JOHN CALVIN'S TEACHING ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE: ITS REFORMATION SETTING AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

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When John Calvin introduced an explicit consideration of the life of the Christian person into the 1539 Strasbourg edition of the *Institutes*, he presented and organized his material using the calling of Jesus to the disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34 and parallels). The discipline of self-denial and daily cross-bearing has in view both the life to come and the proper use of the things of this life. True religion entails a dialectic: On the one hand, the ultimate human destiny lies beyond earthly life in the fulfillment of the kingdom of God in heaven; on the other hand, the proximate, earthly human destiny requires the rightful use of the things of this life in gratitude and obedience. Calvin's eschatology seeks a balance between the enjoyment and use of the things of this life and its final purpose in the life to come. Self-denial, cross-bearing, meditation on the life to come, obedience, and gratitude in the midst of the gifts of God's providence: These are the substance of the religious life for Calvin.

One key to unlocking the continuing significance of Calvin's eschatology is in appreciating the immediate context in the *Institutes* where he moves from considering faith (Book III, Chapter 2) to regeneration (Chapter 3), justification (Chapters 11-19), and to the final resurrection (Chapter 25). In the final edition (1559), they are Book III, chapters 6-10, placed as the working out of regeneration in the Christian life, just before the chapters on justification. Eternal life for Calvin is not a question of speculation about the metaphysical nature of the soul nor the projection of human destiny into an apocalyptic realm remote from daily life and vocation. Calvin treats eternal life as a part of the whole life of faith. Calvin made a distinctive contribution to the Christian ethos by the way he held together a religious vision of this life and the life to come. Calvin's intention is to show how the present life is lived in the light of God's eternal purpose for it, that ethics is necessary and possible because of the promise of the future life.

The historical studies of Reformation theology which came out of the period of theological liberalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made a lasting contribution to our understanding of Calvin's theology; however, they brought certain presuppositions which distorted Calvin's thought. For example, Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), looking for the sources of his theology, gave an interpretation of how Calvin drew on the heritage of later scholastic theology following John Duns Scotus (ca. 1266/1274-1308). The idea that Calvin wrote his theology in a particular theological milieu made a valuable point; however, part of Ritschl's purpose was a polemic against Calvin and an apology for his own interpretation of Martin Luther. While his source analyis was a powerful interpretive tool, he applied it in a heavy-handed way to score his own theological goals. Ritschl considered Calvin's religion a reversion to a medieval Franciscan spirituality, a world-denying ethic, in deference to the life to come. Later, Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) disputed Ritschl's reading of the sources of Calvin's theology and showed that Calvin's ethics was activist. In *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr used Troeltsch's analysis to argue for the Reformed view of Christ as the transformer of culture. However, Troeltsch pushed Ritschl's thesis that Calvin was fundamentally a medieval thinker to the conclusion that the Protestant Reformation as a whole was a phenomenon of the Middle Ages, and for him this

judgment meant that neither its theology nor its original sociological impact could be recovered in the twentieth century. Neo-orthodoxy and the biblical theology movements, though they both were in reaction to liberalism, were heirs of the liberal source analysis of Calvin's theology. They accepted in various ways the historical interpretation pioneered by Adolph von Harnack (1851-1930) in his *History of Dogma* that western theology was a product of the imposition of Greek concepts on Hebrew thought forms. The liberal interpretation of the Reformation has become so much a part of the contemporary reading of Calvin's theology that we hardly notice its influence, but when it is set out in explicit form, we can easily recognize its common themes and thus judge more directly Calvin's position.

Did Calvin's doctrine of eternal life imply a world-denying asceticism? How are we to judge the impact of his Reformation setting upon the theology, particularly the eschatology, of the Reformer? Is his view of the human soul vitiated by the imposition of Greek thought on biblical truth? I want to present Calvin's theology of eternal life, assess the liberal critiques of Calvin's relation to some features of late medieval theology and the piety of humanism, and suggest alternate readings of the influence of these theological sources. The point of this presentation and assessment is to show ways in which Calvin's theological judgment can inform a contemporary affirmation of eternal life without simply trying to offer a repristinization of Calvin's own religion and theology.

II

Calvin's Treatment of the Christian Life

Calvin organizes his treatment of the Christian life (Book III, Chapters 6-10) like this:

A. Introduction (Chapter 6)

Calvin recalls the object of regeneration (Book III, Chapter 3): "to manifest in the life of believers a harmony and agreement between God's righteousness and their obedience." He says he does not intend to describe the Christian life by recounting various virtues, but to provide direction for a rightly ordered life and "briefly to set down some universal rule with which to determine [Christian] duties." The strongest motive for the Christian life is to follow the pattern of Jesus Christ, "that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption." The Christian life is not simply an intellectual matter, but occurs only when "it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart." The Christian life is never a simple human achievement. Instead it is a goal undertaken without either despair or self-flattery "that we may surpass ourself in goodness until we attain to goodness itself."

B. The Denial of Ourselves (Chapter 7)

Two steps are contained in self denial: the dedication of ourselves to God and the seeking of the things which "are of the Lord's will" and which "serve to advance his glory." That "we are not our own . . . we are God's" is the real meaning of Jesus' words to the disciples: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24, and parallels). The Christian person is convinced that he or she has to do with God throughout life and travels with soberness, righteousness, and godliness as a pilgrim through this life. Self-denial gives the right attitude toward other people, and

is the basis of helpfulness and love. It is also the means of our devotion to God's will in adversity and the foundation for the right attitude toward wealth and poverty.

C. Bearing the Cross (Chapter 8)

Christ calls his disciples to a greater demand, to prepare for "a hard, toilsome, and unquiet life, crammed with very many and various kinds of evil." Suffering becomes God's way of promoting our salvation, because by it God brings us to "grasp the power of his resurrection." Instead of trust in our own strength we learn that God "provides the assistance he has promised." In this way we learn patience and obedience. The cross is medicine curing us of a diseased estimate of ourselves. The cross is punishment, correcting our wrongs. The cross is comfort when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Cross-bearing is not an endurance without emotion as the Stoics recommend, but rather means in the midst of emotion "to bear cheerfully" what God wills for our final good. The Christian life is then one of thankfulness and spiritual joy.

D. Meditation on the Future Life (Chapter 9)

The end for which God is preparing us is the future life, and the self-denial and cross-bearing call us to have "contempt for the present life and to be aroused thereby to meditate upon the future life." To be without a desire for "heavenly immortality" is to be like an animal, and yet we are readily distracted from our final good by the attractions and vanity of this life. The discipline of the cross shows us that "this life, judged in itself, is troubled, turbulent, unhappy in countless ways, and in no respect clearly happy." Yet contempt for the things of this life does not mean "hatred of it or ingratitude against God." Not only are we in preparation in this life for the life to come, because the life we live now "is a gift of God's kindness." The contempt is only of "a perverse love of this life" and by way of contrast with a better one to come. This contrast is the only way our natural fear of death can be overcome; we can find comfort, and learn to await the day of death and final resurrection with joy.

E. How We Must Use the Present Life and Its Helps (Chapter 10)

The Scripture also teaches us "the right use of earthly benefits," things both of necessity and of delight. If we use the things God has given us for the end to which they are created, we will find provision not only for what is necessary but also "for delight and good cheer." The aspiration to eternal life teaches us that we are on a pilgrimage and that neither undue severity nor excessive indulgence is appropriate. There are four rules for the use of the things of this life, not in the sense of "fixed formulas" but in the spirit of "the freedom of believers in external matters":

—to indulge oneself as little as possible;
—they who have slender resources, go without things patiently;
—all things are entrusted to us and we must render an account to God;
—in all life's actions to look to our calling.

Calvin's exposition is in a language of piety that is bound to make the religious orientation of his view of the Christian life sound forbidding, even repugnant to our ears. For example, Calvin urges that we ought "to travel as pilgrims in this world" (3.7.3,)[1], that we live as in an "earthly prison of the body" (3.7.5.)[2] that "in comparison with the immortality to come" we ought to "despise this life and long to renounce it, on account of bondage of sin, whenever it shall please the Lord" (3.9.4).

In "Meditation on the Future Life," Calvin expresses the goal of eternal life this way:

> Whatever kind of tribulation presses upon us, we must ever look to this end: to accustom ourselves to contempt for the present life and to be aroused thereby to meditate upon the future life.[3]

More than his language conflicts with much in contemporary theological sensibility. Jürgen Moltmann has criticized theology for consigning eschatology to the last point of doctrine, making it almost an afterthought. To the contrary in Calvin, the centrality and consistency of eschatology in the larger scope of his theology are remarkable. Immortality comes with the renewal of "everything in heaven and on earth" (3.25.2). Eternal life is written into human nature in creation, and as a part of the covenant of God and humankind, is the chief foundation for unity between the Old and New Testaments. In the final resurrection the redemption that Christ has begun will be completed. In the meantime his resurrection is "the example" (3.25.3) which the Holy Spirit sets before us, upon which we are to meditate continously both because it is so difficult for us to take in and because it is the most important claim of Christian faith. Eternal life as the goal of this life is a central affirmation of Calvin's theology. Not only the language of piety in which it is clothed but also the substance of Calvin's eschatological vision requires consideration if we are to know how to take it.

III

Immortality and Resurrection

One of the ways contemporary critics have evaluated Calvin's eschatology is by making "a radical distinction" between resurrection and immortality. In the 1955 Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard University, Oscar Cullmann said the New Testament teaching about life after death implies a "radical distinction" between immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body:

> The concept of death and resurrection is anchored in the Christ-event . . . and hence is incompatible with the Greek belief in immortality; because it is based on *Heilsgeschichte* it is offensive to modern thought.[4]

The "radical distinction" between immortality and resurrection became a canon of judgment in biblical theology.[5] Particularly in America, but also in wider European circles, the biblical theology movement traded on the effort to discern in the Bible a Hebrew mentality, which was said to be radically distinct from Greek thought. Brevard Childs says of this contrast: "For many authors the dichotomy between Greek and Hebrew simply denoted succinctly the need for a distinct perspective, and afforded an easy way of making value judgments."[6] In other words, it was the use of a debatable historical evaluation as a device for theological apologetics. In the atmosphere of biblical theology it became easy to dismiss any idea that was assumed to be Greek and certify as truly biblical one that was held to be part of the "Hebrew mentality."

The "radical distinction" biblical theology made between the gospel and hellenistic thought drew on Adolf von Harnack's *History of Dogma*. Perhaps the major theme of von Harnack's great work considered the dogma of the church (he means primarily the trinitarian and christological doctrines), "in its conception and in its development . . . a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel."[7] Neo-orthodox biblical studies and theology

typically accepted the liberal reading of the history of church doctrine as a hellenization of a Hebrew tradition.

When critics charge that Calvin failed to make a radical distinction between immortality and resurrection, part of the force of the judgment comes from the suggestion that Calvin absorbed from his sources a Platonic or Neo-platonic concept of the human self. Sometimes critics assert that in his early writings Calvin was more spiritualizing, relying on philosophically grounded warrants for the immortality of the soul, whereas in the end he emphasized more the resurrection of the whole embodied self. For Heinrich Quistorp, who wrote a comprehensive monograph on Calvin's eschatology from a Neo-orthodox standpoint,[8] Calvin's view of immortality was the mistaken effort to fund an apologetic more rationalistic than the truly biblical and Lutheran teaching about resurrection of the body. Other historians simply conclude that the explanation lies in Calvin's antecedents, taken over from the past, with or without full awareness.

In seeking to explain how Calvin could have failed to make much of what is allegedly the most important feature of biblical eschatology, the radical distinction between resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul, critics typically make reference to large generalizations about the influence of Plato on the intellectual history of the west, or the influence of Plotinus through the Augustinian tradition, or some other reading of the hellenization of western theology.[9] One does not have to deny the possibility and even the helpfulness of relating the broad western heritage to the development of doctrine to see that a more likely explanation for the shape of Calvin's eschatology lies in the specific events which caused him to make it the central focus of his earliest theological work. The title of the work was *Psychopannychia*. The circumstance was the brutal suppression of both Anabaptists and other Protestant reformers by the French authorities. Among the latter were close personal acquaintances of Calvin.

Calvin wrote *Psychopannychia* when he was twenty-five years old in the autumn of 1534, during his second stay at Orleans.[10] The title is ambiguous; the word literally means the "watchful or sentient wake of the soul" (*psycho*, "mindful"; *pannychia*, "the whole night"), but it came to refer to two variant positions against which Calvin was writing, "soul sleep" and "mortalism."[11] Both views, the one that death is literally a sleep in which the soul is unconscious until the final resurrection, and the other that the soul dies with the body, were characteristic of otherwise diverse branches of the sectarian reformation.[12]

Anabaptists represented the largest threat to unity in the reformation because they wanted to create *de novo* a church that would be faithful to the New Testament, and, after the peasant revolts in Alsace, people in high places in France thought they had violently subversive intent against the old church. This worry spilled over as repression against the Protestant movement generally. When Calvin was on his last trip to Noyon and Paris, a Lutheran preacher, Canus de la Croix, was burned on June 18, 1534, after testifying to his faith. That autumn Calvin went to Orleans; meanwhile, the Placards affair burst out with its crude attacks by Antoine Marcourt of Neuchatel. Francis I, encouraged even by the moderate reformer Guillaume Budé, had de la Croix executed. Calvin and his friend Louis du Tillet immediately quit France for Basle, and probably there he learned of the execution of his dear friend Etienne de la Forge, burned in Paris, February 16, 1535.

The personal effects of these events on Calvin are not difficult to imagine. In a very short time he confronted sectarian eschatology, upheaval in Paris, the failure of nerve among moderate Catholic reformers like Guillaume Budé and Cardinal Jacques Sadolet,

the persecution and execution of fellow reformers and a close personal friend. He barely escaped arrest himself.

Looking back on 1534, reflecting on this turbulent, traumatic moment in his career when he was twenty-five years old, Calvin wrote:

> It seemed to me that if I had not opposed these things with all the strength within me, I would not have forgiven myself; for in keeping silent I would have been cowardly and disloyal. This was the cause that inspired me to publish my *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.[13]

In *Psychopannychia* Calvin was proposing a course between the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory with its penitential theology and the eschatology of the radical reformers. The latter, whether Anabaptists, Spiritualists, or Rationalists,[14] wanted to demolish Catholic sacramental theology, and their eschatology was the equipment for their work. Among all these groups was a common conviction that at death the human soul went to sleep and was unconscious until the last day when the trumpet would sound and the dead should be raised, body and soul together. The conviction was founded on a literalistic reading of the New Testament image of death as a sleep, joined with an apocalypticism which stressed the immanence of the last day. Both the conviction that the dead were unconscious and the nearness of the last things undercut purgatory, prayers for the dead, and the merit of the saints. Radical eschatology was thus an ideology for the restitution of the church. This realization was at the root of Calvin's early polemic.

Calvin thought the teaching of the radicals led to fanaticism. Moreover, he was unwilling to embrace a mistaken view of Christian teaching for the expedient of the reformation of the church. So in this early work Calvin writes against those who say the "soul sleeps from death to the judgment day, when it will awaken from its sleep, without memory, without mental activity, without awareness."[15] Calvin found the wisdom of the philosophers ambiguous in the matter. He found the Scriptures unequivocal in teaching personal, conscious, immortal life beyond death.

He says of the human soul, over against the radical reformers,

> We, on the other hand, maintain that it is a substance, and after the death of the body truly lives, being endowed both with sense and understanding. Both these points we undertake to prove by clear passages of Scripture.[16]

Calvin makes this point by reference to the creation in the image of God and observes that the Bible uses a number of synonyms for "soul." "Life," "living person," "spirit" can all be used interchangeably with "soul." But in no case can the image of God be restricted to to a quality of the human body alone. It is "in respect of spirit" that a person is "made partaker of the wisdom, justice, goodness of God."

When he writes of the hope for immortality in this early work, Calvin has particularly in mind torture and martyrdom: "It is only the body!" he says. He cites Jesus' exhortation not to fear those who can kill the body (Matt. 10:28), his declaration that the body is exempt from the power of tyrants ("Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" [John 2:19]), the commendation of his spirit into the Lord's hands on the cross (Luke 23:46), Stephen's last words ("Lord, receive my spirit!" [Acts 7:59]), and others. These references to martyrdom become poignant in the light of Calvin's own experience in the

failure of the moderate humanist reformers, the death of Lutheran Protestants, and his own refugee status.

Calvin's defense of the immortality of the soul is a part of his larger teaching about the eternal life of the Christian person. The concept of "soul" is interchangeable with "life," "spirit," "living person." Calvin had a holistic view of the human self, understanding personal unity through death to be the promise of the resurrection. He thought that to deny all continuity of consciousness beyond death was tantamount to disbelieving the resurrection promise. Calvin said that to limit the purposes of God to the physical body was to deny eternal life.

Proponents of the hellenization thesis frequently charge that to emphasize the immortality of the soul undercuts the hope for the final resurrection. For Calvin, to the contrary, the two are aspects of the same teaching. Starting as he does with creation in the image of God,[17] Calvin relates personal immortality and resurrection by saying that the beatitude of those souls who at death live in the presence of God is "the hope of a blessed Resurrection." On the other hand, the reprobate wait in dreadful anticipation of judgment. To say the saints are at rest means not that they are insentient but that they have a clear conscience. The torture of the damned is not literal fire but is fear and anxiety. So the blessedness of heaven is a continuing movement up to the day of resurrection, which will conclude and fulfill it. Beyond this affirmation Calvin says we must repudiate inquiry into either the glories of heaven or the agonies of hell: it would be "to plunge into the abyss of divine mysteries."

In conclusion, Calvin's understanding of the human self in *Psychopannychia* was animated by the urgency of his need to develop a distinctively Reformed position over against the radical reformation on the one hand and Roman Catholicism on the other. He held immortality and resurrection together because he found them together in Scripture and thought the church taught that the one should not be held in abstraction from the other. In formulating his position he interpreted directly the Scriptures, meditated on the patristic legacy, brought to bear teaching he had learned from Lutherans. His position cannot be explained by the hellenization of dogma thesis, but rather grew out of a practical struggle for theological definition based on his own reading of Scripture, patristic sources, and the requirements of his circumstances.

IV

Eternal Life in the *Institutes*

The liberal source analysis of key points in Calvin's theology argued that wittingly or not the reformer imported a spiritualizing or Platonizing outlook which determines his positions on some topics. Ritschl and other liberal historians inferred a direct influence of a "Scotist" view of the absolute power of God on Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Williston Walker, for example, says that Calvin's doctrine of predestination is based on a "severe logic, insistent that all salvation is independent of merit . . . that damnation is equally antecedent to and independent of demerit," and avers that "this Scotist doctrine of the rightfulness of all that God wills" calls in question whether God's is "a moral character."[18] Reinhold Seeberg concluded Calvin was in debt to nominalism in "the introduction of the Scotist idea of the irresponsibility of the divine will."[19] In other words, Calvin's main debt to Nominalism was the lamentable acceptance of an abstract view of God's will which caused him to embrace double predestination and an otherworldly ethic.

Another reading of the relationship between Calvin and the theology of the later Middle Ages gives a more plausible account of the overall configuration of his theology. Calvin found congenial the general shift away from a neo-platonic, participationist account of grace and beatitude that came down in the tradition from Augustine, to a more personal, relational view of justification found in the nominalist or terminist theologians.[20] This emphasis meant that Calvin's chief concern was not with the absolute power of God, as the liberal assessment implied, but rather with the events of creation and redemption in God's covenantal relationship with humanity. This understanding of covenant both grew out of and informed his understanding of the relationship of the Old and New Testaments and decisively shaped his view of eternal life.

The particular way Calvin emphasized eternal life in his theology appears in three important and related judgments Calvin makes about the relationship of God in the creation and redemption of humankind. The most decisive is the centrality he ascribed to the resurrection of Jesus from death on the cross as the unifying witness of all of Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments. Eternal life is central because the resurrection is the foundation of our faith. The second is a typological interpretation of the events of salvation in which he affirms the figural or analogical relationship between events and persons in the different dispensations of Old and New Covenants. Thirdly, on a more general level, he elaborates covenant as a unifying and central point of view for his theology. The covenantal nature of redemption is the reason Calvin insisted on the continuing integrity of the human self in the life to come. These three features are consistent with the understanding that his primary connection with the later theology of the Middle Ages was its emphasis on the personal, relational character of salvation.

First, the resurrection of Jesus from death on the cross is the most decisive affirmation of Christian faith, and it means that resurrection is the goal of the Christian life.

For the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin discussed the final resurrection at the end of his treatment of Book III, thus as the goal of "The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ." Resurrection is the aim and hope of the Christian life. In the earliest edition (1535), the final resurrection had been included in Chapter Two in the order of presentation by the Apostles' Creed; in the final edition, the resurrection is the final chapter in his ethics.

While Calvin makes the resurrection the goal of salvation and ascribes to it the position of central theological importance, still his accounting shows how acutely he understood the difficulty it presents for faith and life. In his final presentation of the resurrection, Calvin moves back and forth from deliberation on the resurrection of Christ to the difficulty of our present apprehension of it and forward again in anticipation of resurrection as the final hope. This movement of thought from past event to present experience to anticipation of the future is what Calvin means by a *meditation* on the resurrection. In his reckoning with the resurrection Calvin expresses a sense of its improbability which sounds more modern than we might usually ascribe to a theologian of the Reformation era.

The final resurrection stands at the limit of the idea of salvation. Calvin says the resurrection is incredible: "It is difficult to believe that bodies, when consumed with rottenness, will at length be raised up in their season"; "it is something too hard for men's minds to apprehend" (3.25.3).[21] Its difficulty explains why "faith is so rare in this world." Life is a struggle against the odds, against "the jests of profane men" and "violent

temptations" and therefore a person can profit from the gospel only if one is accustomed "to continual meditation upon the blessed resurrection" (3.25.1).

To make this believing meditation viable, Calvin appeals particularly to the Pauline theology of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. The gist of his reasoning is that Christ acts as an "image" and a "mirror" in which we may see our own selves and destiny and "the pledge of our coming resurrection" (3.25.3). The *imago Christi* is the image of God in which man and woman were created (1.15). Calvin says it "can be nowhere better recognized than from the restoration of . . . corrupted nature" (1.15). The metaphor of the mirror Calvin applies to the Word of God in the definition of faith at the beginning of Book Three: "But we say that the Word itself, however it be imparted to us, is like a mirror in which faith may contemplate God" (3.2.6).

In addition to the Pauline theology, Calvin also points to certain features of the gospel narratives of the resurrection. He recognizes the diversity within the biblical testimony and particularly the ironies and improbabilities in the gospels draw his attention.

In a series of rhetorical questions, he asks:

> What value will the tidings have, brought by poor frightened women and confirmed by disciples almost lifeless with fear? Why does Christ not rather set up shining tropies of his victory in the midst of the Temple and in the public places? Why does he not appear with terrible mien before Pilate? Why does he not also prove to the priests and the whole of Jerusalem that he had returned to life? Worldly men would scarcely admit that the witnesses he chose were adequate (3.25.3).

Calvin is interpreting the accounts of the disciples' coming to faith as a mirror of our own faith. It does not occur to him to argue for the historical reliability of the narratives, although he surely assumes it. Instead, the irony of conflict and the seeming unreliability of the witnesses serve to confirm for us that doubters come to faith. Of the women and the other disciples Calvin says, "their unbelief contributed not little to the strengthening of our faith" (3.25.3). Calvin relishes the lowliness of the Gospel accounts and finds in the hesitancy and frailty of the first witnesses the true picture of the way we come to believe in the resurrection.

Calvin extends just this way of seeing in the accounts of the disciples coming to faith a mirror of our own to his reading of the Old Testament, where he finds "similitudes" or "figures" of the resurrection. If Jesus' resurrection is the central redemptive event, what is its relation to other acts of God's redemption? Are there any analogies which bolster faith in the face of its difficulty? For such questions Calvin develops his typological interpretation of the concrete events of redemption. It is the second distinctive feature of Calvin's eschatological perspective.

He begins his interpretation of the resurrection by issuing a disclaimer. There are no natural analogies to the resurrection. It is "an incalculable miracle, which by its greatness overwhelms our senses" (3.25.4). Still Paul sees in the growing of a seed (1 Cor. 15:37-38) "an image of the resurrection" and so treats Old Testament references as bearers of "the similitude of the resurrection": "holy men in their troubles seek comfort from no other source than the similitude of the resurrection (*ex resurrectionis similitudine*) (3.25.4). The apocalyptic text in Isaiah 26:19 ("Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!"); Job's affirmation, "I know that my redeemer lives, and

at last he will stand upon the earth" (Job 19:25); and Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the dry bones, which Calvin calls a figure (*figura*) of the resurrection, are such similitudes. They all refer to Christ's resurrection and to ours because the resurrection is "the chief model of all the deliverances that believers experience in this world" (*ex resurrectione sicuti nobis praecipium est exemplar liberationum omnium qua sentiunt fideles in hoc mundo*) (3.25.4).

In making the resurrection the central affirmation of Christian faith, Calvin at the same time expresses just how difficult it is for us to believe. He holds together its theological priority with the struggle of faith by relying on his hermeneutic in which he affirms the unity of the Bible's witness to the resurrection through figural or typological interpretation. The figure of the mirror, as in 1 Cor. 13:12 ("now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face"), suggests that we have no direct vision of our destiny. We are reflected by the light of Christ, but our final condition remains obscure to us until at last we are fully his. He says the disciples' faith is a mirror of our own and the resurrection is a mirror of our own. We can hope to apprehend it only by a continual meditation upon it. So Calvin admonishes: "Let us now eagerly triumph in the midst of our battles, because He who has promised us a future life is able to preserve what has been entrusted."[22]

Thirdly, Calvin made covenant a central point of view for his theology. Covenant means that God creates and enters into relationship with the world, that both the divine and the human covenant partners have abiding reality and eternal significance. In the case of God, the abiding reality and eternal significance are owing to God's very nature. In the case of humanity they are owing to God's good pleasure, the grace which creates and redeems us. The emphasis which Calvin gave to covenant meant that eternal life consisted in an eternal relationship between God and humanity, a relationship which could not be broken even by death.

In the 1539 (Strasbourg) edition of the *Institutes* Calvin added an introduction to the Explanation of the Moral Law (2.10-11) on covenant. In 1559 he added an additional chapter (2.9) emphasizing the context of law within covenant and the purpose of the law which was to point to Christ. In these sections he is especially concerned to affirm the unity of the Old and New Testaments over against Anabaptists and Servetus. He says,

> Indeed, that wonderful rascal Servetus and certain madmen of the Anabaptist sect, who regard the Israelites as nothing but a herd of swine, make necessary what would in any case have been very profitable for us. For they babble of the Israelites as fattened by the Lord on this earth without any hope of heavenly immortality (2.10.1).

As in the case of the earlier work on soul-sleep, Calvin affirms continuity in consciousness against the radical reformers' version of soul-sleep. He found them severing the unity of the Old and New Testaments by ascribing to the Hebrews a carnal, materialistic understanding of salvation. For Calvin, this kind of Marcionite hiatus between the Old and New Testaments was caused by a mistaken view, a *spiritualizing* view, of the way the radical reformers understood Old Testament redemption. According to Calvin the Old Testament taught the substance of the Christian view of eternal life, albeit in a different dispensation. As in *Psychopannychia*, Calvin's affirmation that the Bible, and in this case the Old Testament, teaches eternal life, is not owing to his hellenization of the gospel. Just the opposite is true. He affirms the Hebrew understanding of the earthly gifts of God as part of salvation. He could logically hold together the goods of this life and the promise of the life to come because he found a unity of the substance of salvation within the diversity in the Old and New Testaments.

In this unity, he says, the Old Testament covenant "is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same" (2.10.2). They differ "in the mode of dispensation." To affirm the unity and the difference between Old and New, Calvin makes three points. First, "carnal prosperity and happiness did not constitute the goal set before the Jews, . . . rather they were adopted into the hope of immortality. . . ." Secondly, the covenant was supported not on their merits but on the mercy of God. Thirdly, "they had and knew Christ as Mediator, through whom they were joined to God and were to share in his promises."

In rejecting the idea that the Jews espoused a view of salvation as "carnal prosperity," he emphasizes that the Old Testament is concerned with "the care of the soul," and using Pauline references to the Law and the Prophets, asserts that the apostle teaches that "the Old Testament was particularly concerned with future life" (2.10.3).

At first glance it appears that the modern critical history of biblical religion has shattered the kind of unity of the Testaments that Calvin advocates. Historians, making inferences about the development and phenomenology of ancient Hebrew religion, have found that the Old Testament does not teach the immortality of the soul and considers the afterlife to be a shadowy realm, Sheol, where all go at death. Scholars have discovered that resurrection is found only in late strata, and have judged that salvation in the Old Testament is measured by blessings within the confines of this earthly life. Viewing Scripture primarily as the basis for historical inferences about the development of Hebrew religion has undermined the theological viablity of Calvin's sense of the biblical world of which God's covenant was the enduring foundation. It has caused, in Hans Frei's word, "the eclipse of biblical narrative," and so it would seem that historical studies have shattered the unity of the biblical witness in a way that is particularly damaging for a view of eternal life which would hold the Old and New Testaments together in covenantal unity.[23]

It is neither a logically nor factually necessary conclusion that the findings of critical history on the one hand or the projection of eternal life into *Heilsgeschichte* on the other simply displaces the canonical unity *and* difference that Calvin sees between the Old and New Testaments. Calvin's understanding of the unitary witness of the Bible to the reality of God's covenant of creation and redemption allowed him to hold diverse biblical material and disparate events in the economy of salvation together. The logical foundation of this unity and diversity is his sense of the analogical or typological relationship of events within the covenantal relationship between God and humanity. It was to affirm the unity overarching the diversity that Calvin spoke of the two covenants being the same in substance or reality but different in "mode of dispensation."

Calvin's view of the unity of the Old and New Testaments was both possible and necessary because he understood creation and redemption as dimensions of the covenantal relationship of people with God. This emphasis on the relational quality of salvation meant that Calvin could not be indifferent to soul sleep, because to interrupt the believer's relationship with God would be tantamount to denying salvation to a person who by Calvin's conviction can neither disappear in death nor be absorbed into the plenitude of being in accord with platonist versions of immortality. Calvin's argument for the centrality of eternal life in the Bible is a coherent part of his use of relational, covenantal categories to characterize Christian faith and cannot be explained away simply as an independent or unwitting metaphysical commitment to the immortality of the soul.

At least three factors contributed to Calvin's holding the Old and New Testaments together in an eschatological perspective. The decisive foundation for Calvin's eschatolog-

ical vision was the conviction of the Christian community that meditates continually upon the resurrection, understands the Christian life in its light, and so embodies eternal life in cross-bearing, self-denial, meditation on the future life, and the grateful and obedient use of the things of this life. The second was a remarkable hermeneutic which made possible the affirmation of the unity of reality or substance of the biblical covenants within a diversity in "mode of dispensation." This unity within difference was worked out by a typological or figural presentation of the resurrection of Jesus which Calvin took to be the definitive fulfillment of all the lesser affirmations of God's redemption of humankind. Thirdly, Calvin emphasized the covenant relationship of God in redeeming humanity as the general interpretive category for all of Scripture.

V

Meditation on the Future Life

The basis for "Meditation on the Future Life" is Calvin's sense that apart from a willing deliberation upon it, we can never come to believe in the resurrection. Therefore, in writing about the Christian life, he advocates a reverent openness to the otherwise inconceivable central affirmation of faith. The style of his "Meditation" draws on the piety of French Humanism. To recognize this particular historical source allows us a vantage point for assessing and understanding it. We cannot simply imitate Calvin's language of piety today. However, neither ought we to dismiss his eschatology out of hand because it is clothed in the language of this particular piety. The liberal critique of Calvin's eschatology rejected its religious foundation and effectively destroyed its enduring theological value. A restatement of the doctrine of eternal life for today should distinguish between the literary style in which Calvin's "Meditation on the Future Life" is expressed and the theological judgments it embodies.

The *Institutes* has many stylistic textures. Its opening lines might be called sapiential, the expression of a wisdom about divine and human natures: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." Much of its text is expository, the unpacking of ideas, in a straightforward exposition of the meaning of the law and the gospel, the creed and the theology of the church: "The whole third chapter of Romans is nothing but a description of original sin." Frequently Calvin engages his opponents in rhetorical polemic: "These men are fit to be treated by drugs for insanity rather than to be argued with." But in the chapters on the Christian life, which he added in 1539 while he was in Strasbourg, and above all in the presentation of eternal life, he is meditative, speaking out of the language of the piety of the church to the faith of the people of the church.

Yet it is just this language of faith which has been a stumbling block. Albrecht Ritschl, who had no use for *pietism*, accused Calvin and the Anabaptists of being biblical literalists in advocating the restoration of church order from the New Testment church. He took Calvin's insistence on an independent church discipline through the consistory to be a reversion to a monastic, Franciscan lifestyle (*Lebensideal*).[24]

Ernst Troeltsch, closer to the mark, took Calvin's ethic as a "this worldly asceticism" (*innerweltliche Askese*)[25]. He said Ritschl treated Calvin "simply as an imitation of Luther and a reaction towards Catholicism";[26] therefore, he completely misunderstood Calvin. For Troeltsch, although "the fundamental doctrines of Luther were . . . also the fundamental doctrines of Calvin,"[27] Calvinism emphasized the "ethical duty of the preservation and making effective of election."[28] In this emphasis Calvin followed certain

tendencies of the "sect-type," however, unlike sectarian Christianity, he saw discipline as a means, not of purging the church of sinners, but instead of preserving it from overt scandal and of forming a godly community.

Troeltsch, because he was sensitive to what Benjamin Reist has called "the earthly, empirical, ethical character of the substratum of all Christian thought,"[29] rejected the way Ritschl, Harnack, and other liberal interpreters treated the history of doctrine simply against the general history of ideas without attention to its sociological and institutional embodiment. However, the problem for us in Troeltsch's analysis is that he concluded that both the Lutheran and Calvinistic branches of the Reformation were medieval in character, that his analysis of post-Enlightenment Protestantism makes Christianity itself into a sociological problem, its real claims completely historicized and relativized. The final effect is similar to that of the earlier liberals whose analysis he so stringently rejected, namely to sever the stem and fruit of the protestant ethos from the theological root which nourished it and without which it could not continue to exist.

As the previous section has shown, the foundation of his meditation is on the resurrection of Jesus, which is the source of Christian hope. Therefore meditation is the thoughtful reflection on the reality of the resurrection and the incorporation of the eschatological dimension of faith, its orientation to the future life, into the conduct of this life.

John Leith has characterized Calvin's sense of meditation:

> Meditation on the future life must not be conceived in the sense of otherworldly speculation. It is essentially a life of communion with God. It is the apprehension of the fact that the essence of life inheres in this fellowship and not in such things as wealth or power or pleasure.[30]

Two of Calvin's primary convictions inform his view of eternal life. One is that God's providence is always at work providing what is good for us. The other is that we are finite creatures, who in our finitude remain sinful. The tone of his meditation on the future life sounds harsh and negative to our ears, both because of his theology and because he embraces the language of *contemptus mundi* from the spiritual tradition which he inherited. When he speaks of cultivating a contempt of this life he is thinking of two things, our creatureliness and our tendency to take our blessings from God's providence as our deserved inheritance. Calvin, unlike the tendency of the spirituality he inherited, did not fault our finitude or creatureliness as such. Instead he expressed the anxious sense that life is precarious and afflicted with trouble.

This sense of the transience and vanity of human life Calvin expresses in a typical way in these words:

> Then only do we rightly advance by the discipline of the cross, when we learn that this life, judged in itself, is troubled, turbulent, unhappy in countless ways, and in no respect clearly happy; that all those things which are judged to be its goods are evils (3.9.1).

With this sense of transience, however, Calvin insists that we balance "contempt for the present life" with a sense of gratitude and "the right use of earthly benefits" (3.10.1). The benefits of life are not only for necessity but for our delight along our earthly

pilgrimage. In this connection Calvin warns against hatred of the gifts of this life and proscribes a rigorous asceticism.

Calvin can speak of the gifts of this life like this:

> Now if we ponder to what end God created food, we shall find that he meant not only to provide for necessity but also for delight and good cheer. Thus the purpose of clothing, apart from necessity was comeliness and decency. In grasses, trees, and fruits, apart from their various uses, there is beauty of appearance and pleasantness of odor. . . . Has the Lord clothed the flowers with the great beauty that greets our eyes, the sweetness of smell that is wafted upon our nostrils, and yet will it be unlawful for our eyes to be affected by that beauty, or our sense of smell by the sweetness of that odor? What? Did he not so distinguish colors as to make some more lovely than others? What? Did he not endow gold and silver, ivory and marble, with a loveliness that renders them more precious than other metals or stones? Did he not, in short, render many things attractive to us, apart from their necessary use? (3.10.2)

Calvin's specification of the meaning of *contemptus mundi* then really implies on the one hand a balance between critical distance and discipline in the use of the goods of this life and on the other hand the grateful enjoyment of them. He differentiates between what he, with the tradition of humanist spirituality, called "contempt of the present life" and what he variously named "hatred" or "ingratitude," which he strongly repudiated. This sense of balance is Calvin's own unique interpretation of the proper stance of the Christian person.

Why did he retain the language of *contemptus mundi* when it obviously meant in his case something entirely different than for his predecessors and contemporaries? A general answer is the eschatological dimension of his ethics: Compared with the life to come, the blessings of this life are but shadows, incapable of expressing the fulfillment of God's glory. A more definite concern was Calvin's concept of sin. Part of the point of meditation on the future life grows not out of human creatureliness and finitude, but out of human sinfulness.

Our human tendency is to forget our mortality because "we are inclined by nature to a brutish love of this world" (3.9.1). The trouble with us is not that we are limited, but that we seek to compensate for our limitations by overreaching our limits to provide security for ourselves: "In fine, the whole soul, enmeshed in the allurements of the flesh, seeks its happiness on earth" (3.9.1). The result of this grasping pride is to seek to establish immortality for ourselves on earth. Thus for Calvin human pride causes a reversion to the animal within us because the innate human instinct for life is so strong that it will fix upon any grounds for security which present themselves. This is the tendency of the human mind to be "a factory of idols." The problem with humanity is not simply finitude, but that finitude causes us to be disobedient.

To a degree, Ritschl was correct. Calvin does embody his piety in a language held in common with a broad spectrum of otherwise diverse religious thinkers of his day, including and especially Erasmus and the French humanists who were influenced by him.[31]

It was a spirituality that embodied the reservations of an increasing public opposition to Catholicism, that emphasized the devoted response of the individual person to God, and that made its own particular expression of Christian faith accessible to large

numbers of people. Calvin by his own force of mind and sense of vocation rejected the kind of conservative, scholarly reform embodied in these humanists, nevertheless he shared with them certain obvious features of the religion of French humanism. However, Calvin shaped the language of the spirituality current in the humanist piety toward an entirely different style of Christian life from that embodied in any of the main options which were historically available to him. He contributed something new.

VI

Conclusion

The insight of the liberal interpretation of Calvin's eschatology came from locating it in a definite historical milieu, and, in the case of Troeltsch, a definite sociological milieu. However, the net effect of the liberal interpretations was a historical relativism which amounted to a debunking of the theology of eternal life. Is there a way for us, mindful of the historical context, to recover Calvin's eschatological vision?

Part of the answer to the question comes from recognizing how much of contemporary theology has come from the Reformation. For example, a major emphasis in twentieth-century Protestant theology has been the recovery of the doctrine of sin. Reinhold Niebuhr has interpreted Calvin's understanding of creatureliness and sinfulness by trading not on the language of *contemptus mundi*, but instead on "the easy conscience of modern man," and Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety as the "inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness" which tempts us to sin, including pride, sensuality, and self-deceit. Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote of justification and sanctification as "The Call to Discipleship" or "The Cost of Discipleship." Martin Luther King's preaching and leadership, liberation theology's "preferential option for the poor" have moved countless Christian believers and have have drawn in one way or another on the heritage of the Reformation. Among these examples, all rely on the viability of the eschatological claim of Christian faith based on the resurrection. The language of sixteenth-century spirituality drops out, but these theologies imply a religious aspiration toward eternal life.

On the other hand, some tendencies in contemporary theology dismiss eternal life. James Gustafson, in *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), has carried through with the kind of critique that Troeltsch's criticism of Calvin's theology undertook.[32] He has what he calls "a preference for the Reformed tradition," but wants to purge it of an alleged anthropomorphism in its contention that as sovereign, God determines all particular events, and what he calls "anthrocentrism" in its conviction that the focus of the divine purpose in the events of history is on the good or chastisement of persons. Gustafson says that Calvin's doctrine of eternal life is "indispensable" for the coherence of Calvin's theology and its resource for "resolving the deep doubts that arise out of human experience about both the justice and the benevolence of God directed toward particular persons."[33] However, Gustafson himself is agnostic about eternal life. He says there is "no evidence from our bodily natures to sustain it."[34] More than that, belief in eternal life is morally deleterious because it holds out "the utilitarian, prudential carrot that the promise of heavenly life sets before persons as a motive or end of their morality."[35] For Gustafson, Reformed eschatology fails the tests of reasonable evidence and moral worth.

Three aspects of Calvin's theology of eternal life remain decisive for contemporary belief. First is his emphasis on the essentiality of the resurrection of Jesus from death on the cross. Calvin did not think that belief in the resurrection was possible on the basis of

canons of evidence generally accepted in the learning of his day, yet he intended his meditation on the future life to be a reflection on the givenness of that resurrection in Christian tradition. Meditation is his word for the cultivation of a sense of the mystery and indispensability of the resurrection as "the chief article" of Christian belief. As for the charge that eternal life is human egocentricity projected on a heavenly screen, on Calvin's terms the hope for eternal life grows out of and is judged by the willingness to deny oneself, take up the cross, and follow Jesus. Hope for the resurrection, beyond all ordinary expectation is alone sufficient to nurture such a life.

Second is his insistence on holding together the Old and New Testaments. In addition to recognizing the pluralism and historical development of Hebrew and New Testament faith, Christian theology depends upon a unifying hermeneutic in which we can affirm continuity in biblical faith and between the religion of the Bible and contemporary belief. How and in what sense can we affirm that Old Testament faith expected eternal life? Instead of Calvin's language of *contemptus mundi*, we need another sense of religious conviction that expresses better the stewardship of creation and the whole of human personality. The eschatological dimension of New Testament faith and affirmation of prophecy and fulfillment in both testaments are fundamental uniting themes which have currency in contemporary biblical studies. In these we could develop Calvin's sense of figural interpretation and participation in the world of the faith of the people of the Bible.

Third is Calvin's theology of covenant. The covenant provided a unifying perspective not only for biblical faith, but for a sense of ethical solidarity in community. The resurrection was "the chief article" of faith because it alone was the sufficient basis for assuring the New Covenant of Jesus with his followers. God's covenant with humankind is the context in which eternal life is believed and understood. It gives a perspective on human life lived in community oriented toward a future fulfillment of the purposes of the Kingdom of God.

These three dimensions of Calvin's theology explain the particular form of Calvin's theology of eternal life. Contemporary affirmation of a valid and persuasive doctrine of eternal life will depend on accepting the essentiality of the resurrection, a unity of biblical witness, and the solidarity of covenant community.

Calvin held together in a remarkable balance "Meditation on the Future Life" with the "proper use of the things of this life" in gratitude and obedience. His view of the Christian ethic, comprising both its social activism in the common life and its concern for the building up of the institutional life of the church, grew out of his sense of the eternal significance of the human response in history to God's covenant purpose which outruns history. To the degree that we want to claim the Reformed tradition, we ought to recognize that Calvin's belief in the reality of the transcendent hope, inculcated by a "continuous meditation" on the resurrection, gave him a unique perspective on the grateful and obedient use of the things of this life, as well as on the hope for eternal life beyond death itself.

Notes

[1]"*Docet perigrinandum esse in mundo.*" Cf. 3.10.1.

[2]"*In terreno hoc corporis carcere.*" Cf. 3.9.4; 3.25.1.

[3]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3.9.1.

[4]Oscar Cullmann, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in *Immortality and Resurrection*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 9.

[5]The "radical distinction" became preponderant in the neo-orthodox interpretation of Calvin's eschatology. Heinrich Quistorp's *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things* applied the immortality-resurrection distinction to Calvin's teaching on eternal life. He deals with Calvin's failure to make the "radical distinction" by concluding he failed just at the places where Luther succeeded in biblical exegesis. Like Paul Althaus, an important interpreter of both Luther and eschatology in recent theology, he argues that Luther was more likely to embrace the purity of the early gospel, whereas Calvin was inclined to be more medieval in his eschatology. Ever since Quistorp's work, many have simply accepted the "radical distinction" and assumed it adequately characterizes the basic question for contemporary judgment about Calvin's eschatology.

[6]Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 45.

[7]Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7 vols., trans. by Neil Buchanan (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1961), vol. 1, 17. For an important characterization of the role of the hellenization of dogma thesis in the history of doctrine see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Historical Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 63-64, 74-76, *et passim*.

[8]Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955).

[9]A common schematization, one that Troeltsch particularly disdains, holds that the primitive church faithfully embodied the gospel, the catholic period was a mixture, and the reformation was the resolution and restoration of the pure gospel. For example, cf. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 413-417. Althaus draws on this schematization of "the development of eschatology since the time of the New Testament" to show how Luther's eschatology was truly biblical in preserving the distinction between immortality of the soul and resurrection. The schema posits the hope of the early church, "centered on the resurrection on the Last Day," then shows how this early hope was corrupted when the church tried to put together the resurrection with immortality in a so-called "intermediate state" between the death of the individual and the Last Day.

Says Althaus, "Thus the original biblical concepts have been replaced by ideas from Hellenistic gnostic dualism. The New Testament idea of the resurrection which affects the total man has had to give way to the immortality of the soul" (414).

Finally, Althaus seeks to show how Luther restored the purity of the primitive church. However, in applying the hellenization thesis to Luther's eschatology, he has to explain away

such features as Luther's dealing with death as separation of soul and body, his polemic against millennialism in the radical reformers, and says that his failure to maintain that death was simply an unconscious sleep "creates no difficulties for Luther." Thus Althaus uses the "radical distinction" as an apology for his account of Luther's eschatology.

[10]*Psychopannychia* is the title of the 1545 edition, itself a revised version of the first edition of 1542 (*Vivere apud Christum non domire animos sanctos, qui in fide Christi decedunt: assertio*). Both appeared in Strassburg with the prefaces of 1534 and 1536. Cf. John Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, ed. Walther Zimmerli (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1932). An English translation by Henry Beveridge may be found in John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises in Defense of the Reformed Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), vol. 3, 413-490. For the following historical background I have drawn particularly on Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), *passim*.

[11]Williams, 582-583.

[12]In Padua, Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1524) espoused a rationalistic view of the human self, following the Averroistic interpretation of Aristotle, which taught the mortality of the soul and its absorption at death into a universal world soul. Soul sleep fits into an eschatology which stresses the millenarian immanence of the Kingdom of God and the general resurrection of the last day. It was adopted by spiritualists like Carlstadt (c. 1480-1541) and Anabaptists in many quarters. Antinomians, including Quentin of Picardy, whom Calvin reported having met in France about the time of his writing *Psychopannychia*, and Anthony Pocquet, were sympathetic to this eschatology, and against them Calvin wrote his *Treatise Against the Libertines*. A more fateful name among the number of those teaching soul sleep was Michael Servetus. Calvin had a rendezvous with him in 1534, shortly before he wrote *Psychopannychia*, but Servetus failed to appear.

[13]Ganoczy, 99.

[14]These are the categories of George H. Williams.

[15]*De hominis ergo anima nobis certamen est, quam alii fatentur quidem esse aliquid, sed a morte ad iudicii usque diem, quo e somno suo expergefiet, sine memoria, sine intelligentia, sine sensu dormire putant. Psychopannychia von Joh. Calvin*, ed. Walther Zimmerli (Leipzig: A Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1932), 22-23. My emphasis and translation.

[16]John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises in Defense of the Reformed Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1958), vol. 3, 419. Cf Zimmerli, 22-23. *Nos vero et substantium esse ipsam contendimus et vere post corporis interitum vivere sensu videlicet et intelligentia praeditam, ac utrumque evidentibus scripturae testimoniis nos probaturos recipimus.*

[17]On this point, see Zimmerli, "Einleitung," 2.

[18]Williston Walker, *John Calvin* (New York and London, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), 417-418.

[19]Seeberg, 397.

Calvin's reference to late scholasticism is ad hoc and non-systematic; however, his theology is congenial with the shift from the emphasis on an *ontological* causality in high scholasticism to an emphasis on *covenantal* relationship in the experienced realm of creation and redemption. The shift entails a move from concern with grace understood because of

the nature of things (*ex natura rei*) to an emphasis on the actual realization of God's will (*ex pacto divino*). It is not a preoccupation with "quiddities" and speculation, but with the covenantal embodiment of the purposes of God in the biblical account of creation and redemption.

Calvin, in discussing predestination, says of the distinction between absolute and ordained power: "We do not approve of the dream of the Papist theologians touching the absolute power of God; for their ramblings about it are profane, and as such must be held by us in detestation, nor do we imagine a God without any law, seeing that he is law to himself" (3.23.2).

For another example, when Calvin discusses the merit of Christ, he objects to the view of Laelius Socinus (1525-1562) (the uncle of Faustus Socinus, the anti-trinitarian) who refused to attribute "merit" to Christ because it allegedly obscured the grace of God. Calvin insists that the work of Christ is meritorious and therefore salvific, and both of these because of God's antecedent election of Christ as mediator (cf. 2.17.1). In other words, Calvin uses the free election of God not to posit an abstract *potentia absoluta* (a Scotist voluntarism?) in God, but rather to attribute saving merit to Christ and to proscribe any theologizing which prescinds from the actual work of Christ. Instead of justifying an arbitrary divine will, it is rather the logical foundation of the actual, ordained power of God in redemption. This use of the "severe logic" of predestination is just the contrary of what one would expect following the liberal interpretation!

[20]Cf. Farley Waller Snell, *The Place of Augustine in Calvin's Concept of Righteousness* (Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York: Th.D. Dissertation, 1968), 5, 27-28, *et passim*. Snell shows that Calvin and Luther share much that differentiates them both from Augustine, and argues, following Reuter, that for Calvin, righteousness is primarily a relational category, not first a participationist category, as it was for Augustine. For an illuminating characterization of participationist and existential criticism, cf. George Lindbeck, "Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas," *Franciscan Studies* 17 (1957): 1-22, 107-125.

The later scholastics discussed the will of God by making a distinction between the absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) and the ordained power (*potentia ordinata*) of God. The distinction became important especially in the thirteenth century Averroist controversy in Paris. For Averroism the assertion that God acted reliably was tantamount to saying he acted under external constraint. John Duns Scotus employed the distinction to say how God acts *reliably* without implying that God acts *of necessity*. The absolute power of God is his power to do anything short of logical contradiction; the ordained power of God is the set of historical possibilities which God actually brought to be. In other words, God has the ability to do many things he did not will to do, so in absolute terms God remains free, but in actual fact God has imposed limits on the divine activity which reveal eternal purpose and which we may rely on. This distinction was common to both John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, and used in differing ways by such otherwise diverse theologians as Gabriel Biel, Thomas Bradwardine, Gregory of Rimini, and Pierre d'Ailly.

[21]Benoit comments on Calvin's earlier stronger statements on the inconceivability of the resurrection. *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne*, vol. 3 (Paris 1960), 475-76.

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[22]For an illuminating account of Calvin's hermeneutics see Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 19-26, 30-37, *et passim*.

[23]The critical historical judgments about Old Testament eschatology have frequently been bolstered by the theses about "the radical distinction" between the Hebraic concept of selfhood and the hellenistic idea of the immortality of the soul. Ironically, it has been an allegedly more "modern" view of the self as a psychosomatic unity, said to be found in the Old Testament, that unites the eschatologically significant dimension of human selfhood found in the Old Testament with the New. If the left hand of critical historical studies took Old Testament salvation away from the heavenly realm, the right hand apologetics of biblical theology put it back into *Heilsgeschichte* by means of the resurrection of the body on the last day. Strictly as a matter of biblical interpretation, "the radical distinction" rests canonical unity on the thin reed of a hypothetical Hebrew anthropology inferred from the diverse Old Testament materials and said to be consistently present in the New. Whether or not the apologetic move of the right hand is theologically convincing is a matter of debate. Certainly it has more in common with the spiritualizing and rationalistic hiatus between the Old and New Testaments espoused by the radical reformers than it does with the kind of theological judgment Calvin developed in the *Institutes*.

[24]Cf. Marin Schulze, *Meditation futurae vitae: ihr Begriff und ihre beherrschende Stellung im System Calvins* (Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1901) and *Calvins Jenseits-Christentum in seinem Verhältnis zu den religiösen Schriften des Erasmus* (Görlitz, 1902). Ritschl attributed to Calvin a medieval Franciscan aceticism. This line was also argued by Martin Schulze around the turn of the century. He noticed the very important place that Calvin gave to eschatology, argued that it was the controlling principle of his theology, and that as a result, Calvin espoused a medieval aceticism. This aceticism was owing to Calvin's platonism, mediated through the works of Erasmus, involving a world-denying spirit and a longing for death. Both Ritschl and Schulze were using Calvin as a foil to make an apology for a liberal interpretation of Luther.

[25]One might want to translate *innerweltliche* as "inner-worldly," but if you did, recognize Troeltsch is not talking about the *psychologically* inner world, but the *social* world.

[26]Ernst Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, n.d.), vol. 2, 880.

[27]Ibid., 580.

[28]Ibid., 591. Troeltsch spoke of the "unique content" of Calvinism as "the ascetic outlook which was produced by the direction of purpose towards the future life, and by the austere separation between God and the creature; this aceticism also included the most positive kind of work within the world itself. This is one of the most creative elements of the Calvinistic ethic, since it has determined the whole way of life which is peculiar to the nations who have been bred in the atmosphere of Calvinism" (604).

[29]Benjamin Reist, *Toward a Theology of Involvement: The Thought of Ernst Troeltsch* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 36.

[30]John H. Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1989), 155.

[31]Recent studies of the religious dimension of humanism confirm Troeltsch's reservations about Ritschl's sweeping judgment that Calvin's teaching leads to a monastic, Franciscan piety. Lucien Richard in particular has shown how the religious sensibility of John Calvin grew out of the soil of the *devotio moderna*, the piety of "Brothers of the

Common Life" founded in Holland by Gerhard Groote (1340-1384) of Deventer. Desiderius Erasmus, Jacques le Fèvre d'Etaples, and Guillaume Budé gave a particular form to this piety which became one of the foundations of the Reformation in France.

[32]Cf. Chapter 4, "A Preference for the Reformed Tradition."

[33]Ibid., 182.

[34]Ibid., 183.

[35]Ibid.