
Bondage and Liberation in Calvin's Treatise against Pighius

Anthony N. S. Lane

*Director of Postgraduate Research and
Senior Lecturer in Christian Doctrine
London Bible College, Northwood, U.K.*

I. Introduction

In the second edition (1539) of Calvin's *Institutio*, chapter two was on the knowledge of humanity and free choice and chapter eight on the predestination and providence of God. The Dutch Roman Catholic theologian Albert Pighius (or Pigge) wrote a response to these two chapters, which was published in August 1542, his *De libero hominis arbitrio et divina gratia, Libri decem*.¹ Of the ten books, the first six respond to Calvin's second chapter, the remaining four to chapter eight. Calvin wished to respond in time for the 1543 Frankfurt Book Fair, but had time to answer only Pighius's first six books, on free choice.² Some time in February 1543 he published his

¹(Köln: Melchior Novesianus, 1542), hereafter *De libero arbitrio*. Cf. H. Jedin, *Studien über die Schriftstellertätigkeit Albert Piggés* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1931) 40-43.

²CO 6:229f., 233f., 236f., 11:474. Here and hereafter CO = G. Baum, E. Cunitz & E. Reuss (eds.), *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* (Brunswick & Berlin: Schwetschke, 1863-1900).

Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii adversus calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis, which will hereafter simply be referred to as *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*.³

Calvin intended to answer the remaining four books, on providence and predestination, in time for the following Book Fair, but on hearing of Pighius's death he decided to drop the project, in order "not to insult a dead dog."⁴ In 1551 the controversy revived as Jerome Bolsec attacked Calvin's doctrine of predestination⁵ and he responded, while also settling the old score with Pighius, in his *Eternal Predestination of God*, which appeared in 1552.⁶

What did Calvin believe about the freedom of the will? Popularly Calvin is seen, with Luther, as one of the archenemies of free will. Calvin himself did not discourage such an interpretation. One of the chapters in his *Institutio* is entitled: "Man has now been deprived of freedom of choice and bound over to miserable servitude."⁷ In his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* he repeatedly attacks the notion that fallen human beings have free choice. This paper will examine Calvin's attitude towards the free (or otherwise) choice of the will in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* in the context of the different phases of human existence.⁸

³The Latin text is found in CO 6:229-404. Quotations below are taken from the English translation: John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker & Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), edited by A. N. S. Lane, translated by G. I. Davies. I am also editing this work for the new *Opera recognita* series, published by Droz. All references to the work below will be by CO column numbers, which are given in both of these editions. Where a single passage is in mind, the *Calvini Opera* column number(s) will be given in the body of the text.

For details of the controversy, cf. P. Pidoux, *Albert Pighius de Kampen, Adversaire de Calvin, 1490-1542* (Lausanne University thesis, 1932); L. F. Schulze, *Calvin's Reply to Pighius* (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege, 1971); G. Melles, *Albertus Pighius en zijn Strijd met Calvijn over het Liberum Arbitrium* (Kampen: Kok, 1973).

A. N. S. Lane, "The Influence upon Calvin of his Debate with Pighius," in L. Grane, A. Schindler, M. Wriedt(eds.), *Auctoritas Patrum II. New Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15th and 16th Centuries* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998) 125-39, deals more fully with some of the issues covered in this paper.

⁴J. K. S. Reid, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (London: James Clarke, 1961) 54.

⁵For a full account of the Bolsec controversy, cf. P. Holtrop, *The Bolsec Controversy on Predestination from 1551 to 1555* (Lewiston (NY), Queenston (Ontario) & Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1993).

⁶Cf. n.4, above.

⁷Inst. 2:2. All English quotations from the *Institutio* are taken from J. T. McNeill & F. L. Battles (eds), *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Library of Christian Classics vols 20-21) (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960); all Latin quotations are taken from P. Barth *et al.* (eds.), *Johannis Calvini Opera Selecta* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1926-68 - 1st - 3rd editions) = OS. Where a single passage is in mind, the reference will be given in the body of the text.

⁸A. N. S. Lane, "Did Calvin Believe in Freewill?" *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981) 72-90, does this for Calvin's theology as a whole. The present paper will concentrate on his *Bondage and Liberation of*

Calvin's position seems to run counter to the tradition of the Western church. Even those, such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who laid great stress on God's sovereignty and predestination took care to safeguard human free choice. Augustine, Calvin's mentor, at the end of his life wrote a book entitled *Grace and Free Choice*, in which he opposed those who "so defend God's grace as to deny man's free will."⁹ It would appear that Luther and Calvin, in denying free will were falling into just that error and were departing from the whole Augustinian tradition. This is the traditional Roman Catholic interpretation, of which Pighius was one of the pioneers. More recent Roman Catholic scholarship, however, has been less hasty to proclaim the discord between Calvin and the Augustinian tradition. As early as the 1920s the Dominican C. Friethoff concluded that while Thomas accepted and Calvin rejected free will, there is no contradiction because they meant different things by the term.¹⁰ More recently Harry McSorley has sought to show that the Reformers were reviving the "biblical and catholic concept of *servum arbitrium*," though he also detects an unbiblical and uncatholic "necessitarian concept of *servum arbitrium*."¹¹

It is clear that in looking at this question one must, even more than usual, look behind the words used to consider their meaning in specific contexts. It is also important to maintain the distinction between *arbitrium* (choice) and *voluntas* (will).¹² In the past *arbitrium* was often translated "will," contrary to the interests of both accuracy and clarity. The distinction will be carefully maintained from here on, with the sole exception of the title of Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*.

the Will, referring to other works either by way of contrast or in order to fill in gaps. Some material from the earlier article, which is not so widely available, is reused here.

⁹*De gratia et libero arbitrio* 1:1 (P. Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956ff.) (= *NPNF*) 5:443).

¹⁰C. Friethoff, *De predestinatie-leer van Thomas en Calvijn* (Zwolle: Fa.J.M.W. Waanders, 1925), which was translated into German: *Die Prädestinationslehre bei Thomas von Aquin und Calvin* (Freiburg: St. Paulus, 1926). Also "Die Prädestinationslehre bei Thomas von Aquin und Calvin," *Divus Thomas* 4 (1926) 71-91, 195-206, 280-302, 445-66. This conclusion is found on p.461 in the last of these versions. Friethoff does not deny that there are other points where Calvin does contradict Thomas.

¹¹H. J. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* (New York et al.: Newman and Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969) 353-55, 367-69.

¹²M. P. Engel, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta (GA): Scholars Press, 1988) ch.4 seeks to explain Calvin's teaching on free will in the light of the contrast between the divine and human perspectives. She maintains that Calvin denied free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) but affirmed free will (*libera voluntas*) (pp.124,134,138,144). In a review of the book (*Themelios* 16:2, January/February 1991, 21f.) I have argued that Calvin does not thus distinguish between free will and free choice and that the contrast of the two perspectives is by no means as widely relevant as she claims.

In one passage (279f.) Calvin obligingly defines a number of his terms. He recognizes that people mean different things by the term free choice (*liberum arbitrium*). He acknowledges that it can be used as Augustine used it, to refer to what we shall call a 'psychological freedom.' Human choice is free in the sense that is not coerced by external forces but moves voluntarily, of its own accord. In fact a 'coerced will' is a contradiction in terms. But his fear is that most people, including Pighius, mean something different by the term, thinking that a free will has the power to choose between good and evil by its own strength. We shall call this 'ethical freedom.'¹³ The difference between these two definitions is that the bondage of the will to sin can coexist with psychological, but not ethical, freedom. Calvin does not object to scholars using 'free choice' to refer to psychological freedom, nor even to the term being used before the general public, so long as its meaning is clearly defined.

II. Humanity as Created

One of the most basic principles of Calvin's anthropology is the distinction between human nature as originally created by God and as it has now become in its present fallen state. He repeatedly returns to this point in his reply to Pighius.¹⁴ It is on this ground especially that Calvin differentiates his position from that of the Manichees and other ancient heretics.¹⁵ This is also the tool that he uses to interpret many of the passages in the early fathers that speak too glowingly of the freedom of the will.¹⁶ He presents Pighius with a dilemma: either the father was referring to unfallen human nature (in which case the passage is irrelevant to our present condition) or he had failed to distinguish between human nature as created and fallen (in which case he was heretical by the standards of later Catholic orthodoxy). Following Augustine's own example in his *Retractationes*, Calvin uses the distinction

¹³I am using the terms psychological and ethical freedom as convenient shorthand terms for two different views that Calvin describes; the content of these terms is to be understood entirely from the rest of the article, not from any external source. In other words the terms are used *purely* for convenience, not in order to introduce concepts from more modern theories. The terms compatibilist and libertarian freedom would have been very useful but unfortunately have already been appropriated by philosophers to discuss metaphysical issues of more relevance to Calvin's doctrine of providence. Paul Helm, in a forthcoming paper "Calvin on Free Will," helpfully discusses Calvin's position in the light of the modern philosophical debate about causal determinism.

¹⁴CO 6:259,263,323f.,360f.,378-81.

¹⁵CO 6:262-64,308f.,350f.

¹⁶CO 6:280-85,290f.,339.

to interpret some of the less guarded comments in the former's early writings.¹⁷ Augustine's concern in his anti-Manichean writings was to affirm the goodness of human nature *as created*.

(1) INTELLECT AND WILL

The human soul has two parts, the mind and the will. "The function of the mind [is] to go before the will and to guide it—hence its name *ἡγεμονικόν*." The condition of the will varies according to whether it is dragged here and there by the passions or whether it is ruled by the mind and by right reason (285f.). Adam and Eve were created with free choice having "sound intelligence of mind and uprightness of will" (263). Indeed, Calvin claims that he has 'always' believed that humanity was created with free choice (296).¹⁸ Calvin quotes with approval the passage where Augustine differentiates between the sufficient grace given to the first Adam and the efficacious grace given to the elect. Adam was given such help that, had he so chosen, he could have remained good but also such that he could by free choice abandon it.¹⁹ To Adam was given "*posse non peccare, posse non mori, posse bonum non deserere*."²⁰ Thus Adam and Eve had ethical free will.

Dewey Hoitenga, in a recent book on Calvin and the will, expounds Calvin's doctrine, critiques it and offers his own proposals for a corrected Reformed theory of the will. In this paper I will confine myself to discussing his exposition of Calvin. The fact that I focus on points of disagreement should not be taken to deny the very positive merits of his work, which needs to be taken seriously.

Hoitenga argues that there is an inconsistency between Calvin's accounts of the Fall, sin and conversion, where his position is 'voluntarist,' and his account of the will as created, which is 'intellectualist.'²¹ The issue, for Hoitenga, is whether the intellect or the will has primacy: is the will bound to follow the dictates of reason (intellectualism) or does the will have the capacity to reject them (voluntarism)? The exposition of Calvin's voluntarism is clear, the case for his intellectualism less so. It is based on two statements in the *Institutio*, which state that the unfallen will is "always mindful of the bidding of the understanding," awaiting its judgment, and that

¹⁷CO 6:294-301,328,332,334,358.

¹⁸See further on this in Lane, "Influence," 129f.

¹⁹CO 6:323f.,355,401f., quoting *Rebuke and Grace* 10:26-12:38.

²⁰CO 6:403, cf. 401.

²¹D. J. Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) ch.2.

human choice is to “make the will completely amenable to the guidance of the reason.”²²

In the immediate context of these statements Calvin makes other statements about Adam before the Fall which Hoitenga rightly sees as voluntarist. Hoitenga is right to point to at least a verbal inconsistency, but goes too far in implying that Calvin was *consistently* intellectualist in his view of humanity as created. The inconsistency is between two specific statements about humanity as created and the rest of Calvin’s teaching,²³ including other nearby statements about humanity as created. Also, the inconsistency is not quite as stark as he implies. Calvin never goes so far as to say of human nature as created that “the will *always* follows the leading of the intellect.”²⁴

Does Calvin blatantly contradict himself within the same brief passage? This is possible but not likely. Maybe it is better to say that Calvin expresses himself incautiously in the two ‘intellectualist’ passages, no doubt (as Hoitenga states) because of his excessive disdain for scholastic discussions.²⁵ A simple way to reconcile them with the rest of Calvin’s teaching would be to interpret them not as accounts of what must inevitably happen (which they manifestly are not) but rather as what was meant to happen and as what did happen so long as the will did not turn away to sin.²⁶ It is the ‘office’ of the will to follow the intellect. If Calvin appears to state that the will cannot but follow the intellect, this is because he is incautious in his use of language, not because he wished to affirm something that was patently false and which he was about to contradict. This interpretation is confirmed by *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, where Calvin states that “the will is in a good condition *when* it ... attends to the rule of the mind” and that “the whole person is properly constituted *when* right reason rules in him” (285f.)

²²*Inst.* 1:15:7 (1539) and 1:15:8 (1559). Hoitenga describes the intellectualist/voluntarist statements as earlier/later (50,125), which is true as regards location in the *Institutio*, but not as regards timing.

²³Hoitenga himself sees the intellectualist statements as an aberration from an otherwise coherent voluntarism (e.g. 64f.).

²⁴*Ibid.*, 57 (his emphasis).

²⁵*Ibid.*, 20f.

²⁶As does R. A. Muller, “*Fides and Cognitio* in Relation to the Problem of Intellect and Will in the Theology of John Calvin,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 25 (1990) 215f. Helm, “Calvin on Free Will,” independently reaches the same assessment of Hoitenga.

(2) PROVIDENCE

The first six books of Pighius's *De libero arbitrio* attacked chapter two of Calvin's 1539 *Institutio*, which includes the question of free choice, while the final four books attacked chapter eight, on predestination and providence. But Pighius does not keep strictly to this division and Calvin is forced briefly to discuss the doctrine of providence, summarizing the key points of his doctrine as expounded in the *Institutio*:

We say that human affairs are not, by some blind or random chance, turned this way and that, but are controlled by the fixed purpose of God, so that nothing can happen other than what he decreed at the beginning. All things are subject to his power, and so there is no created thing which does not, either of its own accord or under coercion, obey his will. Accordingly, everything that happens, happens of necessity, as he has ordained. Satan too and all the wicked are submissive to his authority, so that they cannot move beyond what he has commanded, for they are constrained by his hand as though by a bridle or a halter, so that now he restrains them, since it pleases him to do so, and now he drives them on and guides them to execute his judgments. (258)

This is not to be understood as fatalistic determinism:

We are not Stoics who dream up a fate based on a continuous connection of events. All we say is that God is in charge of the world which he established and not only holds in his power the events of the natural world but also governs the hearts of men, bends their wills this way and that in accordance with his choice, and is the director of their actions, so that they in the end do nothing which he has not decreed, whatever they may try to do. Accordingly we say that those things which appear to be in the greatest degree due to chance happen of necessity—not by their own innate properties but because the purpose of God, which is eternal and steadfast, is sovereign in governing them. (257)

But does not this doctrine undermine human responsibility? Pighius certainly thought that it did, but Calvin denied the charge. The sovereignty of God does not remove the need for us to act. God's providence works through human means and instruments (256). God uses secondary causes (257), even though his providence is not dependent upon them (266). While we should not trust in our own ability to provide for ourselves, nor should we neglect to make provision (255f.). Crimes are committed of necessity, but are nonetheless justly punished by the law. This is because they are committed with "willful and deliberate evil intent." There is in the wicked a "will and purpose to do evil" which makes them liable to censure (256).

This insistence upon human responsibility is, however, weakened by what follows. The wicked are "driven and forced to this by God," who bends their wills, constrains them and drives them on (256-58). Calvin does distinguish between God's action and the action of the wicked, who "gratify their evil and wicked desires" (256f.). But despite this proviso, Calvin's language sits uncomfortably with his later more careful

definitions, where he denies that the will is coerced or forcibly moved or driven by an external impulse. The wicked are not “taken by force or dragged unwillingly” (279f.). Calvin largely avoids formal linguistic contradiction,²⁷ but he does state both that the wicked are driven (*feruntur*) to sin by God (256) and that the will is not forcibly driven (*violenter fertur*) by an external impulse (280). It is not immediately obvious how the earlier statements that God drives, forces, bends and constrains the wicked are to be reconciled with the later denials of coercion.

(3) ABSOLUTE NECESSITY?

Pighius repeatedly accuses the Reformers of teaching that “everything befalls us by absolute necessity” (248).²⁸ Calvin is irritated by this and criticizes Pighius for dragging in at this stage what belongs to the issue of providence and predestination and should be deferred to that later treatment.²⁹ But he cannot avoid it altogether and in his exposition agrees that “God causes everything and of necessity, that is, in accordance with his providence” (253) and that “everything that happens, happens of necessity, as [God] has ordained” (258).

Why is Calvin irritated by Pighius’s repeated reference to “the absolute necessity of [all] events” (250)? No doubt he was, as he states, annoyed by Pighius’s failure to discuss the issues in an orderly fashion. But there is another reason, which explains Calvin’s touchiness on this issue. Pighius accused the Reformers of duplicity concerning this doctrine, later conceding free choice to humanity “in external matters and in public affairs” (250). Calvin, clearly embarrassed by the charge of Protestant disunity, affirms his deep respect for Luther and claims that the Reformers have remained consistent in their teaching, while developing the manner in which they express that teaching (250). Between Luther and Melancthon Calvin will admit no more than that the latter concentrated on the important issue (the role of the will in salvation) and that regarding “public affairs and outward behaviour” he softened Luther’s “form of expression so as to remove anything displeasing” (250f.).

²⁷The verbs that describe what does happen are: *agere, ferre, flectere, coercere, impellere*; the verbs that describe what does not happen are: *cogere, trahere, ferre* (again), *rapere*.

²⁸Cf. CO 6:250,255. Pighius, *De libero arbitrio* 15b, cites Luther, *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum*, art.36 (WA 7:146). For the same charge, without the ‘absolute’ cf. CO 6:256f.,266,350. McSorley, *Luther*, 255-60, discusses Luther’s teaching on this point.

²⁹CO 6:248,250,255,351. Schulze, *Calvin’s Reply to Pighius*, 37, n.51, correctly rejects the idea that for Calvin the bondage of the will is deduced from the sovereignty of God.

It was not only the divergence between Luther and Melanchthon that embarrassed Calvin. Calvin also diverges significantly from Luther, as becomes apparent in his later *Eternal Predestination of God*. In addition to affirming 'absolute necessity' Luther also denied the scholastic distinction between absolute or consequent necessity (*necessitas consequentis*) and necessity of consequence (*necessitas consequentiae*).³⁰ Pighius assumed that Calvin agreed with Luther's teaching that "nothing happens to us contingently, but everything by sheer necessity" (350).³¹ Calvin's embarrassment was that he did not agree—but could not say so openly without displaying Protestant disunity.³² When he did come to discuss the issue, in his *Eternal Predestination of God*, he took a position significantly different from Luther's. He agreed that God's will is "the chief and principal cause of all things" and "the necessity of things."³³ But he also conceded the validity of the scholastic distinctions between relative and absolute necessity (*necessitas secundum quid et absoluta*) and between necessity of consequence and consequent necessity.³⁴ "Though it is proper for us to regard the order of nature as divinely determined, I do not at all reject contingency in regard to human understanding."³⁵

This is given further development in the 1559 *Institutio*. While all things are controlled by God, "for us they are fortuitous." Not that they are truly random, but they "are in a sense fortuitous." This is because they "bear on the face of them no other appearance, whether they are considered in their own nature or weighed according to our knowledge and judgment." From our perspective the future is contingent, even though the outcome is determined. "What God has determined must necessarily so take place, even though it is neither unconditionally, nor of its own peculiar nature, necessary." Christ's bones were like ours and therefore clearly

³⁰In his *Lectures on Romans, Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* and *Bondage of the Will*, cited by McSorley, *Luther*, 232-36, 242, 315--21. For the meaning of the distinction, see *ibid.* 234f., 319f.; R. A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 200.

³¹Pighius, *De libero arbitrio* 6a.

³²Calvin never admits in this work to any difference of substance from Luther. He refers to "Luther and the rest of our party" (CO 6:234) and the uninitiated reader would remain blissfully unaware that there was any division between Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism. Calvin implicitly calls himself a Lutheran (CO 6:251f.) and calls Luther a "distinguished apostle of Christ" (CO 6:250). For other references to Luther, cf. CO 6:233f., 238f., 241, 245, 247-52, 255-57, 259f., 264-66, 298. Calvin also refers to the Augsburg Confession as "our confession" (CO 6:246).

³³*Eternal Predestination*, 177f. (CO 8:360).

³⁴*Eternal Predestination*, 170 (CO 8:354). The ET is faulty here, conflating the two distinctions into one.

³⁵*Ibid.*

breakable, and yet it was impossible for them to be broken (John 19:33,36). There is, therefore, good ground for the scholastic distinction between different types of necessity (1:16:9).

Calvin's acceptance of this scholastic distinction set him apart from Luther and aligned him with the medieval scholastics.³⁶ Why did Calvin here embrace the distinction when he more often rejected such scholastic distinctions as sophistic subtlety?³⁷ Furthermore, why should Calvin use the distinction when his expressed concern was "lest any subtlety should prevent even the most simple of my readers from understanding what I say"?³⁸ In 1543 Calvin had promised an answer to the charge that he agreed with Luther in asserting absolute necessity. In 1550 he answers the charge—rejecting the idea of absolute necessity, by means of the scholastic distinction. The simple were indeed in danger of being confused—by Luther's position.³⁹ It was in order to rescue the simple from Luther's unsubtle but extreme view that Calvin resorted to the uncharacteristic use of scholastic distinctions. Calvin is careful not to name Luther when tackling the issue in 1550, which would have been harder had he followed Pighius's agenda and tackled it in 1543.

III. The Fall

(1) ADAM'S SIN

Why did Adam sin? He was created "according to the image of God and adorned with remarkable gifts of righteousness, truth and wisdom, with the added assurance that not only he but all his descendants would live in this state if he continued in the innocence which he had received" (263). He was created with (ethical) free choice, able both to sin and not to sin.⁴⁰ God gave him such help that, had he so chosen, he could have remained good but also such that he could by free choice abandon it.⁴¹ The Fall occurred because Adam misused that free choice.⁴² The origin of sin is Adam's

³⁶For the scholastics, cf. *OS* 3.201, n.2; McSorley, *Luther*, 234f.

³⁷A. A. Lavalley, *Calvin's Criticism of Scholastic Theology* (Harvard University Ph.D. thesis, 1967) 67.

³⁸*Eternal Predestination*, 170 (*CO* 8:354).

³⁹McSorley, *Luther*, 233f.,242,259,315,319-21, charitably argues that Luther had not properly grasped the meaning of the scholastic distinction and that he did in fact accept its basic thrust.

⁴⁰*CO* 6:403, cf. 401.

⁴¹*CO* 6:323f.,355,401f., quoting *Rebuke and Grace* 10:26-12:38.

⁴²*CO* 6:263,293,295,336. The last three passages are citations of Augustine, *Enchiridion* 30:9.

voluntary fall, not God's creation or work nor "some influence from heaven."⁴³ Adam could have stood but fell solely by his own will. The Fall was unambiguously his own fault.

(2) *Decretum horribile*

Adam fell of his own accord, through his own fault. While there may be no ambiguity in Calvin's affirmation of this, there is some ambivalence in his position. The Fall is not exempt from the general statement that "everything that happens, happens of necessity, as [God] has ordained (258)." "God causes everything and of necessity, that is, in accordance with his providence" (253) and this must be as true of the Fall as of all other events. In his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* Calvin never explicitly applies these general statements to the specific instance of the Fall, but there is no ground for exempting this particular event from the general rule. Calvin's silence is explained not by any hesitation on his part but by his concern to treat issues in an orderly fashion. This teaching belongs to the doctrines of providence and predestination and is therefore spelt out when Calvin responds to Pighius's last four books, in his 1552 *Eternal Predestination of God*⁴⁴ It is already found in the 1539 *Institutio* and is strengthened by the addition of new material in the definitive 1559 edition (3:23:7f.). Those who place a great emphasis on the separation of the doctrines of providence and predestination in the 1559 edition should note that the former could still exert a considerable influence upon the latter, even at a distance of two books.

IV. Humanity as Fallen

(1) *BONDAGE OF THE WILL*

The Fall affects both the intellect and the will. "We say that man's mind is smitten with blindness, so that of itself it can in no way reach the knowledge of the truth; we say that his will is corrupted by wickedness, so that he can neither love God nor obey his righteousness (320)." Fallen human intellect has become blind to the truth.⁴⁵ As a result of the Fall, the human will⁴⁶ and its choice⁴⁷ are in bondage, as is the mind

⁴³CO 6:295f.,332,351.

⁴⁴*Eternal Predestination* 121-24 (CO 8:313-17). For questions raised by this passage and by the teaching of *Inst.* 1:15:8; 3:23:8f., but not raised in *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, cf. Lane, "Did Calvin Believe in Freewill," 76f.

⁴⁵CO 6:286,317,320; cf. 6:333,352,370,396,400.

⁴⁶CO 6:279f.,295,298f.,303f.,325,399,402.

(298). To what are they in bondage? To sin, especially.⁴⁸ Also to Satan,⁴⁹ to iniquity (325) and to the desires of the flesh (383).

Pighius objected to Luther's doctrine of the bondage of the will. He criticized him for stating that free choice is a reality in name only and cannot but sin (248).⁵⁰ Calvin was happy to support Luther here. He claims that it is scriptural to speak of the bondage, rather than the freedom of the will, citing Romans. Calvin defines his terms carefully. A *coerced* will is one which "does not incline this way or that of its own accord or by an internal movement of decision, but is forcibly driven by an external impulse." By contrast, a will is *self-determined* (*spontaneus*) when "of itself it directs itself in the direction in which it is led, when it is not taken by force or dragged unwillingly." Finally, the will is *bound* which "because of its corruptness is held captive under the authority of evil desires, so that it can choose nothing but evil, even if it does so of its own accord and gladly, without being driven by any external impulse." According to these definitions, all people have choice and this is self-determined. We commit evil of our own voluntary choosing, not as a result of coercion or force. But the choice is not free because it is driven to evil of necessity, by innate human wickedness, and cannot seek anything but evil. It is because of the corruption of the will that it is "held captive under the yoke of sin and therefore of necessity wills in an evil way." Thus bondage brings necessity, but is nonetheless a voluntary rather than coerced bondage (279f.).

Calvin's vocabulary in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* is richer than elsewhere.⁵¹ The human will is at all times self-determined (*spontaneus*), willing of itself (*ultro*), of its own accord (*sponte*) and willfully (*voluntate*). The choices of the will are voluntary or willful (*voluntarius*).⁵² The same point is made in the *Institutio* but with less linguistic precision. *Spontaneus* is used twice, but both times of God.⁵³ *Sponte* occurs more frequently, but only three times (all in 1539) with reference to human choice. We love ourselves *sponte* (2:8:54) and are capable of *sponte* shunning

⁴⁷CO 6:247,253,260,263,282,287,293f.,299,303,338,399.

⁴⁸CO 6:263,279f.,293,295,300,307,322,325,360,379,399,402.

⁴⁹CO 6:254,283,286,383.

⁵⁰Luther, *Assertio*, art.36 (WA 7:142).

⁵¹For another example of this, see the discussion of 'habit' in V.2, below. In the conclusion of this paragraph I have made use of Rick Wevers' concordance of the 1559 *Institutio*.

⁵²The frequency of these words is as follows: *spontaneus* - 14; *ultro* - 4; *sponte* - 27; *voluntate* (the adverb) - 2; *voluntarius* - 43.

⁵³*Inst.* 3:14:6, 3:20:3.

the light of God's truth (2:10:15). On the other hand, the Egyptians would never *sponte* have chosen to give to the fleeing Israelites (2:4:6). Clearly, in the *Institutio* Calvin is not using the word carefully and in a technical way, as he does in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. *Ultero* is used three times to refer to the spontaneity of human choice, twice in 1539 and once in 1559.⁵⁴ But Calvin's preferred term, in this context used six times in 1539 and seven times in 1559, is *voluntarius*.⁵⁵ He argues that although fallen humanity is in bondage to sin and it is necessary and unavoidable, the important thing is that it is voluntary.

The language in the *Institutio* is less varied and less precise. Calvin never there affirms that the will is self-determined (*spontaneus*), as Hoitenga correctly notes. But he is wrong to state that in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* Calvin teaches a "self-determination of the will" which he opposes in the *Institutio*.⁵⁶ Whatever Hoitenga means philosophically by this term, the manner in which Calvin's defines *spontaneus* does not significantly add to his repeated affirmations (in the *Institutio* as well as in the present work) that the will chooses evil of itself (*ultero*) and of its own accord (*sponte*) and that this choice is willful or voluntary (*voluntarius*). The difference between *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* and the *Institutio* is simply that in the former Calvin defines his position more carefully and with a greater technical precision than elsewhere. There is no substantive difference on this matter between the two works.

It follows from the universal corruption of human nature that no good will is possible before the operation of grace. Calvin argues this at length, appealing repeatedly to Augustine.⁵⁷ Augustine teaches that fallen humanity is "unable not only to will or resolve anything good, but even to conceive the thought of it" (325). It follows, therefore, that unredeemed humanity is unable to obey God's law.⁵⁸ This is because "since the worth of good works depends not on the act itself but on perfect love for God, a work will not be righteous and pure unless it proceeds from a perfect love of God" (249). The purpose of the law is not to show us what we are capable of

⁵⁴*Inst.* 2:2:7, 2:3:11, 2:5:1.

⁵⁵*Inst.* 2:3:5,12, 2:4:1, 2:5:1f. It is hard to be certain when *voluntate* is a noun or an adverb, but the latter is likely in *Inst.* 2:2:6, 2:3:5,13, all from 1539.

⁵⁶Hoitenga, *Calvin and Will*, 151. A. Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* (Oxford: OUP, 1949) 386, proposes for *spontaneus* the simple meaning 'voluntary.'

⁵⁷E.g. *CO* 6:304,311,313,320-22,325. Cf. V.1, below.

⁵⁸*CO* 6:248-51,259,266f.,313,346-48,356.

but rather to reveal our inability.⁵⁹ The law “cannot make [sinners] good but can only convict them of guilt” (259). Pighius’ objection is that there can be no obligation without ability,⁶⁰ as with the Pelagian argument that ‘ought implies can.’

Calvin replies, with Augustine, that this argument is true—but of human nature as created, *not* as fallen (313). As Augustine says, God commands things that fallen human beings cannot do so that we should know what we should seek of his grace (330). Pighius also argues that God’s commands, warnings and exhortations are given in vain unless it is within our power to obey. Calvin draws heavily on Augustine’s *Rebuke and Grace* in responding to this.⁶¹

Pighius accused Luther and the other Reformers of “condemning the whole of human nature as it is marred and corrupted after the fall” (265) and finding it guilty of such perversity that it can act only in an evil manner (350). Calvin accepts the charge, maintaining that “it was not some portion in man that became corrupted, as Pighius with his unholy philosophical imagination conceives, but ... the whole of human nature was subjected to depravity” (306). This view he defends from Scripture (351f.) and from Augustine (353f.). He also, here as elsewhere, cites against Pighius the canons of the Second Council of Orange, the first of which stated that Adam’s sin changed human nature in its entirety for the worse and rejected as Pelagian the idea that “only the body was subjected to corruption, the freedom of the soul remaining unharmed” (363).⁶² This appeal to the council was shrewd as Pighius prided himself on holding to the church’s definition of the faith.⁶³ Pighius, like Erasmus before him, was a victim of the fact that the condemnation of semi-Pelagianism at Orange was overlooked from the tenth century to 1538.⁶⁴

The doctrine of original sin plays a key role in the debate between Calvin and Pighius. The latter, in expounding the first of his *Controversies*,⁶⁵ posited a novel

⁵⁹CO 6:259f.,346f.,349f.,376f.

⁶⁰CO 6:259f.,313,327-30,346-48,387

⁶¹CO 6:247,327-32,339-46,358,381f.,390,393,399f.

⁶²Calvin repeatedly accused Pighius of Pelagianism (CO 6:304,309f.,336,338f.,360,363-65,372,384,397).

⁶³CO 6:268,270,272,289,318,326,357,359,363,391.

⁶⁴The medievals relied on compilations for their knowledge of the councils; these compilations, including the most influential, the ninth-century Pseudo-Isidorian *Decretals*, did not include Orange. Thus the canons of this council were unknown and unquoted from the tenth century until 1538, when Peter Crabbe published his two-volume *Concilia omnia* (Cologne: P. Quentel, 1538); see H. Bouillard, *Conversion et grace chez S. Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Aubier, 1944) 98–102,114–21.

⁶⁵*Controversiarum, quibus nunc exagitur Christi fides et religio[,] diligens et luculenta explicatio*, first published in 1541 in two parts and often reprinted with slightly different titles. Cf. Jedin,

theory of original sin according to which the only effects of the fall of Adam were the introduction of death and the imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin to all humanity. There was no talk of the corruption of human nature as a result of the Fall. The lust that human beings experience derives from nature as created and was experienced by Adam before the Fall. This issue resurfaces in the debate with Calvin over free choice, where Calvin points out that Pighius is heretical by the criteria of Roman Catholic orthodoxy. The same conclusion was reached by the delegates at the Council of Trent,⁶⁶ and Pighius's material on the first controversy was placed on the *Index of Prohibited Books* at Lisbon in 1624.⁶⁷

Calvin accuses Pighius of locating the "corruption which derives from our first ancestor" in the members of the body alone (332). The will is deprived by original sin of nothing but its control over the body (304f.). Pighius claimed that Adam's fall led to the loss of supernatural gifts, but not to any loss of natural endowments (360f.). Calvin objects to the latter, but not to the former idea.⁶⁸ He explains carefully how natural feelings have been corrupted. Feelings such as marital or parental love, sorrow at bereavement and fear of danger derive from creation, not from sin, but have been corrupted and become evil. Natural (such as parental or marital) loves, originally good, have become defiled and spoiled. Even desire for honourable things has been blemished by excess, to say nothing of the lust⁶⁹ for evil things (361f.).

Pighius repeatedly accused Calvin of Manicheism, on the grounds that he taught that human nature is evil and that people have no free choice. Calvin has no difficulty in rebutting the charge, appealing to the distinction between humanity as created and as fallen. The Manichees taught that human nature was evil as created; Calvin and the Reformers teach that it has become evil because it has been corrupted through the voluntary fall of Adam. The former taught that it is substantially evil; the latter

Studien, 34-40. For Pighius's doctrine of original sin, cf. J. Feiner, *Die Erbsündenlehre Albert Pighes. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der kath. Kontroverstheologie in der Reformationszeit*, dissertation of Pontifica Universitas Gregoriana ([Zurich]: [1940]). I am preparing an article on Pighius's doctrine of original sin which will include some hitherto unknown primary material.

⁶⁶H. Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, vol. 2 (London: T. Nelson, 1961) 145,153,162.

⁶⁷F. H. Reusch, *Der Index der verbotenen Bücher*, vol. 1 (Bonn: Cohen, 1883) 565.

⁶⁸In the 1539 *Institutio* Calvin approves the Augustinian and scholastic distinction that through the Fall humanity's *naturalia dona* were corrupted and the *gratuita* lost (2:2:16; 2:5:19). In the 1559 edition the contrast becomes, as here, *naturalia* versus *supernaturalia* (2:2:4,12). Hoitenga, *Calvin and Will*, 73-91,100-105, accuses Calvin of not taking this Augustinian formula seriously enough.

⁶⁹Calvin uses the noun *concupiscentia* six times (*CO* 6:300,366,383,391,401f.) and the verb five times (*CO* 6:267,324,355,362). In seven of these occurrences Calvin is citing Augustine or Pseudo-Augustine.

teach rather an accidental corruption of nature and one that can be reversed by grace.⁷⁰ It is noteworthy that Calvin in this context repeatedly invokes the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accidents.⁷¹ He contrasts the teaching of the Manichees, that evil is part of the substance of human nature, inherent to it through its origin, with the teaching of the Reformers that human nature was created good and that, while it has become evil, this evil is ‘accidental.’ Calvin’s use of the Aristotelian distinction is fundamental to his argument. It is, one might say, not merely accidental to it but part of its substance. “Without this distinction it is not surprising if [Pighius] gets everything confused.”⁷²

(2) NECESSITY VERSUS COERCION

The bondage of the will means that fallen human beings cannot *but* sin. Fallen humanity sins by necessity. This appears to run counter to Augustine’s belief that people retain free choice even as sinners. But Calvin took great pains, especially in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, to counter the idea that he was opposed to Augustine at this point. The whole of Book 3 and much of the rest of the work are devoted to this.⁷³

Central to his case is the distinction between necessity and coercion.⁷⁴ Necessity he defines as “a fixed, steady state in which a thing cannot be otherwise than it is.” He agrees with Aristotle that necessity is the opposite of “the existence of alternative possibilities” (335). The necessity to sin means that sinners cannot other than sin. But this necessity is imposed by the corruption of the will and innate human wickedness. Sinners are not coerced or forced by any external impulse but instead sin voluntarily. The necessity is self-determined (279f.).

Pighius would not accept this distinction between necessity and coercion. He maintained that necessity is incompatible with either sin or virtue. Calvin contests this point by citing the examples of God and the devil. God can only be good, but is no less worthy of praise. The devil can only be evil, but is no less culpable. In using these

⁷⁰CO 6:260,262-64,308f.,350f.,372. Calvin once accuses Pighius of being a Manichee (CO 6:361).

⁷¹CO 6:263,264,284,290,331,361,381. See further on this in Lane, “Influence,” 130-32.

⁷²CO 6:361. The distinction referred to is that between human nature as created whole and its accidental corruption, thus combining the two distinctions mentioned in this paragraph.

⁷³For the argument that Augustine believed in the necessity of sin, cf. CO 6:293,296,299-302,328,331-35.

⁷⁴F. Wendel, *Calvin. The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought* (London: Collins, 1963) 190f., points to the prior use of the distinction by Luther and Bucer.

examples Calvin was following Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, both of whom he cited. Pighius falls back on the position that necessity is incompatible not with will as such but with the human condition on earth. This is effectively to concede the validity of the distinction itself, but to question whether it applies in the present case.

Aristotle acknowledges that we can impose a necessity upon ourselves by our free actions, such as acquiring an addiction.⁷⁵ Calvin appeals to this, with the difference that the free action becomes Adam's free choice at the beginning (333-36).

(3) *FREE WILL?*

Pighius repeatedly appeals to the fact that Augustine affirmed the free choice of the will while Calvin denied it. Calvin was well aware of this, but sought to go behind the words used to the substance of what is taught. He had already conceded in his 1539 *Institutio* that there is a sense in which fallen human beings do have free choice: not an equal choice of good and evil but in that they sin by will and not by coercion (2:2:7). They have psychological, not ethical, freedom of choice. He had also there admitted that Augustine could on occasions affirm free choice, while elsewhere teaching the bondage of the will. Calvin conceded the terminological difference between Augustine and himself, while maintaining that there was no difference in doctrine (2:2:8).

Calvin takes the same line in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*:

If freedom is opposed to coercion, I both acknowledge and consistently maintain that choice is free, and I hold anyone who thinks otherwise to be a heretic. If, I say, it were called free in the sense of not being coerced nor forcibly moved by an external impulse, but moving of its own accord, I have no objection. (279)⁷⁶

But in his view it is best not to use the term in this way, since it only serves to foster the illusion that fallen sinners have ethical free will. Calvin also objects to this usage on scriptural grounds:

In any case, it does not even seem to agree very well with the usage of Scripture. For freedom and bondage are mutually contradictory, so that he who affirms the one denies the other. Accordingly, if the human will is in bondage, it cannot be said at the same time to be free, except improperly. (279)

⁷⁵See further on this in Lane, "Influence," 130f.

⁷⁶Schulze, *Calvin's Reply to Pighius*, 39, n.64, suggests that Calvin is also thinking of Bucer, who followed Augustine at this point.

Calvin believed that his difference with Augustine on this point was not doctrinal but purely terminological. Pighius had disputed this and so Calvin was forced tediously to defend his case, passage by passage.⁷⁷

Calvin agrees with Pighius that all sin is voluntary and cites Ambrose and Augustine approvingly to that effect.⁷⁸ Sin is voluntary both in that we are sinners because of Adam's voluntary fall⁷⁹ and because sin arises from our evil wills (299). But Calvin rejects Pighius's claim (based especially on the early Augustine) that because it is voluntary it can be avoided.⁸⁰ He cites Aristotle to demonstrate that a sin which cannot be avoided can nonetheless be voluntary (335f.). Fallen humanity is subject to a bondage that is voluntary, not coerced, so sin is at once both voluntary and necessary.⁸¹

Hoitenga criticizes Calvin for teaching that fallen will has lost *all* inclination to goodness. He accuses him of taking his doctrine beyond what is required to exclude semi-Pelagianism.⁸² His criticism does not stop there. He also accuses Calvin of teaching "nearly the complete destruction of [the will's] natural components" and that through sin the will was able to "destroy its very own *nature* to such a great extent."⁸³ He criticizes Calvin for stating that "man, using free will badly, has lost both himself and his will."⁸⁴ But these words are Augustine's rather than Calvin's.⁸⁵ In their wider context in Augustine they do not actually imply that the faculty of will is destroyed, and the same is true for Calvin. The problem comes because Hoitenga jumps from Calvin's statement that fallen humanity is "deprived of free choice" to pose the question, "with no difference between a corrupted choice and no choice at all?"⁸⁶ But Calvin explicit states, in the context of his careful definition of terms, that

⁷⁷Book 3, esp. CO 6:292-4,301-3,310-19,321f.,325. Also in CO 6:329,340f.,357f.

⁷⁸CO 6:286f.,299,303,318,359,374.

⁷⁹See n.91, below.

⁸⁰CO 6:296f.,328,331-33,348f. Pighius likewise cites the early Augustine for the idea that there can be no blame where there is necessity (CO 6:328,331-33).

⁸¹CO 6:280,302,333,335,

⁸²Hoitenga, *Calvin and Will*, 73-91. Hoitenga repeatedly criticizes Calvin for not taking seriously enough the 'Augustinian principle' (n.68, above), but also acknowledges that Augustine may himself be guilty of the errors that he detects in Calvin (122). My perception is that Hoitenga wishes to make Calvin not more Augustinian but more Thomist.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 73,89 (his emphasis).

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 87, where the reference should be *Inst.* 2:2:8, not 2:2:7.

⁸⁵*Enchiridion* 30:9, also quoted in CO 6:293,295,336. Hoitenga does note that Calvin was "expositing Augustine."

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 74.

fallen human beings have a choice that is self-determined, that this choice is free in the sense of not being coerced and that sinners do evil through their own voluntary choosing (279f.). To criticize Calvin for teaching that fallen will has lost all inclination to goodness is fair; to criticize him for teaching that it is in total bondage to sin is fair; to criticize him for teaching the near destruction of the will and its choice itself is not fair.⁸⁷

(4) RESPONSIBILITY?

Are fallen human beings, whose wills are in bondage to sin, responsible? Pighius argues that blame and responsibility imply that it is in our power to avoid sin. Calvin replies that while sin may be inevitable, nothing else is responsible for our sin except our evil will and that it has that character because of its inherited corruption (348f.). In this answer we see two different grounds on which human responsibility is defended.

First, while fallen humans sin inevitably and of necessity, their sin is nonetheless voluntary. The necessity, as we have seen, arises not from any external coercion or force but from fallen human nature. The sinner is simply acting in accord with character and so is as responsible, as are God and Satan. Calvin repeatedly affirms that sin is our fault. Our inability to fulfil the law is our fault and we are to blame.⁸⁸ Augustine is cited to the effect that our failure and the ensuing punishment are our fault.⁸⁹ The reprobate perish by their own fault (385). Sin is culpable because the desire is voluntary (336).

This ground is necessary, but not sufficient, to establish human responsibility. To what extent are we responsible for our fallen natures? We also breathe inevitably and of necessity, not because of any external coercion or force but in accord with human nature. Calvin would agree that such action cannot be blameworthy. Sinning, however, is blameworthy because the nature from which it proceeds is corrupt and blameworthy. But are we responsible for having such a nature? If not, are we actually responsible for our sins? Calvin argues that it is we, rather than God, who are responsible for our present plight. On what grounds? Calvin affirms that human corruption and bondage to sin is 'man's fault,' but by this he means *Adam's* as

⁸⁷For more on the issue of the destruction of the will and Calvin's denial of this, cf. V.2, below.

⁸⁸CO 6:259,328.

⁸⁹CO 6:336,342.

opposed to God's, not *ours* as opposed to Adam's.⁹⁰ The necessity to which we are subject arises from Adam's voluntary fall, his voluntary fault. Blame for sin is deserved as the *origin* of sin is voluntary.⁹¹

How satisfactory is this answer? Calvin could with justice affirm that "we do not locate the origin of our wickedness in creation or in the work of God, but in the fault of our first ancestor" (351). The fault is Adam's, not God's. But is it *ours*? Calvin argues that we are responsible for our sin because it flows from our wicked natures. But while he establishes *human* (as opposed to divine) responsibility for that nature (through the Fall), he fails to establish *individual* responsibility. Augustine does maintain individual responsibility by affirming that all human beings sinned 'in Adam.' The issue is one of order. Are we guilty of the Fall and therefore, as a punishment, corrupt and sinful (Augustine)? Or are we born sinful and corrupt as a result of the Fall and therefore guilty (Calvin)? By making the Fall a corporate act of the whole human race Augustine offers a reason why all people, and not just Adam, are responsible. Calvin evades this issue and contents himself with establishing Adam's responsibility. An infant is guilty because of its sinful nature and has a sinful nature because of Adam's sin. But why should an infant be penalized because of Adam's sin? Augustine, unlike Calvin, offers an answer to that question.

These discussions may appear amusingly arcane to contemporary post-Darwinian theologians. But the issue is more contemporary than many realize. Unless one takes a strict Pelagian view that all are born morally neutral, one has to concede that human sin is at least in part the result of fallen human nature. Is it pure coincidence that so many billions have all happened to opt for sin? But who is responsible for that fallen nature? Is it simply the way in which humanity has evolved over millions of years? If so, are we more responsible for sinning than for breathing?⁹² Or is it that the human race was created (whether or not via evolution) without sin and at some point opted to rebel against God? If the latter, we are immediately back with Augustine and Calvin.

⁹⁰CO 6:263f.,281f.,284,290,331f.,351,361,381.

⁹¹CO 6:263f.,281f.,284,290,295f.,300,332,335f.,351,361,381.

⁹²It was because Pighius had attributed the propensity to sin to human nature *as created* that Calvin could turn the tables on him and accuse him of being a Manichee (CO 6:360f.).

V. Conversion

(1) *Sola gratia*

The discussion of humanity as fallen has shown very clearly that the bound will cannot make any move towards goodness. One of the points that Calvin repeatedly disputes with Pighius is whether it is possible for fallen human nature to make any preparation for the reception of grace.⁹³ Pighius repeatedly affirms that sinners can make the first move towards God, to prepare themselves to receive his grace, which Calvin denies, frequently with the aid of Augustine. Calvin, like Augustine, never tires of repeating that “the will is prepared by the Lord.”⁹⁴ The will is prepared by antecedent⁹⁵ or prevenient⁹⁶ grace. It is always God who makes the first move. Grace is prevenient, preceding every human thought, will or action.⁹⁷ It is wrong to say that we anticipate God.⁹⁸

Grace is also efficacious.⁹⁹ Prevenient grace is not merely sufficient, bringing to the human will “freedom of contrary choice.” Calvin is aware of and rejects what would later be known as the Arminian view, that God “offers light to human minds, and it is in their power to choose to accept or to refuse it, and he moves their wills in such a way that it is in their power to follow his movement or not to follow it” (322). “Grace is not offered to us in such a way that afterwards we have the option either to

⁹³CO 6:248,306f.,308,312,316,321,325,329,352,354,362-67,370,379f.,382f.,387-90,393f.

⁹⁴CO 6:287,289,295,299,304f.,308,316,323,329f.,341,343f.,354,392. The allusion to Prov. 8:35 (LXX) is sometimes explicit.

⁹⁵CO 6:304,354.

⁹⁶CO 6:312,392.

⁹⁷Calvin four times uses the term *praeveniens gratia* (CO 6:368,370), but repeatedly uses the verb *praevenire* and its derivatives (CO 6:295,304-306,312,352,354,364,368,381,383,386,388, 390,392) to express the fact that God, or his grace, acts before any human response. The verb is translated in a variety of ways: come first, go before, precede, preempt, take the initiative. The fact that God’s grace takes the initiative is also often taught without the use of this word group (e.g. CO 6:288f.,307-11,314,316,319,321,363-66,382-91).

⁹⁸Calvin uses the word *praevenire* (CO 6:306,310).

⁹⁹E.g. CO 6:310f.,313-17,320-26,352-55,368f.,374f. Calvin refers to the *efficacia* of the Spirit/grace (CO 6:351,359), states that the Spirit/grace work *efficaciter* (CO 6:254, 310f., 324, 326, 345, 354,396), calls God’s work *efficax* (CO 6:254,310,344,352,396,403) and quotes Augustine’s reference (*Grace and Free Choice* 16:32) to the *efficacissimas vires* that God provides for the will (CO 6:317,323,330). The verb *efficire* is used frequently. Calvin never refers to grace as ‘irresistible.’ He states that the saints resist grace (CO 6:265) but also that prevenient grace does not leave us as ready to resist as to obey (CO 6:380: the same point with the verb *refragari* appears in CO 6:352f., 396) and quotes Augustine to the effect that when God wishes to make the human soul whole it will not resist (CO 6:400).

submit or to resist" (352f.).¹⁰⁰ Instead, conversion is "entirely the work of grace" and "Paul bears witness that God does not bring about in us [merely] that we are able to will what is good, but also that should will it right up to the completion of the act" (353).

So radical is the work of God that Calvin calls it the creation of a new heart, citing Psalm 51:10.¹⁰¹ God replaces the heart of stone with a heart of flesh, as Ezekiel puts it.¹⁰² This language, although it is biblical, led to misunderstanding.

(2) DESTRUCTION OF THE WILL?

If conversion is a new creation, does it involve the destruction of the will? In the 1539 *Institutio* Calvin at times appears to teach this. God destroys (*aboleat*) our depraved will and substitutes a good will from himself. It is wrong to suggest that the will obeys grace as a voluntary attendant (2:3:7). The heart of stone is replaced by a heart of flesh so that "whatever is of our own will is effaced. What takes its place is wholly from God."¹⁰³ God does not merely assist the weak will; he makes (*efficere*) the will (2:3:9). Chrysostom's statement that "Whom he draws he draws willingly" is to be rejected (2:3:10). In short, the beginning of regeneration is "to wipe out what is ours" (2:5:15). If Calvin was understood to teach that grace destroys the will he must himself bear part of the blame. But in fact he qualified this teaching. After the last-quoted passage he adds that Augustine rightly taught that "grace does not destroy the will but rather restores it." The will is said to be made new (*nova creari*) inasmuch as it receives a new nature.

Despite these qualifications, Calvin was accused by Pighius of teaching that grace destroys the will.¹⁰⁴ Calvin retorted by accusing Pighius of willfully misunderstanding him, but his explanation of his teaching is so much fuller and clearer than the 1539

¹⁰⁰Cf. also *CO* 6:316f.,379f.,396.

¹⁰¹*CO* 6:353,367,378f.,393. Cf. *CO* 6:345 where Calvin calls conversion a "new creation."

¹⁰²Calvin cites Augustine's statements that the stony heart is removed (*CO* 6:304,316,329,354) and cites Ezekiel's prophecy (11:19f., 36:26f.) of the replacement of the heart of stone by one of flesh (*CO* 6:352f.,368f.,375,377,379f.,389).

¹⁰³*Inst.* 2:3:6. Cf. 2:3:8. Hoitenga (*Calvin and Will*, 118f.) takes this language at its face value. He talks of "Calvin's analogy of the unconverted will to a stone," not acknowledging that the analogy is Ezekiel's. He does not take seriously Calvin's qualification of this language, as expounded in this section.

¹⁰⁴Pighius did not allow sufficiently for the element of humanist exaggeration in Calvin's rhetoric. Cf. R. W. Richgels, "Scholasticism Meets Humanism in the Counter-Reformation. The Clash of Cultures in Robert Bellarmine's Use of Calvin in the *Controversies*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 6:1 (1975) 61-66.

Institutio that Calvin must bear at least part of the blame for Pighius's misunderstanding. Calvin reaffirms that in conversion "whatever belongs to our will is abolished and what takes its place is entirely from God" and that "conversion is the work of God alone" (375f.). Pighius had interpreted this to mean that conversion involves the destruction of the substance or faculty of the will and its replacement by another.¹⁰⁵ Against Calvin he cited Ambrose's statement that the substance of the heart is not removed.

Calvin retorted that he had never taught the destruction or removal of the substance of the heart or will. What is changed in conversion is not the faculty or substance of willing, nor is it merely the actions of the will. Instead it is something in-between, the quality or 'habit' (*habitus*) of the will.¹⁰⁶ 'Habit' was a scholastic technical term and, as with the terms used to affirm the voluntary character of the will, Calvin in this work makes use of more precise and technical language than elsewhere. Although he maintains that the distinction between substance and habit was the plain teaching of his 1539 *Institutio*, he fails to introduce this distinction into any edition of that work. But the point that it makes, that the faculty of the will is not destroyed, is taken up in the 1559 edition.

For support in this distinction he turned to a passage of Bernard which he had quoted in 1539, which distinguishes between the will itself, an evil will and a good will. The first of these signifies the faculty or substance of the will. The other two signify qualities or habits of the will. The faculty of will is permanent in humanity, but the evil will comes from the Fall and the good will from regeneration. The will remains as created, the change taking place in its habit, not its substance.¹⁰⁷ It is true that "everything which is ours should be obliterated" but this means "what we have in ourselves apart from God's creation"—i.e. "the corruption which abides not in some part of us but throughout our nature." Sin has affected the whole of human nature so that fallen humanity cannot think, choose, will, attempt or do anything but evil. It is in this sense that all that is ours is destroyed and renovated (380f.).

Calvin also qualified his earlier rejection of Chrysostom's saying that God draws us willingly. He accepted the statement of Ambrose that those who serve Christ or Satan do so voluntarily, while quickly adding that those whom Christ wishes to will the good he causes to do such by his Spirit. Christ does not draw us violently or

¹⁰⁵Pighius, *De libero arbitrio* f.89a-b.

¹⁰⁶CO 6:377-379,392. Cf. Lane, "Influence," 132.

¹⁰⁷CO 6:377f.,381,392.

unwillingly, says Augustine, and we therefore follow him of our own accord (*sponte*) but of a will which he has made. Chrysostom's mistake was not to teach that we follow voluntarily but to suppose that we follow in a movement that is all our own (395f.). God creates a new heart in his people, in order to have "willing servants who follow of their own accord" (367). Finally (quoting Augustine¹⁰⁸) in conversion "it is certain that it is we who will when we will, but it is he who causes us to will the good. It is certain that it is we who act when we act, but it is he who, by giving the will fully effective powers, causes us to act" (330). "It is not that we ourselves do nothing or that we without any movement of our will are driven to act by pressure from him, but that we act while being acted upon by him" (337).

Pighius accused Calvin of reducing human beings to stones by denying their ability to act well. Calvin denied, this affirming that we do think choose, will and act—but only by God's grace (372f.). Calvin also pointed out that Augustine spoke positively about the human role in order to safeguard the fact that "God is working in a human being, and not in a stone, since he has a will born and prepared for willing" (311).¹⁰⁹ The fuller teaching of Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* leaves its mark on the 1559 *Institutio*. The statement that "whatever is of our own will is effaced" is qualified:

I say that the will is effaced; not in so far as it is will, for in man's conversion what belongs to his primal nature remains entire. I also say that it is created anew; not meaning that the will now begins to exist, but that it is changed from an evil to a good will. (2:3:6)

Augustine is quoted with approval to the effect that when God acts upon us we also act. "He indicates that man's action is not taken away by the movement of the Holy Spirit, because the will, which is directed to aspire to good, is of nature" (2:5:14). The qualification to the destruction of the will that is found in 1539 is further reinforced: but even if there is something good in the will, it comes from the pure prompting of the Spirit. Yet because we are by nature endowed with will, we are with good reason said to do those things the praise for which God rightly claims for himself. (2:5:15)

In the 1539 *Institutio* Calvin came dangerously close to teaching the destruction of the will. Pighius's challenge on this point, so vehemently rejected by Calvin, did cause him to qualify his teaching, first in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* and later in the 1559 *Institutio*. The reason why he allows himself to be moved in this

¹⁰⁸*Grace and Free Choice* 16:32. The same passage is also quoted in *CO* 6:317,323.

¹⁰⁹Also *CO* 6:313,358, all with reference to Augustine's *The Merits and Forgiveness of Sins* 2:5:6 (*NPNF* 5:46).

direction is that the debate concerned the teaching of Augustine, for whom he had such a high regard.¹¹⁰

VI. The Christian

(1) LIBERTY

Calvin was reluctant to concede free will to the fallen sinner since he saw freedom primarily in ethical terms, as freedom to do the good. He quotes Augustine's comments that for the fallen sinner, "free choice is free from righteousness and in bondage to sin" (293) and that "the will is free insofar as it has been liberated" (298). While there is a sense, which Calvin concedes, in which the fallen sinner retains free choice, the only freedom that really interests Calvin is that which is given by grace: freedom from bondage to sin. Believers enjoy freedom from the dominion of the flesh. They have been set free from sin and the flesh and become willingly obedient to righteousness.¹¹¹ It does not detract from this freedom that they serve God. The alternative to his service is not pure autonomy but bondage to law, sin and death. It is the willing obedience to righteousness that is the only true freedom.¹¹²

Christian freedom is not fully attained in this life. Regeneration frees us from bondage to sin, but we do not yet enjoy the full possession of this freedom. While sin no longer reigns over us, it remains in us.¹¹³ However far the saints progress in this life, their obedience falls short of the standard of love laid down by the two great commandments (249). The remnants of the flesh struggle against the Spirit and so the Christian life is marked by a daily struggle against sin. Calvin maintains, against Pighius, that "the soul of the believer is by regeneration divided into two parts" (250). Underlying this dispute is both a different understanding of Christian experience and a different interpretation of Romans 7:7-25, which Calvin takes to refer to the regenerate. The 'flesh' in which sin dwells (v.18) is not simply the body, as Pighius maintains. The problem is, rather, that "both the human mind and the human will are not yet wholly reformed by the Spirit of God into newness of life, but in some part still smack of the flesh and the earth" (356f.).

¹¹⁰Cf. Lane, "Influence," 135-37

¹¹¹CO 6:293,295,300,303,305,307,312,367,389f.,400-402.

¹¹²CO 6:316,322, citing Augustine.

¹¹³CO 6:248-50,265-67,279,356f.

(2) COOPERATION WITH GRACE

Medieval Catholic theology, following Augustine, distinguished between operating and cooperating grace. Initially (operating) grace converts the will from evil to good. The converted will then desires the good and so works together with (cooperating) grace. Calvin was extremely suspicious of the concept of cooperating grace as he found it in Peter Lombard, expressing his reservations in the 1539 *Institutio*.¹¹⁴ Why was he so suspicious? There were three errors that Catholic theology had built upon the idea, each of which Pighius exemplifies.

First, the idea of cooperation with grace could suggest that grace is not efficacious. Calvin feared that it would be taken to imply that “it is our right either to render it ineffectual by spurning the first grace, or to confirm it by obediently following it” (2:2:6). This was just how Pighius took it. Pighius erred in bringing cooperation into conversion in that we already cooperate at that stage (368). He held that God gives initial grace only to those who cooperate with it (369). Against this Calvin emphasizes his belief in the prevenient efficacious grace which, in Augustine’s words, “works without us to cause us to will.”¹¹⁵

Secondly, cooperation with grace can imply human merit. This is how Pighius took it, being misled in part by a faulty rendering of I Corinthians 15:10. There Paul qualified his claim that he worked harder than the other apostles with the comment that it was not him but the grace of God that was with him. The Vulgate omits the word ‘that’—*non ego autem sed gratia Dei mecum*. While the original implies that it was not Paul but the grace of God that was at work, the Vulgate implies rather that Paul worked with the help of God’s grace. It was not just Pighius but also Augustine who was led astray by the faulty reading.¹¹⁶ The point that Calvin is seeking to make is not that the human will is inactive: “we willingly allow that people act, but it is because God causes them so to do” (398). But he is reiterating the earlier teaching of the *Institutio* that when we obey God, we do not by some power of our own cooperate with him. It is throughout the Christian life, not just at the beginning, that God works in us to will and to do according to his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13) (353). We cooperate with God not “so that some contribution of [our] own is added in,” but “only in

¹¹⁴*Inst.* 2:2:6; 2:3:11-13.

¹¹⁵*CO* 6:316f.,342,368, citing *Grace and Free Choice* 17:33.

¹¹⁶*CO* 6:370,398. Calvin had already made this point in the 1539 *Institutio* (2:3:12). The Augustine passage is *Grace and Free Choice* 5:12.

accordance with the measure that [we] have received.” We act only to the extent that we are acted upon (355).¹¹⁷

Calvin is emphatic throughout this work that grace is not merited.¹¹⁸ Yet his rejection of merit is not absolute. “Merit, if he understands by it the worth of the act, I deny; but if it means simply obedience accepted by God, then I have no complaint” (336f.).¹¹⁹ He cites repeatedly and without disapproval Augustine’s statement that when God crowns our merits he crowns his own gifts.¹²⁰ He even quotes Augustine, without rebuke, to the effect that “even eternal life itself, which shall be enjoyed at the end” “will certainly be granted on the basis of preceding merits.” This is because Augustine went on to affirm that “those very merits, for which it is given, were themselves a gift” (337). The battle with Pighius concerned the relation between grace and the human will, so “now is not the place for a discussion about how men obtain righteousness before God” (312)—all the more so because on that issue Augustine supported Pighius more than Calvin.

Thirdly, cooperation with grace can imply that the gift of perseverance is given according to how we cooperate with earlier grace. This is an issue that concerned Calvin deeply. The effective operation of grace “does not happen once, so that people are subsequently left to themselves, but they are steered on a steady course, so that their perseverance in goodness is no less the gift of God than their beginning in it” (326). “By the continuous supply of his aid, [God] assists, increases, and strengthens that power which he has granted us, both for the completion of each particular work and for final perseverance through life” (317).¹²¹ Perseverance is not merited,¹²² but is a gift of God’s grace.¹²³ Calvin repeatedly cites Augustine to the effect that while Adam before the Fall was given grace sufficient to persevere should he so will, to the elect is given grace that also ensures that they shall so will.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷Cf. also CO 6:391,394f. The passages in the 1539 *Institutio* to which Calvin is referring are 2:2:6; 2:3:7,9,11f.

¹¹⁸CO 6:295,304,306-8,312,316,324-26,329,337,339,353-56,371f.,382f.,386,390-92,397,400f.

¹¹⁹Calvin alludes to his doctrine of ‘double justification’ in CO 6:248-50.

¹²⁰CO 6:318,337,386. Calvin had already cited it in the 1539 *Institutio* (2:5:2). That our good works and merits are gifts of God’s grace is also affirmed in CO 6:316f.,329,338 et al.

¹²¹Cf. also CO 6:311,353,355.

¹²²CO 6:324-26,353,356,397,401.

¹²³CO 6:323,325f.,329,340,355f.,400-404.

¹²⁴CO 6:324,355,401-403 citing from *Rebuke and Grace* 11:31-12:38.

Despite these misgivings, Calvin was not totally opposed to the idea of cooperation with grace. He was prepared to allow it in Augustine's sense. Initially God by his grace works 'without us' to turn us to himself. Thereafter, "since the will which has now been made good through the power of the Holy Spirit is ours, and we act by means of it after previously being acted upon by God, it is not surprising if a part of the action is ascribed to us." He acts 'with us' in the sense that "by the continuous supply of his aid, he assists, increases, and strengthens that power which he has granted us, both for the completion of each particular work and for final perseverance through life." He compares initial and subsequent grace to the transformation of a wild olive tree into one that is fit to bear fruit, followed by action of the root giving the olive the vigour to bear fruit (316f.). Calvin also makes use of the different operations of grace with the unconverted and the converted to extract himself from another difficulty (345f.).

Calvin disliked the idea of cooperation with grace. He rejected the idea that we need to supplement the grace of God or that we do good *independently* of grace. But he did not deny that the Christian, moved by grace, willingly obeys righteousness, does good and is rewarded. In *this* sense he did believe in cooperation with grace.

VII. The Christian in Glory

In this life the Christian begins to make progress, but does not reach perfection. The struggle against sin is lifelong. But in the age to come salvation will be complete. It is then that our wills will be truly free. To Adam before the Fall was given the ability of not sinning (*posse non peccare*). In the age to come, after the resurrection,¹²⁵ the redeemed will enjoy a much greater gift, where there is no more possibility of sin (*non posse peccare*) (401f.).

This teaching gave rise to an interesting controversy over the interpretation of a passage of Augustine. Augustine, in his *Rebuke and Grace*, contrasts the gift to Adam of *posse non peccare* with the gift to redeemed humanity of *non posse peccare*.¹²⁶ But *when* is the latter given? In the 1539 *Institutio* Calvin claimed that it is given here and now and that Augustine is not "speaking of a perfection to come after immortality" (2:3:13). His aim was not, of course, to defend any form of perfectionism but rather to

¹²⁵Elsewhere Calvin states that final deliverance from sin comes at death. Cf., Lane, "Did Calvin Believe in Freewill?", 85f.

¹²⁶*Rebuke and Grace* 12:33 (NPNF 5:485). I am grateful to David Wright for drawing my attention to the merits of Calvin's interpretation of this passage and to the literature mentioned in the next footnote.

defend his belief that grace is efficacious, that it so works that the sinner is not able to decline. Pighius protests vehemently, arguing that this latter grace (*non posse peccare*) is to be given after the final resurrection. Calvin concedes that the *fullness* of what Augustine describes is reserved for the resurrection, but maintains that it also applies to the present situation. He argues at length, from the wider context in Augustine, that the latter clearly intended the passage to refer to “the present situation of the saints” (401-404).

Calvin’s concession is not reflected in the *Institutio*. In 1539 Calvin had rejected the idea that Augustine was thinking of the future. In the 1541 French translation he had gone further and called the interpretation of it as referring to the future a mockery of the Sorbonnists. In *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* he claims that he does not deny “that the *fulness* of that perfection which [Augustine] there describes does not yet exist, nor is to be hoped for before the resurrection” (401). But this qualification is not reflected in the later editions of the *Institutio*, where the only modification in the text strengthens rather than qualifies the rejection of the future interpretation. This is now called Peter Lombard’s false interpretation (2:3:13). Whose interpretation is correct? It is hard to be definite. It is true (as Calvin argues) that the wider context in *Rebuke and Grace* is a discussion of the contrast between the grace given to Adam before the Fall and the grace given to the elect. The latter certainly refers to this life here and now, but not necessarily to the exclusion of its full fruition in the age to come. The gift of *non posse peccare* can in the context be interpreted to mean “unable to commit mortal sin, to apostatize” (12:35). This is how the passage is understood by the recent *Bibliothèque Augustinienne* edition of the work.¹²⁷

How does Augustine elsewhere tackle this theme? In *The City of God* the state of *non posse peccare* is referred to the age to come.¹²⁸ Elsewhere, in his *The Merits and Forgiveness of Sins* Augustine explicitly tackles the question of timing. Here he carefully argues the New Testament tension between the already and the not yet. With reference to our present topic he argues both that we cannot commit sin (I John 3:9) and that we are not without sin (I John 1:8). We enjoy the first-fruits now of what

¹²⁷ *Œuvres de Saint Augustin* vol.24 (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962) 344f., n.2. Cf. also A. Sage, “Les deux temps de grâce,” *Revue des études Augustiniennes* 7 (1961) 218f.

¹²⁸ *City of God* 22:30 (NPNF 2:510). Cf. *Contenance* 16 (NPNF 3:385) where it is again referred to the age to come and Augustine states that “this we presume not of any just man in this mortal life.”

we will enjoy fully in the future.¹²⁹ This supports the interpretation which Calvin gives in *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, but not the one-sided interpretation of the different editions of the *Institutio*.

VIII. Conclusion

Calvin's teaching on the bondage and liberation of the will in this treatise is very close to that of Augustine. This is partly thanks to Pighius, who quoted many passages of Augustine, forcing Calvin to engage in detail with the teaching of the church father. Augustine, while clearly teaching the bondage of the will and the sovereignty of grace, took care to preserve human free will and responsibility. Calvin was much more polemical in his assertion of human impotence and was reluctant to talk of free will. What Augustine had carefully safeguarded, Calvin grudgingly conceded. Calvin's reluctance manifested itself in his hostility to the term *liberum arbitrium* and in his ambivalence towards the idea of cooperation with grace.

Because of the pressure from Pighius and Augustine, Calvin makes concessions in this work. He develops teaching which is introduced into later editions of the *Institutio*, the 1559 edition in particular. This is seen especially in the more careful safeguard against the idea that conversion involves the destruction of the will. He makes concessions about the timing of *non posse peccare* which are ignored in later editions of the *Institutio*. He also expresses himself with greater care than elsewhere, making precise use of technical terms affirming the uncoerced voluntary character of the will and referring to the habit of the will.

This study has also raised some questions about Calvin's teaching. Does he really teach an 'intellectualist' view of unfallen humanity? Is his teaching on providence compatible with what he says about freedom from coercion? Does he truly establish the responsibility of individual fallen human beings for their sin? Is it fair to say that he teaches the destruction of the will by sin or by grace? Calvin's *Bondage and Liberation of the Will* is of interest because it develops more fully and more precisely than anywhere else his teaching on the will and because this produces developments which are found nowhere else.

¹²⁹*The Merits and Forgiveness of Sins* 8:10 (NPNF 5:48).