

# BIBLICAL WISDOM THEOLOGY AND CALVIN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

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Biblical wisdom theology significantly shaped Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper. The Wisdom dimension of Calvin's eucharistic theology is only one dimension of his thought. One can speak of the covenantal dimension, the kerygmatic dimension, and the eucharistic dimension and several others. In this paper I would like to focus on the Wisdom dimension. The biblical Wisdom school had developed a particular temper of piety and with this temper of piety went along certain tendencies in worship, tendencies which influenced Calvin profoundly. In recent years biblical scholars have made considerable progress in elucidating the theology of the Wisdom school.<sup>1</sup> Calvin, in the middle of the sixteenth century, was hardly aware of all that modern scholars have been able to show about this school, but he was aware of many of the characteristic insights of the school.<sup>2</sup>

## I.

### Calvin's Appreciation of Wisdom Theology

Let us begin with a look at Calvin's grasp of some of the basic insights of the Wisdom school aside from any relation these insights might have to the Lord's Supper. One would expect to get an indication of Calvin's awareness of this particular dimension of biblical theology from the Reformer's commentaries. This approach has some limitations even if in the end it yields the information we need. Calvin has not left us commentaries on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, or the Song of Solomon.<sup>3</sup> We cannot say as much as we might like, therefore, on how he may or may not have recognized the wisdom theology of these major statements of the school. He has, on the other hand, treated the Wisdom Psalms in his commentary on the Psalms.<sup>4</sup> There is a commentary on James, which, as we shall see, shows a certain recognition of its relation to the Solomonic tradition.<sup>5</sup> Calvin's greatest appreciation of biblical wisdom theology, however, is discovered in his commentaries on the Johannine writings where the wisdom theology is found in its Christian form.<sup>6</sup> There the Old Testament wisdom concepts are developed into the logos theology of the early Church. Let us look at some specific passages.

#### A. Prologue to the Gospel of John

Calvin's appreciation of biblical Wisdom theology is especially evident in his commentary on the prologue to the Gospel of John.<sup>7</sup> There Calvin begins by telling us that Christ is called the Word of God because he is the eternal Wisdom of God, the holy Wisdom from above.

I think he calls the Son of God 'the Word' (sermo) simply because, first, He is the eternal wisdom and will of God, and secondly because he is the express image of his purpose.

*Commentaries, IV, 7*

Throughout the remainder of the commentary on the prologue the word "Wisdom" is used as a synonym of "Word."<sup>8</sup> This is a crucial insight. As Calvin understands it, when John was speaking about the Word he had in mind the divine Wisdom.<sup>9</sup> Calvin had a rather surprising grasp of the Wisdom theology. This passage alone should be sufficient to make the point, but there is more.

In first book of the *Institutes* where he is developing his doctrine of the incarnation, Calvin calls attention to the logos theology of the prologue to the Gospel of John.<sup>10</sup> There, too, he tells us that “Word” basically means Wisdom,<sup>11</sup> but what is even more interesting is that he draws this idea out of two very important passages of what today we recognize as Wisdom literature, namely, the eighth chapter of Proverbs and the twenty-fourth chapter of Ecclesiasticus.

...“Word” means the everlasting Wisdom, residing with God, from which both all oracles and all prophecies go forth. For, as Peter testifies, the ancient prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ just as much as the apostles did [I Peter 1:10-11; cf. II Peter 1:21], and all who thereafter ministered the heavenly doctrine....And Moses clearly teaches this in the creation of the universe, setting forth this Word as intermediary. For why does he expressly tell us that God in his individual acts of creation spoke, Let this or that be done [Gen., ch. 1] unless so that the unsearchable glory of God may shine forth in his image?...And indeed, sane and modest men do not find obscure Solomon’s statement, where he introduces wisdom as having been begotten of God before time [Ecclus. 24:14, Vg.], and presiding over the creation of things and all God’s works [Prov. 8:22 ff.]....But John spoke most clearly of all when he declared that that Word, God from the beginning with God, was at the same time the cause of all things, together with God the Father [John 1:1-3]. For John at once attributes to the Word a solid and abiding essence, and ascribes something uniquely His own, and clearly shows how God, by speaking, was Creator of the universe. Therefore, inasmuch as all divinely uttered revelations are correctly designated by the term “word of God,” so this substantial Word is properly placed at the highest level, as the wellspring of all oracles. Unchangeable, the Word abides everlastingly one and the same with God, and is God himself.

*Institutes*, I, xiii, 7

Calvin may not have produced a commentary on Proverbs or on some of the other Wisdom books, but there is no question but that he had considerable insight into their meaning. That he related them to the logos theology of the Gospel of John is almost startling. Calvin anticipated some of the best scholarship of our day on the relationship of the Wisdom tradition to the Gospel of John.

At this point the Wisdom theology is primarily of interest to Calvin because it helps him understand the Johannine Christology. According to Calvin, to understand Christ as the wisdom of God helps us to understand how the Father has a certain priority to the Son, but at the same time one can understand that there was never a time when the Father was without the Son, because there was never a time when God was without wisdom. This thought was hardly original to Calvin. The most obvious place for Calvin to have found this idea is Augustine’s *De trinitate*.<sup>12</sup> It goes back to the logos theology of the early Fathers and beyond that to the Wisdom theology of Israel. Calvin, as is becoming more and more clear, was a thorough student of the church Fathers.<sup>13</sup> He had a particular appreciation of the logos theology of the Greek Fathers who developed Old Testament Wisdom theology in a Christian way. Calvin clearly understood what today we call the Wisdom Christology.

There is something else to be noted. The chief point that Calvin wants to make in this exposition of the prologue to the Gospel of John is that the Word of God is the source of life and light. It is a saving power, “The power of God unto salvation.” It is the Word, the divine Wisdom, who was with God from the beginning, whom the Gospel of John proclaims to be incarnate in the flesh of Jesus. This Jesus, as Son of the Father, is Savior of the world. He is the divine Wisdom, as Calvin understands it, who empowers, enlightens, and enlivens those who receive him by faith. Christ is the divine Wisdom who imparts to us Wisdom. It is because of his Word, the Word of grace and truth, that believers are brought from darkness to light. One easily gathers from a study of Calvin’s Commentary on the prologue to the Gospel of John that Calvin

understands in that crucial passage the sapiential bent of the fourth Gospel which modern scholarship has begun to point out.

More needs to be said about this sapiential bent. The sapiential approach to religion puts a high value on the place of teaching and preaching in the life of devotion. Wisdom theology is characterized by its emphasis on the Word. The Judaism in which Jesus was brought up gave a tremendous amount of time to the study of the sacred text, the scholarly exposition of the Scriptures, and the hearing of sermons which applied this scholarly work to the life of the community. The Wisdom school engendered a very scholarly sort of piety. It practiced a very devout sort of scholarship. The same was true of the early Christian Church. Studying Scripture, memorizing it, meditating on it, and interpreting it were regarded as the most sacred of tasks. They were among the most essential devotional disciplines. The study of Scripture was understood as worship in its most profound sense. This sapiential approach to religion, so characteristic of the biblical Wisdom school, obviously influenced Calvin profoundly. And, of course, Calvin was not the only sixteenth century Reformer to have received this influence.

Calvin's sapiential approach to Christian faith and life is particularly clear in his commentary on the prologue to the Gospel of John when he says,

For the knowledge of God is the door by which we enter into the enjoyment of all blessings. Since, therefore, God reveals Himself to us by Christ alone, it follows that we should seek all things from Christ. This doctrinal sequence should be carefully observed. Nothing seems more obvious than that we each take what God offers us according to the measure of our faith. But only a few realize that the vessel of faith and of the knowledge of God has to be brought to draw with.

*Commentaries, IV, 25*

From this passage it should be clear how important the knowledge of the truth is to our salvation.<sup>14</sup> This saving knowledge, received by faith, is far from being the same thing as being saved by education. For both the Wisdom School and for Calvin, the divine Wisdom is a rich and comprehensive Wisdom. The divine Wisdom is filled with every blessing, with power and vitality, with all the holiness and righteousness for which we hunger and thirst.<sup>15</sup> For the Wisdom theology as we find it in the Gospel of John and as we find it in Calvin the imparting of the divine Wisdom, in all its power, all its illumination, and all its vitality, is of the essence of God's saving work in Christ.

## **B. The Epistle of John**

A second place where Calvin's appreciation of the Wisdom theology is apparent is in the commentary on the beginning of the First Epistle of John.<sup>16</sup> Here we discover one of the marks of the Wisdom theology, namely, its appreciation of the transcendent nature of the Word of God.<sup>17</sup> For Calvin the Word of God is ultimately Christ. The Word which believers have heard and believed is the same Word who is from the beginning the divine Wisdom. We find this very clearly in Calvin's comments.

Furthermore, "Word" can be explained in two ways, either of Christ or of the teaching of the Gospel, by which salvation is brought to us. But since its substance is Christ and it contains nothing but that He who had been always with the Father was at last revealed to men, the first explanation seems to me more simple and natural. Moreover, it is established more fully from his Gospel that the Wisdom dwelling in God is called the Word.

*Commentaries, V, 235*

In substance the Word is Christ, God of God, light of light, very God of very God. Just as he did in the prologue of the Gospel of John, Calvin finds here in the beginning of the First Epistle of John that the Word of God is the divine Wisdom. The Word of God is a transcendent reality. In fact it is the fundamental transcendent reality of our salvation. Surely, if nothing else, this passage makes it clear that Calvin has understood the Wisdom theology not only of the Johannine literature, but of the logos theologians of the patristic age.

Another thing we notice in Calvin's commentary on First John is the Word of God's capacity to enliven. Wisdom as it is understood in Scripture is obviously far removed from the sort of abstract intellectualism that many associate with an education in philosophy, the humanities, and the sciences. Wisdom is a way of life, but then, more, it is a power, a sacred vitality. This, too, is a mark of the Wisdom theology. When the text speaks of "the Word of life" Calvin interprets this to mean the "vivifying Word."<sup>18</sup> This vivifying "Word of life" was with the Father, according to the text. Calvin comments:

This is true, not only from the foundation of the world, but also from all eternity; for always He was God, the fountain of life. And the power and capability of giving life was in the power of His eternal Wisdom.

*Commentaries, V, 235*

For Calvin the eternal Wisdom is a creative wisdom, a redemptive wisdom, and even a sanctifying wisdom and therefore it is a fountain of life. Wisdom is a power, a redemptive, transforming power.<sup>19</sup> The ability of the Word to transform human life is the basis of its authority. It is, in fact, its glory. It is this saving Word, this Word of life, this divine Wisdom which brings us into fellowship with God and restores the bond of love between us and God and between believers, one with another.<sup>20</sup>

As Calvin notes in his preface to the commentary on First John, this is an epistle which above all teaches us about love. The whole book teaches us and exerts us to love God and one another. It is appropriate, therefore, that First John begins with such a strong statement of the divinity of the Word, for this Word establishes the bond of love, and is therefore recognizable as the Divine Wisdom—the revelation of the secret council of God's will.<sup>21</sup>

### C. The Epistle of James

A very different aspect of the biblical Wisdom theology is found in the Epistle of James.<sup>22</sup> Calvin's recognition of this is rather startling. James, like the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament, is a collection of wise sayings on good conduct. Neither of these books, Proverbs or James, tells a story nor develops a systematic line of thought. Typical of the wisdom writers is this delight in collecting proverbs on the living of the godly life. As is well known, Luther had little appreciation for the moral concerns of James. It seemed much too bogged down in works righteousness. Calvin was of a different mind, as he tells us in the introduction to his Commentary on the Epistle of James. Without mentioning Luther by name Calvin refers to the fact that in his day there were those who were of the opinion that James was not as clear on the subject of the grace of Christ as an apostle ought to be. Calvin's response to this is that there is no reason all the New Testament writers should have to go over the same ground.

See how the writings of Solomon differ widely from the style of David. The former was concerned with the training of the outward man, and with handing down rules of social behaviour, while the latter is noted for his profound attention to the spiritual worship of God, peace of mind, God's loving-kindness, and the free promise of salvation. Such diversity does not make us praise one and condemn the other.

*Commentaries, III, 259*

What is surprising here is that Calvin, back in the sixteenth century, recognizes a Solomonic theology, that is, a wisdom theology. It is a distinct style of theology.<sup>23</sup> While Calvin does not use the term “Wisdom theology” the substance is certainly conveyed when he calls our attention to the difference between what he calls the writings of Solomon and those of David. When Calvin tells us that James is to the rest of the New Testament as the writings of Solomon were to the Old Testament we discover that the sixteenth century Reformer recognized in substance what contemporary biblical scholarship has so beautifully identified. Again we see that Calvin significantly anticipated more recent biblical scholarship.

The whole nature of Calvin’s piety was positively disposed toward some of those beautiful passages of the Epistle of James which speak of the character of Wisdom, for example, James 3:13-18.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Calvin’s commentary on this passage shows a sympathy with this kind of piety. Calvin appreciated the sort of wisdom that was calm and well composed, the kind of wisdom that was learned but without pretension.<sup>24</sup> Calvin admired simplicity, sincerity, and sobriety. The Epistle of James taught exactly the sort of piety that he so much admired. It was this kind of life which he hoped to live in Basel or Strasbourg when Farel challenged him to labor beside him in Geneva. Perhaps the pressure of the times, if nothing else, made him admire the calm and peaceful nature of heavenly wisdom.

#### D. The Wisdom Psalms

Let us turn our attention now to Calvin’s commentary on several of the Wisdom psalms to get an idea of how sensitive Calvin was to the thought world of the Wisdom writers.<sup>25</sup> In his commentary on the first psalm Calvin tells us that the sum of this psalm’s teaching is that “they are blessed who apply their hearts to the pursuit of heavenly wisdom.”<sup>26</sup> We notice here that without the prompting of modern scholarship Calvin uses the terminology of the Wisdom school. This psalm is, to be sure, one of the classic statements of the wisdom piety and Calvin gets the spirit of the psalm easily enough.<sup>27</sup> One would hardly expect it to be otherwise, for Calvin lived the same kind of scholarly piety that was exemplified by the scribes, teachers, and biblical scholars of the Wisdom School.<sup>28</sup> When the psalmist tells us that “his delight is in the Law of the LORD in which he doth meditate day and night,” Calvin immediately recognizes a kindred spirit. Though separated by the centuries, they practiced the same kind of bookish piety. Calvin’s comments indicate not only that he understands well the kind of delight to which the psalm refers but that he has found the same kind of blessing. Calvin, too, had delighted in studying the Bible day and night. One senses a word of personal testimony when Calvin tells us about the fruit produced in the lives of those who constantly study the Scriptures. “The children of God constantly flourish, and are always watered with the secret influences of divine grace.”<sup>29</sup> Calvin found a life devoted to the service of the Word to be very satisfying, just as the *hakhamim* of Israel so many centuries before him.

Let us turn our attention now to another psalm, Psalm 19. Here is one of those passages of Scripture of which Calvin seems particularly fond, and it, too, was one of the most characteristic expressions of the Wisdom school. One gathers from the enthusiastic comments Calvin makes on this psalm that it, too, expresses his own piety.<sup>30</sup> It expresses it in a different way, however. The

psalm begins with that well known line, “The heavens are telling the glory of God.” Calvin comments,

As soon as we acknowledge God to be the supreme Architect, who has erected the beautiful fabric of the universe, our minds must necessarily be ravished with wonder at his infinite goodness, wisdom and power.

*Commentary on the Book of Psalms, I, 309*

Calvin was one theologian who was deeply moved by both the beauty of Creation and the wonder of Providence. It may come as a surprise to some, but Calvin often speaks of the spiritual benefits of meditating on the glory of God in Creation. Commenting on the next verse, “Day unto day uttereth speech,” Calvin tells us,<sup>31</sup>

Philosophers who have more penetration into those matters than others, understand how the stars are arranged in such beautiful order, that not withstanding their immense number there is no confusion;...David, therefore having spoken of the heavens, does not here descend from them to other parts of the world; but, from an effect more sensible and nearer our apprehension, he confirms what we just now said, namely, that the glory of God not only shines, but resounds in the heavens.

*Commentary on the Book of Psalms, I, 310*

What is interesting here, and it is quite typical of the wisdom theology of the Old Testament, is that the glory of God is not only seen but heard. It was even more typical of the logos theology of the New Testament. The wisemen of Israel and the saints of the early Church were inspired by what we might call the intellectual beauty of creation. They perceived in it a certain divine law, a certain order or purpose. The creation was understandable. This understandable order was beautiful because it teaches us about the order and purpose of life. The creation has a didactic structure which witnesses to the Creator and his righteousness. It had both an intellectual beauty and a moral beauty. One has only to look at creation to feel its beauty. Its glory is that it speaks to us of divine things.

The heavens and telling the glory of God;  
 and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
 Day to day pours forth speech,  
 and night to night declares knowledge.  
 There is no speech, nor are there words;  
 their voice is not heard;  
 Yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
 and their words to the end of the world.

Psalm 19:1-4

Glory is usually thought of as being seen, but in this instance it is thought of as being heard.<sup>32</sup> What the Psalmist says of the Creation he goes on to say of the Law. The Law of God is the glory of God heard rather than seen. The beauty of the heavens, the order of nature, according to Calvin, is a “visible language.”

David here metaphorically and magnificence of the heavenly bodies, as preaching the glory of God....[It is] a visible language...which addresses itself to the sight; for it is to the eyes of men that the heavens speak, not to their ears, and thus David justly compares the beautiful order and arrangement, by which the heavenly bodies are distinguished, to a writing.

*Commentary on the Book of Psalms, I, 313*

This is a rather startling statement.<sup>33</sup> One is, of course, immediately reminded of the famous phrase of Augustine's, so often used by the Reformers, which referred to the sacraments as the Word made visible. That Calvin spoke of both the sacraments and creation as the visible Word of God is certainly an indication of how fully Calvin followed the teaching of the Wisdom theology. For the biblical Wisdom school it is in hearing the Word that we related to God. Seeing God's glory in Creation is understood in terms of hearing the Word, as is so clear from this particular psalm. The psalm, however, goes on to speak of the Law of the Lord and its perfection, and one finds, quite typically of the Wisdom school, that the Word is an even more profound revelation of God's glory than the glories of nature. This, to be sure, is just what the Gospel of John is so careful to teach us. It is the Word received by faith which saves us. "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18), but seeing God is not really necessary. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). It is because Wisdom, the Wisdom we encounter in Christ, is the fundamental structure of reality that seeing, while it is useful to the life of faith, is secondary to hearing. The Apostle Paul put it this way, "So faith comes from what is heard" (Romans 10:17). It is a fundamental principle of the Wisdom theology that it is primarily by means of the Word that we relate to God. This Calvin understands quite thoroughly, and, as we shall see, it seems to have significantly set the temper of his worship.

These passages should be sufficient to show us that Calvin had an appreciation for biblical wisdom theology; in fact, one might even say, a surprising insight into the Wisdom theology of biblical antiquity. Let us now look at several places where this Wisdom theology seems to have influenced his understanding of the Lord's Supper.

## II.

### CALVIN'S INTERPRETATION OF THE BREAD OF LIFE DISCOURSE

When Calvin speaks of sharing the Supper with Christ it is the covenantal concepts which most naturally come into play, notably when Calvin is dealing with the tenth and eleventh chapters of I Corinthians, but when Calvin deals with those passages which have to do with feeding upon Christ, notably those passages in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John which present Christ as the bread of life, then we discover the influence of the Wisdom school. Calvin frequently emphasizes that in the Supper we enjoy both the presence of Christ and the benefits of Christ. It should be recognized that these are distinctly different lines of thought. They are two fundamental dimensions of Calvin's eucharistic theology. These two sections of Scripture, the one Pauline, the other Johannine, convey very different ideas about the Lord's Supper and these ideas use very different imagery. The sixth chapter of John is filled with the sapiential themes so typical of the Wisdom writers of the Old Testament. Let us look for a moment at how Calvin interpreted the sapiential themes of the Bread of Life Discourse.

#### A. Feasting on Wisdom

That by eating we should be enlightened is rather strange imagery in our thought world. In fact it would be a bit far fetched if it were not that the point is made so clearly in the Wisdom tradition. There are several prominent examples. Surely very important to the development of the ideas found in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John is that passage in the book of Proverbs where Wisdom invites the faithful to a feast.<sup>34</sup> For the Wisdom theology this banquet was a figure for the delight of sacred learning.<sup>35</sup> Wisdom, according to this passage, has built her house, set up her seven pillars, arranged her table and now invites all to come and eat of her bread and drink of her wine. The Bread of Life Discourse picks up on this figure to show that Jesus is the Word of God upon whom the Christian feasts. All are invited to eat of this bread of life and thereby be taught by God. In this discourse Jesus offers himself as the divine teaching to be received by faith. Besides this passage in Proverbs, we find much the same idea in Ecclesiasticus.<sup>36</sup>

Come to me, you who desire me,  
 and eat your fill of my produce.  
 For the remembrance of me is sweeter than honey,  
 and my inheritance sweeter than the honeycomb.  
 Those who eat me will hunger for more,  
 and those who drink me will thirst for more.  
 Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame,  
 and those who work with my help will not sin.

Ecclesiasticus 24:19-22

Several sayings of Jesus seem to play off this passage.<sup>37</sup> This imagery, obviously, was well understood in Jesus' day and it is not at all surprising that it should find its way into the Bread of Life Discourse.<sup>38</sup> A passage of Scripture that may have been more important for Calvin would have been the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah.

Ho, every one who thirsts,  
 come to the waters;  
 and he who has no money,  
 come, buy and eat!  
 Come, buy wine and milk  
 without money and without price.  
 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
 Harken diligently to me, and eat what is good,  
 and delight yourselves in fatness...

Isaiah 55:1-3

What Calvin would have noticed here is the way eating and drinking are taken as a figure for receiving divine teaching and thereby entering into an everlasting covenant.<sup>39</sup> The idea that the Word of God should be understood as spiritual food and that bread and wine should be a sign of that spiritual food is embedded in the biblical Wisdom tradition.<sup>40</sup> All this Calvin has obviously understood, for he tells us toward the beginning of his commentary on the Bread of Life Discourse that its simple meaning is "our souls are fed by the teaching of the Gospel."<sup>41</sup> If we find this imagery awkward we can hardly blame Calvin. As Isaac, he was only digging the wells that had been dug before him.

There have always been those who have interpreted the Bread of Life Discourse exclusively in terms of Christian teaching and preaching. They have insisted that the Discourse presents Jesus as the Word of God, the teacher of heavenly Wisdom, on whom the Christian feeds by faith. According to these interpreters the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John has nothing to do with the Lord's Supper.<sup>42</sup> Calvin is not to be counted among them. As the Genevan Reformer understands it the sixth chapter of John tells us above all about feeding upon the Word of God by faith, but

At the same time, I confess there is nothing said here that is not figured and actually presented to believers in the Lord's Supper. Indeed we might say that Christ intended the holy Supper to be a seal of this discourse.

*Commentaries IV, 170*

If it is true that the Word of God is a sacred food and drink which nourishes us unto eternal life it is also true that this food is given to us both in the reading and preaching of Scripture and in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In fact, Calvin goes even further. He tells us that the Supper is a sign and seal for us today that Christ is the Bread of Life just as it was a sign for the multitude of



Galileans whom Jesus fed with loaves and fishes so long ago. When Calvin speaks of the sacraments as signs and seals of the Word he has in mind that they are signs in the same pregnant sense that the Gospel of John uses the word.

### B. The Manna

Even more important to the Bread of Life Discourse in the Gospel of John is the story of the feeding of the manna.<sup>43</sup> The rabbis of New Testament times had richly embroidered the story of the feeding of the children of Israel with manna in the wilderness. We already find this in the Old Testament itself where the manna is called the grain of heaven and the bread of angels (Psalm 78:24-25). Already in Deuteronomy the manna is understood sacramentally as a sign of the Word of God delivered on Mt. Sinai. We are told that God fed Israel with manna that they might know that man does not live by bread alone but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:3). The idea was well understood in New Testament times; the manna was a sign that the Word of God is a spiritual food.

Philo of Alexandria, commenting on the story of the manna, says, "Of what food can he rightly say that it is rained from heaven, save of the heavenly wisdom which is sent from heaven above on souls which yearn for virtue by Him who sheds the gift of prudence in rich abundance."<sup>44</sup> Philo is concerned to make the point that the manna was a sign of *sophia*, the higher kind of wisdom, which unlike the philosophical education of the Greeks acquired through rigorous study is graciously bestowed by God. Philo believed in revelation. The Law of Moses came down from heaven as a gracious gift from God to enlighten the people of Israel with sacred wisdom.<sup>45</sup> In his *Allegorical Interpretation* Philo has yet another point to make on the subject of the manna. "The food of the soul is not earthly but heavenly....The soul is fed not with things of the earth which decay, but with such words as God shall have poured like rain out of...heaven."<sup>46</sup> The Word of God is clearly a heavenly or spiritual food. For Philo a sapiential interpretation of the story of the manna comes quite easily. The teachings of Scripture are a spiritual food. The story of the manna was of special importance to the Wisdom school, particularly as the school began to develop in the direction of a logos theology. As we see from Philo these ideas were already connected with each other even before Christians began to understand Jesus as the logos, the divine Wisdom from above.

As one would expect, there was no single standard interpretation of the manna in New Testament times either among the rabbis or the apostles. Modern commentators have pointed out the difference between John's interpretation of the manna and Paul's.<sup>47</sup> Calvin noticed the difference as well. He tells us that the Pauline interpretation compares the manna to the Lord's Supper as a type of spiritual food. The Johannine interpretation contrasts the manna which fed the bellies of the murmuring children of Israel with the spiritual food believers receive from Christ in the ministry of Word and sacrament.<sup>48</sup> Whether following the Pauline line or the Johannine, Calvin still comes out interpreting the Supper as spiritual food.

What should be abundantly clear at this point is that when Calvin tells us that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper is spiritual food he is following closely in the tradition of the Wisdom School.

### C. The Feast of Passover

Another central theme of the Bread of Life Discourse is the Feast of Passover.<sup>49</sup> That Christ is the Lamb of God on whom believers feast is obviously an important teaching of the Gospel of John. This Calvin understands quite well. At the very beginning of the Gospel of John Jesus is introduced as the Lamb of God. Noticing this, Calvin suggests that here we have an identification of Christ as the paschal lamb, whose sacrifice will atone for the sin of the world.<sup>50</sup> This theme, that Christ is the paschal lamb, runs throughout the Gospel. The Johannine Passion narrative has Jesus dying at the time when the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple.

In fact the whole Passion is understood in the imagery of Passover (John 13:1). At the beginning of the sixth chapter of John when the story of the feeding of the multitude is recounted John tells us that this event took place around the time of Passover. If one is to understand the sacrifice of Jesus in terms of the Passover imagery then it will come quite naturally that one will speak of feeding upon the Passover lamb. Toward the end of his commentary on the Bread of Life Discourse Calvin again recognizes the paschal theme when he tells us, "For it would be of no use to us that the sacrifice was once offered, if we did not now feed upon that sacred feast."<sup>51</sup> Surely this should make clear that Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper had a place for feeding upon Christ. At the Supper, as Calvin sees it, we feed upon the paschal lamb whose sacrifice atoned for the sin of the world.

The Christian interpretation of the Wisdom theology was at certain points quite radical. In the Wisdom hymn of the eighth chapter of Proverbs we read that Wisdom is the first of God's creations; the prologue to the Gospel of John identifies Wisdom with God. "The Word was God...all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1-3). The Christian interpretation of the Gospel of John understands Wisdom not as the first of God's creations but as the Creator. This is certainly a radical reinterpretation of the Wisdom theology on the part of the early Church. Just as radical is the Christian insistence that in the death of Christ the ultimate wisdom of God is revealed. The Apostle Paul's major passage on wisdom, namely I Corinthians 1:18-2:9, contrasts the divine wisdom and human wisdom.<sup>52</sup> It may be true, Paul tells us, that in the wisdom of this world the cross is folly but in the wisdom of God the preaching of the cross saves those who believe. At this point Paul makes his strongest statement of Christian Wisdom theology, for Christ is the power of God and the Wisdom of God.<sup>53</sup> For Paul the Cross is the ultimate revelation of the Wisdom of God. As he puts it a few verses later, "I have decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." This is another example of how radical was the Christian interpretation of the Wisdom theology.

We find the same thing in the Gospel of John. It is put quite differently but it means the same thing. The Wisdom of God is revealed in the cross. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son..." Calvin's comment on this text is that to behold the cross in faith "is placing Christ before one's eyes and beholding in Him the heart of God poured out in love."<sup>54</sup> In other words, as Calvin understands this central Johannine passage, the Cross reveals that the height and depth of the Wisdom of God is sacrificial love. The Word of God is the Lamb of God, the paschal lamb, who by his sacrifice takes away the sin of the world. The paschal themes alluded to in the story of the feeding of the multitude and the Bread of Life Discourse which follows it become patent in John 6:51-58 which insists that "The bread which I give for the life of the world is my flesh...He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." For Calvin this giving "denotes that unique giving which was made on the cross when he [that is, Christ] offered Himself to the Father as a sacrifice."<sup>55</sup> That is, the Supper reveals that the Wisdom which nourishes us to eternal life is the Cross. Here the Passover imagery is essential for an understanding of this passage.<sup>56</sup> The vicarious suffering of the Lamb of God is the sacred food which enables those who believe to pass from death to life. In Johannine theology as in Pauline theology the proclamation that the Lamb of God who died for the sin of the world and is alive forevermore is the Gospel of salvation, the divine Wisdom which unmask the wisdom of this world. When this Word is received by faith it is a sacred food which nourishes unto eternal life. This is the great feast of the children of God to feed upon the Lamb of God. It is a feast kept in faith and by faith for it is faith that feeds upon the divine Word, the holy Wisdom from on high. The Lord's Supper is not just a symbol of this truth, it is, to use Calvin's words, "actually presented;" it is promised and sealed.<sup>57</sup> In our being offered the bread and wine of the sacrament Christ is truly offered to us for our salvation. When we accept it, the promise is sealed. The sermon and the Supper both proclaim the Lord's death until Christ comes and yet they are two distinct moments in our receiving God's gracious gift of salvation. In the sermon it is presented; in the Supper it is sealed.

To sum this up very briefly: Calvin understands the Bread of Life Discourse to mean that in the worship of the Church, both in the sermon and the Supper, we feast upon the divine Wisdom; the Wisdom revealed in the Cross.

### III.

#### WISDOM CONCEPTS IN CALVIN'S TEACHING ON THE SUPPER

That we feed upon Christ in hearing the Word and in sharing the Supper is central to the Bread of Life Discourse in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. This was, at least, the way Calvin interpreted it, and he was not the first or last to understand it that way. The image of feeding upon the divine Wisdom had been highly developed by the biblical wisdom literature, as we have shown. The question which now raises itself is just how Calvin understands the Lord's Supper as being "spiritual food." This is surely one of the most characteristic features of Calvin's teaching on the Supper and it is here where one finds the most obvious influence of the biblical wisdom theology. First let us look at this food as a food which empowers us, then as a food which enlightens us, and finally as a food which enlivens us.

#### A. The Supper Empowers

The first theme of Calvin's eucharistic theology which appears to be suggested by the Wisdom theology is that feeding on Christ at the Supper empowers the Christian to live the Christian life. This empowering is the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>58</sup> The Supper is spiritual nourishment that we might live in the Spirit. It is spiritual nourishment promised by the sign of bread and wine and realized by the Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup> If this empowering is the work of the Holy Spirit, it must also be said that the Spirit works through faith. The Wisdom theology so strong in the prologue to the Gospel of John tells us that to those who received Christ he gave power to become children of God. This empowering comes through believing the Gospel both as it is preached and as it is offered to us in the sacraments. What the empowering enables us to do, as the prologue to the Gospel makes so clear, is to live the life of the children of God.

In a passage from the *Institutes* Calvin makes the point very clearly.

For though he has taken his flesh away from us, and in the body has ascended into heaven, yet he sits at the right hand of the Father—that is, he reigns in the Father's power and majesty and glory. This Kingdom is neither bounded by location in space nor circumscribed by any limits. Thus Christ is not prevented from exerting his power wherever he pleases, in heaven and on earth. He shows his presence in power and strength, is always among his own people, and breathes his life upon them, and lives in them, sustaining them, strengthening, quickening, keeping them unharmed, as if he were present in the body. In short, he feeds his people with his own body, the communion of which he bestows upon them by the power of his Spirit. In this manner, the body and blood of Christ are shown to us in the Sacrament.

*Institutes* IV, xvii, 18

This passage makes the point that the sort of local presence experienced by the disciples is transcended by another kind of presence experienced by believers after the Ascension. This is an experience of the glorified Christ who dwells in us through the Holy Spirit. It is an experience of power which dwells within us. It is a sort of experience which is not limited to any space or location, but it is real and effective, nevertheless. In fact it is more real and effective because it is not merely beside us, but within us. It is a presence which does not simply aid us but a presence which transforms us so that we are empowered to live as children of God.

At this point Calvin is obviously following the Johannine line of thought which understands the Ascension of Jesus to be necessary that Christ might live within the hearts of his disciples, "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). The crucifixion, death, resurrection, ascension, and the pouring out of the Spirit were all quite necessary that we be redeemed. "Except a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). This fruit bearing presence which Christians experience after the Ascension is not the same as the presence before the Ascension, although to be sure it is grounded in that presence. Christ's presence with us after the Ascension is, according to the Gospel of John, experienced in the spiritual power of bearing fruit. It is in this way that Calvin understands the empowering.<sup>60</sup>

Another passage which should be pointed out is one found in the Commentary on I Corinthians. In the course of Calvin's remarks on Paul's report of the words of institution we find the following:

But I myself maintain that it is only after we obtain Christ Himself, that we come to share in the benefits of Christ. And I further maintain that He is obtained, not just when we believe that He was sacrificed for us, but when He dwells in us, when He is one with us, when we are members of His flesh, when, in short, we become united in one life and substance (if I may say so) with Him. Besides, I am paying attention to the implication of the words, for Christ does not offer us only the benefit of his death and resurrection, but the self-same body in which He suffered and rose again. My conclusion is that the body of Christ is really (*realiter*), to use the usual word, i.e. truly (*vere*) given to us in the Supper, so that it may be health-giving food for our souls. I am adopting the usual terms, but I mean that our souls are fed by the substance of His body, so that we are truly (*vere*) made one with Him; or, what amounts to the same thing, that a life-giving power from the flesh of Christ (*vim ex Christi carne vivificam*) is poured into us through the medium of the Spirit, even although it is at a great distance from us, and is not mixed with us (*nec misceatur nobiscum*).

*Commentaries, IX, 247*

Calvin speaks here of empowering in terms of the covenantal themes so strong in the Apostle Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper in the tenth and eleventh chapters of I Corinthians. For Calvin the covenantal union with the incarnate Christ, crucified and risen, is essential to the Christian. It would seem here that while Calvin distinguishes between being united to Christ in the Supper and being nourished by the blessing of Christ displayed in the Supper he nevertheless recognizes that they cannot be separated. He makes it clear that the covenantal union is the basis of the empowering and one would imagine that the empowering is the means of experiencing the presence.

The question which perplexes us in this passage is what Calvin means by the substance of Christ. One gets the impression Calvin is trying to accommodate himself to the theological terminology which had been used by medieval Scholasticism to insist that Christ is in substance present at the Supper. On the other hand, Calvin probably does not want to use the word substance as it was defined by Scholastic theology. Why, then, does Calvin use the word substance when he and the other Reformers were usually so careful to distance themselves from Scholastic theology? One can only guess. Perhaps he used the word because it conveyed that Christ was present in a special or unique sense. He was obviously not present in the usual sense. Scholastic theology understood that. Scholastic theology taught that the substance of bread and wine were transformed into the body and blood of Christ but the accidents of the bread and wine remained. However one might understand this, it is clear that even for Scholastic theology Christ is present at the Supper only in a certain sense. Calvin had read enough theology to realize that theologians have meant very different things by the eucharistic presence down through history. One could wish that Calvin were more explicit on the subject, but apparently what he meant was

that Christ is present in his bestowing the power of God and the wisdom of God. That is the substance of Christ. "He is the power of God and with wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1:24).

We still need to say something about what Calvin meant by a lifegiving power being poured into us by the Spirit. I think what he means is no less than the changing of the heart, the central miracle of our redemption. This miracle comes about when the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the crucified and risen Son of God, dwells within us. This happens when from the Son of God we become sons of God.

In Calvin's sermon for a communion service celebrated at the Feast of Ascension we find these words:<sup>61</sup>

It is, that since Jesus, having ascended on high, has dominion over everything, indeed, so that even the Angels are subject to Him, they and all creatures will serve us by that token....It is necessary to join this glorious power with the knowledge that He is here with us. Not that it was here for a time, but that His power extends to us, as it is spread through heaven and through earth....That is also how we are certain of His presence, and that by His Holy Spirit He will maintain us. (Otherwise what would happen? We could do nothing else but fail, for we are too frail to do anything else. On the contrary we see the devil who is armed with all kinds of ammunition against us. It is, then, very needful that God give us strength by His Holy Spirit in order that we may be able to resist him.) That is how being far from Jesus Christ, with respect to His body, we are near Him with respect to His power.<sup>62</sup>

This is a significant idea. The presence of Christ is experienced in his sanctifying power. We feel his presence as we are transformed into his likeness, as we are made holy as he is holy. What is important to notice here is that the power of God is to the end of holiness. The Wisdom school always sharpened its arrows so as to aim them at the living of a godly life. Wisdom was to the end of righteousness. This may seem moralistic today but it was as characteristic of biblical wisdom theology as it was of Calvin's whole theological endeavor.<sup>63</sup>

The charge is often made that Calvin's eucharistic theology is dynamistic. It is not some philosophy of dynamism which is at work here. It is rather biblical Wisdom theology which understands Christ as both the power of God and the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1:24).

## B. The Supper Enlightens

That those who participate in the Lord's Supper are enlightened thereby is a theme frequently found in Calvin's writings on the sacrament.

There, Word and sacraments confirm our faith when they set before our eyes the good will of our Heavenly Father toward us, by the knowledge of whom the whole firmness of our faith stands fast and increases in strength. The Spirit confirms it when, by engraving this confirmation in our mind, he makes it effective. Meanwhile, the Father of Lights [cf. James 1:17] cannot be hindered from illumining our minds.

*Institutes* IV, xiv, 10

That the Word is known to the eyes as well as to the ears is a persistent theme of the Wisdom literature. The heavens declare the glory of God. That is, the heavens as seen, declare his glory. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes is a clearly related thought. The Word enlightens by means of the eyes, and yet it is the Word, the Word of life, as the First Epistle of John tells us, which is known, be it through the sense of hearing, the sense of touch, or the sense of sight.<sup>64</sup> For John as for Paul, faith comes by hearing, "Blessed are those who have not

seen and yet believe.” To know God, for us mortal beings, is to know his Word, and yet the Word can be seen as well as heard. One can see the Word in the glory of the heavens, one can see the Word in the incarnate Christ, at least the Apostles did, and one can see the Word in the sacraments. It is this, as Calvin understood it, which Augustine referred to when he spoke of the sacraments as the visible Word.

Of particular interest to us in this quotation is Calvin’s allusion to the Epistle of James where God is called the “Father of Lights.” Calvin understands this title as the Wisdom writers understood it, that is, God is of his very nature a God who enlightens us, by both the gift of the Law and the Gospel. God is one who reveals himself. Of the very essence of God is his Word; he is the “Father of Lights,” that is, the God who enlightens. The Word of the Father is both the light of the world and the bread of life. Calvin even goes so far as to say that God cannot be hindered from illumining our minds. To have communion with God necessarily involves being enlightened.<sup>65</sup>

In the end, however, it is neither the sense of hearing nor the sense of sight which enlightens us; it is the work of the Holy Spirit which opens our minds and hearts to hear, or to see, the Word. It is the Holy Spirit who works faith in us so that what we hear and what we see is received by faith. When the Holy Spirit opens our ears and our eyes then we feed upon Christ in both Word and sacrament so that we are nourished unto eternal life.

The place where Calvin is most eloquent on this subject is his commentary on the Bread of Life Discourse in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. As Calvin understands the Discourse, Christ is presented as the bread of life which the Father has given to us as food for eternal life. As Israel fed upon the manna so the Church no feeds upon Christ presented to us in both Word and sacrament. Primarily the Discourse has in mind Christ as teacher. The bread which the Father gives for us to feed upon is the Word. Commenting on the text, “They shall all be taught by God” (John 6:45), Calvin insists that this is a reference to the inward illumination of the Spirit.

The only way in which the Church can be restored is by God undertaking the office of schoolmaster, and bringing believers to Himself. The way of teaching which the prophet speaks of consists not only in the outward word but also in the secret operation of the Holy Spirit. In short, this teaching of God is the inward illumination of the heart.

*Commentaries IV, 164*

The didactic nature of the Christian faith could hardly be put more strongly or more profoundly. The teaching which those who learn from God receive is the saving Lordship of Christ. Those who are taught by God accept Christ. This is the enlightenment they receive. In fact at this point Calvin calls it wisdom.

It is impossible that any of God’s disciples shall not submit to Christ, and that those who reject Christ will not be taught by God, since the only wisdom that all the elect learn in the school of God is to come to Christ.

*Commentaries IV, 165*

This remark, almost parenthetical as it may be, makes abundantly clear that Calvin has perceived the full implications of the Johannine interpretation of the Old Testament Wisdom literature. As a matter of course Calvin’s approach to worship in general and to the ministry of Word and sacrament in particular is didactic just as the piety of the Wisdom school was didactic. What needs to be sensed is that this didacticism is very, very profound. It is not some sort of arid learning, but a very hearty sort of wisdom.

We must be careful at this point, however, to notice that when Calvin talks about enlightenment he has far more in mind than the absorbing of mere information. He means that opening of our hearts to the divine Wisdom which is the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>66</sup> It is in receiving Christ that we acquire the divine Wisdom and that, Calvin has learned from the biblical wisdom tradition, is what it means to feed on Christ.<sup>67</sup>

### C. The Supper Enlivens

The third theme suggested by the Wisdom theology which we find in Calvin's teaching on the Lord's Supper is that when at the Lord's Table we feed upon Christ we are enlivened. Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life, who makes us spiritually alive.

For the Wisdom theology the divine wisdom is a creative Wisdom. In the beginning God's creative Word was spoken and all things came thereby into existence.<sup>68</sup> As Psalm 33 puts it,

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.

The Wisdom theology had meditated deeply on the fact that God had created the world through his Word.<sup>69</sup> It had found significant the fact that God guided Israel by his Word as it was known in the Law and that it was also by his Word that God had created all things in the beginning. The Word of Creation was the same Word which they heard in the Law; it was a Word of life. This kind of profound appreciation for the creative nature of the Word is found through the whole of biblical Wisdom literature. With this understanding of the Word one realizes why the ancient Jews gave such an important place to the reading of the Law in worship.<sup>70</sup> The Law of the Lord was creative and therefore it was constantly read and preached. For Calvin the Word was far more than just words. Commenting on the text, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51), Calvin says,

Since this secret power of bestowing life of which He is speaking might be referred to His divine essence, He now comes to the second step and tells them that this life resides in His flesh so that it may be drawn from it. It is a wonderful purpose of God that He has set life before us in that flesh, where before there had only been the material of death.

*Commentaries IV, 167*

The Gospel of John, as is often pointed out, is concerned to avoid the spiritualist tendencies of Greek philosophy. Calvin, as Luther, understands the problem quite well and is equally concerned to avoid spiritualism.<sup>71</sup> A bit further on, commenting on the same text, Calvin says,

For as the eternal Word of God is the fountain of life, so His Flesh is a channel to pour out to us the life which resides intrinsically, as they say, in His divinity. In this sense it is called life-giving, because it communicates to us a life that it borrows from elsewhere. This will not be at all obscure if we consider what is the reason for life, namely, righteousness. Although righteousness flows from God alone, we shall not have the full manifestation of it anywhere else than in Christ's flesh. For in His flesh was accomplished man's redemption; in it a sacrifice was offered to atone for sins, and an obedience yielded to God to reconcile Him to us; it was also filled with the sanctification of the Spirit; finally, having overcome death, it was received into the heavenly glory.

*Commentaries, IV, 167*

Christian salvation is not a matter of liberation from the flesh, but rather the sanctification of the flesh. We were created flesh and blood, and by that same creative Word we were made good and

in God's image. In that same flesh and blood we must now be made righteous. We must be made righteous as Christ is righteous. And it is from his righteousness, that is, the righteousness which he manifested in the flesh, that we become righteous. Here again we detect Calvin's Cyrillian Christology. Calvin, as Cyril, is determined to give full justice to the flesh of Christ. Christ in his full human nature is ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father.<sup>72</sup> Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper reflects his understanding of the person and work of Christ. It was only natural, then, that the Johannine interpretation of the Wisdom tradition would show up in his understanding of the Lord's Supper. To feed upon the Bread of Life is to be vivified or enlivened.

First of all, we are taught from the Scriptures that Christ was from the beginning that life-giving Word of the Father [John 1:1], the spring and source of life, from which all things have always received their capacity to live. Therefore, John sometimes calls him "the Word of life" [1 John 1:1], sometimes writes that "in him was life" [John 1:4], meaning that he, flowing even into all creatures, instilled in them the power to breathe and live.

*Institutes* IV, xvii, 8

Fallen humanity, hearing and believing the Gospel, comes to the Lord's Table to feed on the Bread of Life and in so doing returns to the source of life from which its creation came in the beginning.

Calvin understands Christ to be the Bread of Life not only in terms of Creation but in terms of the Incarnation as well.<sup>73</sup> He finds in John six that Christ is the Bread of Life which came down from heaven and gives life to the world. He tells us in the *Institutes*,

The same John afterward adds that life was manifested only when, having taken our flesh, the Son of God gave himself for our eyes to see and our hands to touch [1 John 1:2]. For even though he previously poured out his power upon the creatures, still, because man (estranged from God through sin and having lost participation in life) saw death threatening from every side, had to be received into communion of the Word in order to receive hope of immortality....But when the source of life begins to abide in our flesh, he no longer lies hidden far from us, but shows us that we are to partake of him. But he also quickens our very flesh, in which he abides, that partaking of him we may be fed unto immortality....By coming down he poured that power upon the flesh which he took in order that from it participation in life might flow unto us.

*Institutes* IV, xvii, 8

The Christ upon whom we feed at the Lord's Supper is the incarnate Christ. Calvin calls on Cyril of Alexandria to make the point that it is not only in the divinity of Christ, but in his humanity as well, that there dwells fullness of life.<sup>74</sup> Calvin reminds us that according to the Gospel of John Christ's flesh is truly food and his blood is truly drink. It is because Christ has entered into our humanity, our flesh and blood, and made that flesh and blood spiritually alive, that we can enter into the blessed life. Christ's incarnation nourishes us unto eternal life.

...and by these foods believers are nourished unto eternal life. It is therefore a special comfort for the godly that they now find life in their own flesh. For thus not only do they reach it by an easy approach, but they have it spontaneously presented and laid out before them. Let them but open the bosom of their heart to embrace its presence, and they will obtain it.

*Institutes*, IV, xvii, 8

It is Christ's incarnation, that is, his incarnation in our flesh and blood, which enlivens us, or nourishes us, to eternal life. It is not so much that faith enlivens us, nor even that faith in the



incarnation enlivens us, as it is that the incarnate Christ, whom we receive by faith, enlivens us. Christ always remains the Word of life. When we receive that Word then we are enlivened. The sacrament is not just an auxiliary way of hearing the Word, it is not just seeing the Word instead of hearing it. It is that, to be sure, but beyond that, it is the way in which we receive the Word and thereby the way in which we receive the Word and thereby the way in which the Word is sealed unto us.

If Calvin makes a point that in the Supper we feed on the incarnate Christ and are thereby enlivened, so he also makes the point that in the Supper we feed on Christ crucified and risen and thereby pass from death to life.<sup>75</sup> From the Bread of Life Discourse Calvin had gotten the point that the flesh which is food indeed and the blood which is drink indeed is the sacrificed body and blood of the Lamb of God. In the *Institutes* Calvin tells us,

...the sacraments send us to the cross of Christ,...For we do not eat duly and unto salvation unless he is crucified, when in living experience we grasp the efficacy of his death...When, offering himself as a sacrifice, he bore our curse in himself to imbue us with his blessing; when by his death, he swallowed up and annihilated death [cf. I Peter 3:22 Vg. and I Cor. 15:54]; and when, in his resurrection, he raised up this corruptible flesh of ours, which he had put on, to glory and incorruption [cf. I Cor. 15:53:54].

*Institutes* IV, xvii, 4

For Calvin, to feed upon Christ at the Supper is to be joined to the Lamb of God who was slain and lives forevermore.<sup>76</sup> In that historic event, which happened once and for all at a particular time and place, Christ performed the sacrifice which reconciles us to God.<sup>77</sup> It was a full, complete, and perfect sacrifice which needs no repetition or representation.<sup>78</sup>

It was, to be sure, because the Reformers so insisted on the uniqueness, upon the completely historical genuineness of the death and resurrection of Christ, that the Supper became an important means of uniting us to that event. If Christ's sacrifice were something to be repeated again and again in every age in every land, whenever and wherever Christians gathered, the whole idea of sealing would be unnecessary. But if one were to treat the Supper as a cultic myth to be constantly repeated one would seriously compromise its historical reality. It is upon this that the Epistle to the Hebrews so carefully insists. Christ was sacrificed once for all. Uniting us to this event, therefore, is the essential function of the sacrament. It is from that sacrifice, then and there, that we in our time and our place, here and now, are enlivened with eternal life. That sacrifice saves us; the Supper joins us to that sacrifice. The Supper "shows forth" the sacrifice and the benefits of the sacrifice. In the Supper we experience the restored Communion with God and with each other which flow from that sacrifice. The main purpose of the Supper is to seal upon our consciences the power of that sacrifice so that we live in its power. Living in its power, we witness to the glory of God before the world. Living in its power we give thanks to God. We recount the story of God's mighty acts of salvation. This is how Calvin understands the text from I Corinthians 11:26, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death."<sup>79</sup> At the Supper, therefore, it is upon the sacrificed Lamb, risen and reigning in heaven, that we feed. This is the paschal feast which nourishes us to make the passage from this world to the Father. At the Supper "in living experience we grasp the efficacy" of the Gospel.

## CONCLUSION

Biblical Wisdom theology as we find it in the Gospel of John led Calvin to understand the Supper not only in covenantal terms, as communion with Christ in the bonds of the New Covenant, but as feeding upon Christ as well. The covenantal understanding of the Supper is probably to be considered the basic understanding. We come to the Lord's Table to share a meal with Christ and thereby be united to him and each other in the New Covenant. There is for Calvin,

however, another dimension. We come to the Lord's Table to feed upon him who is the Bread of Life. It is in the sapiential terms of the biblical Wisdom tradition that Calvin understood this. For Calvin those who feed upon the bread and wine of the Lord's Table in true faith are nourished by the flesh and blood of Christ our incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Lord. It is not a matter of symbolism. We are really nourished; we are empowered, enlightened, and enlivened. This nourishing is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit who produces faith in us so that we might chew and digest this spiritual nourishment in a spiritual way.

The Wisdom theology understands our relation to God primarily in terms of the Word. It is not surprising therefore that for one strongly influenced by the Wisdom theology, whether in the first century, as the author of the Gospel of John, whether in the fourth century, as Augustine, or whether in the sixteenth century, as Calvin, even the sacraments are thought of in terms of the Word. The sacraments are the Word made visible. They proclaim the Word; they confirm the Word; they seal the promises made in the Word. But even more, it is important to see that for the Wisdom theology this Word which is so basic to our relationship to God is a life giving power. The Word enlightens us to the end that we are empowered to live the life of the Kingdom of God. The Word, for those who have been shaped by the Wisdom theology, is never dissolved into mere words, mere intellectualism, mere bookishness. The beauty of the Wisdom theology is its appreciation of the surprising power of the Word to sanctify life. In the end it is not that the Wisdom theology stresses the primacy of the Word in our relating to God, so much as its insight into the vitality of the Word.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Among the most important works on the Wisdom theology, Felix Christ, *Jesus Sophia*, ATANT, LVII (1960); H. Conzelmann, "Wisdom in the N. T.," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary volume (1983), pp. 956-960; J.L. Crenshaw, ed., *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (1975); J.L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in the O. T.," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary volume (1983), pp. 952-956; Burton Mack, *Logos und Sophia, Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie im hellenistischen Judentum*, SUNT, X 1973; R.B.Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the O. T.* (1971); G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* translated by James D. Martin (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1972); U. Wilkens, "SOPHIA," ThWNT (1964).

<sup>2</sup>The renaissance of learning in the early sixteenth century was especially interested in the biblical concept of Wisdom. Cf. Eugene F. Rice, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958); Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963). Among the Reformers it was Melancthon who produced the great commentary on Ecclesiastes.

<sup>3</sup>It should be noticed that while there is not a commentary on Job there is a series of sermons. In addition to these sermons we can get a number of ideas of how Calvin would have regarded these works from the notes to the Bible of Geneva.

<sup>4</sup>Calvin's commentary on the Psalms first appeared in the Latin version, *In librum Psalmorum, Iohannis Caluini commentarius* published by the famous printer Robert Stephanus in 1552. A few months later the French version appeared under the title, *Le Livre des Pseaumes exposé par Iehan Caluin*....It was issued by the equally famous printer Conrad Badius. As early as 1571 an English translation was made by Arthur Golding, one of the best known translators of classical literature during the reign of Elizabeth I. It is interesting to note that this translation was dedicated to the Earl of Oxford, whom many today believe to have been the true author of the dramas of Shakespeare. The translation quoted in this paper is *Commentary on the Book of Psalms by John Calvin, Translated from the original Latin and collated with the Author's French Version*, by James Anderson (Edinburgh: The Calvin Society, 1845). Photolithographic reproduction by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1949. Hereafter *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*.

<sup>5</sup>Calvin originally composed his commentary on James in French. It was published by Jean Crespin in 1550 under the title *Commentaire de M. Jean Calvin sur l'Epistre de saint Iaqués*. The following year Crespin published Calvin's Latin version, together with his commentaries on I and II Peter, I John, and Jude: *Commentarri in Epistolas Canonicas, unam Petri, unam Joannis, unam Iacobi, Petri alteram. Iudae unam*. The most recent English translation is that of A.W. Morrison found in *Calvin's Commentaries*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), hereafter *Commentaries*. Translations of Calvin's Commentaries, unless otherwise noted, are taken from this edition.

<sup>6</sup>Calvin's Latin commentary on the Gospel of John appeared at the famous publishing house of Robert Stephanus in 1553. *In Evangelium secundum Iohannem Commentarius*. Calvin's French translation appeared in the same year, *Commentaire de M. Iean Calvin sur l'Evangile selon saint Iean, Traduit du latin*. The translation quoted in this article is that of T.H.L. Parker in *Calvin's Commentaries*, vols. IV & V. For Calvin's commentary on the First Epistle of John, see below note 16.

<sup>7</sup>On the Gospel of John as a Christian interpretation of the Wisdom theology, see Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Company, 1966), pp.

cxxii-cxxviii; F.M. Braun, *Jean le théologien*, II (1964); G. Ziener, *Weisheitsbuch und Johannesevangelium*, Bib 38 (1957), 395-418; and 39 (1958), 37-60.

<sup>8</sup>The Latin text is of interest here. “Quod sermonem vocat Dei filium, haec mihi simplex videtur esse ratio, quia primum aeterna sit Dei sapientia et voluntas, deinde expresse consilii eius effigies.” *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt*, edited by W. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, P. Lobstein, and A. Erichson (Brunswick and Berlin: C.A. Schweiske, 1863-1900) as found in vols. XXIX-LXXXVII of the *Corpus Reformatorum* (hereafter *Corpus Reformatrum*), SLVII, col. 1. It was Erasmus who had translated the Greek *logos* with *sermo*. A few paragraphs further on Calvin discusses the translation of Erasmus.

<sup>9</sup>Calvin’s French version of his commentary on the Gospel of John is of particular interest here. “Quant à ce qu’il appelle le Fils de Dieu *Parole* il me semble que c’est pour la simple raison qu’en premier lieu il est la sagesse et la volonté éternelles de Dieu;...” *Commentaires de Jean Calvin...tome deuxième, Évangile selon saint Jean*, edited by M. Réveillaud (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1968), p. 12. According to those who are knowledgeable in the history of the French language, it is to none other than John Calvin that the credit goes for having coined the modern French word for wisdom, la sagesse.

<sup>10</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, *The Library of Christian Classics*, vols. XX and XXI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960). Hereafter *Institutes*. English translations are taken from this version unless otherwise noted. The Latin text used in this study is that found in *Joannis Calvini, Opera Selecta*, edited by P. Barth and G. Niesel, vols. III-V, second edition (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1957). Hereafter *Opera selecta*.

<sup>11</sup>“...Word means the everlasting Wisdom, residing with God, from which both all oracles and all prophecies go forth.” *Institutes*, I, xiii, 7. the original latin text reads, “Certe quum Dei verbum nobis proponitur in Scriptura absurdissimum fuerit imaginari fluxam duntaxat et evanidam vocem, quae in aerem emissa prodeat extra ipsum Deum: cuiusmodi et oracula Patribus edita, et prophetae comnes fuerunt: quum perpetua magis Sapientia indicetur apud Deum residens, unde et oracula et prophetae omnes prodierunt.”

<sup>12</sup>Augustine, *De trinitate*, VI, 1.

<sup>13</sup>On Calvin’s interest in patristic literature see Luchsius Smits, *Saint Augustine dans l’oeuvre de Jean Calvin*, 2 vols. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1957); Jan Koopmans, *Das altkirchliche Dogma in der Reformation* (Munich, 1955); Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zurich: TVZ, 1975).

<sup>14</sup>Calvin scholars often speak of the importance of saving truth to Calvin’s theological system. For example:...One can only speak this way, of course, if one understands the Wisdom of God to be the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen as we find it in the first and second chapters of I Corinthians. See below.

<sup>15</sup>*Commentaries*, IV, 23.

<sup>16</sup>The first edition of the commentary on I John appeared in the volume *Commentarii in epistolas Canonicas* mentioned above in note 5. In the same year, 1551, a French edition of this commentary appeared separately in Geneva at the publishing house of Girardi, *Commentaire sur l’epistre Canonique de S. Jean*. The translation quoted in this article is that of T.H.L. Parker in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. V.

<sup>17</sup>While the older literature spoke at great length of wisdom as a hypostasis, e.g. O.S. Rankin, *Israel’s Wisdom Literature* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), pp. 222-264, recent literature is more cautious, e.g. Hans Conzelmann, *Der Brief an der Korinther* (Göttingen:

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), pp. 53-64, and Gerhardt von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, (1972), pp. 144 ff.

<sup>18</sup>*Commentaries*, V, 235.

<sup>19</sup>Burton Mack's *Logos und Sophia*, p. 179 ff., gives us a helpful excursus on the doctrine of power found in Philo's Wisdom theology.

<sup>20</sup>*Commentaries*, V, 237.

<sup>21</sup>*Commentaries*, IV, 7.

<sup>22</sup>Our understanding of the Epistle of James has changed considerably in the last few years. Recent research has shown its strongly semitic character. The attempt, for example, of Martin Debelius to explain James from the popular philosophy of the Hellenistic world has not succeeded, M. Debelius, *Der Brief des Jakobus*, edited by H. Greaven, 11th edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964). It has even been claimed that it is the oldest book in the New Testament. Even if it is written in good koine Greek it was written by a Christian of strong Palestinian Jewish background. For the more recent discussion, see: K. Beyer, *Semitische Syntax in Neuen Testament*, SUNT I, 1962; Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, *Achor Bible*, (New York, 1964).

<sup>23</sup>The Latin text of the introduction to Calvin's commentary on the Epistle of James needs to be quoted here. "Multum a stylo Davidis distant Solomonis scripta. Nam quum hic posterior formando externo homini, et tradendis politicae vitae praeceptis magis sit intentus: illum assidue de spiritali tum Dei cultu, tum conscientiae pace, Deique misericordia, et gravita salutis promissione concionari, notum est. Atqui non facit haec diversitas ut alterum probando, alterum damnemus." *Corpus Reformatorum*, LV, col. 381.

<sup>24</sup>Calvin would no doubt have been of much the same mind as Ulrich Wilckens who in regard both to the Apostle Paul's understanding of Wisdom and that found in the Epistle of James stresses the fact that the biblical writers distanced themselves from the Wisdom philosophy of Hellenism. Biblical Wisdom theology was not some sort of rationalism which spiritualized the biblical as well as the Greek religious traditions. That sort of Wisdom was "earthly, unspiritual, and devilish," in spite of its claims. Ulrich Wilckens, "SOPHIA", *ThWNT*, VII, 519-523 and 526.

<sup>25</sup>On the Wisdom psalms see the following: J.K. Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel, their Rhetorical, Thematic, and Formal Dimensions," *Essays in Honor of James Muilenberg*, edited by Jared T. Jackson and Martin Kessler (Pittsburg: The Pickwick Press, 1974); Sigmund Mowinckle, *The Psalms in the Worship of Israel*, 2 vols. (Nashville: Abington Press (?)), vol. 2, pp. 104-125; Roland Murphey, "A Consideration of the Classification 'Wisdom Psalms'," *Vetus Testamentum*, Sup. 9, pp. 156-167; Roland Murphey, *Seven Books of Wisdom* (Milwaukee, 1960), pp. 28-52; Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, pp. 47 ff.

<sup>26</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, I, 1.

<sup>27</sup>For the various themes of Wisdom theology found in this psalm, see: Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen (Biblischer Kommentar altes Testament)*, 2 vols. (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), vol. 1, pp. 1-10; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms, a Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 102-103.

<sup>28</sup>On the scholarly piety of the Wisdom school, see von Rad's chapter, "Centers and Transmitters of the Didactic Traditions," *Wisdom in Israel*, pp. 15-23.

<sup>29</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, I, 6.

<sup>30</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, I, 307 ff.

<sup>31</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, I, 310. It should be noted here that when Calvin uses the word "philosophers" he means natural philosophers or what today we would call natural scientists.

<sup>32</sup>On the relation of seeing and hearing to faith, see the perceptive study of Walter Ong, S.J., *The Presence of the Word, Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).

<sup>33</sup>The Latin text is as follows: "Sed quum metaphorice coelestis machinae splendorem David hic instar doctoris de gloria Dei concionatem inducat, frigida esset ista loquutio, lineam coelorum exire in ultimos usque terrae fines. Adde, quod statim proximo membro verba ubique exandiri subiicit, quid autem verbis affine cum specie aedificii? Quod si vetamus scripturam, haec duo optime convenient, in coelis, tanquam volumine omnibus conspicuo, descriptam esse Dei gloriam, et simul inditam illis esse sonoram vocem quae ad omnium aures perveniat. Atque ita monemur, visualem (ut ita loquar) esse sermonem illum, cuius facta prius fuit mentio. Oculis enim, non auribus loquuntur coeli: ut merito eorum speciem tam distincte ordinatam scripturae comparet David." *Corpus Reformatorum*, XXXI, col. 196-197. We notice here that Calvin speaks of *visualem sermonum* rather than *visualem verbum*. As we have already noted, Calvin consistently follows the Latin translation of Erasmus which in translating the Greek *logos* in John 1:1 uses *sermonum* rather than *verbum*.

<sup>34</sup>That Proverbs 9:1-6 stands behind John 6 is recognized by a number of commentators. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, I, 273; C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1958), p. 336.

<sup>35</sup>As yet I have not found any passage where Calvin treats Proverbs 9:1 ff. except perhaps a few passages where the Supper is referred to as a banquet. On the Wisdom theology of Proverbs 9:1-6, see: A. Barucq, *Le livre des Proverbs* (Paris: Gabalda, 1964), pp. 97-100; Charles T. Fritsch, *The Book of Proverbs, The Interpreter's Bible*, volume IV (New York & Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), pp. 834-835; Berend Gemser, *Sprüche Solomos, Handbuch zum alten Testament*, 2nd edition (Tübingen: J.D.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1963), pp. 48-49; William McKane, *Proverbs, a New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 360-365.

<sup>36</sup>Ecclesiasticus, or, as it is more often called today, the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach, is a book which the Reformers may not have regarded as cononical, but which they would have studied nevertheless. For Calvin's appreciation of the Wisdom character of Ecclesiasticus, see his allusion to this chapter, *Institutes* I, xiii, 7. For a contemporary commentary on Ecclesiasticus, see Alexander A. DiLella and Patric W. Spehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, the Anchor Bible Commentary, volume 39 (New York: Doubleday, 1987), particularly pp. 31-39 and 327-338. See also M. Gilbert, "L'Eloge de la Sagesse (siracide 24)," *Revue théologique de Louvain* V (1974): 326-348.

<sup>37</sup>Matthew 11:28, "Come unto me all ye that labor...;" John 4:14, "Whoever drinks of the water I will give will never thirst;" and then again, John 6:35, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger." We notice, to be sure, that while the language and imagery of Jesus is similar what Jesus says with it is quite different.

<sup>38</sup>Even in more conservative rabbinic circles, it was common to speak of the Torah as bread. Cf. C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 333-345.

<sup>39</sup>In his commentary on Isaiah Calvin tells us the words water, wine, bread, and milk refer to all that is necessary for spiritual life. As our bodies are nourished by these ordinary foods so our souls are fed and supported by the teaching of the Gospel, the inner work of the Holy Spirit and all other gifts of Christ.

<sup>40</sup>While this passage is not from one of those books of the Bible which we usually regard as a wisdom book, it clearly shows the influence of the Wisdom School. Cf. Burton Mack, *Logos und Sophia* (1973), p. 97. As early as 1938 J. Begrich pointed out the influence of Wisdom theology on Isaiah 55, *Studien zu Deuterocesaja*, reprint (Munich: Theologische Bücherei, 1963). That Isaiah 55 is an expression of the Wisdom School seems to be commonly accepted in more recent commentaries. James Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah," Chapters 40-66, *Interpreters Bible*, vol. V (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 642-646; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66, A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 280-286.

<sup>41</sup>*Commentaries*, IV, 154.

<sup>42</sup>For a list, see R. Brown, *John*, I, 272.

<sup>43</sup>For further information, see: P. Borgen *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, Leiden, 1965; Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 271-304; U.W. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, SBT 39, 1963; R. Meyer, "MANNA," ThWNT IV, 466ff.

<sup>44</sup>Philo of Alexandria, *On the Change of Names*, as found in volume V of the works of Philo in *The Loeb Classical Library*, Greek text with English translation by F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971, paragraphs 259-260.

<sup>45</sup>On Philo as a Wisdom theologian, see Burton Mack, *Logos und Sophia*, pp. 110 ff.

<sup>46</sup>Philo of Alexandria, *Allegorical Interpretation*, as found in volume I of the works of Philo in *The Loeb Classical Library*, book III, paragraph 162.

<sup>47</sup>Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus, A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 296.

<sup>48</sup>Calvin, *Commentaries* IV, 157 and *Commentaries* IX, 201 ff.

<sup>49</sup>On the history of interpretation of the Passover and particularly on its relation to the sixth chapter of John, see: Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John* I, 268-294; Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, pp. 178-214; B. Gärtner, *John 6 and the Jewish Passover* (Lund, 1959).

<sup>50</sup>*Commentaries* IV, 32.

<sup>51</sup>*Commentaries* IV, 168.

<sup>52</sup>On the Apostle Paul's distinction between the wisdom of this world as exemplified by some of the Corinthians and the wisdom of God, see Ulrich Wilckens, "SOPHIA," ThWNT, VII, 519-523.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Hans Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), pp. 53-64. Conzelmann's exposition of Paul's Wisdom theology in this passage is particularly well balanced.

<sup>54</sup>*Commentaries*, IV, 74.

<sup>55</sup>*Commentaries*, IV, 168.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Bertil Gärtner, *John 6 and the Jewish Passover*.

<sup>57</sup>*Commentaries*, IV, 170.

<sup>58</sup>The role of the Spirit in the Wisdom writers is discussed by Burton Mack, *Logos und Sophia*, pp. 176ff. See as well Kleinknecht, "PNEUMA," ThWNT, VI, 343-357; Bieder, "PNEUMA in Sapientia," p. 369; E. Schweizer, "PNEUMA bei Johannes," pp. 436-443.

<sup>59</sup>The marrow of Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is his understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. A particularly good statement of this is given by Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, English translation by Harold Knight (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 223-228. See further, W. Niesel, *Calvins Lehre vom Abendmahl*, 2nd edition (Munich, 1935); François Wendel, *Calvin, the Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, translated by Philip Mairet (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), especially the chapter, "The Hidden Work of the Holy Spirit," pp. 233-290; W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen, 1957).

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Calvin's commentary on John 14:8-14, *Commentaries*, V, 78-81.

<sup>61</sup>John Calvin, *Sermon on the Saving Work of Christ*, selected and translated by Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 206-207. Hereafter referred to as *Sermons*.

<sup>62</sup>*Sermons*, pp. 206-207.

<sup>63</sup>Calvin's great concern for holiness and the cultivation of the Christian life has attracted the attention of many scholars. Of particular interest for our study is: Jean Boisset, *Sagesse et sainteté dans la pensée de Jean Calvin* (Paris, 1959); A. Goehler, *Calvins Lehre von der Heiligung* (Munich, 1934); W. Kolfhaus, *Christusgemeinschaft by Johannes Calvin* (Neukirchen, 1939); John H. Leith, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), especially pp. 95 ff.; Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh, 1959).

<sup>64</sup>On the priority of hearing over seeing in our innermost communion with others, and especially in our religious experience, see Walter Ong, S.J., *The Presence of the Word, Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).

<sup>65</sup>On the subject of illumination or enlightenment in the theology of Calvin, see Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, pp. 30-39. There were plenty of those in Calvin's day who pushed an illuministic understanding of Scripture and Calvin was careful to push for a full appreciation of the objective nature of God's self-revelation in Scripture. The Anabaptists particularly tended to be illuministic. On the other hand any kind of literalistic or mechanistic approach to revelation Calvin significantly transcended with his teaching on the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit. See further: Donald K. McKim, "Calvin's View of Scripture," *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 43-68; Richard Muller, "The Foundation of Calvin's Theology: Scripture as Revealing God's Word," *The Duke Divinity School Review* XLIV (1979).

<sup>66</sup>*Commentaries* IV, 164.



<sup>67</sup>It is at this point that we would need to speak of the evangelistic dimension of Calvin's eucharistic doctrine. In another paper I have shown how Calvin, particularly in his sermons for Holy Week, was accustomed to preach on the Passion Narrative from the Gospels in such a way that it had an evangelistic thrust. Calvin, leading up to Easter Communion, preached Christ as crucified for us and risen for us. This made the receiving of the bread and wine at Communion the accepting of Christ as Lord and Savior. It was in this way that the sacrament sealed the covenant. This idea was seminal for Reformed piety as it developed in the Scottish Communion seasons. Cf. John Willison, *A Sacramental Directory*, (1716); *Five Sacramental Sermons*, (1722); and *Sacramental Meditations*, (1747), found in a collection of Willison's works edited by W.M. Hetherington (Glasgow, Edinburgh, and London: Blackie and Son, [c. 1830]). The same evangelistic approach to the sacrament is found in the communion sermons of Gilbert Tennent, *The Espousals, or a Passionate Persuasive to a Marriage with the Lamb of God* (New York: J. Peter Zenger, 1735.)

<sup>68</sup>On Calvin's understanding of the creative nature of the Word, see my article, "The Prophetic Criticism of Worship" in *John Calvin and the Church, A Prism of Reform*, edited by Timothy George (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 234ff.

<sup>69</sup>Calvin's commentary on Psalm 33:6 speaks of the Wisdom of God both in creation and in providence. At some length Calvin speaks of the vitality of the Word of God, the same Word who is incarnate in Jesus Christ. Quoting Isaiah 11:4, "and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips and he shall slay the wicked," Calvin insists on the power of the divine wisdom. Apparently for Calvin the Pauline phrase "the power of God and wisdom of God" refers to the same Word. The Word of truth is a powerful word. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, I, 542ff.

<sup>70</sup>On the importance of Scripture reading in the synagogue, see: David Hedegard, *Seder R. Amran Gaon* (Lund: A. B. Ph. Lindstedts Universitetsbokhandel, 1951), especially chapter VIII, "The Synagogue Service a Bible Service"; Jacob Mann and Isaiah Sonne, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue*, 2 vols. (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1971, and Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College, 1966); George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), vol. 1, chapter 6 and vol. 2, chapter 3; Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge, Liturgical Parallels in Synagogue and Early Church* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 50-101.

<sup>71</sup>There were numerous attempts early in the Reformation to develop a spiritualist interpretation of the Lord's Supper. Andreas Bodenstein von Carlstadt, Luther's senior colleague at Wittenberg, had developed a spiritualist interpretation of the Lord's Supper which Luther rejected uncompromisingly. George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 39-44. Caspar Schwenkfeld von Ossig developed a thoroughly spiritualistic interpretation of the Lord's Supper which he presented both to Luther and to the Strasbourg Reformers. Living in Strasbourg between 1529 and 1533 he had the effect of alienating Bucer, and the Rhenish Reformers generally, from a spiritualist interpretation of the sacraments. On Schwenkfeld's eucharistic teaching, see George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 106-117.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. E. David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology. The function of the so-called extra calvinisticum in Calvin's theology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966).

<sup>73</sup>On Calvin's doctrine of the incarnation, see Paul van Buren, *Christ in Our Place* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957).

<sup>74</sup>*Institutes* IV, xvii, 9. Cyril of Alexandria was one of the Fathers for whom Calvin had a particular appreciation.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. Robert Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960).

<sup>76</sup>Note the Latin text: “Non ergo praecipuae sunt sacramenti partes, corpus Christi simpliciter et sine altiori consideratione nobis porrigere: sed magis promissionem illam qua carnem suam vere cibum testatur, et sanguinem suum potum, quibus in vitam aeternam pascimur, qua se panem vitae affirmat, de quo qui manducaverit vivet in aeternum: illam (inquam) promissionem obsignare et confirmare: et quod id efficiat, ad Christi crucem mittere, ubi aet promissio vere praestita et numeris omnibus impleta fuit. Neque enim Christo rite et salutariter vescimur nisi crucifixo, dum efficaciam mortis eius vivo sensu apprehendimus. Nam quod se panem vitae nuncupavit, non eam a sacramento sumpsit appellationem, ut quidam perverse interpretantur: sed quia talis a Patre datus nobis fuerat talemque sese praestitit, quum humanae nostrae mortalitatis particeps factus nos divinae suae immortalitatis consortes fecit: quum in sacrificium se offerens, maledictionem in se nostram sustulit, ut sua nos benedictione perfunderet: quum morte sua mortem de glutivit et absorbit: quum in sua resurrectione carnem hanc nostram corruptibilem, quam induerat, in gloriam et incorruptionem suscitavit.” *Opera selecta*, V, 345.

<sup>77</sup>The attempt of certain reformed theologians such as Donal Baillie and Max Thurian to “recover” a doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice for the Reformed churches is contrary to the whole direction of Protestant theology be it Lutheran or Reformed. Donald Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments* (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1957); Max Thurian, *L’Eucharistie, Mémorial du Seigneur, Sacrifice d’action de grâce et d’intercession* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1959); Pierre-Yves Emery, *Le sacrifice eucharistique selon le théologiens réformés français du XVIIe siècle* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1959).

<sup>78</sup>It is here that the eucharistic theology of the Reformation departed most radically from that of Medieval Scholasticism. It was the doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice far more than the doctrine of the Real Presence to which the Reformers so vehemently objected. Both Luther and Calvin insisted on some kind of real presence. It was another matter with the doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Ulrich Beyer, *Abendmahl und Messe, Sinn und Recht der 80. Frage des Heidelberger katechismus, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche* (Neukirchen: Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1965); Carl F. Wisloff, *The Gift of Communion, Luther’s Controversy with Rome on Eucharistic Sacrifice*, translated by Joseph M. Shaw (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964).

<sup>79</sup>*Commentaries*, IX, 250.