"TRUE PIETY BEGETS TRUE CONFESSION": JOHN CALVIN'S ATTACK ON IDOLATRY

by Carlos M. N. Eire

Introduction

To some extent, Reformation scholarship still labors under the burden of trying to explain the religious upheaval of the sixteenth century according to the concerns of the institutions created by the Reformation. Since certain theological questions became the focus of intense debate after the initial period of the Reformation, it has long been assumed by many scholars that these were the central questions raised by the Reformers themselves, and that these issues alone gave shape to the Reformation. Thus, the agenda for research has often been set--especially in regard to theology--by those problems which came to be considered crucial by the heirs of the Reformers. Lutherans, for instance, still devote much attention to the issue of justification. Calvinists, whether they like it or not, are drawn into discussions about predestination.

This tendency helps explain, at least in part, why the Reformed polemic against Catholic worship has received relatively little attention since the seventeenth century. Wherever the initial struggle against Catholicism was successfully resolved, pastors and theologians usually desisted from focusing directly on the subject of idolatry. When the "idols" were no longer an immediate threat, the question of idolatry quietly slipped into oblivion, and remained rather obscure to succeeding generations, down to our own day. Hence, it is not surprising to find scholars in 1987 who insist that the attack against idolatry was "only one aspect of the Reformed movement, and a transitional and negative aspect at that," or who argue that the issue of worship had no independent significance, but was rather subordinate to the "real" issue of the Reformation as defined by Luther, that of works-righteousness.

What I contend, in opposition to such interpretations of the Reformation, is that there may be a vast difference between what has been traditionally perceived as the "canon" of central Reformation issues and those problems that actually occupied the attention of the Reformers. Furthermore, I would like to argue that some of the so-called "transitional and negative" aspects may have contributed much more to the formation of Protestant theology than has heretofore been assumed. More specifically, I would like to suggest that in order to understand the Reformation on its own terms, as it was perceived by contemporaries, one must accept the polemic against Catholic worship as a dominant issue: The issue of idolatry was not an adjunct, "negative" or subordinate question for the Reformed, but rather a central, positive organizing theme of much of their theology and piety.

Some scholars have also averted their gaze from this subject for a different reason, because they consider it as an embarrassment and an impediment to ecumenism. From the perspective of whose whose primary concern is the promotion of Christian unity rather than the writing of history, the subject of idolatry is far too disconcerting. Consequently, the problem is hidden in the cellar, along with other troublesome topics such as witchcraft and demon possession. (Interestingly enough, historians and anthropologists have developed a great appreciation for the relevance of these other two "embarrassing" subjects). To some extent, then, the agenda for Reformation research is set by the churchly concerns of the present day. Since some scholars are genuinely interested in casting off the burden of divisiveness created by the Reformation, they strain to highlight similarities, rather than differences, between medieval Catholicism and sixteenth-century Protestantism. Thus are we driven further from understanding the Reformation on its own terms.

Though some of these well-intentioned ecumenists would rather gloss over the repugnance Calvin felt towards Catholic worship, preferring instead to relegate this problem to the ash heap of "sectarian" history, the fact remains that Calvin devoted a tremendous amount of attention to idolatry. To Calvin and many of his contemporaries, the Reformation was not just a struggle for right theology, but also for right worship. Over against what they perceived to be the "right" worship proclaimed by the Gospels stood the abominable "idolatry" of the Roman Catholic Church. If this language sounds oddly old-fashioned, tendentious, or abusive, it is precisely because it is the language used by Calvin. This was not the dispassionate language of academic theology (as practiced by Protestant scholastics and present-day ecumenists), but rather of reforming zeal.

By focusing on the controversy over idolatry in the sixteenth century, one may not be paying attention to something defined as "important" by post-Reformation theologians, or to what some might consider beneficial for our own age, but one can certainly come closer to understanding what was crucial for Calvin.

One question this study does not seek to answer is whether the idolatry issue is important for our own day. This is a question for theologians and ecclesiastics, not for historians. Still, if Christians, Catholic as well as Protestant, are to continue the progress already made towards mutual respect and a greater sense of confraternity, it is imperative that they gain a fuller appreciation of their own history. It is not only ahistorical, but counterproductive to strive for unity by pretending that serious disagreements never existed.

<u>Calvin's Theology of Worship</u> Knowledge of God and worship of God

According to Calvin, the purpose of human existence is to know God and to glorify him by worship and obedience. Here may be seen the foundation of Calvin's theology of worship and of his attack on idolatry. Knowledge of God and worship of God are inseparable: One cannot come to know God without yielding some worship to him.

Various attempts have been made to provide a neat descriptive phrase for Calvin's principal concern in worship, but the two most commonly used are soli Deo gloria (to God alone be the glory) and finitum non est capax infiniti (the finite cannot contain the infinite). Although Calvin never explicitly used the phrase "finitum non est capax infiniti," and would never have defended its most extreme implications (logical consistency would make the incarnation impossible if the concept were interpreted strictly), it is fair to say that he agreed in principle with its meaning in everyday life. These two interdependent principles are the basic components of Calvin's argument against idolatry.

Calvin's primary concern in his struggle against Catholic piety was to defend the glory of the God who is "entirely other," who transcends all materiality, who is "as different from flesh as fire is from water," and whose reality is inaccessible. Calvin's attack on idolatry was an effort to restore God's primary dignity among human beings.' Calvin forcefully asserted God's radical transcendence through the principle finitum non est capax infiniti and his omnipotence through soli Deo gloria. make others aware of this dual realization, Calvin systematically juxtaposed the divine and the human, contrasted the spiritual and the material, and placed the transcendent and omnipotent solus of God above the contingent multiple of humanity and the created Calvin's attack on Roman Catholic "idolatry" is a condemnation of the improper mixing of spiritual and material in worship--an affirmation of the principle finitum non est capax It is also an indictment of the human attempt to infiniti. domesticate God and to rob him of his glory--an affirmation of the principle soli Deo gloria.

Calvin speaks about the nature of worship and about the seriousness of the sin of idolatry in his 1543 treatise, On the Necessity of Reforming the Church, where he concentrates on the significance of worship for the Christian religion. Calvin's argument, as indicated by the title of the treatise, is that the church had reached such a corrupt state that its reform could wait no longer. The most significant aspect of corruption singled out by Calvin is the perversion of worship, and it is in explaining this issue that he set forth the basis for his attack on idolatry.

Calvin begins by studying the place that worship holds in the Christian faith, and he concludes that it is one of the two elements that define Christianity:

If it be asked, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence amongst us, and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, viz., a knowledge first, of the right way to worship God; and secondly of the source from which salvation is to be sought. When these are kept out of view, though we may glory in the name of Christians, our profession is empty and vain.

Calvin thus asserts that one cannot be a Christian without a proper knowledge of worship, and even places worship before salvation in order of cognitive importance. Correct worship not only precedes righteousness, it precedes the true knowledge of salvation. In any discussion of the relationship between religious knowledge and worship, Calvin gives prior consideration to what has been called "the existential aspect" of the knowledge of God. In fact, Calvin even proposed in an alearlier treatise that "genuine piety begets genuine confession."

It is because he believes worship to be the foundation of theology that Calvin can answer one of the more frequent charges made against Protestantism by the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholics accused the Protestants of raising disputes that were of little significance, needlessly causing a schism. Calvin responds by saying, on the contrary, that disputes over points of worship should be given preference over all other aspects of religion. Commenting further on the dispute over worship that divided Christendom, Calvin asserts that it is not an insignificant struggle at all, but rather a life-and-death combat over what is most essential to the Christian life: "For it is not true that we dispute about a worthless shadow. The whole substance of the Christian religion is brought into question." Calvin uses equally strong language when he exhorts all Christians to assume their primary duty, that is, to struggle for the maintenance of pure worship:

There is nothing to which all men should pay more attention, nothing in which God wishes us to exhibit a more intense eagerness than in endeavoring that the glory of his name may remain undiminished, his kingdom be advanced, and the pure doctrine, which along can guide us to true worship, flourish in full strength.

Calvin ridicules Catholics for saying that Protestants are only concerned with trifles. When the pagan idolaters spoke of fighting for their altars and sacred hearths, says Calvin, they

supported what they believed to be the noblest of all causes. Catholics, though also idolaters, are so confused about the nature of their worship that they regard as almost superfluous a context that is undertaken "for the glory of God and the salvation of men..." Calvin thus points to the contradiction in Catholic polemics: The Catholics cling tenaciously to their forms of worship, yet also try to minimize the effect of the Protestant attack by arguing that only trivial matters have been brought into question. The seriousness of their corruption, Calvin adds, is evident in their failure to see that worship is the soul of the Christian life. Idolatry, then, is the very antithesis of religion.

The imperative for spiritual worship

Calvin maintains that the only correct form of worship that can be offered to God is "spiritual worship," which for him means two things: worship devoid of trust in material props or humanly devised ceremonies; and worship that has been commanded by God. Concerning the nature of spiritual worship, Calvin says that it must begin with an attitude of complete dependence on God₂ as the source and endpoint of all human acts and aspirations. The true foundation of proper worship, according to Calvin, is

to acknowledge God to be, as He is, the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, power, goodness, mercy, life and salvation; in accordance with this, and to ascribe and render to Him the glory of all that is good, to seek all things in Him alone, and to look to Him alone in every need.

The principal lesson to be learned from this knowledge is that, since God is spiritual, one should never try to form an earthly or carnal conception of him. Human beings can only meet God on God's terms and at God's level, and it is the role of worship to raise men's hearts above the world. Although the human race searches for God in the material world, this search is always futile. The sum of the matter, says Calvin, is that the worship of God must be spiritual, in order that it may correspond with his nature. It is necessary to remember what God is, he cautions, "lest we should form any crass or earthly ideas respecting Him."

The superiority of the spiritual dimension over the material is at the center of Calvin's teaching. Calvin insists that God is always improperly worshiped in the visible symbol, and that "whatever holds down and confines the senses to the earth is contrary to the covenant of God; in which, inviting us to Himself, He permits us to think of nothing but what is spiritual." Idolatry is interpreted by Calvin as a diminution of God's honor. Calvin repeatedly maintains that some loss of glory comes about through the improper mingling of spiritual and material in wor-

ship, since God's honor is corrupted 7"by an impious falsehood" whenever any form is attached to him.

Calvin's second dictum concerning spiritual worship states that God is to be honored only according to his commands in scripture. It is at this point that Calvin uses his hermeneutic of transcendence to attach Catholic worship. Calvin assails the established piety as something that had no sanction from the Word of God and was thoroughly corrupt. Not once does Calvin waver in regard to his interpretation of what scripture means by "spiritual worship." The Word of God is clear, he says, and as the rule that distinguishes between false and true worship, it has a universal and univocal application. God's commands stand inscribed in the pages of the Bible as an unchanging rule that human beings must never alter in any way: "Here indeed is pure and real religion: faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law.

What Calvin says in the first few chapters of the <u>Institutes</u> is tightly woven around this series of facts: Scripture settles all questions and describes the truth in detail. What is this truth? That nature can lead to God, but only scripture reveals him; that this revelation gives knowledge of God, and that worship is the result of knowledge. As Calvin says, scripture first invites to fear, then to God, and finally, "by this, we can learn to worship Him." There is no escaping this hermeneutical circle in Calvin. In fact, he asserts that even the Bible itself is incapable of limiting discussion of God to a purely analytic level. All considerations of God, even the simplest mention of his name, require a response, and even more important, the <u>right kind</u> of response: "As often as Scripture asserts that there is one God, it is not contending over the bare name, but also prescribing that nothing belonging to his divinity be transferred to another.

<u>Calvin's interpretation</u> of the history of idolatry

The ultimate object of Calvin's theology may be knowledge of the supreme reality of God, but Calvin points out that one can only be concerned with this as it pertains to human beings. For Calvin, God is never an abstraction that has to be related to an abstractly conceived humanity; he is always the God of human beings, the God who reveals himself. Correspondingly, the human person is always described in terms of its relation to this revealing God.

Calvin traces the origin of idolatry to the Fall. In addition to being ontologically removed from the reality of God, human beings, as a result of the Fall, cannot come to know God properly. Calvin argues that fallen humanity is separated from God by a cognitive gulf that can only be bridged by grace and

revelation, since its faculties have been impaired in two ways: Its natural gifts have been corrupted and its spiritual gifts have been completely taken away. The imperfection of human beings is greater in the spiritual part of their nature as a result of sin, since all things that pertain to the life of the soul are extinguished in them.

Human beings, says Calvin, have been placed in a hopeless situation as a result of the Fall. There is still implanted in human nature a desire to search for the truth, but this desire can never be fulfilled. The human mind, dulled in its intellectual capacities, and the human soul, stripped of its original capabilities, can only grope in the dark for the truth. In this state of confusion human beings can only move in the direction of falsehood and evil. They are perpetually headed in a downward direction, towards death, ignorance, and spiritual destruction:

With respect to the kingdom of God, and all that relates to the spiritual life, the light of human reason differs little from darkness; for, before it has pointed out the road, it is extinguished; and its power of perception is little else than blinggess, for before it has reached its fruition, it is gone.

Just as human beings retain an insatiable desire for the truth they once knew before the Fall, so do they retain a longing for the relationship they once enjoyed with God. This innate desire is called the sensus divinitatis (awareness of divinity) or the semen religionis (seed of religion). Calvin feels that there is ample proof for this in the fact that there is not one nation on earth that does not have some form of religion. Idolatry and superstition are themselves an additional proof of this natural inclination in humanity. Calvin argues that the impious themselves prove through their distortion of religion that there is some conception of God present in the mind of every human being.

Ironically, this seed of religion does not bring human beings closer to God, but further alienates them. Stressing the spiritual ineptitude of human beings to the point where he seems inconsistent, Calvin asserts that this seed seldom takes root, and that when it does, it only brings forth deformed and poisonous fruit. Scarcely one person in a hundred, he says, follows the inclination given by this principle; and the one who does fulfills this desire in a perverted manner. Because of their sinful condition, then, human beings can only respond to this instinct erroneously, either by suppressing its effect or by distorting its intended purpose. The "seed of religion" causes human beings to disparage the honor of God and to separate them further from the grace they sorely need. The sensus divinitatis, in fact, is the fountainhead of superstition and idolatry among human beings:

All have naturally something of religion born with them, but such is the blindness and stupidity, as well as the weakness, of our minds, that our apprehension of God is immediately depraved. Religion is thus the beginning of all superstitions, not in its own nature, but through the darkness which has settled down upon the minds of men, and which prevents them from distinguishing between idols and the true God.

Calvin's interpretation of human corruption plays an important role in his assessment of the problem of idolatry. their state of corruption, human beings stray off as wanderers and vagrants. Although they can know God correctly in the Bible, 4they choose to create their own fantasies about the These false conceptions lead to the development of idolatrous practices, and this process separates them from God even further. Calvin proposes a twofold corruption of worship, saying that there are two tendencies in fallen humanity that displease God immensely. The first is that human beings, though they can come to know the truth, choose to follow their own base instincts and create their own religion. (This choice, however, is limited by the perversion of nature, which will only allow human beings to fall into deception.) The only worship that can please God, says Calvin, is that which He has decreed as acceptable in scripture. Thus, the first step of human audacity is to ignore the prescriptions of God.

God is further displeased, adds Calvin, by the manner in which his commands are corrupted. This is the second step in human audacity: God demands to be worshiped spiritually, but human beings can only devise material forms of worship. The rebellion of the human race in regard to worship displeases God tremendously, not only because of the act of disobedience, but because of the form of worship it creates. It is insult added to injury.

Calvin asserts that human beings, in the state of sin, are continually drawn to the earthly and material. They have become creatures "of the flesh"--a selfish and self-centered race that delights in physical gratification to such an extent that all their thoughts are dominated by material conceptions. Fallen humanity has become engulfed in material existence; it has completely forsaken the spiritual dimension, and has therefore removed itself from the realm of God. Calvin comments on this situation by stating that in order to approach God correctly, human beings must transcend their own materiality and egocentricity.

For as long as our views are bounded by the earth, perfectly content with our own righteousness, wisdom and strength, we fondly flatter ourselves and fancy we are little less than demigods. But if we once elevate our

thoughts to God, and consider his nature, and the consummate perfection of His righteousness, wisdom, and strength, to which we ought to be conformed—what before charmed us in ourselves under the false pretext of righteousness, will soon be loathed as the greatest iniquity; what strangely deceived us under the title of wisdom, will be despised as extreme folly; and what wore the appearance of strength, will be proved to be most wretched impotence. So very remote from the 4divine purity is what seems in us the highest perfection.

In this passage, Calvin makes it clear that the root of idolatry lies not in the material world per se, but in human beings themselves, who are impudent enough to seek divinity on their own terms instead of the Creator's. Human beings reverse the order of divine reality, expecting to find the Creator in the created. As long as they remain enmeshed in the material level of their own existence, and are satisfied with their own corrupt being, human beings are immersed in the darkest error. Human beings are flesh, says Calvin, and they delight in those things that correspond to their own disposition; hence, they delude themselves by contriving many things in the worship of God that "are all full of pomp and have no solidity."

At this point Calvin further refines the theology of idolatry that had already been developed by Zwingli. Though Calvin's predecessors had also placed the blame for idolatry in human beings rather than in the material world, they had focused on this problem in isolation from the doctrine of the Fall. Calvin weaves this teaching into the <u>Institutes</u> precisely at the point where it can be turned into a <u>categorical</u> judgment on the human condition: Idolatry is inescapable in the fallen state, "for each man's mind is like a labyrinth."

Calvin is no dualist. The created, material world is viewed as good in itself. The material world is neutral, it seems, or indifferent. When compared to God and the spiritual realm, it is impossible to deny that ontological superiority belongs to the Creator. But what matters for Calvin is the fact that idolatry does not result from any insufficiency in matter itself, due to its contingency and ontological inferiority, but rather from a defect in human beings. It is the human mind, or "flesh," that tries to reverse the natural order. Since they are incapable of properly perceiving the superior, spiritual oneness of God, human beings continually atomize the divine by trying to create a pantheon of fictitious material deities: "Surely, just as waters boil up from a vast, full spring, so does an immense crowd of gods flow forth from the human mind, while each one, in wandering about with too much license, wrongly invents this or that about God Himself." The end result of this process is that the objective reality of God is denied by human beings. Instead of understanding the true metaphysics, the human race creates an

infinite number of false, subjective opinions, so that religion is atomized and men are severed from reality itself, as well as from each other. Because the "fault of dullness is within us," says Calvin, each person is to blame for creating falsehoods:

... after we rashly grasp a conception of some sort of divinity, straightaway we fall back into the ravings or evil imaginings of our flesh, and corrupt by our vanity the pure truth of God. In one respect we are indeed unalike, because each one of us privately forges his own particular error; yet we are very much alike in that, one and all, we forsake the one true God for prodigious trifles.

When one considers that Calvin regarded knowledge of God and of oneself to be the proper end of all human beings, it is easy to see why the idolatrous impulse seemed so heinous: It produced a complete reversal of the true, natural order, and perverted the cognitio that alone could make life good.

Calvin emphasizes the relative worthlessness of human material existence (in comparison with God) and argues that the true goal of humanity is to transcend the created world. human beings are ever to attain truth and eternal life, they must then regard the world as worthless. 54 Calvin speaks of the flesh as an obstacle that must be overcome, 55 but not in a spiritualistic or dualistic sense. What Calvin opposes is the egocentricity of human beings, that is, their attempt to worship God according to their own whims. The fault lies not in the material world, but in human beings, who obstinately refuse to accept the spiritual truth of God. Commenting on the corruption of worship, Calvin says that mortals are carried away by too much folly and rashness, who while "precariously drawing a fleeting breath from moment to moment" dare to devise their own form of wor-The sin of corrupt worship is augmented by the fact that human beings try to bring God down to the level of creation. The "crass imaginations" and materialistic conceptions of human beings always incline them "to try to circumscribe God's infinite essence, or to draw Him down from heaven, and to place Him beneath the elements of the earth." Human beings try to reverse Human beings try to reverse the proper order of creation. Instead of adapting themselves to the spiritual reality of their creator, human beings try to make God adapt to the created world. Calvin warns that this is a dangerous error: "This single consideration, when the inquiry relates to the worship of God, ought to be sufficient for restraining the insolence of our mind, that God is so far from being like us, that those things which please us most are for him loathsome and nauseating.

Since the Fall has made human beings slaves to error, says Calvin, "every one of us $_{60}$ is, even from his mother's womb, a master craftsman of idols." When the <u>semen religionis</u> is awakened

in human beings, it necessarily leads to error, because the fallen mind can only conceive of God in material terms. It is no surprise, therefore, that Calvin refers to the semen religionis as "the beginning and source of idolatry." Human beings persist in their search for a material divinity, and refuse to accept God on his own terms. Calvin finds the origin of idolatry in the human effort to domesticate God and tailor religion to human desires:

For this is the origin of idolatry, that when the genuine simplicity of God's worship is known, people begin to be dissatisfied with it, and curiously to inquire whether there is anything worthy of belief in the figments of men; for men's minds are soon attracted by the snares of novelty, so as to pollute, with various kinds of leaven, what has been delivered in God's word.

The argument against miracles

All of this would still remain rather academic and subject to dispute, though, if Calvin were not also to deny the metaphysical reality that the Catholics claimed for their worship. Catholic piety was defended through the example of the numerous miracles, ancient and contemporary, that had been performed through the agency of material objects of worship, especially through relics.

Catholics argued that Protestant worship could be proven false through its lack of miracles. Calvin answers this charge by reinterpreting the role played by miracles in the Christian church, and by denying that there is any real substance to Cath-olic claims. What they adduce as the strongest physical evidence of the truth of their worship, says Calvin, is but its subtlest and most heinous deception. Calvin asserts that the only function of miracles is to strengthen the authority of God's messengers, not to alter the fabric of material reality. This is especially evident in the cases of Moses and the apostles of Christ. In regard to the message of the New Testament, miracles must be regarded as "seals of the Gospel," that is, as the signature of God upon the work being carried out by Christ and the apostles. Calvin argues that it is wrong for Catholics to demand miracles from the Protestants for this very reason, because they are not forging some new gospel, but are instead "retaining that very Gospel whose truth all the miracles that Jesus Christ and his disciples ever wrought serve to confirm." This is the principal point of Calvin's response to the Catholic argument, and it is a significant point. He asserts that miracles ceased at the end of the Apostolic Age. But, then, what becomes of the numerous miracles claimed by the Catholic church? Calvin has a ready answer, taken from scripture: They are not really miracles, but humanly devised deceptions that give the impression of being more than they really are.

We may also fitly remember that Satan has his miracles, which, though they are deceitful tricks rather than true powers, are such a sort as to mislead the simple-minded and untutored [II Thes. 2:9-10]. . . . Idolatry has been nourished by wonderful miracles, yet these are not sufficient to sanction the superstition either of magicians or of idolaters.

Calvin, then, will grant miracles neither to God nor to the devil.

Like Bucer before him, Calvin realized that the miracles claimed by the Catholics were one of the mainstays of their piety. "For whence," he asked, "come so many superstitious worshipings of saints, save only from the abuse of miracles?" Since the numerous New Testament examples of miracles performed through the agency of physical objects provided the Catholics with a scriptural argument, Calvin had to develop a different interpretation of the nature and function of miracles. One example often cited by Catholic polemicists was the story of the miracles performed by Peter's shadow as it fell upon the sick (Acts 5:15). Calvin comments on this particular case:

The papists abuse this text, not only to the end they may commend feigned miracles, which they say are done at the graves of martyrs, but also that they may try to sell us their relics. Why, say they, shall not the grave, or garment, or the touching of the bones, of Peter have as much power to heal, as his shadow had?

Calvin refutes the Catholic argument by saying it is wrong to think that Peter's healing power is a universal and everlasting characteristic of sainthood. The gift of miracles in the church was restricted to a specific time, he says, and its only purpose was to spread the truth of the Gospel among the heathen of antiquity.

The same issue surfaces again in connection with the story of the healing power of pieces of clothing touched by St. Paul (Acts 12:2). These miracles, says Calvin, are temporary testimonies of the power of God, not a permanent condition of Christian religion. Calvin argues that Paul was given this power so that his doctrine would have greater authority, and that he was the minister of this power, not its source. All miracles are performed to increase knowledge of the glory of God, he continues, not to further the glory of the saint performing them or, even less, of the articles through which the miracles are performed. The miracles claimed by Rome for its relics are utterly false, he concludes, because they accomplish the 79 pposite effect: They lead men away from the true worship of God.

Calvin thus applies his transcendentalist hermeneutic to the miracle stories of the New Testament, and therefore skirts

having to consider the possibility of miracles being wrought through the agency of material objects. He does not deny that God chose such means to reveal his truth to the Jews and to propagate the gospel, but he argues that the time has passed when such things would occur.' In reference to the miraculous effects obtained by the apostles through chrism and unction, for instance, Calvin advised that it was no longer possible to expect these material objects to be of any use. Now that the gift of miracles had ceased, he said, the figure ought no longer to be employed, and such things should be banished from the church. The historical argument for the usefulness of miracles, therefore, removes from Calvin the responsibility of having to admit that miracles can be performed through objects that may lead to idolatry. Calvin bypasses the potentially troublesome subject of a scriptural warrant for the existence of miraculous cures, and instead ridicules the Catholics in a superficially polemical manner: "For which cause the Papists are more absurd, who wrest this place unto their relics; as if Paul sent his handkerchiefs that men might worship and kiss them in their honor; as in Papistry they worship Francis' shoes and mantle, Rose's girdle, St. Margaret's comb and such like trifles."

Calvin points to the will of God as the source of miracles. Nothing, after all, is impossible for the Almighty, but he restricts their employment to dramatic revelational events. The momentous changes brought about in the knowledge of God through the work of Moses, Jesus, and the apostles completely overshadow the relatively small service rendered by the miracles that accompanied the revelation. At the heart of Calvin's argument against the miracles of the Catholic church may be seen his deep distrust of the religious value that men come to place on material objects. He has to accept the possibility of having miracles occur through material mediation, but he does so reluctantly, removing this possibility to remote and specific instances, and keeping them as divinely chosen instruments that aid the revelation of the spiritual reality of God.

Calvin's denial of miracles in the material sphere is the capstone of his metaphysical assumptions. Uneasy with any intermingling of spiritual and material, he takes the miraculous out of the ordinary and moves it into the realm of revelation. Only when God decides to break into this world to communicate with human beings does he appoint specific instances where the natural, material order is changed. Aside from such extraordinary events, which God intends as proof of his revelation, and not as ends in themselves, there is no intrusion of the divine, spiritual sphere into the material. This world operates on its own divinely appointed principles. Religion, then, does not seek to change the way the material world operates, but rather to understand it as it is: eternally subject to God's will and as always incapable of transmitting any spiritual power in and of itself. To believe otherwise, says Calvin, is to transfer God's glory to his creation, and this is the trap of idolatry.

Pollution and punishment: the dangers of misdirected worship

Because Calvin sees human nature as inherently prone to idolatry, he constantly warns that it is dangerous to accept even the most insignificant form of material worship in the church, for "men's folly" cannot restrain itself from falling headlong into superstitious rites. The acceptance of materiality in worship presents a threat to the purity of religion, and Calvin cautions so much against idolatry because he considers it a contagious and fertile evil: "Idolatry is certainly so very fertile, that of one feigned god there should quickly be begotten a hundred; that a thousand superstitions should bubble up from one." Calvin believes that idolatry progresses gradually, but warns that once the process of idolatry has begun there can be no turning back. He attributes this to the great speed with which the seed of false belief takes root in men's hearts: "Experience teaches us how fertile is the field of falsehood in the human mind, and that the smallest of grains, when sown there, will grow to yield an immense harvest."

Taking these factors into consideration, Calvin warns that it is necessary to keep the seed from ever coming into contact with the soil; in other words, that every effort must be made to ensure that worship remains "spiritual." The image of idolatry as fertile is accompanied by that of idolatry as highly inflammable. Calvin cautions that when men begin to accept objects such as images into worship, they are playing with fire:

So innate in us is superstition, that the least occasion will infect us with contagion. Dry wood will not so easily burn when coals are put under it, as idolatry will seize and occupy the minds of men, when the opportunity presents itself to them. And who does not see that images are sparks? What! sparks do I say? nay, rather torches, which are sufficient to set the whole world on fire.

Keeping in mind the conflagration that can be produced by the smallest distortion of spiritual worship, Calvin maintains that images are inseparable from idolatry and that once an image has been erected withing a religious context, men cannot be stopped from worshiping it.

Calvin's argument is that there is no such thing as an "innocent" religious image. Their acceptance alone is an act of idolatry, so that as soon as images appear, religion is corrupted and adulterated. Calvin also asserts that the prohibition against images voiced in the second commandment contains two distinct injunctions. The first prohibits the erection of any graven image, or any such likeness; the second forbids the payment of honor to any of these "phantoms or delusive shows." By

divine law, therefore, all believers are prohibited from taking the first step toward idolatry.

The same argument is used by Calvin in regard to relics. One cannot keep these material reminders of someone else's holiness without falling prey to one's baser instincts, that is, without eventually believing that God's power can be harnessed through the relic. Calvin argues that no distinction can be made between the preservation of relics and the worship of relics, because "experience teaches them one is never present without the other," and that, inasmuch as they "degenerate into idols," the pollution and defilement they bring about ought not to be tolerated by the church. Relics pervert the Christian faith because they make men cleave to things "vain and perishing." Their presence in the church is inexcusable, Calvin concludes, for it is most rare for anyone to be devoted to relics without also being polluted by some degree of superstition.

But the greatest danger involved in false worship is the punishment it can bring from God. The ultimate result of all misdirected worship is to bring additional calamities upon the human race: unreasonableness, famine, pestilence, and war. This, Calvin insists, is another reason why idolatry needs to be removed from every town and nation. Even though Calvin regarded all idols as false and powerless in any real, divine sense, he still believed that they were an objective danger, a source of pollution for body and soul. Calvin does not say that all idolatrous paraphernalia are dangerous in themselves, as if they objectively exude a contagious pollution to all who come in contact with them. There is no more pollution involved in looking at a statue, he says, than there is in looking at a stone. Yet, he adds, one must be cautious. Danger increases when the faithful are surrounded by idolatry on all sides and are continually incited to participate in false worship. The best policy to follow concerning idols, says Calvin, is to keep away from them:

He alone keeps himself free, who does not even allow himself any faked imitation of idolaters, but is abstinent to such an extent that he contracts no guilt or stain either by look, access, or nearness; approving his constancy to the Lord all the more, because while surrounded by hostile forces, he does not allow himself to be conquered.

A final consideration Calvin takes into account is that all impure worship not only displeases God, but goes to Satan as well. Those who become embroiled in idolatry, he points out, are handing themselves over to the devil, because the ultimate result of false worship is abandonment by God:

As long as we keep this rule (that one conform to the pure doctrine of God), we know that God will approve the

worship that is rendered by us; but if we add any of our fantasies or borrow anything from men, everything will be perverted and corrupted. And then 95 devil will be placed in charge of everything we do.

The practical implications of Calvin's warnings about the dangers of idolatry are significant. Since idolatry is a fertile danger, the true Christian must maintain a strict separation from all kinds of misdirected worship. Catholic piety, therefore, must be avoided as a contagious plague. There is a vast gulf separating the Protestants, who worship spiritually, and the Catholics, who worship wrongly—a gulf that can never be bridged without endangering the purity of spiritual religion. This attitude deeply affected the course of Protestantism in France from the 1540s onward, through the Wars of Religion.

Conclusion

In many ways, it is fitting that Calvin's most popular published work against idolatry was not one of his theological tracts, but rather the <u>Inventory of Relics</u> (1543), a sarcastic expose of the "falsehood" of Roman Catholic piety written in an Erasmian vein.

The <u>Inventory</u> is primarily what the title implies: a catalog of various relics held and venerated throughout Europe. In this work, Calvin lists numerous items, one after the other in quick succession, always pointing out how absurd they are; trying to show his readers that their falsehood can be easily proven through the use of reason. It is this last point that Calvin wants to stress: The worship of relics is "against reason," "some foolish desire that has no foundation in reason," "tog absurd even to amuse children," or even "madness" (folie). In fact, he says that the purpose of the <u>Inventory</u> is not really to show why the cult of relics is wrong, but rather to point out that it is foolish and fraudulent. Calvin says he hopes to reveal the "blindness" of idolaters through a display of the most obvious deceptions of the Catholic church. If men cannot be convinced of the theological error involved in relic worship, then at least they might be able to see that its actual practice is insulting to human reason.

This remarkable expose, one of the few places in all of his work where Calvin allows some humor to surface, is a good lens through which to peer into the inner texture of Calvin's theology of idolatry. In the first place, it is significant that the piece is so obviously a part of the Erasmian heritage to which Calvin and the Reformed tradition were indebted. The Inventory reveals the ideological roots of the war on idolatry very clearly. At times, in fact, Calvin even borrows freely from Erasmus, almost word for word, as in this joke about the relic of the true cross: "In brief, if all the pieces which could be found

were collected into a heap, they would form a good ship-load, though the gospel testifies that a single man was able to carry it."

The <u>Inventory</u>, which went through numerous editions and translations, is not only a fitting homage to Erasmus by one of his intellectual grandchildren (even if the humanist would have objected to its "vehemence"), but also a convincing testimony to the enduring power of the Erasmian critique and its influence on the Reformed. No matter how much the conclusions reached by Erasmus and Calvin may have differed, their approach to piety remained similar, as did their style, and more importantly, their intention. Erasmus had wanted to turn piety from the outer to the inner, from the visible to the invisible. He also reveled in poking fun at what seemed irrational, nonsensical, or grossly stupid. Seven years after Erasmus's death, Calvin was trying to do the same thing, only with a more urgent sense of purpose.

This brings us to another point: Unlike Erasmus, who seems to have delighted in the mere act of ridiculing folly or absurdity, Calvin joked in a most serious manner. The comic face of the <u>Inventory</u> is not graced with an ironic smirk, but rather with the <u>frozen smile</u> of victory, of triumph over an opponent. Calvin's <u>Inventory</u> is a good complement to the first few chapters of the 1559 <u>Institutes</u>. If one keeps in mind what Calvin says about cognitio in his later work, then it is easy to see that the <u>Inventory</u> is a manifesto of the very same human powers that are fulfilled by this knowledge. True <u>cognitio</u> of God and self does not allow for nonsense.

The unreasonableness of relics, and of all misdirected worship as well, plays an important role in Calvin's polemic against Catholicism. By arguing that idolatry is not only wrong but wrongheaded, Calvin can compare idolaters to unreasoning beasts. Those who do not direct every thought and action to the goal of worshiping God as he commands degenerate from the law of their creation, which is to come to know and worship God correctly. Calvin even argues that men become more miserable than beasts when they fail to worship properly. He warns his readers to take stock of their position as rational beings and not let themselves be deprived of their humanity: "Let everyone, then, be on his guard, and not allow himself to be led along like an irrational animal, and as if he were incapable of discerning any way or path by which he might be guided safely."

In other words, Calvin is here arguing about reality and the way it is to be perceived, just as he does in the <u>Institutes</u>. The purpose of human existence is to know God and worship him correctly. In doing this, one also knows oneself and is fulfilled. There is but <u>one</u> reality to perceive: .God's reality. Yet, this involves knowing that there is a fundamental division

between material and spiritual and that one cannot approach the spiritual through the material.

Which means, of course, that once one knows that the divine-human relationship can only be transacted in spiritual terms, the material world assumes its proper place. It, too, is definitely real, but only in a contingent, finite way. But the important thing is this: It operates according to its own laws, as determined and directly controlled by God. It functions as it is supposed to function, as created, as material, as finite. Material reality cannot be usurped by spiritual reality: In fact, it is incapable of being altered by its superior. Miracles can occur only because God, at rare moments, in his infinite power, decides to use them as proof of his revelation. But they are not the order of the day: They have not occurred since the time of the apostles, and would not occur again. Even then, when they did take place, they never went against human perception or reason, but depended primarily on faith.

Calvin says over and over in the Inventory that what one sees, or observes as real, is real in this material sphere. If something is contrary to experience, or reason, then it must be considered false. This is why he lashed out with such comic fury against "pious frauds," using a keen empirical eye to unmask inconsistencies, and sharp measured descriptions to demolish absurd claims. What fish ever lasted over 1,500 years, he asks. then, is it possible that the fish distributed by Jesus can still be around? This is not the way the world works. What object ever multiplied itself endlessly? How then is it that there are so many duplicated relics? Has any ancient object ever taken on the appearance of something new? How, then, is it that St. Peter's robes look just like those of contemporary clerics? Or that the wine jars from Cana are all in different styles, shapes, and sizes? Or that so many of Jesus' household items are strikingly contemporary in appearance? The point Calvin wants to make is that if anyone claims that these objects are real (as the Catholic church did in many cases), then it naturally follows, by reason and common sense, that the one making such claims should not be heeded.

This is the application of the new Renaissance metaphysics as adopted in the Reformed tradition. Although Calvin's argument in the <u>Inventory</u> is based on a scriptural foundation, his hermeneutic is shaped by metaphysical considerations about the fabric of reality. The intended audience of the treatise is a new phenomenon, too. The <u>Inventory</u> aims to convince the educated, those who take pride in their thinking abilities, the cultured, urbane men and women of the Renaissance. Though theological from top to bottom, Calvin's attack on idolatry as something "unreasonable" is a product of the humanist tradition, and it indicates that the Reformation succeeded in part because of its affinity with certain aspects of the intellectual climate of the sixteenth century.

The metaphysical assumptions of this most Erasmian of Calvin's works force us to consider how Calvin finally shapes the Reformed notion of transcendence. As far as the fundamental principles are concerned, he adds nothing new. He is very faithful in maintaining a tradition, defending the principles of finitum non est capax infiniti and soli Deo gloria. His contribution lies principally in the clarification, expansion, and application of these principles.

Calvin makes three crucial contributions to the Reformed theology of transcendence. First, he refines a point that Zwingli, Bullinger, and others had not fully developed. Calvin, like his predecessors, places the blame for idolatry in human beings, not in the material world. This anthropological perspective is more than a matter of emphasis. Calvin makes it central to this theology, turning it into an essential component of his doctrine of the Fall. Whereas Zwingli had concentrated more on the psychology of idolatry, Calvin now focused, theologically, on the human condition itself. The problem on which The problem on which Calvin focuses is the endemic corruption of human nature and the fact that the material world itself is not evil. Men are evil. Religion is a human phenomenon, a human response to the reality of God, but since men are corrupt, religion, too, shares in this corruption. Because they try to reverse the order of creation by attempting to bring God down to their level, men are inherently idolatrous. By stressing this point as a universal rule, Calvin makes idolatry an ever-present danger, a contagious disease of sorts, and he closes the door on compromise with any kind of religion that is not by his definition "spiritual." In juxtaposing the objective reality of God with the infinite number of subjective opinions that fallen human beings create about him, Calvin makes it a doctrine that men are metaphysically deranged, naturally inclined to reverse the order of things. Idolatry, then, is a permanent condition of the human race, something against which human beings must always struggle.

In connection with this anthropological and metaphysical focus, Calvin makes a second and perhaps greater contribution toward the development of a theology of idolatry. Calvin defines the place of worship as none of his predecessors had done before. Though they had struggled against idolatry, their theology was somewhat fundamentalistic and more inclined towards action than systematic exposition. Calvin clears whatever doubt anyone could have had about the theological foundations of the Reformed struggle for "pure worship." Calvin states plainly that the war against idolatry is not merely blind obedience to scripture, but also something reasonable. Worship, he says, is the central concern of Christians. It is not some peripheral matter, but "the whole substance" of the Christian faith. It is the reason for human existence, the fundamental principle that alone can bring true cognitio to human beings, and therefore true fulfillment, since the proper end of human existence is knowledge of God and

of ourselves. By making worship a necessary existential component of knowledge, Calvin turns it into the nexus between thought and action, between theology and its practical application. It is a very practical sort of theology that Calvin develops as a result of this. Religion is not merely a set of doctrines, but rather a way of worshiping, and a way of living. "True piety begets true confession." This is enormously significant. One may even argue that it becomes the fundamental defining characteristic of Calvinism.

The Reformation for which Calvin struggled was not so much one of doctrine, but rather one of piety, which involved profound social and cultural changes. To be properly "Reformed," a community would not only have to change its theology, but also its outward expression of faith, not to mention its attitude toward the material world. Though this was already part of the Reformed tradition long before Calvin entered into the fight, it was Calvin, more than anyone else, who turned this into an explicit guiding principle and devoted his energies to making it understood. This, too, would have serious consequences when it came to considering any compromise on religion.

Calvin's third contribution is closely related to his second, and this is his analysis of reverential acts. In connection with his theology of worship, Calvin develops a univocal interpretation of reverential acts that, on the one hand, is an affirmation of his metaphysical assumptions, and on the other, is a practical application of these principles. By carefully defining what goes on in worship, how human actions relate to the spiritual reality of God, regardless of man's intentions, as some sort of spiritual commerce, Calvin finally drives the Reformed attitude toward worship to its logical conclusion in a clear, forceful manner. It is this point, because of its practical nature, that will allow Calvin to wage a new kind of war against Unlike his predecessors, Calvin faced the task of idolatry. teaching Protestants who did not have the power to overcome the "idolatrous" societies in which they lived. Instead of fighting against the idols by knocking them down, Calvin looked for a more effective way of undermining the system that supported their existence. It was to prove a long, hard battle, but without this understanding of reverential acts, or of the place of worship in human life, or of the dangers of idolatry, it is doubtful that the war against the idols could have become as serious a challenge to Catholicism as it eventually became wherever Calvin and his ideas were taken seriously.

Notes

*This paper is a condensed version of chapter six of my book, War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). I am grateful to the publisher for permission to use this material.

¹Mark Edwards, review of <u>War Against the Idols</u>, <u>American Historical Review</u> 92.5 (1987): 1194.

William Bouwsma, review of <u>War Against the Idols</u>, <u>Catholic Historical Review 73.4 (1987): 588-9.</u>

 $\frac{3}{\text{Genevan Catechism}}$ (1545), questions 1, 2, and 6: CR 6.9-10.

⁴Inst. I.5.9. Subsequent references to the <u>Institutes</u> will be to the 1559 edition, unless specified otherwise. All English quotations are from the translation by Ford Lewis Battles, J. T. McNeill, ed. (Philadelphia, 1960).

⁵Commentary on John's Gospel, CR 47:90, "cui nihilo minus est cum carne dissidium quam igni cum aqua."

Kilian McDonnell, <u>John Calvin</u>, <u>The Church and the Eucharist</u> (Princeton, 1967), 163.

A. Ganoczy, <u>Le Jeune Calvin, Genese et evolution de sa vocation Reformatrice</u> (Wiesbaden, 1966), 202.

⁸Ganoczy proposes a tripartite centrality in Calvin's theology: (a) "soli Deo gloria"; (b) "solus Christus"; (c) "verbum Dei." Each of these principles defends the complete otherness and singularity of God for Calvin, according to Ganoczy. He does add, however, that "on peut affirmer sans hesiter que le principe du 'soli Deo gloria' est pour Calvin le premier et le plus fondamental" (Le Jeune Calvin, 202). Francois Wendel makes a similar observation: "From the beginning of his work, Calvin places all his theology under the sign of what was one of the essential principles of the Reform: the absolute transcendence of God and his total 'otherness' in relation to men. . . . That is the idea that dominates the whole of Calvin's theological exposition and underlies the majority of his controversies." Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought, trans. P. Mairet (New York, 1963), 151. McDonnell approaches the subject with more caution, stating that Calvin's transcendental premises were at the root of the majority of his theological controversies, though not necessarily at the root of all his work (McDonnell, Calvin, 165).

⁹Ernst Saxer, Aberglaube, Heuchelei und Frommigkeit. Eine Untersuchung zu Calvins Reformatorischer Eigenart (Zurich, 1970), 69. Saxer thinks that Calvin based his opposition to Rome on the two Lutheran concepts of "sola fides" and "sola scriptura," and that he thus formulated his concept of "true religion" on an opposition to unscriptural beliefs and works-righteousness. I believe Saxer overlooks an important part of Calvin's theology by ignoring the principles of "soli Deo gloria" and "finitum non est capax infiniti." Similarly, Margarete Stirm overlooks the significance of worship in Calvin's theological opposition to image worship. Though she provides a good summary of Calvin's own arguments against images, she sees his adherence to the letter of the biblical Law as the source of these arguments. See: Die Bilderfrage in der Reformation (Gutersloh, 1977), 161-222.

12 Edward Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York, 1952), 28. Also: E. Doumergue, "Deux Grandes Doctrines de Calvin: la Paternite et l'Honneur de Dieu," in Foi et Vie (1909), 638-42.

¹⁵Ibid. (italics mine). Calvin also said to Cardinal Sadoleto: "I have also no difficulty in conceding to you that there is nothing more dangerous to our salvation than a twisted and perverse worship of God." Reply to Sadoleto (1539), CR 5:392.

¹⁰De necessitate reformandae Ecclesiae (1543), CR 6:459.

¹¹Inst., II.8.11.

¹³De fugiendis, CR 5:244.

¹⁴De necessitate, CR 6:502.

¹⁶ De necessitate, CR 6:530.

¹⁷Ibid., CR 6:502.

¹⁸Inst., II.8.11.

¹⁹CR 7:673. Calvin speaks of idols in <u>Vera Christianae</u> pacificationis et Ecclesiae reformandae ratio as follows: "Idolam enim erigitur, non quod externam sacrarii speciem deformet, sed quod total ecclesiae sanctitatem inquinet ac pervertat: quod labefactet totum Dei cultum, nihil in religione nostra impollutum relinquat."

²⁰CR 7:607. "Primum enim statuendum est spiritualem esse Dei cultum, se in externis vel caeremoniis, vel aliis quibuslibet operibus reponatur: deinde non esse legitumum, nisi ad eius cui praestatur voluntatem sit compositus, tanquam ad suam regulam. Utramque solus quam necessarium est."

- ²¹This conception of reality is only one of many Platonic influences evident in the thought of Calvin. For a detailed study of Calvin's Platonism consult: Gerd Babelotzky, <u>Platonische Bilder und Gedankengange in Calvins Lehre vom Menschen</u> (Wiesbaden, 1977); J. Boisset, Sagesse et Saintete dans la pensee de Calvin (Paris, 1959), especially "Les Themes Platoniciens dans la Pensee de Calvin" and "Le Platonisme de Jean Calvin," 225-314.
- 22 <u>De necessitate</u>, CR 6:440. In the <u>Institutes</u> Calvin expands on this point, indicating that what man owes to God may be divided into four classifications: (1) adoration; (2) trust; (3) invocation; and (4) thanksgiving (II.8.16).
- 23 Commentary on Isaiah (1551), CR 37:20. "Volunt enim homines praesantem habere Deum: atque hoc initium et fons idolatriae est: quia Deus per simulachrum nobis non adest, sed per verbum suum et spiritus virtutem. Quamvis autem et gratine suae et bonorum spiritualium imaginem nobis obiiciat in sacramentis, non alio tamen spectat, quam ut sursum ad se nos invitet."
- 24 Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses (1563), CR 24:403. "Certum enim est, Deus nunquam voluisse coli nisi pro sua natura. Unde sequitur verum eius cultum semper fuisse spiritualem, ideoque minine situm in externis pompis."
- 25 Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses, CR 24:376. Also Inst., II.8.17: "God wholly calls us back and withdraws us from petty carnal observances, which our stupid minds, crassly conceiving God, are wont to devise. And he makes us conform to his lawful worship, that is, a spiritual worship established by himself."
 - ²⁶Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses, CR 24:387.
 - ²⁷<u>Inst</u>., I.11.2.
- De necessitate, CR 6.463-4. Also: Peter Auski "Simplicity and Silence: The Influence of Scripture on the Aesthetic Thought of the Major Reformers," <u>Journal of Religious History</u> 10 (1979): 343-64.
- ²⁹Calvin's doctrine of scripture is best summarized in Inst, I.6-10. For further reference: J. K. S. Reid, The Authority of Scripture (London, 1957), 29-55. Reid provides a good summary of Calvin's doctrine of scripture and supplies thorough notes in reference to the most significant scholarly debates about this subject. J. T. McNeill also provides a brief and helpful study in "The Significance of the Word of God for Calvin," Church History, 28 (1959): 140-5. Other studies include the following: T. H. L. Parker, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Edinburgh, 1952), 41-7; E. Dowey, Knowledge, 86-146; W. Niesel, The Theology of Calvin (Philadelphia, 1956), 22-38; F.

Wendel, Calvin, 156-60; and more recently, H. J. Forstman, Word and Spirit: Calvin's Doctrine of Biblical Authority (Stanford, 1962); and H. Kraus, "Calvins Exegetische Principien," Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, 79 (1968): 329-41. Also: W. H. Neuser, "Theologie des Worts-Schrift, Verheissung und Evangelium bei Calvin," in Calvinus Theologus: Die Referate des Europäischen Kongress für Calvinforschung 16-19 Sept. 1974, W. H. Neuser, ed. (Neukirchen/Vluyn, 1976), 17-38; and in the same volume, A. Ganoczy, "Calvin als paulinischen Theologe. Ein Forschungsansatz zur Hermeneutik Calvins," 39-70.

30<u>Inst</u>., I.2.2.

³¹Inst., I.10.2.

³²Inst., I.12.1.

Inst., I.1.1: "... nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." This statement stands at the beginning of every edition of the Institutes, each time in a slightly different form. J. T. McNeill indicates that Calvin may have been following a precept used earlier by Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas (Inst., I.1.36, n. 3). Roy Battenhouse discusses the Neoplatonic overtones of Calvin's "duplex cognitio" in "The Doctrine of Man in Calvin and in Renaissance Platonism," Journal of the History of Ideas, 9 (1948): 447-71. Charles Trinkaus, attempting to prove that Calvin was a "modern" thinker, argues that one may see in Calvin's epistemological concerns a "healthy skepticism" derived from nominalism—the same sort of skepticism, he adds, that produced modern science. "Renaissance Problems in Calvin's Theology," Studies in the Renaissance, 1 (1954): 59-80.

³⁴Dowey refers to this principle as "correlation," and insists that it is not merely a formal principle, but a reality that must be faced in treating any religious or moral category of Calvin's thought: "every theological statement has an anthropological correlate, and every anthropological statement, a theological correlate: (Knowledge, 20).

³⁵<u>Inst</u>., II.2.12.

³⁶Inst., II.2.12.

³⁷Hans Engelland does not think the labyrinth is all that hopeless for Calvin. He sees the Reformer as torn between the rationalism of the humanists and the revelation theology of Christianity. This theory, however, exaggerates Calvin's indecision, since it is clear that Calvin accepts a dominant pessimism in regard to man's spiritual capabilities. Gott und Mensch bei Calvin (Munich, 1943), 7-32, 46-59. Also: W. Kolfhaus, Vom

Christilichen Leben nach Johannes Calvin (Neukirchen, 1949), 23-68; and G. Bockwoldt, "Das Menschebild Calvins," Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie, 10 (1968): 171-173; and Richard Stauffer, Dieu, la Creation et la Providence dans la Predication de Calvin (Bern, 1978).

- ³⁸<u>Inst</u>., II.2.12.
- ³⁹Commentary on Ephesians, 4.17: CR 51:204.
- 40 Inst., I.3.1: "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity [sensus divinitatis]." Also: I.4.1, "God has sown a seed of religion [semen religionis] in all men." Edward Dowey maintains that outside the Institutes, Calvin uses the term semen religionis most often. Dowey, Knowledge, 52 n. 13. See also: H. C. Hoeksema, "Calvin's Theology of the Semen Religionis," Protestant Reformed Theological Journal, 8 (1975): 25-37.
- 41 Inst., I.3.1. (Calvin cites Cicero on this point, <u>De</u> Natura Deorum, I.16.43.)
 - ⁴²<u>Inst.</u>, I.3.1.
 - 43<u>Inst</u>., I.4.1.
- 44 Commentary on Psalms, 97.7: CR 32.44. J. Ries, <u>Die Naturliche Götteserkentnis in der Theologie der Krisis im Zuzammenhang mit dem Imagobegriff bei Calvin</u> (Bonn, 1939), 34-5.
 - ⁴⁵Inst., I.5.15.
- 46 At times Calvin attributes man's perversion to the direct temptation of the devil, not to man's corruption. Calvin believes that Satan's work among men is to disrupt God's plan and to estrange man from God. Petit Traicte, CR 5:457; Commentary on Samuel, CR 29:473.
 - 47 Inst., I.11.4; Commentary on Ezekiel, 6.4: CR 40:140.
 - 48<u>Inst</u>., I.11.1.
 - 49 Commentary on John's Gospel, CR 47:90.
 - ⁵⁰Inst., I.5.12.
 - ⁵¹Ibid.
 - ⁵²<u>Inst</u>., I.5.12.
 - ⁵³Inst., I.5.11.

- ⁵⁴<u>Inst</u>., II.9.1-2.
- 55 De fugiendis, CR 5:243. "Iam istud quoque aeque ac saeculorum omnium vitium est, tam vafras esse, amabiles, captiosas, speciosisque praetextas nominibus, ad illudendum unumquemque, carnis suae illecebras, ut illam arcere a concilis nostris, abigereque, primus sit sapiendi gradus."
- De necessitate, CR 6:461. "Scio quam difficulter hoc persuadeatur mundo, improbari Deo cultus omnes praeter verbum suum institutos. Quim potius haeret haec persuasio, et quasi in ossibus omnium defixa est, ac nedullis, quidquid agant, in eo se satis iustam approbationem habere, si modo qualemunque honoris Dei zelum obtendat . . . mendacium esse, quidquid verbo suo additur, praesertim in haec parte: ethelothreseia meram esse vanitatem."
 - ⁵⁷Inst., I.11.4.
 - ⁵⁸Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses, CR 24:392.
- 59 Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, CR 48:562. Jean Delumeau stresses the point that Calvin, and the Reformers as a whole, were among the first armchair ethnologists of the western world. "Les Reformaterus et la Superstition," Actes du colloque sur l'Admiral de Coligny (Paris, 1974), 471.
 - ⁶¹Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses, CR 24:423.
- 62 Commentary on Isaiah, CR 37:20. "Volunt enim homines praesemtem habere Deum: Atque hoc initium et fons idolatriae est: quia Deus per simulacrum nobis not adest, sed per verbum suum et spiritus virtutem."
- 63 Commentary on Acts, CR 48:153. "... quod mens humana, ut nihil nisi crassum et terrenum de Deo concipit, ita ad eandem crassiteam transfert omnia divinae preasentiae symbola... nos autem, qui terrae sumus affixi illum similiter volumus in terra habere." Calvin also says elsewhere: "Le source d'idolatrie est que nous sommes charnelz et apprehendons Dieu selon nostre fantasie."
- Gommentary on the Last Four Books of Moses, CR 24:282. John H. Leith has remarked that "the history of religions becomes for Calvin the history of idolatry" in "John Calvin's Polemic against Idolatry," in Soli Deo Gloria: New Testament Studies in Honor of William Childs Robinson, J. M. Richards, ed. (Richmond, VA, 1968), 114.
- 65"Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France" (1536), included in the McNeill edition of <u>Institutes</u>, p. 16. In the <u>Commentary on Acts</u>, Calvin mentions that "the papists do object unto us miracles again and again."

For a detailed analysis of Calvin's view of miracles consult: H. Schutzeichel, Die Glaubenstheologie Calvins (Munich, 1972), 258-65; E. Saxer, Aberglaube, 44-5; and Bernard Vogler, "La Réforme et le Miracle," Revue d'Histoire de la Spiritualité, 48 (1972): 145-149.

67 <u>Inst</u>., I.8.5-6.

68 Commentary on Acts, 5:15, CR 48:104; Commentary on Matthew, 10:1; Commentary on John's Gospel, 2:11.

69"Prefatory Address," McNeill ed., <u>Institutes</u>, p. 16; <u>Commentary on Matthew</u>, 10:1. In the <u>Commentary on John's Gospel</u>, <u>Calvin says: "Tenendus est enim duplex miraculorum usus, nempe ut vel ad fidem nos praefarent, vel in fide confirment" (CR 47:270). In connection with this point, Calvin adds that miracles do not produce faith in and of themselves, and that in order to benefit from miracles, men must have their hearts purified. Otherwise, how would it have been possible for the Jews to be angered by the resurrection of Lazarus? Even "if heaven and earth were mingled" (the greatest miracle imaginable for Calvin), this would do nothing to change a heart that has no fear of God to begin with. Miracles, then, cause no objective change in those who behold them (CR 47.271).</u>

70"Prefatory Address," McNeill ed., <u>Institutes</u>, p. 16.

⁷¹Ibid., 17. Calvin adds to this argument the testimony of Augustine, who attacked the "miracles" of the Donatists in the same manner (Augustine, Commentary on John's Gospel, 13:17).

⁷²M. Bucer, <u>Summary</u> (1523), DS I, 112.

73 Commentary on Acts, 3.9: CR 48:65; Sermons on Deuteronomy, 4:5: CR 28:208.

74Commentary on Acts, CR 48.104.

75_{Ibid}.

⁷⁶"Prefatory Address," McNeill ed., <u>Institutes</u>, p. 17.

77 Commentary on Acts, CR 48.104: "Hic enim finis est, ut mundus a Christo abductus ad sanctos transfugiat."

78 Martin Luther had also at times argued that although physical miracles could not occur in the post-Apostolic age, the Word of God continued to work spiritual miracles. "A Sermon on Keeping the Children in School" (1530), WA 30/2:534ff. Also: Vogler, "La Réforme et le Miracle," 146-7; H. Berger, Calvins Geschichtsauffassung (Zurich, 1955), 108-110.

- 79 Inst., IV.29.4-13; IV.19.18-21. Although Calvin and the other Reformers abandoned the use of chrism as a method of healing, they never abandoned hope in the power of God to cure illness as he wished. Vogler maintains that through this interpretation of the miraculous, the Reformation separated medicine and religion. He feels this is distinctly "modern" and in keeping with the spirit of the Renaissance ("La Réforme et le Miracle," 148-9).
 - 80 Commentary on Acts, 19.11-12. CR 48:445.
- 81 For a discussion of Calvin's use of the nominalist concepts of the "potentia Dei absoluta" and "potentia Dei ordinata," see F. Wendel, Calvin, 127ff. The same issue is also analyzed by Karl Reuter, Das Grundverstandnis der Theologie Calvins, unter Hinbeziehung Threr Geschichtlichen Abhängigkeiten (Neukirchen/Vluyn, 1963), 143-52; and K. McDonnell, Calvin, 8-12. For a general discussion of the concept of God's authority in Calvin's theology consult Bohatec, Bude und Calvin, 325-45.
- 82<u>Commentary on Acts</u>, 7:42: CR 48:155. Also: <u>Inst.</u>, I.11.3.
 - 83_{Letters}, CR 13:85.
 - 84 Commentary on I John, CR 55:376.
- 85 <u>De fugiendis</u>, CR 5:253-4. Zwingli had warned against this danger in <u>De vera et falsa religione</u>: "Since sure danger of a decrease in faith threatens wherever images stand in the churches, and imminent risk of their adoration and worship, they ought to be abolished in the churches and wherever risk of their worship threatens" (Latin Works, 3:336).
- 86 Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses, CR 24:377: "spectra illa, vel fallaces pompas." Also, Inst., II.8.17.
 - 87 Inventory of Relics, CR 6:410.
 - ⁸⁸Ibid., CR 6:450.
 - ⁸⁹Ibid., CR 6:411.
 - ⁹⁰Ibid., CR 6:410.
- 91The threats made by God to sinners and idolaters are described by Calvin in the <u>Institutes</u>, II.18-21. Also: <u>De necessitate</u>, CR 6:502: "Scimus quam execrabilis Deo sit idolatria: et quam horrendis poenis eam ultus sit tum in populo israelitico, tum in aliis gentibus, passim narrant historiae."

^{92&}lt;sub>De fugiendis</sub>, CR 5:250.

- 93 Even when one's life is threatened by idolaters, says Calvin, one must never give in or manifest the slightest indication of outward consent to any form of material worship. This would be Calvin's main argument against the Nicodemites. Response a un Holandois, CR 9:604.
 - 94 De fugiendis, CR 5:265.
- 95<u>Sermons on Deuteronomy</u>, CR 28:715; <u>Petit Traicte</u>, CR 6:548.
 - 96 <u>Inventory</u>, CR 6:451.
 - ⁹⁷Ibid., CR 6:411.
 - ⁹⁸Ibid., CR 6:442.
 - ⁹⁹Ibid., CR 6:416.
 - ¹⁰⁰Ibid., CR 6:449.
 - ¹⁰¹Ibid., CR 6:420.
- 102Between 1543 and 1622, the <u>Inventory of Relics</u> appeared in at least twenty different editions, including seven French, one Latin, six German, two English, and four Dutch. CR 59:461-96. "Catalogis operum Calvini chronologicus."
 - ¹⁰³Inst., I.3.3.
 - 104 Inventory of Relics, CR 6:452.
 - 105 Commentary on John's Gospel, CR 47:271.
- $^{106}\underline{\text{Inventory of Relics}}, \text{ CR 6:415-17.}$ In another place, Calvin remarks on the incompatibility of faith and absurdity: "Ie m'en rapporte aux plus povres idiotz qu'on pourra trouver, si on dont adiouster foy à des choses tant absurdes" (CR 6:445).
 - ¹⁰⁷Inst., I.5.12.
- 108Charles Garside, <u>Zwingli and the Arts</u> (New Haven, 1966), 161-6.
 - 109 De necessitate, CR 6.459.
 - 110 De fugiendis, CR 5.244.