture. Only a few very skilled homileticians can strictly model themselves on Calvin and survive in this day.

The signs of reality are different in our culture from the evidences that were persuasive in Calvin's. The measure of truth, the tests of intelligibility, as well as the human problems, are now perceived in different ways by eyes both opened and blinded by the Enlightenment, the scientific revolution, and a secular culture.

Calvin's vision of the Christian community has to maintain itself in a highly ideological age. Our society is more aware of the ideological factors that shape every faith and world view than any has ever been. Yet this knowledge has not given us the freedom which Calvin enjoyed over against every cause, movement, or institution of his day.

Calvin the preacher cannot be copied or repeated today in this new time and place. But there is no convincing evidence to cause us to give up the hope that the Bible as the Word of God and theology as an intelligible expression of Christian faith shall not unite again in preaching "to draw the world to God and to build up the Kingdom of our

Lord Jesus Christ."⁶⁹ We can rightly hope and struggle to do as preachers of the Word in our particular time and place what Calvin did in his. For however much the culture and social matrix change, human existence remains essentially the same. And it is the Christian faith that God is forever God.

⁶⁹Sermon on II Timothy. 2:16-19.