

John Calvin and the Prophetic Criticism of Worship
by
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If one is to find the marrow of Calvin's theology of worship, one must take quite seriously his concern that Christian worship be according to scripture. One easily recognizes that in this concern Calvin is following Luther, Bucer, and the other Reformers. What makes Calvin's theology of worship interesting is the way he has given weight to passages of scripture which had not been so very important to the older Reformers. To be sure, Calvin built on the insights of those who went before him, but he had insights of his own. The prophetic insistence on a true, obedient, and sincere worship had a great influence on Calvin. In fact, Calvin's willingness to take so seriously the preaching of the prophets in regard to worship is no doubt largely responsible for some of the most marked characteristics of his approach to worship.

We have already spoken of the importance of the Law of Moses for Calvin's theology of worship.¹ For Calvin, the first tablet of the law, interpreted in the light of the gospel, to be sure, set forth the basic command to worship. Jesus himself summed up the first tablet of the law when he taught, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind and with all thy soul."² As Calvin understood it, this Christian interpretation of the first tablet of the law was the heart of liturgical theology. The key word for Christian worship, then, is love. And of course, in this Calvin stands in the tradition of Augustine. As we have shown, Calvin arranged his commentary on the harmony of the books of the law in such a way that most of the ceremonial law found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy is treated as an interpretation of the first four commandments. The first tablet of the law was the basic code in regard to worship. It was further interpreted by the ceremonial legislation, by the prophets, and finally by Christ in his teaching and his fulfillment of it. It is only natural that this emphasis on the law should be balanced by an equally strong emphasis on the prophets. One of the most obvious reasons for this is that the prophetic criticism of the worship of the temple was fundamental to much of the New Testament understanding of worship: Christ's fulfillment of the law was a fulfillment of the law as it had been interpreted by the prophets.

Let us look at Calvin's commentaries on some passages from the prophets.³ We shall select typical passages with an eye to showing the range of comments which Calvin typically made on these passages. To these we will bring a number of passages from Calvin's commentaries on New Testament books. Calvin was keenly aware of how basic this prophetic critique of the temple worship was to the formation of New Testament worship.

Amos 5:21-24 is without doubt the most well known of all these passages. The words of Amos are directed against the worship of the king's sanctuary at Samaria.

I hate, I despise your feasts
 and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies
 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings
 I will not accept them,
 and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts
 I will not look upon.
 Take away from me the noise of your songs;
 to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
 But let justice roll down like waters,
 and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Calvin comments, "Here the prophet shows that the Israelites were mistaken because they thought God was pacified by their sacrifices."⁴ There is something wrong about approaching God in this way. Calvin sees that it is not quite Christian to try to pacify or appease God. The true worshiper approaches God with faith in his mercy. For the Christian who has a true knowledge of God's love in Christ there is no need to appease or pacify God. The Christian knows that "Christ is our peace." Nevertheless, Calvin is aware that there are many passages of the Old Testament which tell us that God is pleased with sacrifices. Calvin points out that we often read in the law that God is pleased with the smell of incense. Here Amos makes clear, at least as Calvin understands it, that sacrifices should be accompanied with repentance and faith. Moses gave the sacrifices of the law that they might be "religious exercises." They were to exercise the people in faith and repentance.⁵ To be sure, the sacrifices of the law fell short of the gospel, but they served as warming-up exercises for the gospel. They were a preparatory training in faith and repentance. Moses assumes these sacrifices would be offered with sincerity as evidence of repentance, but the prophets often had to remind the people of the importance of this sincerity. The prophets criticized the sacrifices when they were not accompanied by godliness. It is not as though the prophets were denying the promises of the law of Moses. It is not as though the prophets were opposed to liturgical forms. The prophets were making clear the inner spirit with which the ceremonies of the law must be performed. One thing is clear, Calvin tells us: whether under law or gospel, "God never frustrated his worshippers, but ever received them graciously, provided they came to him in sincerity."⁶ When, on the other hand, men try to appease God by these same rites without repentance, then God is angered by them.

The point Calvin is trying to make is only seen when we ask why it is that God is angered by these attempts to appease or pacify him. It is because such rites misrepresent him. They would reveal him as a vain and foolish despot who can be manipulated by flattery and bribery. Such rites, when performed by the wicked, insult his justice and becloud his holiness. Such worship, assuming God does not know the hearts of those who proffer it, belittles his wisdom. It is mocking and trifling with God. Calvin goes on to say that it is characteristic of the worship of hypocrites that it multiplies ceremonies. Vain men assume God is just as vain as they are. The flattery and the bribery that so pleases them they assume will please God, too. "But hypocrites amuse themselves, as

children do with their puppets. Inasmuch then as they do nothing seriously, and yet desire to pacify God as with baubles, the Prophet here shakes off such delusions, as though he said, 'Do you think that God is like a child? Why do you set up these trifles? Do you think that righteousness is a fictitious thing?'"

Calvin goes on to point out that Amos criticizes the worship of Samaria not only for its hypocrisy and insincerity but because it was contrary to the law. It was not only that the inner meaning had been corrupted but that the outward form had been corrupted as well. For, Calvin tells us, it was not lawful to offer sacrifices except at Jerusalem. "They devised a worship elsewhere, and even there worshipped the calves."⁸ Their worship did not follow the rules set down in the law. This was an ever-recurring problem among God's people. Calvin, to be sure, saw that the church of his day was once again beset by this problem. Rites and ceremonies had been devised which had no basis in scripture.

Calvin's comment on the music in the sanctuary at Samaria is interesting. It is not so much what he says as what he does not say. He criticizes the worship which had developed under the papacy for the multitude of its songs which went on day and night. New forms were constantly devised. For Calvin, the problem was the foolish laboriousness. His criticism is much the same as Luther's. The worship of the late medieval church amounted to nothing more than works righteousness. It tried to buy God off, to pacify him by flattery. Because it did not come from faith, it became flattery instead of praise. But what is most interesting is that Calvin does not take the opportunity to launch into an attack on the use of musical instruments in worship or the writing of Christian hymns as opposed to the use of the Psalms and canticles. He says nothing that would imply that only certain types of music should be used in church.⁹ If Calvin were so much opposed to the use of organs and Christian hymns, as sometimes we are told, surely this would have been the place to have made this opposition clear.

Again and again when Calvin takes up the subject of worship he tries to make the point that the liturgy is not the place to express our own human creativity. The Christian is not to go about inventing new forms of worship, but rather, as a matter of the obedience of faith, Christians are to worship according to God's Word. In this particular passage we find an important development of this thought. The Reformers were forever fulminating against superstitious worship, and sometimes the modern reader is not too sure just what is meant by this. In commenting on Amos 5:26, Calvin says, "And the Greeks call superstitious and this word means voluntary acts of worship, such as undertaken by men of their own accord."¹⁰ One should perhaps remark that the word literally means "will-worship." It appears once in the New Testament where Paul is attacking the ascetic practices of certain Christians: "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh" (Col. 2:23). However appropriate it may or may not be to translate this Greek word by "superstition," this remark does make clear just what Calvin meant by

calling a religious rite "superstitious." He meant that it was a rite thought up by the human imagination and undertaken by men of their own accord.

Let us look for a moment at Calvin's comment on Amos 5:26, "But ye bore Sicuth, your king, and Chion, your images, the stars being your gods; which ye made for yourselves."¹¹ Calvin discussed several possible translations. As Calvin understands the text, it is a condemnation of the worship of images. He points to the fact that the word used is "images" rather than "idols." Surely, Calvin charges, any attempt to say that it is acceptable to venerate images as long as one does not worship idols is mere casuistry.¹² "To make these things is at all times vicious in sacred things; for we ought not to bring anything of our own when we worship God, but we ought to depend always on the word of his mouth, and to obey what he has commanded. All our actions then in the worship of God ought to be, so to speak, passive; for they ought to be referred to his command, lest we attempt any thing but what he approves."¹³ This is, to be sure, an extreme statement, that our worship should be passive.¹⁴ It certainly cuts across the grain of much that the liturgical movement has been trying to say. The statement evokes a number of attitudes toward worship which today we deplore, and no doubt Calvin would have deplored them as well. Calvin obviously does not have in mind that we should come to worship and sit there as spectators watching a show or as an audience listening to a lecture. What Calvin has in mind is that God is active in our worship. When we worship God according to his Word, then he is at work in the worship of the church. For Calvin the worship of the church is a matter of divine activity rather than human creativity. This is most obviously the case when the human creativity in question is disobedient to the Word of God, as was so clearly the case in the worship criticized by Amos. Setting up a sanctuary in the Northern Kingdom and, even more, erecting the golden calf, were contrary to God's Word,¹⁵ no matter how creative or politically expedient it may have been.

Another prophet who preached on the nature of true worship was Micah. Calvin found a number of passages in this short book which were relevant to the liturgical reforms of his day. In Micah 4:1-2 Calvin found that Micah spoke of the worship of the age to come.

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Calvin tells us, "Here the Prophet in a few words defines the legitimate worship of God: for it would not be sufficient for the nations to come together into one place to profess the one true God, unless true obedience followed, which rests on the faith as faith does on the word."¹⁶

Calvin notices that that which in the last day will draw all nations to Jerusalem for worship is a strong teaching ministry. The

Reformer makes the point that God himself retains the position of teacher of Israel. A true ministry of the Word recognizes that faithful preaching is a matter of presenting God's Word to his people. In this passage it is very clear that Calvin has in mind the Word of God rather than simply words about God. Calvin is thinking of the Word of God in the sense of Torah, and he is fully aware of the rich concept which stands behind this Hebrew word. It is not the speculative knowledge of the religious philosopher which is to be preached. Calvin was of the opinion that true teaching of the Word was something quite different from the dialectics of scholastic philosophy. Nor did Calvin want to understand the Word of God as some sort of moralistic legalism. Interpreting Psalm 110, he tells us that the rod by which Christ rules his people is "the doctrine of this Gospel." The Word of God as he saw it was not a matter of abstract thought, general rules, or principles, but rather an "energizing power."¹⁷ It was the creative Word by which God spoke and there was light. When Calvin understands that Christian worship is to give a central place to the teaching of God's Word, he has in mind neither the teaching of a legalistic Word nor a speculative Word, but rather entering into "the sanctuary of celestial wisdom."¹⁸

Surely, one of the most important elements of Calvin's theology of worship is the cardinal importance of the ministry of the Word, and this Calvin has so obviously read out of the prophets.

Yet another great prophetic passage on the nature of true worship is Micah 6:6-8.

"With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
He has showed you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Calvin interprets this passage as a prophetic call for spiritual worship. Just what Calvin meant by "spiritual worship" must be made clear. Calvin's understanding is based on several New Testament passages such as Romans 12:1, 1 Peter 2:5, and John 4:23. "Spiritual worship" is that worship which is "in spirit and truth" mentioned in the Gospel of John. It is the "spiritual sacrifices of 1 Peter 2:5." It is the worship which is "according to God's Word" of Romans 12:1.¹⁹ Calvin interprets these passages to mean the same thing.²⁰ Commenting on Micah 6:7, "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression?" Calvin says that far too many people think that by elaborate sacrifices and mortifications they can render God propitious. They toil in ceremonies, pour forth money, become faint with fasting, and think that in doing so they have fulfilled their duty. What they do not do is bring a sincere heart. What they

bring is outward works; what God wants of them is an inward inclination of the heart. Calvin goes on to say, "Hypocrites place all holiness in external rites; but God requires what is very different; for his worship is spiritual."²¹ Calvin well understands that spiritual worship is not the same as non-material worship. It is rather the "broken spirit and contrite heart: of Psalm 51:17. It is not the distinction between material worship and spiritual worship which Calvin found in these lines, but rather the distinction between inward worship and outward worship."²²

There is another distinction which should be noticed here. Calvin does not interpret these lines in such a way that worship dissolves into mere subjectivism. Under the law, we read, "God indeed wished sacrifices to be offered to him; and then to this promise was always added, 'iniquity shall be atoned.' But the object must be noticed; for God did not command sacrifices, as though they were of themselves any worth; but he intended to lead the ancient people by such exercises to repentance and faith. It was therefore his design to remind the Jews that they did no good, except they themselves become sacrifices."²³ Subjectivism is avoided by Calvin by his recognition that under the law there were specific forms of worship which were enjoined by God. These rites exercised the faith of the Jews and pointed to the coming of Christ. Under the gospel other forms of worship have been established which more fully exercise the faith of Christians and witness to the fulfillment of the law and the promises of the prophets. Calvin, as the prophets of the Old Testament before him, had no thought of discontinuing the forms of worship which God had given to his people in favor of some sort of private religious feeling. Calvin often called the prayer forms used by the Church of Geneva exercises of faith.²⁴ That the various forms of worship of the church are exercises is characteristic of his theology of worship. It was important that under the law the Jews maintain the rites God had given them and that under the gospel Christians observe the ordinances God had instituted for them. The outward forms were to be observed as a means of nourishing the inner disposition of the heart. What Calvin found important in the preaching of the prophets was that the prophets understood the two could not be separated. The outward form of worship and the inward adoration of the heart must remain firmly joined together.

Another important point in Calvin's commentary on this passage is what he has to say about the offering of the heart, or to use another phrase, the sacrifice of oneself to God. Calvin tells us, ". . . the principal thing--that which [God] especially requires--[is] to bring a sincere heart."²⁵ This idea was an important thought for Calvin. It is in the light of such passages that we are to understand the emblem he was so fond of using. This emblem is often reproduced. It shows a hand offering a heart and carries the motto, "prompt and sincere." The idea which it would symbolize is that the Christian life is an offering of our hearts to God in all sincerity. The prophets taught that the point of the sacrifices of the law was that worship should be a sacrifice to God of all that we are and all that we have. The New Testament picks up this idea with considerable conviction. Its most eloquent expression is found in the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a

living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"²⁶ (Romans 12:1).

Surely one of the things which must be recognized in any attempt to understand the worship of the New Testament church is the way it picked up on the prophetic criticism of the worship of the temple.²⁷ As the writers of the New Testament understood the prophets, liturgical reform was not just a matter of performing the rites of the temple with sincerity. If that was the way they had understood it, they would have established a new Christian temple and continued all the old rites. They understood the rites of the law as prophetic of something better. Calvin comments on Romans 12:1, "We now also find what sacrifices Paul recommends to the Christian Church: for being reconciled to God through the one and true sacrifice of Christ, we are all through his grace made priests, in order that we may dedicate ourselves and all that we have to the glory of God. No sacrifice of expiation is wanted; and no one can be set up without casting a manifest reproach on the cross of Christ."²⁸

Perhaps the most interesting thoughts which Calvin has on this passage are found in his comment on the phrase, "What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." From this passage we learn of the great importance which he gives to the service of worship. Calvin tells us, "No doubt, as the name of God is more excellent than anything else in the whole world, so the worship of him ought to be regarded as of more importance than all those duties by which we prove our love towards men."²⁹ One wonders if Calvin really means this. Could Calvin possibly consider worship anyway near as important as social justice? Calvin often tells us that justice, mercy, godliness, and righteousness are the fruit of true religion. He often tells us that without these our worship is vanity. As Calvin sees it, justice and mercy have to do with the second tablet of the law. "Justice, which is to be exercised toward men, is the real evidence of true religion."³⁰ Justice and mercy, not ceremonies, are the evidences of true religion, because they are the effects of true religion. This does not mean, however, that Christian morality is more important than Christian worship. Calvin is clearly of a different mind. Christian worship, faithfully celebrated, is the tree which produces as its fruit Christian morality. One should not be surprised that a theologian, such as Calvin, who put such stress on the majesty, sovereignty, and glory of God, would also give a grand importance to worship. Today, Calvin passes for one of those theologians who was not particularly interested in worship. This estimation is seriously misleading.

There is something else here, and this might well surprise us. Micah's phrase, "to walk humbly with your God," Calvin assumes is a reference to worship. After centuries of worship which had taken its idiom from the imperial court, after centuries of expressing solemnity by means of grandeur, it is surprising indeed that Calvin should teach us that humility "is the very beginning of worshipping God."³¹ This is a line which might well be quoted in any book on the subject of Reformed worship. If worship in the Calvinist tradition tends to be very simple, this is the reason: it is in this simplicity that we confess God's majesty.

Another passage from the prophets which we want to consider is Malachi 1:11.

For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

The influence of this text on the history of Christian worship has been great.³² It has usually been regarded as a prophetic vision of Christian worship. In the patristic period this understanding of the passage was often expressed. Read in its context, it is a condemnation of the legalism, the lack of sincerity, and the cheapness of the worship at the temple. Above all, Malachi condemns the Jews of his day for offering blind, sick, or lame animals, or polluted food--sacrifices which cost the worshipers little or nothing. The patristic interpretation is indeed well founded. Malachi's prophetic vision does indeed speak of a day when the Gentiles from one end of the earth to the other will offer to God a pure and sincere worship. Calvin sums up the passage by saying, "The time would come when the pure and spiritual worship of God would prevail in all places."³³ Once more Calvin turns his attention to considering what spiritual worship is.

For Calvin the basis of the pure and spiritual worship of the Gentiles is their coming to true faith and a sound knowledge of God's Word. True worship must be based on a true knowledge of God. Calvin says, "And it is necessary always to begin with this principle--to know the God whom we worship."³⁴ To make his point, Calvin brings into the discussion Christ's discourse with the woman of Samaria found in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John. In that passage Jesus tells the woman that the Samaritans worship what they do not know, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshiper will worship the Father in spirit and truth." Calvin comments, "We must also bear in mind that God cannot be rightly worshipped except he is known."³⁵ It is this same principle which demands that our service of worship be in obedience to God's Word. "Obedience is better than sacrifice," Calvin never tires of quoting. It was this, of course, which falsified the worship of the Samaritans, as Calvin made so clear in his commentary on Amos 6:6. It was not in obedience to God's Word. Even worse, it was in rebellion against God's Word.

Another important point of Calvin's commentary on Malachi 1:11 is his remarks about incense, altar, and sacrifice. Calvin understands them as figures of speech for spiritual worship. "This mode of speaking is common in Scripture, for the prophets who were under the Law accommodated their expressions to the comprehension of the people. Whenever then they intend to show that the whole world would come to faith and true religion--'An altar,' they say, 'shall be built to God;' and by altar they no doubt meant spiritual worship, and not that after Christ's coming sacrifices ought to be offered. For now there is no altar for us; and whosoever builds an altar for himself subverts the cross of Christ, on which he offered the only true and perpetual sacrifice."³⁶ Here we are beginning to get into one of the most important aspects of Calvin's theology of worship.

We read further, "It then follows that this mode of speaking ought to be so taken, that we may understand the analogy between the legal rites, and the spiritual manner of worshipping God now prescribed in the Gospel."³⁷ Essential to Calvin's theology of worship is the prophetic vision of a pure, sincere, and spiritual worship and the way that vision was understood by the New Testament. The prophetic passages were understood by Calvin in the light of such New Testament passages as John 4:23, Romans 12:1, Colossians 2:17, and Hebrews 13:15.³⁸ Calvin continues, "But what are the sacrifices of the New Testament? They are prayers and thanksgivings according to what the Apostle says in the last chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews."³⁹ This passage from Hebrews urges Christians to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ.⁴⁰ "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." This verse from Hebrews alludes to two prophetic passages, namely Isaiah 57:19 and Hosea 14:2. Calvin is amazingly sensitive to the way scripture has interpreted scripture down through the centuries, that is, from Moses to the Apostles. The law was interpreted by the prophets and the prophets were interpreted by Christ. It is obviously in this tradition that Calvin wants to stand.

Interpreting Malachi 1:11, Calvin recalls Psalm 50 to show that prayers of praise and thanksgiving were the sacrifices which God really sought from his people. That was essential to the prophetic vision of a more pure worship. Psalm 50, which, to be sure, belongs to the same prophetic strand of thought as the passages which we have studied, tells us that God is not interested in animal sacrifices, "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" But God does ask sacrifices of thanksgiving from those who would worship aright. "He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honors me" (Psalm 50:23). Calvin was rather reserved in his interpretation of this psalm. He comments, "There was also under the law the spiritual worship of God, as it is especially stated in the fiftieth psalm; but there were shadows connected with it, as it is intimated in these words of Christ--'Now is come the hour when the Father shall be worshipped in spirit and in truth. . . . He does not indeed deny that God was worshipped in spirit by the fathers.'⁴¹ Calvin is perhaps more respectful of the Old Testament worship than even the prophets he is interpreting. But here again we notice with care that what is leading Calvin's interpretation of the prophets is the interpretation found in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus in this passage tells the woman of Samaria that the worship of Mt. Gerazim, as the worship of Mt. Zion, will give way to a worship which is in spirit and truth. Calvin goes on, "He (that is, Jesus) says that now under the Gospel the simple, and so to speak, the naked truth is taught. What then the prophet says of offering and incense availed under the Law; but we must now see what God commands in his gospel, and how he would have us to worship."⁴² That the rites of the Old Testament Law such as the offerings of incense and the animal sacrifices and even such things as the altar were foreshadows of realities to be revealed only in the gospel was an important principle for Calvin. It is of course based on the text of Colossians 2:17, "These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."⁴³ For Calvin it was very important, however, to observe very carefully just

exactly how this liturgical typology was worked out in the New Testament itself. He found that both the incense and the sacrifices of the Law were taken in the New Testament as types of Christian prayer, not as types of Christian rites of sacrifice.⁴⁴ For Calvin, to invent Christian incense rites or to make of the Lord's Supper a Christian sacrifice, when there is neither dominical nor apostolic warrant for it, is to go the way of the Samaritans rather than to worship God in spirit and truth.

In this study we have found several major themes of Calvin's theology of worship being developed. One of these major themes is that Christian worship must be according to scripture. In his commentaries on the prophets we get some very clear ideas of what Calvin meant by this. Worship should be a matter of humble obedience. In its simplicity it confesses God's majesty. In its sincerity it confesses God's verity. We have noticed how essential the role of preaching and teaching is to Calvin's understanding of worship. True worship must be based on a true knowledge of God. Perhaps the most important development we have seen is the development of Calvin's concept of "spiritual worship." Calvin understands this phrase in terms of the New Testament's interpretation of the Old Testament rather than in terms of a Platonizing or even Neo-Platonizing of worship. Calvin understood by "spiritual worship" worship which in all sincerity and humility was obedient to God's Word. Finally, we have noticed Calvin's concept of sacrifice and its place in Christian worship. Particularly we have seen how clear Calvin is about the difference between the sacrifices which were commanded under the law and the sacrifices which under grace Christians are to bring to God in their worship.

Surely there is much more to be said on Calvin's theology of worship. The three papers which I have already written on this subject need to be balanced with papers on Calvin's use of covenant theology in regard to baptism and Calvin's doctrine of presence in Word and sacrament.⁴⁵

Notes

¹In a paper, "Calvin's Theology of Worship," presented to the Calvin Studies Society in May, 1981, held at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, this subject was treated at length. I have also presented other papers on Calvin's theology of worship. One concerns Calvin's theology of Word and prayer and another Calvin's theology of worship in his Commentary on the Psalms. These papers are preliminary studies for a more comprehensive book on Calvin's theology of worship.

²Calvin taught very clearly that the Decalogue is to be divided into two tablets. The first tablet tells us of the duties of worship which we owe to God and the second the duties of justice which we owe to our neighbor. Calvin tells us that this interpretation goes back to Jesus who summarized the law under two heads: that we should love God with all our hearts, and we should love our neighbors as ourselves. Institutes II, viii, 11. For the English translation, see the edition of Ford Lewis Battles, Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, The

Library of Christian Classics, edited by John T. McNeill, vols. XX and XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960). For the Latin text, see Joannis Calvini, Opera selecta, 5 vols., edited by Petrus Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1926-1962), hereinafter OS. (References made to the Institutes of the Christian Religion are made simply to book, chapter, and section, hence: Institutes II, viii, 11.)

³Here we are particularly concerned with Calvin's commentary on the Book of the Twelve Prophets. English quotations in this article are taken from John Calvin, Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets, translated by John Owen, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Owen's translation was made in 1841 and is based on the Latin edition of 1567. The first edition of Calvin's commentary on the minor prophets appeared in 1559, Praelectiones in duodecim prophetas quos vocant minores (Geneva: John Crespin). Two years earlier the commentary on Hosea had appeared separately. Latin quotations are from the Corpus reformatorum, edited by G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss (Brunswick: C. A. Schwetsche and Sons, 1863-1900), vols. XLII, XLIII, and XLIV. (References made to this commentary are given according to the prophetic book in question and the column of the Corpus reformatorum edition.)

⁴"Hic propheta . . . ostendit Israelitas falli, quia Deum suis sacrificiis placari confidat." (In Amos col. 92).

⁵To understand liturgical and devotional practices as exercises was typical of the sixteenth century. For example, Ignatius of Loyola gave his fundamental work the title Religious Exercises.

⁶"Nunquam frustratus est cultores suos Deus quin ipsos reciperet in gratiam, modo sincere ad ipsum accederent." (In Amos col. 94).

⁷"Nam hypocritae quemadmodum puellae in suis puppis ineptiunt. Quoniam ergo nihil agunt serio, et interea tamen vellent Deum quasi crepundiis placare, ideo hic propheta excutit tales blanditias, ac si diceret, Putatisne Deum esse puero similem? cur illi obicitis has nugas? Putatisne rem esse fictam iustitiam?" (In Amos col. 96).

⁸"Ipsi autem sine arca foederis alibi novum cultum commenti erant: imo adorabant illic vitulos." (In Amos col. 93).

⁹In the introduction to the Genevan Psalter of 1542, Calvin speaks of the value of singing psalms in worship. He does want to make the point that the musical accompaniment should not be frivolous, but moderate and appropriate to the worship of God. La Forme des Prieres et Chantz ecclesiastiques, OS II, 16-18.

¹⁰"Et . . . vocant Graeci superstitiones: significat autem illud nomen voluntarios cultus, et qui sponte suscepti sunt ab nominibus." (In Amos col. 100).

¹¹The proper translation of this verse remains disputed to this day. Cf. J. L. Mays, Amos, A Commentary (Philadelphia: The Westminster

Press, 1976), pp. 112ff. Calvin discussed several possible translations.

¹²Calvin was aware of the arguments of certain patristic authors such as Gregory the Great for the use of paintings on the walls of churches. He was also aware of the controversy in the Eastern Church over the liturgical use of art and the opposition of the Western Church to the position adopted by the Council of Nicaea in 787. In the Institutes Calvin discusses the distinction between the two Greek words dulia and latria by which the Eastern Church and then later the Scholastic theologians of the West tried to justify the liturgical use of art. Institutes I, xi, 11.

¹³"Istud facere semper vitiosum est in rebus sacris, quia nihil debemus afferre proprium, ubi colendus est Deus, sed debemus pendere semper ab eius ore, et obsequi simul ac aliquid mandavit. Omnes igitur actiones nostrae in cultu Dei passive, ut ita loquar, esse debent: quia referendae sunt ad eius mandatum, ne quid tentemus nisi quod ipse probat. Ubi ergo audent homines hoc vel illud aggredi sine Dei mandato, mera est abominatio coram eo." (In Amos col. 100).

¹⁴As can be seen from the previous note, the problem is not whether the English translation is correct. This passage is significant because it signals a completely different concern in liturgical reform on the part of Calvin from the more popular concerns of our day. Calvin's theology of worship is consistent with his strong doctrine of grace. In the ministry of Word, prayer, and sacraments God himself reaches out to his people in redeeming and sanctifying power.

¹⁵Calvin has no interest in ruling out human artistic creativity. He makes it very clear that there is no reason for Christians to refrain from the artistic representation of the human form. What is wrong is the representation of God in visible form. This is wrong not on philosophical grounds but because God has expressly forbidden it. Calvin recognized, and quite expressly, that both painting and sculpture were divinely given talents when used as God intended them. Institutes I, xi, 12.

¹⁶"Hic propheta paucis verbis definit legitimum Dei cultum. Neque enim sufficeret gentes ad locum unum confluere, ut profiterentur se esse unius Dei, nisi etiam accederet vera obedientia, quae pendet ex fide, sicuti fides ex verbo." (In Michaeam col. 342).

¹⁷"Hac particula monemur, doctrinam Dei non esse speculativam, ut loquuntur, sed plenam efficaciam." (In Michaeam col. 343). Owen's English translation happily gets the sense of what Calvin is saying even if it is not completely literal.

¹⁸"... sacrarium coelistis sapientiae." (In Michaeam col. 344).

¹⁹The latria logika of Romans 12:1 Calvin translates as "reasonable service," but explains that what is meant by this is the worship which is according to God's Word. John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans, translated by John Owen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 453.

²⁰In the Institutes Calvin puts this very clearly, "And then he makes us conform to his lawful worship, that is a spiritual worship established by himself." Institutes II, viii, 17.

²¹"Hypocritae totam sanctimoniam locant in externis caeremoniis. Deus autem longe aliud requirit. Cultus enim eius spiritualis est." (In Michaeam col. 394).

²²J. L. Mays, Micah, A Commentary (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 142.

²³"Deus enim volebat sibi offerri sacrificia: diende addita semper fuit haec promissio, Expiabitur iniquitas. Sed notandis est finis. Deus enim non mandavit sacrificia, quasi per se sint ullius momenti: sed voluit adducere veterem populum talibus exercitiis ad poenitentiam et fidem. Voluit igitur monere Iudaeos nihil ipsos proficere, nisi ipsi sacrificia fierent. . . ." (In Michaeam col. 393).

²⁴Cf. Ordonnances of 1537 (OS I, 370), Institutes II, xx, 2 and 50, and Commentary on the Psalms, passim.

²⁵. . . nec scilicet cogantur praestare quod praecipue, imo unice requirit, ut scilicet afferant cor integrum." (In Michaeam col. 393).

²⁶Interestingly enough, this translation, found in the Revised Standard Version, justifies Calvin's assumption that Romans 12:1, 1 Peter 2:5, and John 4:23 mean the same thing.

²⁷Cf. Ernst Lohmeyer, Lord of the Temple, a Study of the Relation between Cult and Gospel, translated by Stewart Todd (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1962).

²⁸Commentary on Romans, edition quoted above, p. 452.

²⁹"Non dubium est quin sicuti pretiosius est Dei nomen toto mundo, ita etiam pluris aestimari debeat eius cultus, quam omnia officia quibus probamus caritatem nostram inter homines." (In Michaeam col. 394).

³⁰" . . . tamen iustitia, quae inter homines colitur, vera est pietatis approbatio." (In Michaeam col. 394).

³¹" . . . quia hoc est etiam initium colendi et glorificandi Dei, . . ." (In Michaeam col. 395).

³²Both the Didache and Justin Martyr, for example, quote this passage in their explanations of Christian worship.

³³"Ergo nihil aliud continent hic locus quam venturum esse tempus, quo cultus Dei purus et integer florebit in omnibus locis." (In Malachiam col. 421).

³⁴"Et necesse est incipere semper ab illo principio, nempe ut sciamus quem colamus Deum." (In Malachiam col. 420).

³⁵"Et simul meminerimus, non posse Deum legitimo ritu coli, nisi cognitus fuerit." (In Malachiam col. 420).

³⁶"Sed haec ratio loquendi passim trita est in scripturis, quia prophetae, qui sub lege erant, sermonem accomodarunt ad captum populi. Ideo quoties dicere volunt totum mundum accessurum ad fidem et pietatem, Altare extruetur Deo, inquit. Per nomen altaris non dubium est, quin designent spiritualem cultum: non quod post Christi adventum debeant offerri victimae. Nunc enim nobis nullum altare est. Nam quisquis altare sibi erigit, evertit crucem Christi in qua obtulit unicum et perpetuum sacrificium." (In Malachiam col. 420).

³⁷"Sequitur ergo formas has loquendi debere ita accipi ut teneamus analogiam inter ritus legales et inter spiritualem modum colendi Dei, qui nunc praescribitur in evangelio." (In Malachiam col. 420).

³⁸That Calvin interprets Malachi 1:11 in the light of these passages is made clear in the Institutes where Calvin quotes Malachi 1:11 and then brings to it Romans 12:1, Hebrews 13:16, and Philippians 4:18. Institutes IV, xviii, 16.

³⁹"Quae enim sunt sacrificia Novi testamenti? Preces, gratiarum actiones, quem admodum ultimo ad Hebraeos capite dicit apostolus." (In Malachiam col. 421).

⁴⁰In his commentary on Hebrews Calvin tells us that the Christian sacrifice of praise spoken of by the prophets is "of more account than all those external sacrifices under the Law." A bit further on he says, "We hence see that it is the highest worship of God, justly preferred to all other exercises, when we acknowledge God's goodness by thanksgiving; yea, this is the ceremony of sacrificing which God commends to us now." John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews, translated by John Owen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 350.

⁴¹"In lege etiam fuit cultus Dei spiritualis, ut presertim Psal. 50 dicitur: sed umbrae tamen simul erant coniunctae: quemadmodum etiam significant Christus illis verbis. Nunc venit hora quando adorabitur pater in spiritu et veritate. Neque enim prorsus negat Deum fuisse adoratum in spiritu a patribus: . . ." (In Malachiam col. 421).

⁴²". . . ideo dicit nunc in evangelio simplicem veritatem et nudam, ut ita loquar, doceri. Quod ergo de suffitu, quod de oblatione dicit propheta, valuit sub lege: nunc autem videndum est quid praecipiat Deus in evangelio, et quo ritu coli velit: . . ." (In Malachiam col. 421).

⁴³In his commentary on Colossians Calvin says, "For the substance of those things which the ceremonies anciently prefigured is now presented before our eyes in Christ . . . Hence the man that calls back the ceremonies into use, either buries the manifestation of Christ, or robs Christ of his excellence . . ." Then Calvin asks the question of whether the Christian sacraments are shadows, too. He tells us they are not shadows but signs and witnesses of Christ's presence. John Calvin,

Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, translated by John Owen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), pp. 192ff. In this comment we see very clearly how Calvin distinguishes between Neoplatonic allegory and biblical typology.

⁴⁴In the Institutes IV, xviii, 12-18, Calvin treats at length the question of the relation of the concept of sacrifice to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Calvin is willing to speak of the Lord's Supper being a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. "The Lord's Supper can not be without a sacrifice of this kind, in which while we proclaim his death and give thanks, we do nothing but offer a sacrifice of praise." Institutes IV, xviii, 17. Calvin is very clear that it is in proclaiming Christ's death and giving thanks for God's redemptive work in Christ that the sacrifice is made. This is something quite different from presenting the Eucharist to God as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

⁴⁵The pressure of other duties has not allowed me to comment on several other passages which eventually must be taken into consideration. Unfortunately, I have not been able to give more time to the footnotes, particularly in regard to modern commentators on the scripture passages under discussion. What appears here in print is, therefore, offered as a progress report on my studies in Calvin's theology of worship.