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GOD'S ACTIVITY AND THE BELIEVER'S EXPERIENCE

IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN

Judith Ann Rossall

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Submitted to the University of Durham for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy in 1991. Research conducted in the Department of Theology.

2 1 APR 1992

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father,

John Keith Rossall

ABSTRACT OF 'GOD'S ACTIVITY AND THE BELIEVER'S EXPERIENCE IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN' BY JUDITH ANN ROSSALL

This thesis argues that, in the theology of John Calvin, the believer's experience should be studied by means of an understanding of the way in which God is active in the sphere of life which the believer experiences. The means to understanding the believer's experience is, therefore, sought in the idea of engagement. According to Calvin God works within the believer's life in order to engage him/her in a living relationship with Himself. This engagement implies a fundamental change in the way in which human life is experienced.

The notion of engagement and the consequent change in the way in which life is experienced is explored. It is shown that the engagement consists in the Spirit's re-creation of the human capacity to know God. In this experience God works through Word and Spirit to re-order the human personality in such a way that the believer is fitted for a true relationship with God.

The idea of a true relationship with God is described using the concept of orientation; being oriented to God is described as bringing the whole of one's life into a clearly understood relationship with Him, living one's life so that one is open to His activity and so that every area of life is determined by one's relationship with Him.

The thesis concludes that Calvin's understanding of the believer's experience was shaped by his understanding of the end towards which God works in the believer's life. Experience itself was of interest to Calvin only in so far as what was experienced affected the believer so as to draw him/her towards that relationship which can be described as a total orientation to God.

Preface

This thesis was written in the belief that Calvin's understanding of the believer's experience has a valid contribution to make, not only to Calvin studies as such, but also to modern-day debate on the question of the experience of God. Throughout this thesis I have argued that this is the case, and also that at least part of the contribution which Calvin has to make to the modern-day understanding is the result of the breadth of his concept of experience. In contrast to the tendency found so often today to restrict the notion of the experience of God to particular occurrences in which the believer is aware of the divine presence, Calvin related the experience of God to the whole of the believer's interaction with Him, something which occurs in every aspect of his/her life.

While this approach represents a great strength in Calvin's writings it also created a problem for my work in writing a thesis on the subject. In one sense the whole of Calvin's theology represents an analysis of this divine-human interaction. The potential scope of the thesis was, therefore, very wide. Accordingly, I introduced two restrictions on the area to be covered in order to keep my work within the limits of a doctoral thesis. First, this thesis is concerned with the experience of the individual believer as s/he interacts with God. Secondly, in order to facilitate a consistent exposition of Calvin's theology across this broad area of interest, I have given little space within the thesis itself to discussions of secondary literature. This is despite the fact that the reading of secondary literature has proved of great help both in understanding Calvin and in forming my own ideas about his work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to record my grateful thanks to my supervisor Daniel W. Hardy, who is now Director of the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey. His generosity with his time and patient guidance have proved invaluable in the preparation of this thesis.

DECLARATIONS

None of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this, or any other, University.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of the experience of God is of perennial interest both to scholars who study religion as an academic discipline and to believers who have committed themselves to the Christian faith. Religious faith is not simply a matter of acceptance of credal statements or the performance of particular rites, but implies also both a particular interpretation of, and directing of the believer's experience and the expectation that his or her experience and his/her way of living will be touched and shaped by the reality of God.[1]

Moreover, the concept of experience has come to be of especial importance for modern theology, or at least that tradition within modern theology which stems in particular from the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher. The explicit aim of Schleiermacher's *On Religion* was to free religious doctrine and practice from dependence upon metaphysical beliefs and ecclesiastical structures and to show that beneath these external factors lies the true essence of religion, namely the immediate feeling of the Infinite and Eternal.[2] In *The Christian Faith* he defined the essence of religion as lying in the sense of absolute dependence and attempted to re-interpret the whole range of Christian doctrine in the light of this understanding of religion. Thus he sought to ground religion in an

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1) Cf the comments of Bultmann "If man must say that he cannot find God in the reality of his own present life, and if he would compensate for this by the thought that God is nevertheless the final cause of all that happens, then his belief in God will be a theoretical speculation or a dogma; and however great the force with which he clings to this belief, it will not be true faith, for faith can only be the recognition of the activity of God in his own life." *Jesus and the Word* (Fontana, 1958), p 113.

2) See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* trans by John Oman (New York, Harper & Row 1958), p15-6

experience which is intrinsically religious. The analysis of religious experience in this way became a central task of theology.

The irony of this development for those interested in the subject of Calvin's understanding of experience, however, is that it was also Schleiermacher, and in particular his interest in the subject of religious experience, which led many later theologians who were influenced by Calvin, especially those of the neo-orthodox school, to treat the subject of experience with suspicion.[1] Barth, for example, argued that, although he had no quarrel with the concept itself, he avoided the term, first because it implied that the human being's own capacity for experience is what is at stake and secondly because it also implied that that capacity had the significance of a norm.

Nevertheless, Calvin's teaching on the experience of God has been the subject of several studies in this century. It was in 1910 that Doumergue pointed out that for Calvin faith is inseparable from experience.[2] In 1933 H Obendiek considered the relationship between experience and the Word of God in Calvin's

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1) "Fundamentally there could be nothing to object to in describing the event as 'experience', even as 'religious experience'. The quarrel is not with this term and still less with the right and important thing which this term might conclusively denote, namely the extremely real and determinative entry of the Word of God into the reality of man. But the term is burdened (and that is why we avoid it) with the view in the background that man generally is capable of religious experience and that this capacity has the critical significance of a norm." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.1 p 220

2) E Doumergue, *Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps*, Vol IV p 437

theology. He concluded that for Calvin the experience of the believer serves the Word of God in that it points to the fact that God both has spoken and will speak; while experience cannot affect or bring about the encounter with the Word of God, it is means by which the Word demonstrates its continuing relevance.[1] In 1935 Marcel Cadix examined the question of faith and the inner witness of the Spirit, concluding that while revelation and the Spirit's witness are inseparable for Calvin they are not to be confused. The work of the Spirit is an action of God upon our minds, hearts and conscience which enables us to appropriate revelation.[2] However all these studies were limited, not only because of their length, but also because they examined the subject from only one perspective. As Partee was to point out Calvin's view of experience is not entirely contained in his doctrines of faith, Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

Charles Partee published his study of Calvin and experience in 1973.[3] This represented an advance over the work previously published, both in that it examined Calvin's use of the concept of experience as a whole, rather than from a particular perspective, and in the perspicaciousness of the analysis offered. It was Partee who argued that for Calvin, experience represents "the arena of human life in which events occur which properly interpreted shows that man

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1) See H Obendiek, 'Die Erfahrung in ihrem Verhaltnis zum Worte Gottes bei Calvin' in *Aus Theologie und Geschichte der Reformierten Kirche: Festgabe fur EF Karl Muller,* pp 188-9
2) Marcel Cadix, 'Le Calvinisme et l'experience religieuse' in *Bulletin de la Societe de l'Histoire du Protestantism Francais,* (July-Sept 1935) p 183.
3) Charles Partee, 'Calvin and Experience' in *Scottish Journal of Theology,* 26, (1973) pp 169-81. Much of the material contained in this work was re-published in Chapter Three 'Reason and Experience in Epistemology' in Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy.*

deals with God in everything."[1] However, the brevity of this study prevented a full analysis of the subject. Similarly Wilhelm Balke's study, published in 1980,[2] whilst offering some useful insights, was too short to fully come to grips with the subject. It also seems that Balke failed to take account of work previously published on the subject and therefore, for example, did not take up and use the points offered by Partee.

The only major study of the concept of experience which has been undertaken to date is that of Sou-Young Lee.[3] This work suffers from a number of weaknesses. There were two explicit aims to this study, to illuminate the general theological position of Calvin in the light of the problem of experience and to examine the notion of the experience of Calvin himself. The entire first part of the work therefore consists simply of an examination of some of the fundamental points of Calvin's theology, such as revelation and Jesus Christ as the Word Incarnate, and has no new insights to offer. The second part continues to examine the concept of experience from the perspective of particular aspects of Calvin's thought; the argument is therefore shaped by doctrinal points rather than the notion of experience itself. Moreover, the work also failed to examine the historical context of Calvin's argument on the subject, which, as will be seen, is in fact of great importance. Thus, although this study has a number of

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1) *Ibid* p 178
2) Wilhelm Balke, 'The Word of God and experientia according to Calvin' in *Calvinus ecclesaie doctor. Die Referate des Internationalen Kongresses fur Calvinforschung*, pp 19-21.
3) Sou-Young Lee 'La Notion d'Experience chez Calvin, d'après son Institution de la Religion Chrestienne' Doctoral Thesis, Universite des Sciences Humaine de Strasbourg. Faculte de Theologie Protestante, 1984.

interesting points to offer it failed to give a full analysis of Calvin's thinking in this important area.

In contrast, this study will aim to examine Calvin's teaching on the experience of God, not from the perspective of particular doctrinal points but rather in and of itself. Thus, it is the concept of experience itself, both independently and as it interacts with Calvin's concept of the nature of humanity, which has shaped both the structure of this study and the areas which will be examined. To facilitate this study, it is necessary to examine three further areas in this Introduction, the historical background to Calvin's thought, the development in the concept of experience between the time of Calvin and the present day and modern day understanding of the concept of experience.

The Historical Background

A full study of the place and function of experience in the classical philosophers is, of course, beyond the confines of this study. However, a number of relevant points can be made. Aristotle's rejection of the Platonic doctrine of the 'Forms', led on one level to an increasingly important role for worldly experience. Plato had argued that behind and corresponding to phenomena in the world of experience, there existed intuitable archetypes, known as the 'Forms' (*ειδος*) which are visible only to the eye of the understanding. Each 'Form', according to Plato, represents true reality, and the individual instances of each phenomenon in the world represent only derivative and weakened images of the true reality. Thus true knowledge is knowledge of the 'Form' which is known by contemplation, which attempts to look through the material world to the eternal reality.[1]

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1) See Plato, *Phaedo* 74a-75c and *The Republic* 509d-511a

Aristotle, however, rejected Plato's doctrine of the 'Forms' although he retained Plato's view that true knowledge is knowledge of that which is universal and real.[1] Nature, for Aristotle, was a unified physical system, which embodied both law and purpose and which was ultimately explicable in terms of the transcendent supernatural substance, God. Thus, for Aristotle, knowledge develops from sense-perception, since men and women have the innate capacity to perceive, remember, notice similarities, form general ideas and grasp universals.[2] In other words, knowledge, for Aristotle, is derived at least in part from men's and women's experience of the world around them.[3]

However, even for Aristotle experience, in general, was of interest only for what it contributed to reason. Thus, he understood experience as being related to the immediate presence of individual objects, but argued that a combination of a number of repeated memories of experience is necessary to give that mastery over it which corresponds to science or art. He did not contrast experience with thought, as tends to happen in modern day studies, but rather saw thought as the completion of an experience of an object, an experience which is already determined from every aspect by thought itself. Since experience *per se* cannot grasp its own unity, but rather remains completely embedded in production, practice and knowledge, it is still only a material

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1) See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Z.13
2) *Posterior Analytics* II.19.99b
3) On this particular question of the importance of worldly experience in knowledge Calvin was, as will be seen, closer to the philosophy of Aristotle than that of Plato. Thus, despite the fact that, as Partee notes (Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* p99) he quoted Aristotle rarely, it is wrong to conclude that Aristotle had only a slight influence on Calvin.

element in the direction of a fixed body of knowledge, which surpasses experience.[1]

G Picard has shown that during the Medieval period there existed two understandings of the question of perception.[2] Whatever the differences between these two theories were[3] they were united in agreeing that the essence of the act of perception lay in the assimilation of the subject to the object by means of what was called the *species impressa*. This was the name given to the determination of the subject by the object which was seen as being logically prior in the cognitive act. Accordingly both sides were agreed that in order for the subject's ability to know to be actualised, s/he had to be affected or determined in an appropriate way by the object of the experience.

In general, however, it can be said that the main historical background for Calvin's understanding of experience lay in the thought and work of those writers who form the movement known as the Renaissance. One major characteristic of the Renaissance was the increasing emphasis upon the importance of human history and natural reality. Since reality was perceived more and more as a natural and human phenomenon, rather than as referring to the transcendent, it was inevitable that the humanists would question the adequacy of Scholastic reasoning which claimed to perceive divine reality. In particular, they criticised the excessive reliance of Scholasticism on logic

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1) Karl Lehmann, 'Experience' in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol 2 pp 307-9.
2) G Picard, *Essai sur la Connaissance d'après les Scholastiques*.
3) See DJB Hawkins, *The Criticism of Experience*. pp 114-6

and reason, and the excessive confidence that logic and reason are the means by which men and women come to know about God. This criticism had already had a profound influence upon the understanding of theology some time before Calvin began his work. To take one example, the work of Nicholas of Cusa shaped the ideas of many members of this movement. In his work *De Docta Ignorantia*[1] of 1440 he argued that human finitude and the limitations of human faculties should make men and women realise that they are ignorant about what is divine and infinite. By the senses men and women can only perceive and can only affirm what they perceive; by discursive reason men and women can only arrive at approximate knowledge. Accordingly, full knowledge, that is knowledge which involves knowledge of God is beyond the grasp of men and women because it transcends their finitude. Thus, Nicholas argued that the only true basis for knowledge is in fact a recognition of one's ignorance.[2]

This criticism of the methods and reasoning of the Scholastic theologians became a mark of the work of humanists such as Petrach Erasmus and Valla who set out to show that syllogistic reasoning is quite simply unable to lead to concrete or genuine knowledge.[3] The net result of criticisms was quite simply

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1) English translation by G. Heron, *Of Learned Ignorance,* (New Haven: 1954).
2) "Nothing could be more beneficial for even the most zealous searcher for knowledge than his being in fact most learned in that very ignorance which is peculiarly his own; and the better a man will have known his own ignorance, the greater his learning will be." *Ibid* pp 8-9
3) "Petrach, Erasmus and others like them may have done more to undermine confidence in both the methods of knowing and the purported knowledge emanating from the university centres of learning than more technical philosophical critics, as far as the general intellectual public was concerned. However, the technical analyses of the Aristotelian method of gaining knowledge set forth by such figures as Lorenzo Valla, Rudolph Agricola, Juan Luis Vives and Petrus Ramus attempted to show that Aristotelian logic was just an abstruse, artificial and abstract way of manipulating ideas and symbols that led to neither (cont)

a changing view of theology and, in particular, an increasing recognition of the human nature of the theological endeavour.

> All of these changing attitudes to our knowing had an impact on theology - that is, knowing about God and God's will - long before Calvin. Their general result was a humanization of theology based on a recognition of the limits of human understanding and an awareness therefore that theology is a *human* enterprise.[1]

One result of this increasing pessimism about the ability of reason to lead to true knowledge was that the humanist turned instead to other ways of knowing which had previously been considered unreliable. Thus, empirical knowledge either in the narrow sense of knowledge gained through the fallible senses or

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concrete nor genuine knowledge. The vaunted Aristotelian logic machinery was in fact really a form of sophistry. Valla, Agricola, Vives and Ramus were not just insulting the logicians, or pointing out their ignorance of classical literature or the barbarousness of their Latin expression. Much more they were offering a technical analysis of what is involved in scholastic reasoning, why it is not a method of discovering new knowledge and what should replace it. Scholastic logical training concentrated on establishing the validity of syllogistic reasoning. But, the humanist critics pointed out, this did not aid in the pursuit of truth. Utilising some of the sceptical material in Cicero's writings, they contended that there were great difficulties in discovering truth, and that the best that men could do was work out methods of discovery, arts of reasoning, which would lead to the most probable or most useful knowledge rather than to valid but vacuous syllogistic conclusions." Charles B Schmitt, *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, pp 672-3.

1) William J Bouwsma, 'Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing' in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 17, (1982) p200 cf "The humanists wanted religiosity to rely principally on the individual's inner assurance of faith and to be experienced as a continuing meditation on man's transcendent destiny. So, though scholastic distinctions and divisions were rejected, the very conception of philosophy was changing because its chief object was now man - man was at the centre of every enquiry - and because the direct appeal to classical models demanded the rejection of traditional epistemological methods. Even the humanist insistence on rhetoric and its techniques implicitly emphasised a profound questioning of values. In this process philosophy was stripped of its ahistorical character and swept up in the transience and mutability of human existence." Charles B Schmitt, *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, p 61.

in the broader sense of knowledge gained through experience, gained a growing importance.[1]

However, although the humanists argued that experience itself could yield knowledge, and even a form of knowledge not available to reason, they also, of course, generally assumed that such knowledge was concerned only with human affairs. In general it can be said that for the humanists religion itself was seen as something human, albeit spiritual and internal, 'philosophy' was concerned with a way of living rather than doctrine and the reform of religion was an essentially human process, based upon insights to be found in the New Testament and the early Church Fathers. The Renaissance in general was so much concerned with the questions of human experience and human history that the question of the knowledge of God fell into the background. Thus the question of the relationship between human experience and the activity of God was never raised.

Thus, it can be argued that one result of the Renaissance was an increasing scepticism about the ability of men and women to gain true knowledge of God and a growing concern rather with the experience of human events and affairs. One of the challenges which faced the Reformers was therefore to come to terms with this new way of thinking and to find new ways to talk about God and a new

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1) Bouwsma quotes the saying of Guicciardini "Let no-one trust so entirely to natural prudence as to persuade himself that it will suffice to guide him without help from experience. For there is no man, however prudent, who has been employed in affairs, but has had cause to know the experience leads us to many results we could never have reached by the force of natural intelligence only." *Ricordi* Ser. C, 10 *Ibid* p 198

understanding of the way in which men and women come to know God within the context of Renaissance thought.

It is from within this context that both the greatness of Calvin's theological achievement and the importance to his theology of the concept of experience can be better appreciated. For he took up the humanist concern for knowledge which is not excessively dependent upon logic and reasoning, and also made use of the growing emphasis on the importance of human events and experience. As this thesis will show, in Calvin's theology God is known, not by means of pure rationality but rather as a direct result of his activity within the sphere of human existence. It is this acknowledgement of the activity of God within human existence which means that experience is far more central to Calvin's theology than might at first appear.

To understand this a distinction has to be drawn between two different meanings of experience. The first is the most simple and most common understanding of experience as an event through which an individual goes and which affects him or her. The crucial notion which defines such an event as an experience, as opposed to an observation for example, is the notion of the subject being affected by what occurs and participating in the understanding of it. A person who observes might stand apart from the event but if someone is said to experience what occurs this implies that the event in some way touches him or her and that s/he in some measure participates in it.

There is also the second and wider understanding of the concept of experience. Human life consists in a continuous succession of individual experiences which merge into one another. By this succession an individual relates to his/her

environment and whatever or whoever enters into that environment. Experience can thus refer to that sphere of human existence in which one individual's life is impinged upon by others, whether the others be other people, events or God, and also to the individual's own awareness and comprehension of that impingement. It is because of the way in which others impinge upon him or her and his or her own comprehension of this that the individual interacts with others and so it is possible for a genuine relationship to be established.

Calvin's theology, and in particular his use and understanding of the notion of experience, was concerned with the way in which God impinges upon the individual and the way in which the individual understands and reacts to this. Experience was of interest to Calvin because of his belief that a genuine interaction between God and men and women can take place within the arena of human existence. God, according to Calvin, is active within the world which the believer experiences in such a way that He also may be experienced. This thesis will seek to show not only that this is the case, but also that Calvin argued that God is at work in the believer's life towards a particular purpose and that it is possible for the Christian to discern this purpose. By understanding the way in which God is active within his/her world and the purpose towards which God is working in his or her own life, the believer is able to come to understand his or her own experience better. As this thesis will show, in Calvin's theology God enters into the world which the believer experiences, both through Creation and in Christ, in such a way as to draw each believer to Himself and to transform the existence of him/her. It is the nature of that drawing and transforming which will occupy the central chapters of this thesis.

The Philosophy of Experience

The understanding of the concept of experience can be shown to have undergone a major change as a result of the philosophical reasoning which occurred during the period from Calvin to the modern day. It is therefore necessary to present a very brief outline of the changes in the understanding of experience and its role in knowledge in order that the differences between Calvin's understanding and that of the present day may be better understood. This change can be seen to have begun with Descartes and his system of 'methodical doubt', that is a system of universal doubt applied to all accepted ideas, opinions and beliefs.[1] Having made his own existence as a thinking being his starting point for philosophical reflection he encountered extreme difficulties in accounting for the relations between the ideas which exist in the human mind and actual matter.[2] In effect, the result of Descartes' philosophy was to produce a division between, on the one hand, the mind and its thoughts and, on the other, the world and experience. Descartes' own solutions to this problem have been severely criticised but the problems which he raised could not be ignored.

John Locke had read Descartes while at Oxford but approached the problems raised in a very different manner. Locke argued that all the materials which the mind uses for reasoning and knowledge come from experience. Experience furnishes the mind, which begins as a blank sheet, void of all characters,[3] with ideas either derived from external sensible objects or resulting from the internal operations of the human mind. These two sources supply all the ideas

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1) René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*. (Everyman 1912) pp 15-6
2) See the article entitled 'Descartes' in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*
3) John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. I i-iv

which form the basis of human knowledge. The mind itself has no direct knowledge of the outside world as it can perceive only the data which is supplied to it by the senses,[1] and its only object of knowledge is its own ideas.[2]

David Hume pushed this theory of knowledge to its limits. He argued that all the perceptions of the human mind are either impressions of experience or 'ideas' by which he meant faded copies of these impressions. However, according to Hume, it is impossible to prove that these impressions accord with reality. While the relations of ideas can be known with certainty, it is not possible to be certain that anything exists beyond the data of our senses.[3] This leads to what has been called the 'ego-centric predicament', that is the problem which is caused if one takes as a premise the notion that what one directly experiences is not reality but only one's own ideas.

It was, however, Immanuel Kant who made the greatest difference to the philosophical understanding of the concept of experience. It was Kant who denied one point which had been generally agreed by previous philosophers - the idea that the mind basically functions in a passive role. Kant argued that it was this passive view of the role of the mind in cognition, conceiving of the mind as purely receiving external sense impressions, which led to Hume's scepticism. He argued that in fact, the mind is active in cognition, as it imposes upon the material given by experience forms of sensibility and

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1) *Ibid* II i
2) *Ibid* IV i.i.
3) Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, I.i.6.

categories of understanding, moulds the material along definite lines and makes it conform to the conceptions of the mind.[1]

Kant concluded that human knowledge consists of a conjunction between sensuous perception (*Anschauung*) and concepts of the understanding.[2] Thus, neither sensibility nor understanding can give knowledge independent of the other, rather the multiplicity of sense impressions, which are presented in perception, are ordered and synthesised according to the forms of sensitivity and the categories of the understanding as they are grasped by the mind, resulting in knowledge. The implication of this argument is that it is the sensibility and the understanding (through its categories) which provide the possibility of experience, not only because the categories are applied to experience in the act of the mind grasping and understanding experience, but also because experience, being subject to the categories of the understanding, is, in fact, limited by these categories.[3] The significance of the work of Kant for the concept of experience lies in the way in which he highlighted the role of the human

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1) "Now as I cannot rest in the mere intuitions, but - if they are to become cognitions - must refer them, as *representations*, to something, as *object*, and must determine the latter by means of the former, here again there are two courses open to me. *Either*, first I may assume that the conceptions, by which I effect this determination, conform to the object - and in this case I am reduced to the same complexity as before; *or* secondly, I may assume that the objects, or which is the same thing, that *experience*, in which alone as given objects they are cognized, conform to my conceptions - and then I am at no loss how to proceed. For experience itself is a mode of cognition which requires understanding. Before objects are given to me, that is *a priori*, I must presupposes in myself laws of the understanding which are expressed in conceptions *a priori*. To these conceptions, then, all the objects of experience must necessarily conform." Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Preface to the Second Edition p 12. See also p 90-92

2) *Ibid* p 93f

3) John Kemp, *The Philosophy of Kant*.

understanding in shaping the way in which a man or woman grasps experience. Thus Kant radically changed the whole understanding of experience, for according to Kant experience is shaped and formed, not by God, but rather by the forms and categories of the human understanding.

Most modern understandings of the concept of experience have been greatly affected by this development in the understanding of the subject and are, in fact, caught up in either phenomenalism or idealism. Phenomenalism teaches that our immediate awareness in perception is not an awareness of reality, but rather of 'sensa', that is of private, transitory and probably purely mental existents.[1] Idealism teaches that the world of consciousness is radically separated from the real world and treats the 'ideas' or 'forms' through which we know the real world as subjective representations, which are either innate (as Descartes taught) or drawn from experience itself (as Locke and Hume argued).[2]

This development in the way in which experience is understood had a number of effects of which it is important to be aware in reading Calvin. The concept of experience is a broad and often ill-defined one, especially as it occurs in common usage, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the way in which it is used today; nevertheless a number of tendencies in modern thought can be noted. Most modern ideas of experience, being caught up in either idealism or phenomenalism, lack the basic assumption that what is experienced corresponds to what actually is. Under the impact of scientific materialism

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1) Scmidt, 'Phenomenalism' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol 6, p 135.
2) Walter Kern, 'Idealism' in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol 3, pp 86-94.

experience is perceived as a private and subjective affair having little to do with the claim to objective truth' although it might be of great importance in an individual's own appreciation of a particular truth (and especially a religious one). Furthermore, it is also perceived as a basically superficial event, something which happens to a person, but which may have little or no real effect upon him or her.

Calvin, by contrast, treated experience as an aspect of human life within which an individual can be touched and affected by reality and, more importantly, as an aspect of human life within which God is active. In Calvin's theology God has providential control over all events in human existence and therefore over the individual's experience. This had a number of results for his conception of experience. First, as will be seen, in discussing experience Calvin concentrated upon the interaction between God and men and women which takes place within it; that is, as he put it, the way in which God deals with men and women and they deal with Him. Secondly, since, according to Calvin God is active in human experience, it is far from being the superficial event which much of modern thought would make it. Through the experience of the believer God acts to involve him/her in what is happening and to shape both his/her inner life and his/her life in the world.

This being said, one major problem associated with experience remains. As has already been raised by the examination of the history of its development given

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1) John Smith argues that it is generally accepted that "'Experience' is no more than feeling or subjectivity and hence insufficient for expressing the claim to truth and objectivity that accompanies serious religious faith." John E. Smith, *Experience and God*, p 11

above, that which is experienced cannot be straightforwardly identified with that which is real. Rather the existence of perceptual illusion indicates that the self contributes something to experience by way of inference, interpretation or construction. In other words experience is, in part if not totally, a product of the mind. It can therefore be divided into two different aspects. The first is generally referred to as 'immediate' experience, that is the given aspect of experience which is independent of the mind's interpretation. The second is generally referred to as 'developed' experience, that is experience as it is interpreted and grasped by the subject.[1] Although this problem had not been raised in precisely these terms in Calvin's day, one mark of humanism as already seen was the recognition of the human nature and therefore the fallibility of perception and knowledge.[2] It is therefore important to ask what awareness Calvin showed of the way in which a person contributes to his/her own experience by way of interpretation and on what basis he taught that a Christian's interpretation of his/her experience should be carried out.

In this thesis the overall concept of experience has been divided into three distinct but related concepts. The first is that of *encounter*. To experience something implies that the subject of the experience encounters the object. Furthermore the idea of encounter implies a relationship between the one who encounters and the one who is encountered; and the nature of this relationship must be examined. The idea of an encounter with God also implies that God Himself presents Himself in order that He might be experienced, that He both originates and sustains the relationship which is the foundation of the

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1) PL Heath, 'Experience' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol 3, pp 156-8.
2) Bouwsma, *op. cit.* p 196

encounter. It is, therefore, important to examine what Calvin had to say about the nature of the divine-human relationship, and the way in which God brings about the encounter between Himself and men and women. This will be the subject of Chapter One.

Closely allied to and indeed based upon the notion of encounter is the secondary idea of *affectivity*. This includes both the way in which the one who is experienced influences and changes the one who experiences and the way in which the latter responds to the former. This idea of experience will be the subject of Chapters Two Three and Four, which will explore the way in which the reason, the affections and the moral life are drawn into the relationship with God and the way in which by means of the transformation of the reason, the affections and the moral life, the experience of the believer itself is changed.

The third aspect of experience is the idea of *accumulated* experience, that is habitual and repeated experience and the way in which this leads to changes in the capabilities, attitudes and actions of the one who experiences. Also included in this is the question of the way in which experience itself is interpreted. This will be the subject of Chapter Five which will draw on themes developed in the previous chapters to demonstrate that Calvin's theology argues that the final purpose of the divine-human interaction described is a change in the way in which the believer experiences life such that the whole of his/her life is oriented to God Himself.

CHAPTER ONE

The Encounter with God

Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself but as he is towards us; so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain high flown speculation.[1]

The paramount concern which shaped the theology of John Calvin was the issue of the knowledge of God.[2] Questions concerned with how a man or woman comes to know God, what s/he may know of God and the results of this knowledge for both his/her inner life and outer actions, dominate both the structure and the content of the final edition of the *Institutes*. Calvin's understanding of the experience of God is, therefore, best understood by means of an understanding of his conception of the knowledge of God. This is not to suggest that the two are identical but rather it will be shown that the experience of God is of great importance in Calvin's theology because of the part that it plays in shaping the nature of the knowledge of God. This thesis will seek to highlight the way in which the experience of God has a vital role to play within all aspects of this question of the knowledge of God and indeed will argue that Calvin's conception of the knowledge of God cannot be fully understood without a grasp of his conception of and use of the idea of experience.

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1) *Institutes* 1.10.2
2) cf "Calvin's theology exalts the category of knowledge" Edward A Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, p 3 and "Evidence of Calvin's preoccupation with the problem of knowing, or with knowing as a problem, can be discerned everywhere in his work." William J Bouwsma, 'Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing', in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 17, (1982), p 201

This chapter is concerned in particular with the question of the encounter with God. This raises the question of what is meant by *encounter*. The basic sense of encounter is to meet with someone or something. Calvin's teaching on the encounter with God is concerned with the way in which men and women meet and interact with God through the arena of their human experience, or, in other words, the way in which God impinges upon a human life and shapes human experience. In examining the subject the great strength of Calvin's exposition can be seen. In dealing with the question of experience, an author is always vulnerable to the danger of subjectivity, that is of handling the subject in such a way as to be concerned only with the perceptions and consciousness of the one who experiences. This inevitably means that the examination is purely phenomenological and has little or no theological foundation. By contrast, Calvin deals with the subject in such as way as to be concerned primarily with the nature and activity of the One Who is experienced. This means that the focus of attention in describing the encounter does not lie with the experiences of the believer *per se*, or with the formal characteristics of the experience, rather the focus of attention lies first with the understanding of the God Who is encountered and secondly with the way in which the encounter with God shapes the life of the believer.

Thus Calvin's understanding of the encounter with God cannot be examined simply by describing what he had to say about the various experiences of the believer. This is not to deny the importance of the believer's own perception of his/her experience but rather to acknowledge the important point that the experience can only be truly understood by means of an understanding of the way in which God is active in it. It is the God Who gives Himself in order that He might be encountered Who shapes not only the experience itself, but also the way in

which the experience is to be understood. Thus, just as it is the experience of God which in Calvin's theology gives shape to the knowledge of God, so also what is known of God forms the way in which the experience is understood.

It is this consideration which has structured the approach of this chapter. It will begin by examining the historical background to Calvin's teaching on the knowledge of God and in so doing will show how Calvin, in contrast to his predecessors, made the experience of God central to the question of the knowledge of God. Secondly, in keeping with Calvin's own approach it will deal with the question of the character of God, moving then to examine the question of how God enters the arena of human experience. Finally, it will deal with the question of the nature of the knowledge of God, that is of discriminating between a true encounter with and knowledge of God and human imitations of the same, asking both what characterises a true encounter with God and what marks out a false one.

The Encounter and the Formation of Knowledge

In arguing that the knowledge of God is dependent upon and formed by an encounter with God, Calvin differentiated his understanding of the subject sharply from the usual understanding of the Medieval Scholastics. Steven Ozment has pointed out that the question 'How does a person know truly?' and therefore also, 'how does a person know God?' received three distinct answers during the Medieval period, one from Augustine, one from Aquinas and one from Occam.[1] Augustine's highly influential doctrine of 'divine illumination' was

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1) Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation History*. p 42f

based on a fundamental transformation of the Platonic scheme of epistemology and cosmology. As seen in the Introduction[1] Plato argued that true knowledge is always knowledge of the 'Form' from which a particular object derives its being and never of the object itself. Plato also taught that the 'Forms' were known only because the image of them had been implanted within the memory when the mind was in its pre-created state, thus the 'Forms' are in fact known by recollection or anamnesis. Augustine argued that in fact these 'Forms' are 'ideas' within the mind of God[2]. These are mediated to the individual by Christ who is the true teacher of all and who is said to dwell in the inner being of each person,[3] and who illumines the mind. By this illumination the mind received divine light by which it can truly know. It was also because of this transcendent, illuminating presence of God in the soul that, according to Augustine, it is possible for a person to know, or in his terminology 'remember' God[4] - that is not apprehend God as an image from the past but rather be attentive to His current illuminating presence.[5] In Augustine's understanding,

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1) Introduction p 5
2) Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, p 80.
3) "Concerning Universals of which we can have knowledge, we do not listen to anyone speaking and making sounds outside ourselves. We listen to Truth which presides over our minds within us, though of course we may be bidden to listen by someone using words. Our real Teacher is he who is so listened to, who is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ, that is the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God. To this wisdom every rational soul gives heed, but to each is given only so much as he is able to receive, according to his good or evil will." Augustine, 'The Teacher' in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, p 95.
4) Gilson notes that the continuing use of the term 'remember God', cannot be linked in Augustine's mature thought with a Platonic doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul. Rather, it is a recognition of the 'abiding truth' which Augustine drew from Platonism, that men and women do not make truth, they find it. *Ibid* pp 71-3
5) "See how I have explored the vast field of my memory in search of you, O Lord! For I have discovered nothing about you except what I have remembered since the time when I first learned about you. Ever since then I have not forgotten you. For I found my God, who is Truth itself, (cont)

God is to be found by a journey inwards, by attentiveness to God's presence within the soul.

Thomas Aquinas, however, rejected Platonic epistemology, and with it Augustine's doctrine of illumination, on two grounds - first because by concentrating on 'unchanging forms' it excluded from the province of science what should in fact be its proper area of concern, that is the knowledge of matter and motion, and secondly because he found it ironic that the knowledge of what is manifest should be dependent upon the knowledge of something else.[1] Thus he both denied the theory that the mind has innate ideas[2] and argued that the first object of human knowledge is the nature of the material thing.[3] In other words, Aquinas introduced a radical change in the understanding of the nature of knowledge, and especially of knowledge of God by arguing that all true knowledge begins with data drawn from sense experience. The role of experience as mediated through the senses therefore had an important role in the thought of Aquinas. The senses both set the mind in contact with material things and supply it with the materials needed for the formation of ideas and the mind uses these ideas to

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where I found truth, and ever since I learned the truth I have not forgotten it. So, since the time when I first learned of you, you have always been present in my memory, and it is there that I find you whenever I am reminded of you and find delight in you." *Confessions*, Book 10 Chapter 24 cf *On the Trinity*, Book 14.

1) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a, 34, 1.

2) *Ibid* 1a, 79, 2

3) "Since the human intelligence in the present state of life cannot understand even immaterial created substances, much less can it understand the essence of the uncreated substance. Hence it must be said simply that God is not the first object of our knowledge. Rather do we know God through creatures, according to the Apostle (Rom. i. 20), *the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made:* while the first object of our knowledge in this life is the *quiddity of a material thing*, which is the proper object of our intellect." *Ibid* 1a, 88 3

render intelligible the data with which the senses present it.[1] Aquinas also held that since material realities are in a relation of dependence upon God it is possible to know and speak of God by analogy with human experience.[2]

In this way, although Aquinas thus retained the possibility of a knowledge of God within his epistemology, he radically altered the understanding of the way in which God is to be known. Where Augustine had seen the knowledge of God as being concerned primarily with contemplation and attention to God's illuminating presence, Aquinas based the possibility of a knowledge of God primarily upon the power of human reason working with the data which the senses present to it. Accordingly, although Aquinas emphasised the role of sense experience within his epistemology the knowledge of God came to be viewed as a considerably more abstract operation, divorced from the experience of Him.

This process was continued in the work of the Nominalist theologians and especially William of Occam. Occam was among the first of the Medieval philosophers to reject the idea of actually existing Universals. He argued that instead Universals should be seen as no more than mental composites, useful ways of speaking of features which were common to a number of individually

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1) *Ibid* 1a 84. 6
2) "Our natural knowledge begins with sensation, and therefore can be led as far as sensible things can take us. Through these effects, which do not equal the virtue of their cause, we cannot know the full power of God or, consequently, see his essence. Nevertheless they are his effects and dependent on their cause. We can be led by them so far as to know of his existence and some necessary attributes. He is the first universal cause, surpassing all his effects, and we can know his relationship to creatures and their difference from him." *Ibid* 1a 12. 12

existing objects but which have no logical or metaphysical status.[1] This rejection of the idea of Universals produced a radical alteration in the understanding of the nature of the knowledge of God.

It is worth noting that the rejection of the existence of Universals did not imply an automatic denial of a correspondence between thought and reality.[2] Occam and the Nominalists remained *realistic conceptualists*, that is they argued that during the process of knowing the intellect forms a conception of the experienced object and in a perfect act of cognition this concept will correspond perfectly to the object. However, they also argued for a distinction between this form of knowledge, that is direct knowledge of an object which is actually present (*notitia intuiva*) and a second form of knowledge in which the object is not apprehended directly, as it is in itself, but is known only in abstraction from its existence through the use of reason (*notitia abstractiva*).[3] Thus they posited two forms of knowledge, of which the first, intuitive, form was seen as the more fundamental.

This understanding of the nature of knowledge and the process by which a man or woman comes to know had its greatest effect upon the understanding of the

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1) William of Occam, *Super quattuor sententiarum* (1495) I. d. 7 q. 2k *Summa totius logicae* I. c. 12
2) cf Philotheus Boehner, *Collected Articles on Occam*, p 156f and Heiko A Obermann, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, p 61f.
3) T F Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, p 13.

knowledge of God.[1] It was widely held that it is impossible for a *viator* (that is a man or woman who is still in pilgrimage upon earth) to have direct, intuitive knowledge of God, this being reserved solely for the beatified. Instead it was held that it is possible for God to grant abstractive knowledge of Himself without prior intuitive experience. This abstractive knowledge was identified with what Occam called 'creditive ideas', that is the conceptions about God which are lodged in Scripture and in the Tradition of the Church. The task of theology was therefore seen as being to define and elaborate these ideas in terms and propositions[2] while faith was identified with the acceptance of the teaching of the Church.[3]

When Calvin's teaching on the knowledge of God is set against this background two points become clear. The first is the distinctive nature of his understanding of the subject; the second is the importance of the experience of

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1) cf "The nominalistic 'epistemology of the *viator* is not intended to restrict the knowledge of the world in which the *viator* lives; of this world he can have experimental, intuitive and indirect, abstract knowledge. The purpose of this epistemology is rather to show the deficiencies in man's natural knowledge of *God*. Since the intuitive knowledge of God is only possible for the beatified and not for the *viator*, the resulting restriction of metaphysics highlights the importance of God's revelation, the chosen order." Obermann, *op. cit.* p. 41.

2) T F Torrance, 'Knowledge of God and Speech about Him according to John Calvin' in *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse, 44, (1964)*, p 401.

3) "It has often been said that ecclesiastical positivism is the hallmark of late medieval nominalism. Where the theory of knowledge is constructed in such a way that only the direct experience of individual objects can lead to certain evident knowledge of contingent things, faith, by necessity must become reliance on some form of authority, ecclesiastical, biblical or otherwise. In the religious realm neither experimental, intuitive natural knowledge nor syllogistic abstraction - the only possibilities of acquiring natural knowledge - are applicable. The intellect, it is alleged, must to some extent be sacrificed and replaced by a self-effacing confidence in the reliability of data which escape the critical test of experience and abstraction." Obermann, *op. cit.* p 68f

God to the way in which he views the knowledge of God. In direct contrast to the positions of both Aquinas and Occam he argued that, in fact, it is possible to have a direct, intuitive knowledge of God, this being based upon an encounter with God's own manifestation of Himself.

> And here again we ought to observe that we are called to a knowledge of God; not merely that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart. For the Lord manifests himself by his powers, the force of which we enjoy. We must therefore be much more profoundly affected by this knowledge than if we were to imagine a God of whom no perception came through to us. Consequently, we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out, but rather for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself.[1]

This argument had a number of profound consequences for the understanding of the knowledge of God. If, as Augustine argued, God can be known ultimately only through His presence in the human memory then knowledge of God involves withdrawing from the experience of the world. If, as Aquinas argued, human knowledge of God is gained by analogy with created reality then men and women will be able to understand God only in accordance with that reality and will be unable to rise above it to a knowledge which is formed in accordance with the reality of God. On the other hand, if, as Occam argued, God can be known only in abstraction from human experience then the knowledge of Him is reduced to the acceptance of a number of propositions. Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge

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1) *Institutes* 1.5.9

of God suffered from none of these weaknesses. According to Calvin, God can be known by the believer solely because of His own action of self-communication. It is this basic thesis as well as the nature of the self-communication which he outlined, which highlights the importance of experience in Calvin's theology. For he argued that God manifests Himself in such a way that He can be perceived to be active in the world which men and women experience. In Calvin's theology, God Himself takes up and uses the arena of human experience, making of it a field in which the divine and the human interact. Thus, it is possible to know God through the arena of human experience *because of His own activity.*

It is therefore, the encounter with God, and in particular God's activity in that encounter, which shapes the nature of the knowledge of God. As the quotation given above makes clear, God, through the believer's encounter with Him, shapes the knowledge in two specific aspects. First He transforms the knowledge of Himself from what might be called a purely 'head' knowledge to a knowledge which involves the 'heart' as well. That is He touches the believer's affections as well as his/her mind. Thus, in Calvin's words, the knowledge is transformed from one which is 'cold and empty' into one which is 'sound and fruitful' and which 'takes root in the heart'.[1]

Secondly, God transforms the way in which He is known. As is clear from this quotation, Calvin argued that the only true knowledge of God is that knowledge which is the fruit of His own self-manifestation; God can be understood only as

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1) On this see Chapters Three and Four

He reveals Himself.[1] All attempts to know God which are not formed by His own self-manifestation are rejected by Calvin as dreams, presumptuous imagination and speculation[2] which lead inevitably to idolatry.[3]

In this way, when Calvin's understanding of the knowledge of God is compared with that of the Scholastic theologians and especially with that of Aquinas and Occam it is possible to see that the manner of knowing God has been transformed from what was primarily, or even exclusively, an intellectual search, to an exercise of contemplation, not in terms of an inner search, as in Augustine, but rather in terms of attentiveness to God's activity in the world, and, more specifically, God's activity in impinging upon the believer's experience. Thus, a key aspect of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God is that of attentiveness to the way in which God has given Himself to be known. The act of attentiveness implies the application or direction of the self with determination and interest to that which is known and therefore involves far more than a simple act of observation; true attentiveness occurs only as the knower is taken up or drawn by that which is known. The primacy of

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1) "For God is not known by the naked imagination, but He reveals Himself inwardly to our hearts by the Spirit." *I John 2:4* cf *Isaiah 52:6* and *Institutes* 1.13.2
2) On *speculation* see Chapter Two pp 119-122
3) "In seeking God, miserable men do not raise above themselves as they should, but measure him by the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity, and neglect sound investigation; thus out of curiosity they fly off into empty speculations. They do not therefore apprehend God as he offers himself, but as they have fashioned him in their own presumption. When this gulf opens, in whatever direction they move their feet they cannot but plunge headlong into ruin. Indeed, whatever they afterward attempt by way of worship or service of God they cannot bring as a tribute to him, for they are worshipping not God but a figment and a dream of their own heart." *Institutes* 1.4.1

attentiveness in Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God has two main implications.

The first has already been mentioned but needs to be explored further. Attentiveness implies that the knowledge of that which is attended to is formed by its own presence. In the terms of Scholastic theology the knowledge of God is direct and intuitive and in Calvin's argument it is formed within the believer as a result of God's own activity. Thus all aspects of the way in which men and women come to know God, the encounter with Him, the language used about Him and even their actual understanding of Him, are given by God Himself. Attentiveness therefore implies submission to God's revelation of Himself and acceptance of His control over the knowledge of Him.[1]

The second implication is that true knowledge of God can occur only as God Himself engages the attention of the believer. In order for the believer to come to know God, the Spirit must draw him/her.[2] Moreover God engages the

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1) "For to begin with, the pious mind does not dream up for itself any god it pleases, but contemplates the one and only true God. And it does not attach to him whatever it pleases, but is content to hold him to be as he manifests himself, furthermore, the mind always exercises the utmost diligence and care not to wander astray, or rashly and boldly to go beyond his will." *Institutes* 1.2.2 cf "The shews how dangerous it is to contrive anything about God out of our own fancy; for when we make any kind of graven image we produce an idol instead of God. We ought, therefore, to embrace nothing but what has proceeded from God, so as not to allow ourselves any liberty on this subject." *Isaiah* 43:11

2) "Therefore, as we cannot come to Christ unless we be drawn by the Spirit of God so when we are drawn we are lifted up in mind and heart above our understanding. For the soul illumined by him, takes on a new keenness, as it were to contemplate the heavenly mysteries, whose splendour had previously blinded it. And man's understanding, thus beamed by the light of the Holy Spirit, then at last begins to taste these things which belong to the kingdom of God, having previously been quite foolish and dull in tasting them." *Institutes* 3.2.34

believer's attention not simply by taking hold of a faculty which already existed, but by actually forming within the believer the capacity to know Him[1]. Thus, Calvin argued that the ability to embrace the doctrine of Christ is a peculiar gift of God and not within the capability of men and women,[2] and that, in order for the believer to be drawn to God, the Spirit must form the ears to hear and the mind to understand. What sight and hearing do for a person's perception of the physical world can be used as an analogy for what the Spirit does for the believer as s/he is drawn to God.[3]

Who is God?

It has already been pointed out that Calvin's understanding of the encounter with God is shaped by his understanding of the God who is encountered, and the way in which His activity shapes and forms the life of the believer. This means that a vital issue to be examined is Calvin's argument on the character and activity of the God Who is encountered. Who is the God who shapes the experience of the believer and what is known of the nature of His activity in the world; or, to put the question more formally, what did Calvin have to say about the proper content of the knowledge of God?

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1) See Chapter Two
2) *John* 6:44
3) *Institutes* 4.14.9 cf "But nothing is accomplished by preaching him (Christ) if the Spirit, as our inner teacher, does not show our minds the way. Only those men, therefore, who have heard and have been taught by the Father come to him. What kind of learning and hearing is this? Surely where the Spirit by a wonderful and singular power forms our ears to hear and our minds to understand." *Institutes* 2.2.20

Calvin's argument on the content of the knowledge of God corresponds to his argument on the way in which men and women come to know God. As has already been seen, in Scholastic theology the knowledge of God tended to be an abstract affair, divorced from concrete experience; and this criticism could be applied both to what was said about the way in which men and women come to know God (by knowledge of the teaching of the Church) and to what was known about God (an abstract system of knowledge). In contrast to this position Calvin argued that it is, in fact, impossible for a man or woman to step outside of his/her relationship with God and examine God as if He were a passive object of knowledge. Rather, the very humanity of the believer sets him/her within a particular relationship with God and ensures that s/he can only ever know God from within that relationship. This is the significance of the argument at the beginning of the *Institutes* where Calvin contends that the knowledge of God and that of self are bound together because men and women are bound to God by their very humanity; their very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God.[1] Because of this relationship, the knowledge of God cannot be concerned with abstract questions, but rather considers the nature of the relationship as it is seen from the human point of view. Thus, it considers both the nature and activity of God as He reveals it to men and women and the proper way for men and women to relate to God. Its focus of interest, therefore, is both what it is proper for men and women to know of God and what it is useful for them to know.[2] In Calvin's own words, the knowledge of God is concerned with the God with Whom men and women have to do.

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1) *Institutes* 1.1.1

2) "Now the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him (*quod...expedit*). Indeed, we shall not say that properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety." *Institutes* 1.2.1

> What is God? Men who pose this question are merely toying with idle speculations. It is more important for us to know of what sort he is and what is consistent with his nature. What good is it to profess with Epicurus some sort of God who has cast aside the care of the world only to amuse himself in idleness. What help is it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do?'

To put this point another way, the central concern of the knowledge of God is the way in which God deals with humanity. This conception of dealing with God was of great importance to Calvin; this importance can be seen in two ways. First, he frequently emphasised that the knowledge of God is not concerned with God as He is in Himself, but rather with God as He is towards us,[2] that is, it is concerned not with God divorced from His dealings with men and women but with God as He can be known from the way in which He deals with them. Secondly, he frequently used the correlate idea to this and argued that just as God is to be known only in His dealings with men and women, so also the Christian should view him/herself as dealing with God in every aspect of life.[3]

It was this central concern to understand the way in which God and men and women deal with each other which gave Calvin's understanding of the knowledge of God its great potency. For it was faithfulness to this central concern which gave his theology its focus and therefore enabled him to deal astutely with the

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1) *Institutes* 1.2.2
2) See *Institutes* 1.2.2; 1.10.2; 2.2.18; 3.2.19; 3.2.21; 3.2.21; 3.2.26; *Isaiah* 45:24
3) "The Christian must be so disposed and minded that he feels within himself that it is with God he has to deal throughout his life." *Institutes* 3.7.2 cf "The calamity which David now experienced had, perhaps, been inflicted by men, but he wisely considers that he has to deal with God." *Psalms* 6:1 cf *Institutes* 1.17.2; 3.3.6; 3.3.16; 3.20.29; *Ephesians* 4:24 *Calvin's Calvinism*, p 227

problems involved. In other words, it was faithfulness to this central concern which ensured that his theology never lost touch with the demands of the life of piety.[1] And this concern again highlights the importance of experience to Calvin, for God and men and women are able to deal with each other only because God is active within the experience of men and women. The importance of experience lies in the fact that it is the field within which God and men and women interact with one another.

This, of course, raises the question of what Calvin says about the nature of God and His activity in the World. Calvin's general understanding of the answer to this question can be summed up in one phrase. God is to be known as the 'fountain of every good' (*fons omnium bonorum*).[2]

> Moreover, although our mind cannot apprehend God without rendering some honor to him, it will not suffice simply to hold that there is One whom all ought to honor and adore, unless we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of every good, and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in him. This I take to mean that not only does he sustain this universe (as he founded it) by his boundless might, regulate it by his wisdom, preserve it by his goodness, and especially rule mankind by his righteousness and judgment, bear with it in his mercy, watch over it by his protection; but also that no drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him, and of which he is not the cause. Thus we may learn to await and seek all these things from him, and thankfully to ascribe them, once received to him.[3]

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1) cf Brian A Gerrish, 'Theology within the Limits of Piety Alone' in *The Old Protestantism and the New*, p 196f.
2) Or 'the author of every good' (*omnium bonorum autorem*) *Institutes* 1.2.1; 1.2.2
3) *Institutes* 1.2.1

As can be seen, the idea of *fons omnium bonorum*, had two general senses for Calvin.

First, to know God as the *fons omnium bonorum* is to know Him as the one who not only created, but even now sustains, regulates and preserves both the Universe and, more particularly, the life of humanity. Accordingly it includes the recognition not only of the fact that God is the One to Whom men and women owe their very existence, but also of the fact that He is the God with Whom they have to deal in every aspect of their lives. An important aspect of the recognition of God as *fons omnium bonorum* is, therefore, the acknowledgement of His intimate concern for the way in which men and women live their lives, that is an acknowledgment that His activity in the world includes the rule of His justice over humanity and the prospect of His judgment. Calvin argued that the character of God makes it inconceivable that He should ignore human evil.[1] To deny this concern about human sin, and more especially to deny the possibility that God will act to punish sin, therefore amounts to little more than idolatry or atheism.[2]

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1) "Now there is nothing less in accord with God's nature than for him to cast off government of the world and abandon it to fortune and to be blind to the wicked deeds of men so that they may lust unpunished." *Institutes* 1.4.2

2) "Now God would be merely like an idol, if, contented with an inactive existence, he should divest himself of his office as judge. Whoever, therefore, refuse to admit that the world is subject to the providence of God, or do not believe that his hand is stretched forth from on high to govern it, do as much as in them lies to put an end to the existence of God. It is not, however, enough to have some cold and unimpressive knowledge of him in the head; it is only the true and heartfelt conviction of his providence which makes us reverence him, and which keeps us in subjection to him." *Psalms* 10:4 cf "They may not plainly deny the existence of God, but they imagine him to be shut up in heaven, and divested of his righteousness and power; and this is just to fashion an idol in the room of God. As if the time would never come when they will have to appear before

The recognition of God as *fons omnium bonorum* therefore gave to Calvin's understanding of the experience of God one aspect of its characteristic nature. God is active in holiness and judgment, therefore His activity may be perceived as, and in deed may be, a threat to the human who is imperfect and evil. Hence, Calvin argued at the beginning of the *Institutes* that dread as well as wonder is a characteristic response to the presence of God. God's presence may well be perceived as overwhelming and can threaten the one who perceives it with annihilation.[1]

Secondly, the idea of God as the *fons omnium bonorum* also points to the fact that all goodness and righteousness in the world is to be ascribed to Him alone. In this way the idea of dealing with God in every aspect of life is again highlighted for since God is the source of everything that is good, men and women are to learn to seek every good that they need from Him. Thus, again, the recognition of God as *fons omnium bonorum* shapes one characteristic of Calvin's understanding of the experience of God. As will be seen in Chapter Five, it is the need to seek every good from God as well as the consequent gratitude to Him for every good received which form the basic dynamics of the Christian life for Calvin.[2]

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him in judgment, they endeavour, in all the transactions of and concerns of their life, to remove him to the greatest distance, and to efface from their minds all apprehensions of his majesty." *Psalms* 14:1

1) *Institutes* 1.1.3. On this see Chapter Two.

2) cf Brian A Gerrish, 'The Mirror of God's Goodness', *op. cit.* p 150f.

How does God enter the arena of human experience?

The next question to be asked is this, how can God be experienced? For Calvin, as already stated, argued that the God, who is the *fons omnium bonorum*, enters into the arena of human experience in such a way that it is possible for men and women to encounter Him and to be aware that such an encounter has taken place. Once again, Calvin approached this question in a concrete manner, he discussed the means by which God breaks into the experience of the believer and the implications of this for him/her.

Before turning to this discussion, however, it will be useful first to note one general principle which is fundamental to Calvin's understanding of the way in which God gives Himself to be known and the effect which this had upon the understanding of the encounter with God. One of the basic principles of Calvin's scriptural exegesis was that of accommodation, that is the belief that God had given His Word in Scripture in a form which was best suited to the limited capacity of the human condition.[1] Historically, this notion of accommodation can be connected with classical work on rhetoric, where it was used to refer to a way of speaking and writing which ensured that the nature of the communication was best adapted to the situation and character of the person being addressed.[2] The idea was also used by the Early Church Fathers to explain the nature of the communication given in the Scriptures; they argued that in speaking in Scripture God had taken cognizance of human limitations and

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1) See Ford Lewis Battles, 'God was accommodating Himself to human capacity' in *Interpretation*, 31, (1977), pp19-38. and David F Wright, 'Calvin's Pentateuchal Criticism: Equity, Hardness of Heart and Divine Accommodation in the Mosaic Harmony Commentary' in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 21, (1986), pp33-50.
2) Battles, *Ibid.* p 21-2

so qualified the content and form of Scripture as to suit the capabilities of human nature.[1]

It was this notion of a communication which is suited to the limited capabilities of humanity which Calvin took up in his own Scriptural exegesis. However, it is also arguable that the idea of accommodation (as opposed to the actual term which, with a few important exceptions rarely occurs outside of Calvin's work on Scripture) is not only to be found in Calvin's work on Scripture but also governs the whole breadth of what he had to say about God's dealings with humanity. Every aspect of the way in which God deals with men and women is qualified and formed by the need for it to be suited to the needs of and comprehensible to the person concerned.

> God, it is true, fills both heaven and earth; but as we cannot attain to that infinite height to which he is exalted, in descending among us by the exercise of his power and grace, he approaches as near to us as is needful (*quoad expedit*), and as our limited capacity (*captus*) will bear.[2]

This quotation highlights what are two major aspects of Calvin's understanding of the nature of God's accommodation to humanity. Both aspects can best be discussed in relation to a key phrase taken from this quotation and also frequently used by Calvin elsewhere in his discussion of God's self-manifestation.

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1) *Ibid* p 22-6.
2) *Psalms* 78:60 cf *Daniel* 7:9

The first phrase is *captus* - capacity. The fundamental point about the idea of accommodation for Calvin was, of course, the idea that God, who understands the weakness and smallness of the human *captus* manifests Himself in such a way as to accommodate His infinity to human finiteness.[1] The limited nature of the human capacity received various descriptions; for example men and women were said to suffer from carnal stupidity[2] and from sluggishness and inertia.[3] In general, however, the various ideas can be brought together under two main conceptions. These are, first, the weakness of human intellectual capacity, that is the impossibility of the human mind comprehending the essence of God,[4] and second the more general idea of a weakness in the entire human personality, such that any direct encounter with the glory of God would be quite literally overwhelming. Thus, for example, in commenting upon Moses' encounter with God as described in Exodus 33 Calvin said.

> To Moses...a still clearer vision (of God) was vouchsafed. Now, however, he obtains something better and more excellent; and not so as perfectly to see God as He is in Himself, but so far as the human mind is capable of seeing. For, although the angels are said to see God's face in a more excellent manner than man, still they do not apprehend the immense perfection of His glory, whereby they would be absorbed. Justly, therefore, does God declare that He cannot be seen by mere mortal men; for we shall not see Him as He is, until we shall be like Him. (1 John 3:3). For it must needs be that that incomprehensible brightness would

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1) "But we ought to be aware that, when God exhibited Himself to the view of the Fathers, he never appeared such as He actually is, but such as the capacity of men could receive. Though men may be said to creep on the ground, or at least dwell far below the heavens, there is no absurdity in supposing that God comes down to them in such a manner as to cause some kind of mirror to reflect the rays of His glory. There was therefore exhibited to Isaiah such a form as enabled him, according to his capacity, to perceive the inconceivable majesty of God." *Isaiah* 6:1

2) *Institutes* 1.4.1; 1.11.1

3) *Institutes* 1.13.1

4) *Institutes* 1.13.21

> bring us to nothing. God, therefore, whilst He withholds from us a complete knowledge of Him, nevertheless manifests Himself as far as is expedient (*quoad expedit*); nay attempering the amount of light to our humble capacity (*captus*), He assumes the face which we are able to bear.'

As can be seen from both of the quotations given above, the second key phrase in Calvin's understanding of accommodation is *quoad expedit* - as far as is useful. Calvin frequently linked the idea of the accommodation of God's self-manifestation with the idea of usefulness.[2] In other words, he argued that God gives Himself to be known not only in a way designed to protect the weakness of men and women but also in the way best designed to be useful to them in their knowledge of Him. This again raises the question of Calvin's understanding of means to say that the knowledge of God is useful, a question with which this chapter will deal later.

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1) *Harmony of the Pentateuch*, Exodus 33:20 cf "God's majesty would inevitably swamp the entire world, if its inherent awesomeness were not tempered with a degree of gentleness." *Harmony of the Gospels*, Luke 2:10 and "For it cannot be otherwise but that God's majesty, like a consuming fire, will burn us up like stubble, because of the weakness of our flesh." *1 John* 3:2 see also *Genesis* 32:30 and *Institutes* 1.1.13

2) "For we must believe that God, as often as he appeared of old to the holy patriarchs, descended in some way from his majesty, that he might reveal himself as far as was useful, and as far as their comprehension would admit." *Harmony of the Pentateuch*, Exodus 3:2 cf "Paul thus designates what is right or expedient for us to know of God, and he means all that refers to the showing of the glory of the Lord, or, which is the same thing, whatever ought to induce and excite us to glorify God. This means that we cannot fully comprehend God in his greatness, but that there are certain limits within which men ought to confine themselves, even as God accommodates to our limited capacity every declaration which he makes of Himself." *Romans* 1:19

The Twofold Knowledge of God

With the background in mind the question must now be asked, what did Calvin have to say on the way in which God enters the realm of human experience? The answer to this question raises an important and much disputed area of Calvin's theology, that is the place of natural theology in Calvin's thought and the question of the two-fold knowledge of God. In view of the controversy which has occurred over this aspect of Calvin's thought,[1] it is necessary to begin this section by making clear certain fundamental points.

First, Calvin did not teach any form of natural theology, or of a knowledge of God from Creation, which could be viewed as an alternative to the knowledge of God in Christ or which could be appropriated by men and women as a source other than Christ of a saving knowledge of God. Rather, he taught a two-fold knowledge of God in which both aspects of the knowledge presuppose and complement each other.

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1) See in particular the debate between Barth and Brunner. Emil Brunner, *Natur und Gnade*, and Karl Barth, *Nein: Antwort an Emil Brunner*, English translation of both in *Natural Theology* translated by P Fraenkel. See also the comments of Willis "Now, does Calvin propound another knowledge of God not originating in the Christ witnessed to in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and if so, how?
...It comes as no surprise that the answer to this question depends on what one means by 'revelation'. If one means God's self-disclosure in non-Scriptural ways which can be appropriated by sinful men as an alternative source of saving knowledge, the answer must still be 'no' in Barth's sense. If one means God's self-disclosure through the marks of justice and ordering power in creation, no matter how utterly incapable sinful men are, lacking Scripture, of appropriating this self-disclosure, then the answer must be 'yes' as with Brunner." E David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: the Function of the So-called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology*, p 120. See also Edward A Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, p 247 and T H L Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p 29f.

> First as much in the fashioning of the universe as in the general teaching of Scripture the Lord shows himself to be simply the Creator. Then in the face of Christ, he shows himself the Redeemer. Of the resulting two-fold knowledge of God we shall now discuss the first aspect; the second will be dealt with in its proper place.[1]

The *duplex cognitio Dei* does not, therefore, refer to two different means to the knowledge of God which are somehow viewed as alternatives to each other, but rather to the knowledge of the one God as He reveals Himself in His two operations of Creation and Redemption.

The knowledge of God as Redeemer presupposes the knowledge of God as Creator because the God who redeems humanity must be known as the true God; that is the God Who is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe and to Whom the Scriptures point.[2] Moreover, it has already been argued that, according to Calvin, a true knowledge of God necessarily includes a recognition of His creating and providential activities, that is, of the fact that He is the source of all good, (*fons omnium bonorum*).

On the other hand, the knowledge of God as Creator equally presupposes and is dependent upon the knowledge of God as Redeemer, because sin has blinded men and women to that knowledge of God which should have been possible simply from Creation. Thus, although the revelation of God in Creation still exists, sin has destroyed the human ability to appropriate that revelation, and it is only the

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1) *Institutes* 1.2.1
2) Calvin assumes that the true God is the Creator to Whom men and women are bound by right of Creation. "God, as he is our Creator, has towards us by right the place of Father and Lord." *Institutes* 2.8.2 cf 1.2.2

illumination of the Spirit, which is a part of the Spirit's work in the creation of faith in Christ, which makes a true knowledge of God as Creator from Creation possible.'

The Encounter with God in Creation

Calvin spoke of two closely related ways in which God breaks into the world of human experience in Creation. The first had to do with the recognition of the Creator from the World which He created. According to Calvin God has engraved what he called 'marks of His glory' upon all His works.[2] Thus, for the believer who has been given the ability to discern these marks, something of God's wisdom, goodness and power can be learnt from the contemplation of the way in which the world has been made.[3]

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1) "We must, therefore, make this distinction, that the manifestation of God, by which He makes His glory known among His creatures is sufficiently clear as far as its own light is concerned. It is however, inadequate on account of our blindness...Hence the apostle in Hebrews 11:3 ascribes to faith the light by which a man can gain real knowledge from the work of Creation." *Romans* 1:20 cf "And since true knowledge of God is a special gift of His, and faith, by which He is known, proceeds only from the illumination of the Spirit, it follows that with nature alone as guide our minds cannot penetrate to Him." *Acts* 17:27. See also *1 Corinthians* 1:21 and *Institutes* 1.5.11

2) "Indeed, his essence is incomprehensible; hence his divineness far escapes all human perception. But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory." *Institutes* 1.5.1.

3) "In the whole architecture of His world God has given us clear evidence of his eternal wisdom, goodness and power and though He is invisible in Himself He shows Himself to us in some measure in His work. The world is therefore rightly called the mirror of divinity, not because there is enough clarity for men to know God by looking at the world but because He makes Himself clear to unbelievers in such a way that they are without excuse for their ignorance. On the other hand believers to whom He has given eyes to see discern the sparks of glory as it were shining out in every individual creature. The world was founded for this purpose, that it should be the sphere of divine glory." *Hebrews* 11:3 cf "The reason why the author of the Letter to the Hebrews elegantly calls the universe the appearance of things invisible is that this skilful ordering of the (cont)

There is, however, a second and more important aspect to the encounter with God in Creation. As has already been seen, Calvin argued that God is made known to men and women by means of His own activity; because He is active with the world of their experience in such a way that it is possible for them to be touched and affected by that activity. In line with this argument, Calvin contended that God may be known as Creator not simply because His works can be contemplated but also because He is active in Creation. He exercises His powers of righteousness and mercy upon humanity. This is the exercise of what Calvin called the *virtutes Dei*. He mentioned this exercise of the *virtutes Dei* in three places in the *Institutes* and in each instance used the idea of the *virtutes* to make two main points. He argued, first, that men and women are able to recognise the activity of God in this way, and secondly that this recognition of God's exercise of the *virtutes Dei* should transform the experience of knowing God

The first instance comes immediately after Calvin has argued that God is to be known through His activity as *fons omnium bonorum*. This recognition of God's activity should, according to Calvin teach piety, that is both reverence and love for God.

> "For this sense of the powers of God is for us a fit teacher of piety, from which religion is born. I call 'piety' that reverence joined with the love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces."[1]

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universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible." *Institutes* 1.5.1 and "God is invisible in Himself, but since His majesty shines forth in all His works and in all His creatures, men ought to have acknowledged Him in these, for they clearly demonstrate their Creator." *Romans* 1:20

1) *Institutes* 1.2.1

The second instance also is concerned with the nature of the knowledge of God. Calvin argued that in knowing God the believer should not be content with empty speculation but rather the knowledge should take hold of him or her because it is a result of God's manifestation of His powers.

> "For the Lord manifests himself by his powers, the force of which we feel within ourselves, and the benefits of which we enjoy. We must therefore be much more profoundly affected by this knowledge than if we were to imagine a God of whom no perception came through to us."[1]

Similarly, in the third instance of the use of the idea of the *virtutes Dei* Calvin argued that this encounter with God's activity in the world should transform the knowledge of God from empty speculation to a living experience.

> "Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us, not as he is in himself, but as he is towards us: so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation. Now we hear the same powers enumerated there that we have noted as shining in heaven and earth: kindness, goodness, mercy, justice, judgment, and truth." [2]

Thus, Calvin argued that there is a way in which men and women can encounter God in Creation. God the Creator has left marks of His glory upon all His works and, what is more, so exercises His powers upon humanity that it is possible for them to be deeply affected by the experience of these powers. This experience, however, has only a secondary role in the knowledge of God, for in Christ, men and women encounter not simply the powers of God but the very presence of God.

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1) *Institutes* 1.5.9
2) *Institutes* 1.10.2

The Encounter with God in Christ

In the article to which this chapter has already referred, Battles called the Incarnation "the accommodating act *par excellence* of our divine Father, Teacher, Physician, Judge and King."[1] This summarizes well Calvin's teaching on the place of Christ in God's entrance into the world of human experience; since it is impossible for men and women to raise themselves up to God, God in Christ has brought Himself down to them in their weakness.[2] According to Calvin, Christ is the supreme instance of divine accommodation.

> There are two reasons why faith cannot be in God, unless Christ intervenes as a Mediator. First the greatness of the divine glory must be taken into account, and at the same time the littleness of our capacity. Our acuteness is very far from being capable of ascending so high as to comprehend God. Hence all thinking of God without Christ is a vast abyss which immediately swallows up all our thoughts....The second reason is that as faith ought to unite us to God, we shun and dread every access to Him, unless a Mediator comes who can deliver us from fear, for sin, which reigns in us, renders us hateful to God and Him in turn to us. Hence as soon as mention is made of God, we must necessarily be filled with dread, and if we approach Him, His justice is like fire which will utterly consume us.
>
> It is evident from this that we cannot believe in God except through Christ, in whom God in a manner makes Himself little in order to accommodate Himself to our comprehension, and it is Christ alone who can make our consciences at peace so that we may dare to come with confidence to God.[3]

It was, perhaps, this understanding of the Person of Christ as the principal way in which God accommodates Himself and gives Himself to men and women which, at least in part, led Calvin to refer to the phrase 'God manifested in the flesh'

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1) Battles, *op. cit.* p36.
2) *John* 5:22
3) *1 Peter* 1:20 cf *Institutes* 2.6.4

(*Deus manifestatus in carne*; 1 Timothy 3:16) as the most perceptive description of Christ's person. This expression points to God's disclosure of Himself in the concrete person, Jesus of Nazareth, thus emphasising what will be seen to be both of the most important aspects of Calvin's Christology - the reality of God's self-giving in Christ, and the reality of the human person Jesus of Nazareth in whom God gave Himself.

Calvin adopted *in toto* orthodox Chalcedonian Christology, affirming both the unity and the distinction of the two natures in Christ.[1] Thus, he stated that what attracted him to the description of Christ as *Deus manifestatus in carne* was the way in which, in his opinion, it safeguarded, both sides of Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

> The most fitting description of Christ's person is contained in the words, 'God manifested in the flesh'. First, we have here a distinct affirmation of both natures, for he declares Him to be at once true God and true man. Secondly, he takes note of the distinction between the two natures, for he first calls Him God and then declares His manifestation in the flesh. And, thirdly, he asserts the unity of His person by declaring that He was one and the same Person who was God and who was manifested in the flesh. In this single phrase the true and orthodox faith is powerfully armed against Arius, Marcion, Nestorius and Eutyches. [2]

In fact, so concerned was he with this point that he could refer to both the unity and the distinction of the two natures in Christ as 'chief articles of belief' and even go so far as to claim that in attempting to overturn true theology Satan has always used a denial of one of these two points.[3]

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1) "For we affirm his divinity so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired and yet these two natures constitute one Christ" *Institutes* 2.14.1
2) *1 Timothy* 3:16
3) *John* 1:14

In view of these strong affirmations of both sides of the Chalcedonian definition it seems at first somewhat strange that Calvin himself has been charged with the heresy of Nestorianism, or at least with an inability to confess consistently the union of the two natures in Christ. Nevertheless, some scholars have argued that while it may be accepted that he held to the unity in principle, his formulation of this lacks the clarity and force of his arguments for the distinction and his positive descriptions of the person of Christ give at least some basis to the charge of Nestorianism. Wendel, for example, wondered whether Calvin "by thus accentuating the distinction between the two natures "did not endanger the fundamental unity of the person of Christ"[1], while Kratz argued "ist nicht zu bestreiten, daß Calvin die Einheit von Gott und Mensch in Christus nicht mit der gleichen Anschaulichkeit hat darstellen können wie die Wirklichkeit seiner menshlichen bzw. göttlichen Natur."[2] Even Willis, although he argued strongly for Calvin's adherence to the unity, concluded that Calvin had 'no clear concept' of the ontological foundation of the personal union, a fact which he attributed to Calvin's awe before the mystery and distaste for speculation.[3]

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1) Wendel, *Calvin*, p 225.
2) Wolfgang Kratz, 'Christus Gott und Mensch. Einige Fragen an Calvin's Christologie', *Evangelische Theologie*, 19, (1959), p 13.
3) Willis *op. cit.* cf the conclusions of Witte that "Calvin hat einige wertvolle antiochenische Elemente der Christologie betont, welche zum »*depositum fidei*« gehören, so besonders das »Unvermischt« und das »*salva proprietate utriusque naturae*«. Dies tat er in einer Weise, daß er mit den anderseitigen Bestimmungen der calkedonischen Definition wenigstens formell nicht in Widerspruch geriet. Dagegen stellt er sich durch seine Ablehnung einer Vergöttlichung der Menscheit Jesus in offenen Gegensatz zur altkirchlichen Theologie und wird somit auch dem Johannes-Evangelium nicht gerecht." Johannes L Witte, 'Die Christologie Calvins' in *Das Konzil von Calkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart* vol III (ed) Grillmeier & Bacht, p 529.

The basis of this argument is not difficult to locate; Calvin, in his description of the Person and Work of Christ, showed a great concern for the reality of both the natures in Christ and a desire to avoid anything which might suggest that they were mingled in any way which would lessen the authenticity of either one. This was, of course, a result of his recognition of the vital importance of both the human and the divine nature to of Christ to His work and, therefore, to the salvation of humankind. The human nature is essential because it is this which is the basis of Christ's communion with humanity, and of His ability, therefore, to impart to men and women what is His, and also because it is a pledge to men and women of their reconciliation. The divine nature, on the other hand is essential because only God has the ability to overcome death and conquer sin.[1] The error of Eutyches, therefore, threatened not only a right understanding of the Person of Christ but also His work, since in mingling the two natures it in fact produced an intermediate being who is neither God nor man[2] and could therefore neither identify with humanity nor defeat sin and evil.

Moreover, according to Calvin, faith is dependent upon, or 'rests upon the foundation of'[3] the recognition of both natures in Christ.

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1) "In short, since neither as God alone could he feel death, nor as man alone could he overcome it, he coupled human nature with divine that to atone for sin he might submit the weakness of the one to death; and that, wrestling with death by the power of the other nature, he might win victory for us." *Institutes* 2.12.3. See the entire section 2.12.1-3.
2) *Institutes* 4.17.30
3) *Institutes* 2.12.3

Thus, if the believer wants to find life in Christ, and be sure that in Him s/he has found the means to conquer evil, s/he must be assured of His divinity.[1] On the other hand, if s/he wants to be sure that in Him s/he has found the remission of sins and the way to come to God s/he needs to be assured of His humanity.[2]

It is the contention of this chapter, however, that Calvin's understanding of the encounter with God in Christ is, in fact, dependent upon his understanding of the unity of the Person of Christ. It will, therefore, seek to show not only that it is possible to demonstrate clearly Calvin's conception of the unity but also that the way in which he conceives of the unity has the greatest of significance for the understanding of the encounter with God.

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1) "We must not seek salvation elsewhere than in Christ. But we shall not be satisfied with Christ, unless we know that in Him we possess God. We must therefore believe that there is a unity between the Father and the Son, so that they have nothing separate from each other." *John* 17:10

2) "Voilà donc pour un item, que nous puissons distinguer en nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ les deux natures. Et ceci n'est point pour speculer en l'air, mais il faut que nous le prattiquions pour nourrir nostre foy. La raison? Si nous voulons chercher en Iesus Christ vie, il faut que nous entendions qu'il a en soy toute maiesté Divine... Si nous voulons estre maintenus contre le diable, et contre tous nos ennemis, il faut que nous cognoissions Iesus Christ estre Dieu. Voulons-nous en somme mettre nostre fiance en luy? il est question aussi de cognoiste qu'il a toute puissance: ce qu'il n'auroit pas sinon estant Dieu... Et puis quand nous chercherons la remission de nos pechez, la satisfaction de nos dettes, le moyen d'invoquer Dieu, d'estre secourus en nos infirmitez, et d'estre deliverez de la maledictiion, il faut que nous trouvions Iesus Christ prochain de nous et que nous le voyons là comme homme." Sermons sur la Premiere Epitre à Timothée 3:16 CO 53 325-6

Calvin followed Christian tradition in teaching a truly *hypostatic* union, that is he concentrated not on the abstract question of how the two natures were related in Christ but on the concrete point that the actual person Jesus of Nazareth was, at the same time, both God and man. Thus, when he did speak of the unity he based his exposition around the idea that "the selfsame one was both God and man" (*ipse erat Deus et homo*).[1] Accordingly, when Elizabeth calls Mary the mother of her Lord, Calvin argued that this indicated the unity of the natures because it was as if she said that "he who is a mortal man in the womb of Mary is at the same time the eternal God."[2] while a little earlier on in the same Commentary Calvin explained that the unity meant that "He is the same, who was Son of God in the eternal Godhead, that appeared also Son of God in human flesh."[3] In commenting upon John 1:14 Calvin explained "in Christ two natures were united in such a way that one and the same Christ is true God and true man" while in the *Institutes* he put it like this "the very same Christ, who according to the flesh dwelt as Son of Man on earth, was God in heaven."[4] In all these quotations we see repeated the same point, that the unity is to be seen as consisting in the fact that the same person was, at the same time, both God and man. So, it must be repeated, for Calvin what is central is not the relationship between the two natures as such, but the grasp of the fact that

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1) *Institutes* 2.14.2
2) *Luke* 1:43
3) *Ibid* 1:35
4) *Institutes* 4.17.30 cf *1 Timothy* 3:16 quoted above and "The unity of person in Christ is also expressed here; for the same one is called God and Lord." *John* 20:28

the concrete historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, was simultaneously both God and man.

In this understanding of the unity of Christ, the *communicatio idiomatum* is highly significant. In accordance with his general understanding of the unity as just described Calvin saw the *communicatio idiomatum* as taking place not between the natures as such but at the level of the Person. This is the meaning of the simile which Calvin uses in introducing the *communicatio idiomatum* in the *Institutes.*[1] The simile is based around the relationship between the body and the soul in the human person; the point being that although a person is composed of two different aspects, the body and the soul, s/he is still in fact only one person. Thus, although a person can be spoken of as though s/he were simply a body, or although s/he were simply a soul or as being both body and soul, yet s/he is at the same time only one person. So also, although the Scriptures sometimes speak of Christ as though He were simply human and sometimes as though He were simply divine, in truth He is both God and man. Just as there is just one person in a human who is both body and soul, so also there is just one Person in Christ who is both God and man.

> Thus, also, the Scriptures speak of Christ: they sometimes attribute to him what must be referred solely to his humanity, sometimes what belongs uniquely to his divinity; and sometimes what embraces both natures but fits neither alone. And they so earnestly express this union of the two natures that is in Christ as sometimes to interchange them. This figure of speech is called by the ancient writers *'ιδιωμάτων κοινωνία'*[2]

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1) See *Institutes* 2.14.1
2) *Institutes* 2.14.1

This way of understanding the unity of the Person of Christ is also highly significant for Calvin's teaching on the way in which men and women come to encounter God in Christ. The understanding of the encounter also was shaped by the idea that Christ was at the same time both God and man, thus, to encounter Christ is to encounter someone who is both human, just as we are, and yet at the same time who is also far greater. As Calvin put it, "Christ was recognised as a man who showed in Himself something far greater and more sublime." [1] Accordingly, the encounter with God in Christ has to be understood on two levels.

First, Christ is recognised as a man. The human nature of Christ therefore has a vital and dual role in Calvin's conception of the encounter with God. First because He is God drawn near to us and accommodated to our weakness, His humanity represents the point at which God, who dwells in inaccessible light is made accessible to men and women.[2] But secondly, also because the humanity of Christ represents the accommodated nature of the knowledge of God, it brings men and women only to such an encounter with God as their weakness permits. Thus, Calvin can refer to Christ's humanity as a 'veil'[3] which keeps men and women from seeing the naked majesty of God, and this not only for the unbeliever who is unable at any time to penetrate behind the veil, but also for

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1) *John* 1:14
2) "What had been hidden in God is revealed in Christ the man, and life, formerly inaccessible, is now close at hand." *John* 5:27 cf *Institutes* 3.2.1.
3) "He took the image of a servant, and content with such lowliness, allowed his divinity to be hidden by a "veil of flesh",....for a time the divine glory did not shine, but only a human likeness was manifest in a lowly and abased condition." *Institutes* 2.13.2

the believer who, at least during the earthly life, still needs protection from the glory of God. Accordingly, Calvin interpreted 1 Corinthians 15:28 "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone," as teaching not the abdication of Christ from rulership but rather the transferral of that rulership to his divinity so that the humanity is no longer a veil and no longer holds men and women back from a total vision of God.[1]

However, Calvin's reference to the flesh of Christ as a 'veil' must be carefully understood within the context of accommodation. He was not arguing that the flesh of Christ in any way prevented men and women from attaining a true knowledge of God. Rather, it is Christ's flesh which, by preventing men and women from being overwhelmed by the presence of God, directs and brings them to a true knowledge of Him.[2]

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1) "Christ will then hand back the Kingdom which He received, so that we may cleave completely to God. This does not mean that He will abdicate from the Kingdom in this way, but will transfer it is some way or other from His humanity to His glorious divinity, because then there will be opened up for us a way of approach, from which we are kept back by our weakness. In this way, therefore, Christ will be subjected to the Father, because, when the veil has been removed we will see God plainly, reigning in His majesty, and the humanity of Christ will no longer be in between us to hold us back from a nearer vision of God." *1 Corinthians* 15:27

2) "Just as the veil covered the recesses of the sanctuary and yet opened a door to it, so, though His Godhead was hidden in the flesh of Christ, He yet leads us to heaven, and no one will find God unless the Man Christ is his way and his door. We are thus reminded that the glory of Christ is not to be thought of from the outward aspect of His flesh nor is His flesh to be despised because it conceals like a veil the majesty of God and since it is that which directs us to the enjoyment of all God's benefits." *Hebrews* 10:20

In this way Calvin argued that for those who wish to know God there is no other place to start than with Christ in the flesh.[1] It is important to note at this point that when Calvin spoke of Christ in the 'flesh' he was not speaking simply of Christ in the body but rather following the practice of Scripture in using 'flesh' to refer to mortal man. 'Christ in the flesh' is, therefore, a reference to the actual human person Jesus of Nazareth.[2] And, Calvin argued, there is no other way to conceive of Christ than as this actual person.[3]

This argument also shaped Calvin's understanding of how it is that a person comes to encounter God in Christ. He argued that those who wish to know God should direct their search for Him to the concrete person Jesus Christ, and they would find in this person not only His humanity but also the Majesty of God. Thus, the Christian is urged to direct his/her mind and senses to Christ,[4] to

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1) "..there is no other way for Him to become ours than by our faith being directed to His flesh. For none will ever come to Christ-God who neglects the man. Wherefore, if you want to have anything in common with Christ you must especially take care not to despise His flesh." *John* 6:56

2) Thus, on 'the Word became flesh' Calvin commented, "'Flesh' here is not used for corrupt nature (as in Paul) but for mortal man. It denotes derogatorily his frail and almost transient nature: 'all flesh is grass' (Isa 40:5) and similar verses. But we must note at the same time that this is rhetorical synedoche - the lower part embraces the whole man....The plain sense therefore is that the Word, begotten of God before all ages, and ever dwelling with the Father, became man." *John* 1:14

3) "I confess, indeed, that we may not conceive of the Son of God in any way other than as clothed in the flesh." Last Admonition to Joachim Westphal in *Tracts and Treatises*, Vol 2, p 385.

4) "Whoever aspires to know God without beginning at Christ must wander in a labyrinth, so to say; for it is not for nothing that he is called the image of the Father, as has been said already. Again, because everyone is deprived of all right knowledge of God who leaves Christ and strives Titan-like after heaven, so whoever directs his mind and all his senses to Christ will be led straight to the Father. For the Apostle truly declares that by the mirror of the Gospel we clearly behold God in the person of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). And it is indeed an incomparable reward for the obedience of faith that he who humbles himself before Christ penetrates above all the heavens, even unto those mysteries which the angels behold and adore." *John* 8:19

seek life in His flesh and embrace Him as the servant of the Father[1] or to devote him/herself to Christ,[2] all with the corresponding expectation that those who do so will encounter in Christ not only that which is human but also that which is divine.

One important point about Calvin's argument needs to be made here. In describing the encounter with God in Christ he frequently used language which spoke of the believer being 'raised' to perceive the majesty of God.[3] This should not, however, be taken to imply that the believer is somehow raised above the level of the human in Christ and comes to deal only with what is divine. If this were the case this would run counter to his argument, already seen, that Christ is inseparably God and man at the same time. Rather, according to Calvin, as faith progresses it is still concerned with the humanity of Christ, even His divine power cannot be thought of as separate from His humanity.

> John sees the Holy Spirit descending upon Christ, to teach us that there is nothing carnal or earthly to be looked for in Christ as such, but rather He comes forth from heaven as a divine man, under the royal power of the Holy Spirit. We know that He is God manifested in the flesh, but His heavenly power is also to be thought upon in His person as minister, in His human nature.[4]

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1) *John* 6:55 quoted below
2) "And yet we must note the order of faith as it is described here. Properly, the Son who came from the Father alone knows Him. Therefore, all who desire to approach God must betake themselves to Christ meeting them and must devote themselves to Him. And when He has been known by the disciples, He will at last raise them to God the Father." *John* 17:25
3) for example "Since Christ's majesty could not be perceived in its loftiness, the power of God, which was manifest in His flesh, gradually raises men's gross and slow sense to that height. For He wishes to be wholly ours and we need not be surprised if He accommodates Himself to us in various ways." *John* 11:41
4) *Matthew* 3:16

What Calvin did argue was that those who concern themselves with the human Christ will find in Him also God. Thus, he could argue that faith progresses from Christ the man to Christ as God.[1] Although the Christian can in one sense never get beyond Christ crucified in the weakness of the flesh, those who embrace Him as such will find that He is also the Prince of life.[2]

This description of the encounter with God in Christ raises one further question. Granted that Calvin argued that in Christ and in Christ only, the believer could encounter the presence of God, is it possible to tell from what he said about this encounter something of what, in his opinion, characterises the experience of God and which, in particular, marks the difference between a true and a false experience of God?

In answering this question it is important to make one preliminary point. No-where in Calvin's writings does he provide a description of the experience of God which is sufficiently definitive to allow the experience of the believer to be precisely distinguished from that of the non-believer. Indeed he

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1) "that our faith may arrive at the eternal divinity of Christ, we must start off from that knowledge which is nearer and easier. Thus, some have justly said that by Christ-man we are led to Christ-God, because our faith progresses gradually; apprehending Christ on earth, born in a stable and hanging on a cross, it goes on to the glory of His resurrection and then at length to His eternal life and power, in which shines His divine majesty." *John* 20:28

2) "You will only find life in Christ when you seek the substance of life in His flesh. Thus we should glory with Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:2 that we regard nothing as excellent but Christ crucified; for as soon as we depart from the sacrifice of His death, we encounter nothing but death. Nor does any way but His death lead us to a sense of His divine power. Embrace Christ therefore, as the servant of the Father, that He may show Himself to you as the Prince of life." *John* 6:55

specifically states that at times there might be little difference between the two, so that those who are in fact reprobate might be deceived by their experience into thinking that they are elect.'

This appears initially to be a major weakness in Calvin's handling of the concept of experience. It is arguable that one of the main tasks of a study of experience in relation to the knowledge of God should be to provide the ability to distinguish precisely between a true and a false experience of God and yet Calvin failed to do this. This apparent failure, however, becomes more understandable when it is realised that is in accordance with both the nature of experience and with Calvin's understanding of assurance.

It is well known that the believer's personal certainty of salvation was of great importance to Calvin.[2] His doctrine of predestination confronted him with a major problem in defining the basis of that assurance. For, according to this doctrine the salvation of any one individual is dependent upon the election of God; since Calvin himself freely asserted that a person who is not elect might be deceived by his/her own experience into believing that s/he is in fact elect,

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1) "For although only those predestined to salvation receive the light of faith and truly feel the power of the gospel, yet experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected by almost the same feelings as the elect, so that even in their own judgement they do not in any way differ from the elect. Therefore it is not at all absurd that the apostle should attribute to them a taste of the heavenly gifts and Christ, faith for a time; not because they firmly grasp the force of spiritual grace and the sure light of faith, but because the Lord, to render them more convicted and inexcusable, steals into their mind to the extent that his goodness may be tasted without the Spirit of adoption." *Institutes* 3.2.11

2) See for example his definition of faith as 'firm and certain knowledge'. *Institutes* 3.2.7

it is of utmost importance to define on what basis an individual might be assured of his/her election. Indeed it might be said that one of the great weaknesses of the Calvinist system lies in the continual temptation with which the believer is presented, to attempt the impossible and try to discern the hidden will of God,[1] for it is God's own election of the individual which is the sole true basis of his/her personal assurance.[2]

Calvin himself always argued that the assurance of election is not to be found in either the hidden will of God or in the individual, but only in Christ.

> But if we have been chosen in him, we shall not find assurance of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father if we conceive him as severed from his Son. Christ, then is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election.[3]

For those whom the Spirit has enabled to turn to Christ, the love of God as displayed in Christ and in particular in His death, is the only true ground of

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1) cf "The very real weakness in Calvin's formulation of predestination, however, is manifest in the lifeless but formidable things his followers made of it, finding it increasingly easy to bypass Christ and depend solely on the hidden *electio patris*" .Charles AM Hall, *'With the Spirit's Sword': The Drama of Spiritual Warfare in the Theology of John Calvin*, p 52.
2) cf "At some point in Calvin's system, and in the system of any Calvinist, the scope of election and of the application of the atonement must co-incide. The question of assurance of salvation must be answered by reference to that point." Paul Helm, 'Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of Doctrinal Development' in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 34, (1981), p 182.
3) *Institutes* 3.24.5

assurance.[1] It is in accordance with this doctrine that Calvin never attempted to make his description of the true experience of God as against a false one so distinct as to make it possible easily to distinguish between the two. Not only does the subjective nature both of each individual's experience and of his/her interpretation of it make this an extremely difficult task, but were it to be accomplished it would raise the further difficulty of the temptation for the believer of basing his/her assurance upon the belief that his/her experience of God corresponded to the description given. Thus experience itself would be made the foundation of assurance, which is not only in direct contradiction of Calvin's argument that assurance of election can not be found in oneself but only in Christ, but also encourages the worst kind of introspection.

However, while it is not possible to draw from Calvin's writings a precise description of the distinction between a true and a false experience of God, it is possible to answer in more general terms the question, what are the main characteristics of a true experience of God? This is the question which will be asked several times throughout this thesis - what characterises a true experience of God? When this question is approached by means of a comparison between what Calvin had to say about the knowledge of God in Christ and the fallacious attempt to know God outside of Christ the following conclusions can be drawn. The latter, according to Calvin, is characterised by two main points,

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1) "The true looking of faith, I say, is placing Christ before one's eyes and beholding in Him the heart of God poured out in love. Our firm and substantial support is to rest on the death of Christ as its only pledge.... Moreover, let us remember that although life is promised generally to all who believe in Christ, faith is not common to all. Christ is open to all and displayed to all, but God opens the eyes only of the elect that they may seek Him by faith." *John* 3:16

First by its short-lived and transitory nature[1] and secondly by a sense of confusion.[2] In speaking of the fallacious nature of the knowledge of God outside of Christ he frequently used metaphors such as being lost in a labyrinth,[3] swallowed up by an abyss,[4] or wandering in uncertain byways.[5] In contrast, when he was speaking of the knowledge of God in Christ Calvin referred to a sense of coming to rest or coming to be fixed in Christ,[6] or of being taken by Christ to the presence of the Father.[7] The comparison between these two descriptions suggests that what characterised the encounter with God in Christ for Calvin was the sense of being drawn by someone outside of oneself. In other words the believer is aware of being taken up, held and drawn by God Himself.

What is the knowledge of God?

It can be seen from the above that in Calvin's theology the knowledge of God is dependent upon and formed by the encounter with God. Thus experience and

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1) "This is an important passage, from which we may learn that God is not to be sought after in His inscrutable majesty (for He dwells in light inaccessible) but is to be known in so far as He reveals Himself in Christ. Thus the attempts of men to know God apart from Christ are ephemeral for they wander from the right way.....it is more profitable for us to behold God as He appears in his only begotten Son than to investigate His secret essence." *Commentary upon the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 4:6

2) "Whoever then seeks to really know the true God must regard Him as the Father of Christ, for, whenever our mind seeks God, unless it meets Christ it will wander and be confused, until it is wholly lost." *Commentary upon the First Epistle to Peter* 1:3

3) "Unless we look straight toward him, we shall wander through endless labyrinths." *Institutes* 3.2.2 cf *John* 8:19

4) *1 Peter* 1:20

5) *1 Timothy* 2:5

6) "Christ holds Himself out as the object to which our faith, if it is directed, will easily find where it may rest. For He is the true Emmanuel who, as soon as He is sought by faith, responds within us. It is one of the leading articles of our belief that our faith should be directed to Christ alone and not wander through round-about ways; and that is should be fixed in Him, that is should not waver in temptation." *John* 14:1

7) *John* 8:19 & 17:25

especially the way in which God acts in the sphere of the believer's experience is crucial to the nature of the knowledge of God according to Calvin and experience therefore provides the key to a question which is vital to understanding Calvin's theology. When Calvin spoke of the knowledge of God what kind of knowledge did he have in mind? It has frequently been noted that for Calvin the knowledge of God is not an abstract, theoretical affair which is generated purely by the power of human reason, but it is rather a concrete and practical matter. What is not always clear, however, is exactly what is meant by calling Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God practical and concrete, and also the exact significance of this for the rest of his theology. For example, the 'practical' nature of the knowledge of God is linked by both Parker and Doumergue to the idea of it being useful in teaching the believer what it means to be Christian.[1] Dowey attempted to broaden this idea by arguing that practicality also included the idea that the knowledge draws out from the believer a religious response of worship and obedience,[2] and Harbison argued that the fundamental meaning of 'useful' in Calvin's thought was 'instrumental in fostering awe, reverence and true piety'.[3] Even this idea of usefulness is however too restricted. The broadest explanation of Calvin understanding of the practical nature of the knowledge of God, and also the one which is most in line with the conclusions drawn above, was, in fact, provided by Lobstein when he said,

> "la connaissance de Dieu n'est pas chose purement théorique, mais expérience pratique, engageant toute la personnalité

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1) E Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, IV, p24. THL Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p15
2) EA Dowey, *op. cit.* p24f.
3) EH Harbison, 'The Idea of Utility in the thought of John Calvin' in *Christianity and History*, p. 254

> humaine, sollicitant toutes les énergies de sa conscience et de son cœur, mettant en branle toutes les facultés de son être spirituel."[1]

Lobstein argued that the 'practical' nature of Calvin's understanding of the knowledge of God can be characterised by the fact that it is experienced as something which takes hold of the believer and brings into play all aspects of his/her personality.

There is one word which sums up this conception of the knowledge of God, that is the idea of *engagement*. Calvin's understanding of the knowledge of God is best characterised as one in which God creates the knowledge by *engaging* the believer in a living relationship with Himself.

The idea of engagement, in fact, expresses well several aspects of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God. It has already been shown that, according to Calvin, the knowledge is dependent upon a living encounter with God's manifestation of Himself and that it is this encounter which forms the knowledge of God in the believer. It has also been shown that, for Calvin, what marked out the encounter with God in Christ is a sense of being taken up and drawn by Him into the presence of God. Both of these can be well expressed by the idea that what happens in the encounter with God is that God engages the believer and forms the knowledge of Himself in the believer by creating within him/her a capacity for knowledge. More specifically, the idea of engagement has the following implications, each of which provide at least a preliminary aid in

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1) P Lobstein, 'La Connaissance religieuse d'après Calvin' in *Revue de Theologie et de Philosophie*, 42, (1909), p58.

the task of discriminating between that which characterises a true encounter with God and human imitations of the same.

First, the idea of engagement suggests that the one who knows is taken up by and drawn into the knowledge by the One who is known. It thus expresses the very heart of Calvin's theology, that the knowledge of God is given by God Himself. The opposite to this is idolatry, which attempts to know God, not as He gives knowledge of Himself, but rather as the human mind imagines Him to be.[1]

Secondly, the idea of engagement suggests the idea of being drawn or attracted by the pleasing qualities of the One who is known. Calvin, in fact, set great store by the fact that a truly useful knowledge of God was one which attracted men and women to seek after Him.

> Indeed, no small part of the grace of God is to be seen in his alluring us to himself by such attractive titles. Were he to bring his power prominently into view before us, we would be cast down by the terror of it rather than encouraged, as the Papists represent him a dreadful God, from whose presence all must fly, whereas the proper view of him is that which invites us to seek after him. Accordingly, the more nearly that a person feels himself drawn to God, the more he has advanced in the knowledge of him.[2]

This can be compared with what Calvin called the second sin of those who turn from a true knowledge of God. As well as being caught up in idolatry they also fall into hypocrisy, that is not worshipping God freely and voluntarily but only

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1) *Institutes* 1.4.1
2) *Psalms* 145:8

because worship is forced from them by a slavish, forced fear of God's judgment.[1] In faith, the believer, far from being horrified and overwhelmed by God's presence is, in fact, moved and drawn to love God.[2] Thus, even though Calvin argued that men and women must be changed from being unwilling to know God to being willing, he did not conceive of this as an external forcing of the believer, but rather as a reforming of the heart.[3]

The idea of engagement also suggests the idea of being held fast by the One who is known. Thus, Calvin frequently drew comparisons between true faith which is lasting and takes deep root in the believer and the temporary faith which a non-believer might show.[4]

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1) *Institutes* 1.5.4. Thus, the common misconception of Calvin's understanding of the Christian life as one marked by fear before an authoritarian God is, in fact closer to his idea of idolatry than of true Christianity.

2) "But how can the mind be aroused to taste the divine goodness without at the same time being wholly kindled to love God in return? For truly, that abundant sweetness which God has stored up for those who fear him cannot be known without at the same time powerfully moving us. And once anyone has been moved by it, it utterly ravishes him and draws him to itself." *Institutes* 3.2.41 cf "faith is always connected with a seemly and spontaneous reverence for God, because we do not have a true belief in the Word of God except when it is attractive to us and worthy of our devotion." *Commentary upon the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* 2:10

3) "As far as the manner of drawing goes, it is not violent so as to compel men by an external force; but yet it is an effectual movement of the Holy Spirit, turning men from being unwilling and reluctant into willing. Wherefore, it is false and impious to say that only the willing are drawn, as if a man will yield obedience to God at his own motion. For when men follow God willingly it is what they already have from Him, who has formed their hearts to obey Him." *Commentary upon the Gospel of John* 6:44

4) "Whatever sort of assent that is, it does not at all penetrate to the heart itself there to remain fixed." *Institutes* 3.2.10 cf "I deny, therefore, that they either grasp the will of God as it is immutable, or steadfastly embrace its truth, for they tarry in but a fleeting awareness. They are like a tree not planted deep enough to put down living roots. For some years it may put forth not only blossoms and leaves, but even fruits; nevertheless, it withers after the passing of time." *Institutes* 3.2.12.

And finally, the idea of engagement suggests being wholly taken up by the One who is known. According to Calvin it is impossible for a person to be only partially engaged by their knowledge of God, rather the knowledge of God transforms the whole person.

> He shows first that newness of life consists in knowledge; not that a simple and bare knowledge is sufficient, but he speaks of the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which is lively and effectual, so as not only to enlighten by kindling the light of truth, but also to transform the whole man.[1]

In this way it can be seen that the idea of engagement expresses well several aspects of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God .

Conclusion

This chapter began by arguing that Calvin's conception of the knowledge of God can not be fully understood without a grasp of his conception of and use of the idea of experience. It went on to show the way in which the knowledge of God and the experience of God are interlinked in his theology since the knowledge of God is dependent upon and formed by the encounter with God both in creation and in Christ. Finally it showed that the concept of engagement, that is of God taking hold of the believer and creating in him/her the capacity to know him, best expresses the nature of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God . It is therefore to be expected that the concept of engagement will also enable

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1) *Epistle to the Colossians* 3:10 cf "We learn that faith does not consist in a person giving subscription to true doctrine, but also includes something greater and deeper; the hearer is to deny himself and commit his whole life to God." *Harmony of the Gospels* Matt. 21:32

Calvin's concept of experience to be better understood. This is in fact the case. It is the argument of this thesis that Calvin's understanding of the experience of God is concerned with the way in which God engages the believer in a living relationship with Himself. God is active in the believer's life working towards the objective of taking hold of and of re-shaping and even re-creating all aspects of his/her personality. Not only does Calvin argue that this activity can be experienced, it is clearly his expectation that it will come to shape the whole of the believer's experience. The task of the next section of this thesis is to explore this engagement and the way in which it shapes the believer's experience. In particular it will explore the engagement of the rational capacity, the affections and the moral capacity of the believer and show the way in which, according to Calvin each of these is taken up and drawn into the relationship with God. In this way these chapters will begin the task of answering the question of the implications for the believer's experience of the encounter with God - that is, how does the way in which God impinges upon the believer's life shape his/her experience?

CHAPTER TWO

The Engagement of the Rational Nature

> *No religion is either pleasing to God or ought to be regarded as holy and legitimate if it lacks knowledge and truth.*[1]

The importance of knowledge and truth to Calvin's theology is well known. He would have nothing to do with a view of religion which viewed it as either a non-rational or subconscious affair, concerned more with the religious affections than with the knowledge of God. Accordingly he attacked with equal vigour the Scholastic notion of implicit faith, (that is the teaching that lay people should accept the teaching of the Church on the basis of the authority of the Church rather than on the basis of their own recognition of the truth of the teaching)[2] and the pagan worship of an unknown deity, both because they lacked this essential element of conveying to the believer the truth about God.

To emphasise the role of knowledge and truth in religion lays one open to the potential weakness of rationalism. This rationalism can be manifested either in an inordinate reliance upon doctrine such that religion is reduced to a matter which is concerned simply with correct doctrine and right speech about God, or in an overly optimistic assessment of the ability of human reason to grasp the truth about God and the Universe. In either case the experience of God is

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1) *Acts of the Apostles* 17:22
2) "Faith rests not on ignorance but on knowledge. And this is, indeed, knowledge not only of God but of the divine will. We do not obtain salvation either because we are prepared to embrace as true whatever the Church has prescribed, or because we turn over to it the task of inquiring and knowing. But we do so when we know that God is our merciful Father." *Institutes* 3.2.2

diminished in importance, since experience is then perceived as being antithetical to reason and knowledge, and the nature of religion is distorted. The old caricature of Calvin is one of an excessive rationalist who, in the words of Durant 'developed the thoughts of his predecessors to ruinously logical conclusions.'[1]

It is the contention of this chapter, however, that for all his stress upon the role of reason and the importance of right knowledge about God to the relationship with Him, one of the great strengths of Calvin's theology lay in the fact that this was not opposed to the experience of God, rather he made the use of reason and the perception of the truth about God a part of the way in which God is experienced. In Calvin's theology the engagement of the rational nature is a vital aspect of that dynamic interaction with God which the Christian experiences.

This raises the important question, why knowledge and truth were so important in Calvin's understanding of Christianity. The answer to this question lies in an understanding of his perception of the nature of truth and his consequent understanding of the nature of knowledge and its role in the relationship with God. In common usage and in the history of thought the idea of 'truth' has three fundamental senses, of which the first is the most common and fundamental and therefore the most important. The first sense is that of a correspondence between what is thought or said and what is really so. The second is the

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1) Will Durant, *The Reformation*, p 465. Cf the conclusion of Bouwsma that Calvin was inclined to an 'intellectualized' Christianity, *John Calvin*, p98.

manifestation of what is there (for example, a statement of the truth is one which enables us to perceive the world as it really is). The third is constancy of being, (for example, a true friend is one who remains a friend through a long period of time and in differing circumstances).[1] Calvin's basic perception of the nature of truth had to do with the first sense mentioned here; that is a correspondence between what is thought or said and what is really so. It was his recognition of the necessity of a fundamental correspondence between what is thought or said about God and the reality of God which shaped his perception of the role of truth and the knowledge of truth in Christianity.

This can be seen from his attack upon worship which is not founded upon the truth about God which is to found in His Word. According to Calvin, a vague and uninformed worship of God is not, in fact, worship of *God* at all, for it lacks the essential element of a correspondence between thought and reality; it is therefore only the worship of men's and women's own invented deities[2] and it is, therefore, entirely unacceptable to God.[3] Thus, he was forced to explain Paul's apparent acceptance of the Athenian's worship of an unknown God as being worship of God himself, as being, in fact, the free use of their attitude as material for the right teaching about God. The basic principle still holds true,

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1) See Robert P Scharlemann, *The Being of God: Theology and the Experience of Truth*, pp 11f.
2) "unless there is knowledge present, it is not God that we worship but a spectre or ghost.....Christ plainly declares that an idol or an empty image is put in God's place when men are ignorant of the true God." *John* 4:22. "whoever worships God without any certitude is merely worshipping his own fabrications in the place of God." *Acts of the Apostles* 17:22
3) "if any religion is to be approved by God it must needs rest on knowledge conceived of His Word." *John* 4:22

God cannot be worshipped until He has been made known, and only worship in accordance with the Word of God is acceptable to God.[1]

Moreover, since he saw truth as a fundamental correspondence between what is stated and what is so, it is clear that, for Calvin, there was also a correspondence between God and truth. It is not possible to speak truthfully about the nature of the universe and human life without speaking about them in their relationship with God. God is the source of all truth, just as He is the source of all other good things which can be found in the world.[2] This belief that God is the source of all good had two main consequences for Calvin's perception of the nature of truth. First, he saw truth as being something which is essentially given by God, and also tended therefore to assume that truth will be the same for all people, at all times and in all places. And secondly he worked with a dynamic notion of the way in which truth is given. God, the source of all truth, actively promotes truth amongst humankind and enables men and women to grasp the truth.[3]

It was this recognition of the importance of truth to the believer's relationship with God which also shaped Calvin's understanding of the role of human reason in the same relationship. For the reason is that human faculty which is equipped to recognise, and therefore be engaged by, truth. It is important to recognise from the beginning that the question of the effect of

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1) *Acts* 17:23
2) "no drop will be found of either wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him and of which he is not the cause." *Institutes* 1.2.1
3) *Luke* 24:14 cf *Ephesians* 3:14

the Fall upon human reason had a great effect upon Calvin's argument in this area, but it will be seen that, despite this, Calvin still regarded the reason as the 'governor of the soul' and argued therefore that there can be no real relationship with God which by-passes the rational nature of humanity. Rather, according to Calvin, the reason has a vital role to play in the way in which the believer is engaged by God and drawn into a relationship with Him. It is, at least in part, the believer's own recognition of the truth about the character of God which leads inevitably to the desire to worship Him.

> There is no religion where truth does not reign. If a true knowledge of God dwells in our hearts it will inevitably follow that we are brought to reverence and fear. God is not truly known apart from His majesty. From this comes about the desire to worship Him and from this it comes about that the whole life is directed towards Him as towards its goal.[1]

This chapter will, therefore, examine what Calvin had to say about the character of the rational nature and its role in the experience of God.

The Rational Nature - its character, purpose and limitations

The Character of the Rational Nature

The rational nature, or the understanding, according to Calvin, is the capacity of men and women to grasp the truth, either about themselves and the things pertaining to the world or about God and things pertaining to the spiritual realm. Its nature therefore corresponds to the nature of truth. In particular Calvin argued that the character of the rational nature corresponds to truth in two main respects, first in that it is a higher rather than a lower capacity of

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1) *Hebrews* 11:6

men and women and second in that it is able to perceive order.

> For the sense perception inhering in brute animals does not go beyond the body, or at least extends no further than to material things presented to it. But the nimbleness of the human mind in searching out heaven and earth and the secrets of nature, and when all ages have been compassed by its understanding and memory, in arranging each thing in its proper order, and in inferring future events from past, clearly shows that there lies hidden in man something separate from the body. With our intelligence we conceive the invisible God and the angels, something the body can be no means do. We grasp things that are right, just and honorable, which are hidden to bodily senses. Therefore the spirit must be the seat of this intelligence.[1]

The first main characteristic of reason is seen in its distinction from sense perception. For, so Calvin argued, sense perception is able to respond only to the material world, to that which is immediately present to it. To grasp the truth is to grasp something higher than the material world. The rational nature is able to grasp ideas and concepts and things which are not actually present to it and can reason about them. Therefore, the seat of the intelligence should be seen as being the soul rather than the body.

However, one caveat must immediately be noted. It has already been shown that Calvin argued that all truth comes from God. It follows from this that the truth which is given by God can only be grasped by men and women as the Spirit capacitates them for its assimilation. In other words, according to Calvin, not only truth itself, but also the human ability to grasp the truth, comes from God.

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1) *Institutes* 1.15.2

This raises the complex question of the power of human reason and in particular of Calvin's argument on the state of the understanding after the Fall. Many scholars, noting his frequent comments to the effect that reason is corrupted and useless before God,[1] have argued that in Calvin's theology the reason is so perverted by the Fall, that thereafter it functions only to condemn men and women who are unable by the use of reason to find God.[2] However, it is also possible to point to many passages in which Calvin gives an apparently positive assessment of the role of human reason with respect to earthly things.[3] In her book *Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* Mary Potter Engel argues persuasively that all of Calvin's comments on the nature of humanity are pervaded by a basic distinction between the perspective of God and the perspective of humankind, each of which represents a different vantage point for the evaluation of human life and therefore leads to a different view of the self.[4] In Calvin's view, human reason, seen from the perspective of God and assessed purely for its own power, untouched by the Spirit, is clearly entirely corrupted and useless in reasoning about divine matters.[5] With respect to human life, however, the reason still has the power, albeit weakened to grasp at least some truth.[6]

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1) See for example, *John* 1:5 *Genesis* 6:3 Sermon on Job 35:8f
2) T F Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, p101f cf Edward A Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, p 72f and T H L Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, Chapter Two p 25f.
3) See *Institutes* 2.2.12-17
4) Mary Potter Engel, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology*, p1
5) "I reply, *as to the Kingdom of God, and all that relates to the spiritual life*, the light of human reason differs little from darkness; for, before it has shown the way it is extinguished; and its perspicacity is worth no more than blindness, for before it comes to harvest it is gone." *Ephesians* 4:17
6) "Yet its (reason's) effort do not always become so worthless as to have no effect, *especially when it turns its attention to things below.*" *Institutes* 2.2.13

With regard to the knowledge of earthly matters, Calvin argued that this also, and not only the knowledge of the spiritual, should be attributed to the work of the Spirit. The ability of pagan writers and philosophers to grasp and express the truth and the knowledge of everything which is most excellent in human life is therefore attributed to the influence of the Spirit, for although the Spirit of sanctification dwells in believers only, still the Spirit fills, moves and quickens all things according to the character bestowed upon them at Creation and it is therefore the Spirit who gives the ability to understand. It was on this basis that Calvin could argue that the Christian should be willing to recognise and accept all truth, no matter who the human author might be, since to reject the truth meant that the Spirit of God would be dishonoured.[1]

The second main characteristic of the reason, according to Calvin, lay in its ability to perceive order. In grasping the truth the understanding uses reason, that is the ability by an orderly process of thought to make sense of the world. In his association between the grasping of the truth and the ability to perceive order, Calvin demonstrated the continuing influence of Stoicism upon his work. Stoicism had enjoyed a revival of interest in its philosophy during the late Medieval period,[2] and its influence upon Calvin, at least in his earlier days, can be seen from his choice of the book *De Clementia* by the Stoic author Seneca as the subject of his first Commentary.[3] Two key points in Stoicism

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1) *Institutes* 2.2.15
2) Maurice E Osterhaven, "John Calvin, Order and the Holy Spirit" *Reformed Review*, 33, (1978/9) pp 23-44.
3) John Calvin *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, trans Battles and Hugo. See Francois Wendel, *Calvin: the origin and development of his religious thought*, pp 27-37.

were, firstly the identification of God with reason and order[1] and the argument for the unity of the World controlled by Reason.[2] The Stoics argued that men and women should be able to apprehend that Reason and order and to live in harmony with it, thus gaining mastery over the World.[3] Disorder, on the other hand, they saw as being essentially irrational.

In his association of God, reason and order Calvin was, therefore, influenced by Stoicism. On one major point, however, he disagreed with the Stoics; rather than identifying God and world order, he argued that the latter is created and sustained by God. Thus, when he came to describe the way in which the believer should contemplate nature, he argued that what s/he should find in Creation above all is the order which God created and which reflects the order and rationality of God Himself.

> The first part of the rule is exemplified when we reflect upon the greatness of the Artificer who stationed, arranged, and fitted together the starry host of heaven in such wonderful order that nothing more beautiful in appearance can be imagined; who so set and fixed some in their stations that they cannot move; who granted to others freer course, but so as not to wander outside their appointed course; who so adjusted the motion of all that days and nights, months and years, and seasons of the year are measured off; who so proportioned the inequality of days, which we daily observe,

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1) See Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, LXV 24.
2) "Either a universe that is all order, or else a farrago thrown together at random yet somehow forming a universe. But can there be some measure of order subsisting in yourself, and at the same time disorder in the greater Whole? And that, too, when oneness of feeling exists between all the parts of nature, in spite of their divergence and dispersion?" Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* IV:27 trans Maxwell Staniforth. (Penguin 1964) cf "Universal Nature's impulse was to create an orderly world. It follows, then, that everything now happening must follow a logical sequence; if it were not so, the prime purpose towards which the impulses of the World-Reason are directed would be an irrational one." *Ibid* VII:74
3) See C N Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, pp 165-167

> that no confusion occurs. It is too when we observe his power in sustaining so great a mass, in governing the swiftly revolving heavenly system, and the like.[1]

Calvin always insisted that both God's actions and His government of the World are inherently rational; although His actions might be incomprehensible to men and women, they are, nevertheless based upon the best of reasons[2]. However, Calvin lacked the Stoics' optimistic assumption that men and women would be able by the power of their own reason to perceive this order. Such is the weakness of human reason that the rationality and order in the world and in events that occur in the world, frequently exceeds the capacity of human comprehension. Thus in one sense, Calvin's doctrine of Providence is about the weakness of human reason; in discussing this doctrine Calvin's argument was frequently aimed at convincing the reader that behind the disorderly appearance of nature and human events there lies an order which, despite the fact that it is incomprehensible from the perspective of men and women, nevertheless governs everything which happens.[3]

> Yet since the sluggishness of our minds lies far beneath the height of God's providence, we must employ a distinction to lift it up. Therefore I shall put it this way; however all things may be ordained by God's plan, according to a sure dispensation, for us they are fortuitous. Not that we think that fortune rules the world and men, tumbling things at

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1) *Institutes* 1.14.21
2) *Psalms* 115:3
3) "When dense clouds darken the sky, and a violent tempest arises, because a gloomy mist is cast over our eyes, thunder strikes our ears and all our senses are benumbed with fright, everything seems to us to be confused and mixed up; but all the while a constant quiet and serenity ever remains in heaven. So must we infer that, while the disturbances in the world deprive us of judgment, God out of the pure light of his justice and wisdom tempers and directs these very movements in the best conceived order to a right end." *Institutes* 1.17.1

> random up and down, for it is fitting that this folly be absent from the Christian's breast! But since the order, reason, end and necessity of those things which happen for the most part lie hidden in God's purpose, and are not apprehended by human opinion, those things, which it is certain take place by God's will, are in a sense fortuitous. For they bear on the face of them no other appearance, whether they are considered according to their own nature or weighed according to our knowledge and judgment.[1]

In this way Calvin's argument gave a particular twist to the relationship between human reason and the perception of order in the world. The latter can not be grasped solely by the contemplation of events which occur; it can be known only be faith. That is, the order which exists in the world can be known only by first knowing the God Who governs the world and gives it order. Without the knowledge of God everything appears to be random and fortuitous.

The Purpose of the Rational Nature

The great strength of Calvin's understanding of the rational nature and its role in the experience of God can be seen when his argument on its purpose within human life is examined. For this argument makes it clear that in being drawn into the experience of God the reason is made to fulfill what was its original purpose.

Calvin discussed the purpose of the rational nature while examining human nature as originally created in *Institutes* Book 1 Chapter 15. For the sake of a simple definition which would suffice for the purpose of building up godliness[2] he argued that there are two main faculties in the human soul, which are the

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1) *Institutes* 1.16.9
2) *Institutes* 1.15.6

understanding (*intellectum*) and the will (*voluntatem*). The understanding or rational nature he saw as that faculty in humanity which both distinguishes between good and evil and discerns what should be followed and what should be avoided, while the will he saw as being that faculty which chooses and follows what the understanding pronounces to be good.[1] Thus he concurred with the philosophers who referred to the rational nature as a directing part, τό *ἡγεμονικόν* (leader, governor).[2] According to Calvin, therefore, prior to the Fall at least, it was the understanding which by reason and judgement directed the human life and was capable even of directing the person completely to God.[3] The point of Calvin's argument is that reason is the human capacity not simply to think and deliberate but even more to judge and to decide the direction of the person's life. Thus, in humanity as originally created it was the understanding which directed the life and settled the most basic questions of the way in which the life was oriented, whether for or against God.

The rational nature is, therefore, for Calvin, the human capacity by reason and deliberation to direct a life. In discussing how this capacity for a man or woman to direct his/her life is to be used Calvin demonstrated the astuteness of his understanding of the rational nature, for it is this argument which is the basis of his description of the place of reason in the experience of God. In Calvin's theology the chief purpose of the rational nature is the direction or the orientation of the life to God; men and women were created with a rational

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1) *Institutes* 1.15.7
2) *Institutes*1.15.8
3) "Man in his first condition excelled in these pre-eminent endowments, so that his reason, understanding, prudence and judgment not only sufficed for the direction of his earthly life, but by them men mounted up even to God and eternal bliss." *Institutes* 1.15.8 On this see Chapter Three

nature in order that they might both recognise and acknowledge the goodness of God and so be led to aspire after Him.' Thus Calvin emphasised that what sets men and women apart from the animals is, therefore, not simply the possession of reason but also the way in which reason is used; by reason men and women can be conscious of their relationship to God.

> We are no different from brutish beasts if we do not understand that the world was made by God. Why are men endowed with reason and intellect except for the purpose of recognising their Creator?[2]

It is worth noting that here again it is possible to see the intrinsic connection in Calvin's thought between reason (and especially here the use of reason) and order. Where reason is used properly, to acknowledge God, order prevails, but on the other hand Calvin argued that there can be no more terrible disorder than where God the Creator Himself is not acknowledged.[3]

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1) "And if human happiness, whose perfection it is to be united with God, were hidden from man, he would in fact be bereft of the principal use of his understanding. Thus also, the chief activity of the soul is to aspire thither. Hence the more anyone endeavours to approach God, the more he proves himself endowed with reason." *Institutes* 1.15.6 cf "he (man) was endued with understanding and reason, that being distinguished from brute animals he might meditate on a better life and might even tend towards God, whose image he bore engraven on his own person." *Book of Genesis Argument p 65*

2) Epistle to the Hebrews 11:3

3) "Still we are to remember that so long as ungodliness has possession of the minds of men, the world, plunged as it is into darkness, must be considered as thrown into a state of confusion, and of horrible disorder and misrule; for there can be no stability apart from God.....though all the creatures should be discharging their offices, no order can be said to prevail in the world until God erect his throne and reign amongst men. What more monstrous disorder can be conceived of then exists where the Creator himself is not acknowledged." *Book of Psalms* 96:10

The same idea is apparent in Calvin's argument on the image of God in humanity[1], he again argued that the vital issue was not simply the possession of reason, but the way in which it is used. The reason is to be used in conscious acknowledgment of God. In exegeting Genesis 1:26 Calvin affirmed, as against the greater part of traditional exposition of the verse, that 'image' and 'likeness' were intended to convey the same idea, in accordance with the Hebrew custom of parallelism. Therefore, the phrase 'let us make man in our image, according to our likeness' he explained as referring to men and women being like or reflecting the likeness of God[2]

When he came to describe exactly how men and women reflect the glory of God Calvin apparently aimed at comprehensiveness and pointed to several factors, thus the image is both everything which sets humanity apart from the rest of creation and everything which men and women receive from redemption in Christ.[3] Within this argument, however, the rational nature, or more specifically the ability to acknowledge God, has an important role.

> The likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man's nature towers over all the kinds of living creatures. Accordingly, the integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word, when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order,

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1) See 'The Mirror of God's Goodness: A key metaphor in Calvin's view of man' in Brian A Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New* pp 112-115
2) Thus he often compares the image of God to a mirror. "Hence too, we learn both what is the end of our regeneration (that is, that we may be made like God and that His glory may shine forth in us) and also what is the image of God which Moses speaks of; that is, the rectitude and integrity of the whole soul, so that man represents as in a mirror the wisdom and righteousness of God." *Epistle to the Colossians* 3:10 cf *Epistle to the Ephesians* 4:23 and *Institutes* 1.15.4
3) *Institutes* 1.15.4

> and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker.[1]

Here the reason is used to refer the excellencies of human nature to God. Thus in the image of God also what is important is not simply the possession of reason but the way in which it is used. Men and women reflect the glory of God only when they are conscious of their dependence upon Him and because of that consciousness orient themselves to Him in thankfulness.

The limitations of the rational nature

In dealing with the question of the limitations of the rational nature, Calvin was again concerned with the role of the reason in the proper orientation to God and this had a particular effect upon his understanding of the subject. He was concerned not only with what men and women are able or unable to know but also with what it is appropriate for them to know within the bounds of a proper relationship to God. According to Calvin reason can be used in such a way that men and women cease to relate to God properly, that is orient themselves to Him in thankfulness, but rather by questioning God they set themselves up over against Him. This argument for the appropriate use of reason can be seen in Calvin's account of Adam and Eve and the Fall of humanity.

First, in his account of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Calvin put forward the idea that the abuse of reason occurs when it is used not to orient the self to God but rather to set the self up over against Him. He contended

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1) *Institutes* 1.15.3

that the tree was forbidden to Adam and Eve in order that they might learn not to rely upon themselves, trust only in their own understanding and so set themselves up as judge of what is good and what is evil but that they might rather cleave to God.' In this way they would learn wisdom, but wisdom that came not from their own process of reasoning, but rather by obedience,[2] that is wisdom that is gained not in independence from God but rather by the practical working out of dependence and submission to Him.

This same theme was continued in Calvin's argument on the nature and cause of the Fall. In *Institutes* 2.1.4 Calvin attempted to show what sin lay at the very heart of the Fall and here again the way in which reason is used had its part to play. Just as in his arguments on the image of God Calvin apparently aimed at comprehensiveness, so here also he sought a description of Adam's sin which would take into account several factors, thus, although he found some use for Augustine's argument that pride was the beginning of all evil, he eventually rejected it and looked instead for a fuller definition. The word which he finally suggested as a description for the root of the Fall was 'unfaithfulness' (*infidelitas*) which included the idea of disobedience but also, more importantly of contempt for God's truth and the refusal to listen to Him.

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1) "Concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we must hold that it was prohibited to man, not because God would have him to stray like as sheep, without judgment and without choice; but that he might not seek to be wiser than became him, nor, by trusting to his own understanding, cast off the yoke of God, and constitute himself an arbiter of good and evil. .....We now understand what is meant by abstaining from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; namely that Adam might not, in attempting one thing or another, rely upon his own prudence; but that, cleaving to God alone, he might become wise only by obedience." *Book of Genesis* 2:9

2) cf "But not only faith, perfect and in every way complete, but all right knowledge of God is born of obedience." *Institutes* 1.6.2

> The first man revolted from God's authority, not only because he was seized by Satan's blandishments, but also because, contemptuous of the truth, he turned aside to falsehood. And surely, once we hold God's Word in contempt, we shake off all reverence for Him. For unless we listen attentively to Him, his majesty will not dwell among us, nor his worship remain perfect. Unfaithfulness then was the root of the Fall.[1]

The essence of unfaithfulness for Calvin is the wrong use of the rational nature, that is using reason to question the Word of God. It is important to note, however, that for Calvin, far from being purely intellectual, this abuse of reason is closely linked with other imperfections - the loss of a proper attitude of reverence toward God, rebellion, pride and ungratefulness.

> Thereafter ambition and pride, together with ungratefulness, arose, because Adam by seeking more than was granted him shamefully spurned God's great bounty, which had been lavished upon him. To have been made in the likeness of God seemed a small matter to a son of the earth unless he also attained equality with God - a monstrous wickedness![2]

Thus the very heart of sin for Calvin is, in fact, the inversion of the image of God, and in both the image and its inversion the rational nature has its part to play. Where men and women were created that they might reflect God's glory both by the gifts and excellencies which He bestowed upon them and by their conscious acknowledgement of those gifts, by using their reason not to acknowledge God but rather to question His Word they fell instead into an attitude of ungratefulness and pride and rather than orienting themselves to God they turned away from Him.

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1) *Institutes* 2.1.4. cf "Very dangerous is the temptation, when it is suggested to us, that God is not to be obeyed, except so far as the reason of his command is apparent.....But, whosoever desires to be wise beyond measure, him will Satan, seeing he has cast off all reverence for God, immediately precipitate into open rebellion."

2) *Institutes* 2.1.4

Not only was the Fall rooted, in part, in the wrong use of reason, according to Calvin, it also had its effect upon reason in that it both weakened and corrupted the rational nature.[1] It has already been noted that in his theology Calvin examined human nature from two basic perspectives, that of God and that of humanity and that this produced two different evaluations of the power of reason after the Fall. From the perspective of humanity, men and women are still capable of the greatest achievements in the arts and the sciences,[2] however, from the perspective of God human reason is now inadequate for what was previously its greatest purpose, that is acknowledging the goodness of God and orienting the person to Him. The key failure of the reason after the Fall for Calvin lies in the fact that it is unable to assure men and women of the benevolence of God.

This argument can best be illustrated with reference to what Calvin had to say about the *sensus divinitatis*, that is the innate awareness of the existence and majesty of God which He has implanted in humanity.

> There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity (*divinitatis sensum*). This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretence of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty (*numinus intelligentiam*). Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops.[3]

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1) *Institutes* 2. 2. 12
2) *Institutes* 2. 2. 14-17
3) *Institutes* 1. 3. 1

This passage shows clearly Calvin's understanding of the nature of the *sensus divinitatis*; it is a sense of God which God himself has implanted within men and women for two purposes, both in order that no-one might be excluded from the knowledge of Him[1] and in order to prevent men and women from having recourse to ignorance as an excuse for their sin in refusing to acknowledge Him.

In what, then, does this *sensus* consist? In answering this question we must first note the number of different phrases which Calvin uses to denote this phenomenon. The title of the relevant chapter of the *Institutes* refers to *Dei notitiam* but within the chapter the *sensus* is variously referred to as *sensus divinitatis*, *sensus deitatis*, *numinis universis Dei*, *persuasio Deum esse*,[2] *constanti illa de Deo persuasione*,[3] *ingenitam....persuasionem, esse aliquem Deum*,[4] and *exiguum divinitatis suae gustum*.[5] The very variety of the words that Calvin uses for this *sensus* indicates the care which must be taken in attempting a precise definition.[6] The variety indicates also, perhaps, the fact that the sense itself is marked by a lack of clarity.[7] That knowledge is included within the idea is certain since it is described as *notio*, but it is also an impression or persuasion or presumption. Thus, perhaps it would best

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1) "Lest anyone be excluded from access to happiness he...sowed in men's minds that seed of religion" *Institutes* 1.5.1
2) *Institutes* 1.3.1
3) *Institutes* 1.3.2
4) *Institutes* 1.3.3
5) *Institutes* 2.2.18
6) "The first thing that strikes us about these words is their variety, the second their vagueness; and indeed their very variety is a sort of vagueness." THL Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p34.
7) In *Institutes* 1.4.4 it is described as 'confused'.

be described as an innate conviction, but one which has a definite noetic element; the recipient of the *sensus divinitatis* knows that God exists.[1]

This conviction, however, provokes within its recipient, not the joy and delight in God's presence of the believer, but rather a 'slavish forced fear'[2] of God's judgement and dread of His power, which in turn leads, not to the true worship of God, but only to idolatry, that is worshipping a God of human invention[3] and to hypocrisy, that is a religion which is forced and insincere.[4] This description of the reaction to the *sensus divinitatis* in turn provides another clue as to its content, what provokes such dread is an awareness of God's majesty and judgment. Thus in the *Institutes* of 1560 the term was translated as *"le sentiment qu'ils ont de la maiesté de Dieu."*[5]

The *sensus divinitatis* is, therefore, a most unwelcome sense of the majesty of God in the eyes of its recipients. It is something from which they attempt to

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1) *Institutes* 1.3.1; 1.3.3
2) *Institutes* 1.4.4
3) "All men have sought to form some conception of the majesty of God, and to make Him such a God as their reason could conceive Him to be" *Epistle to the Romans* 1:22 cf "For the knowledge of God as it now remains in man is nothing but a dreadful fountain of idolatry and all superstition." *Gospel of John* 3:6
4) "But while they know that His inescapable power hangs over them because they can neither do away with it nor flee from it, they recoil from it in dread. And so, lest they should everywhere seem to despise him whose majesty weighs upon them, they perform some semblance of religion." *Institutes* 1.4.4
5) *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne* JD Benoit (ed) (Paris: J Vrin 1957ff) 1.3.3 cf "If this sensus is a knowledge of God's existence, it is also an overwhelming and ineludible apprehension of his awfulness and majesty. It is the *mysterium tremendum*" Dowey, *op. cit.* p55.

escape,[1] but which nevertheless forces itself upon them,[2] so that they are unable to deny its existence due to the fact that it is implanted deep within them.[3]

This sense and fear of God's judgment is, moreover, reinforced by the operation of the conscience; according to Calvin the function of this also is to convict men and women of their guilt and to prevent them from hiding their sin. Thus in his definition of conscience he claimed that it was a 'witness' the purpose of which was to prevent men and women from hiding their sins and, instead, to bring them before God's judgment.[4]

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1) "Indeed they seek out every subterfuge to hide themselves from the Lord's presence and to efface it again from their minds. But in spite of themselves they are always entrapped." *Institutes* 1.3.2
2) "..the sense of divinity which they greatly wish to have extinguished, thrives and presently burgeons." *Institutes* 1.3.3
3) "..this conviction, namely that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were, in the very marrow." *Institutes* 1.3.3
4) "For just as when through the mind and understanding men grasp a knowledge of things, and from this are said 'to know', and this is the source of the word 'knowledge', so also when they have a sense of divine judgement, as a witness joined to them, which does not allow them to hide their sins from being accused before the Judge's tribunal, this sense is called 'conscience'. For it is a certain mean between God and man, because it does not allow man to suppress within himself what he knows, but pursues him to the point of convicting him...A simple knowledge could reside, so to speak, closed up in man. Therefore this awareness which hales man before God's judgement is a sort of guardian appointed for man to note and spy out all his secrets that nothing may remain buried in darkness." *Institutes* 3.19.15 cf "The conscience, if it looks to God, must either have sure peace with his judgments or be besieged by the terrors of hell." *Institutes* 3.13.3

Indeed it is interesting to note that Calvin says that in its fulfilment of this function of making men and women more aware of their guilt the conscience militates against a true knowledge of God. The recognition of his/her guilt makes it harder for a person to perceive the fatherly love of God. It is therefore impossible for persons by the use of their reason alone to recognise the benevolence of God.

> Therefore, since we have fallen from life into death, the whole knowledge of God the Creator that we have discussed would be useless unless our faith also followed, setting forth for us God our Father in Christ. The natural order was that the frame of the universe should be the school in which we were to learn piety, and from it pass over to eternal life and perfect felicity. But after man's rebellion, our eyes - wherever they turn - encounter God's curse. This curse..must overwhelm our souls with despair. For even if God will to manifest his fatherly favour to us in many ways, yet we cannot by contemplating the universe infer that he is Father. Rather conscience presses us within and shows us in our sin just cause for his disowning us and not regarding us as his sons.[1]

This for Calvin was the key failure of the rational nature - the rational nature of humanity alone is unable to overcome the perversion of the divine human relationship which is caused by sin. Thus, where the relationship to God was originally intended to be marked on the human side by gratitude and openness to God, it is instead marked by fear and rejection of God. This means that using only their unaided reason men and women would be unable to establish a solid basis for their relationship with God. According to Calvin it is only the recognition of the benevolence of God which can be the foundation of piety[2] and

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1) *Institutes* 2.6.1

2) "For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God." *Institutes* 3.11.1

of obedience[1], and without this certainty all religion will collapse.[2]

The failure of human reason, according to Calvin, is therefore not even an inability to know anything about God. On the contrary he accepted that it is possible for the non-believer to grasp and express many truths about God. Even the cleverest of natural men and women are, however, quite blind to the insight into the benevolence of God and without this insight they are lost in confusion.

> We must now analyse what human reason can discern with regard to God's Kingdom and to spiritual insight. This spiritual insight consists chiefly in three things: (1) knowing God; (2) knowing his fatherly favour in our behalf, in which our salvation consists; (3) knowing how to frame our life according to the rule of his law. In the first two points - *and especially the second* - the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles! Certainly I do not deny that one can read competent and apt statements about God here and there in the philosophers, but these always show a certain giddy imagination.....In short, they never even sensed that assurance of God's benevolence toward us (without which man's understanding can only be filled with boundless confusion). *Human reason, therefore, neither approaches, nor strives toward, nor even takes straight aim at this truth: to understand who the true God is or what sort of God he wishes to be towards us.*[3]

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1) "noone will ever reverence God but him who trusts that God is propitious to him. Noone will gird himself willingly to observe the law but him who will be persuaded that God is pleased by his obedience." *Institutes* 3.3.2 cf *Book of Psalms* 117:2

2) "This is the outstanding fruit of spiritual teaching, namely, the sure confidence of calling on God, just as on the other hand all religion falls and perishes when this certainty is taken away from men's consciences." *Epistle to the Hebrews* 4:16

3) *Institutes* 2.2.18, italics added.

The failure of the rational nature therefore undercuts the entire relationship with God. Unable to perceive the benevolence of God, men and women are therefore left with no basis for their dealings with Him.[1]

The Engagement of the Rational Nature

Having explored both the nature of truth and the nature of human reason in Calvin's theology, the question of the way in which the latter is enabled to grasp and respond to the former must now be raised. As has already been seen, Calvin argued that God actively promotes truth in the arena of human experience; therefore to ask how men and women grasp the truth is, in fact, to ask how God Himself forms their reason so that it is able to rise above the corruptions and limitations caused by the Fall and to grasp the truth about God Himself.

In his doctrine of the Trinity Calvin attempted to explicate the distinction between the three Persons following what he believed to be the Scriptural teaching, and in doing so he distinguished between them in terms of their respective activities,

> It is not fitting to suppress the distinctions that we observe to be expressed in Scripture. It is this: to the Father is attributed the beginning of all activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to

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1) "until God is recognised as Saviour, the minds of men will never enjoy true and unrestrained delight, but will be bogged down in confusion and care. Only the fatherly kindness of God, and the salvation that flows from it, can flood our hearts with gladness." *Luke* 1:46

> the Spirit is assigned the power and the efficacy of that activity.'

In the activity of God the following distinctions are to be understood; the origin of activity rests with the Father and its power and efficacy with the Spirit, but to the Son is assigned two different points which have already been shown to be closely associated in Calvin's mind - wisdom and counsel (reason) and the proper ordering of things. Thus Calvin followed Christian tradition in associating the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word of God, with both reason and order.

Accordingly Calvin argued that the significance of the Biblical teaching in Genesis 1 that God spoke in the act of Creation, in John 1 that all things were made through the Word and in Hebrews 1:2-3 that God upholds all things through His Word, lay in the idea that the Word was intermediary in the act of Creation.[2] In particular the power of the Word can be seen in the stable order of nature.[3] In addition Calvin argued that it was by the power of that same Word that humanity received the gift of understanding.[4]

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1) *Institutes* 1.13.18
2) *Institutes* 1.13.7
3) "In the creation of the World His power did not simply suddenly appear only to pass away, but.....it is visible in the permanence of the settled and stable order of nature." *Gospel of John* 1:4
4) "For there are two distinct powers of the Son of God. The first appears in the architecture of the world and in the order of nature. By the second He renews and restores fallen nature. He is the eternal Word of God: and so by Him the world was made; by His power all things keep the life they once received; in particular, man was adorned with the unique gift of understanding, and though by his fall he lost the light of understanding, he still sees and understands, since what he naturally possesses from the grace of the Son of God is not entirely destroyed." *Gospel of John* 1:5 cf 1:4

However, it is worth noting here that, although Calvin associated the existence of order in the World primarily with the power of the Word, the Spirit can in no way be segregated from the creation and in particular the preservation of order. He also was involved in the Creation of the World and in particular the creation of order out of chaos[1] and, since it is by the power of the Spirit that the World is sustained in being, the Spirit also is involved in preserving the order of the World.[2]

All order in the World is therefore dependent upon the Word of God Who acts by the power of the Spirit of God. Not surprisingly therefore Calvin argued that to be separated from the Word is to fall into disorder, while to be reunited with Him means the restoration of order. Thus on Ephesians 1:10 (*ἀναχεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῳ*) he commented

> The Vulgate has *instaurate* Erasmus has added *summatim* I have preferred to keep the strict meaning of the Greek word *ἀναχεφαιλαιώσασθαι* because it is more agreeable to the context. For to my mind, Paul wants to teach that outside

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1) "moreover, although no mention is made of the Spirit except in the creation of the universe, nevertheless the Spirit is introduced here, not as shadow, but as the essential power of God, when Moses tells us that the as yet formless mass was itself sustained in him (Genesis 1:2). Therefore it then has become clear that the eternal Spirit had always been in God, while with tender care he supported the confused matter of heaven and earth, until beauty and order were added." *Institutes* 1.13.22

2) "The creating of the world was completed in six days, therefore, but its government is continual and God is incessantly at work, guarding and preserving its order; just as Paul teaches that in Him we live and move and are (Acts 17:28). And David says that all things stand so long as God's Spirit animates them and fail so soon as they are deprived of His power (Psalm 104:9) Nor is it only by a general providence that the Lord maintains the nature He has created, for He orders and regulates every part of it." *Gospel of John* 5:17 cf *Acts of the Apostles* 17:28 *John* 12:31, *John* 13:31

Christ all things were upset, but that through Him they have been reduced to order. And truly, outside Christ, what can we perceive in the world but mere ruins? We are alienated from God by sin, and how can we but be wondering and shattered? The proper state of creatures is to cleave to God. Such an *ἀναχεφαλαίωσις* as would bring us back to regular order, the apostle tells us, has been made in Christ. Formed into one body, we are united to God, and mutually conjoined with one another. But without Christ, the whole world is, as it were a shapeless chaos and frightful confusion. He alone gathers us into true unity.

And just as the world and humanity will be brought into a proper relation and order when all things are gathered into the Word who is the source of true order, so also the human mind will be restored to a proper order only when it is taken up by the Word Who is the source of true reason. The rational nature of humanity is restored to a proper function and sound reasoning when it is submitted to the ordering of the Word of God. Hence Calvin could argue that the beginning of true understanding lies in embracing the teaching of the Word of God.

> Now, in order that true religion may shine upon us, we ought to hold that it must take its beginning from heavenly doctrine and that no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture. Hence there also emerges the beginning of true understanding, when we reverently embrace what it pleases God there to witness of himself.[1]

This immediately raises one question, that of the relationship in Calvin's thought between the two uses of the term Word of God, as applied to Christ and as applied to Scripture. This raises the wider question of the relationship between the encounter with Christ as the Word of God and the submission to

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1) *Institutes* 1.7.1

Scripture as the Word of God. This issue has an added importance in view of two points raised by scholars who have commented upon Calvin's doctrine of the Word of God. Several scholars have, in fact argued, that there exists an implicit dichotomy in Calvin's thought between faith which is directed to the Person of Christ and the believer's acceptance of the whole of Scripture as the Word of God.[1] Moreover, in opposition to those who argue that Calvin held to a rigid doctrine of verbal inspiration, several commentators have attempted to show that there is actually in Calvin's writings a distinction between Christ as Word and Scripture as imperfect witness to that Word effective only through the Spirit.[2]

It is undoubtedly the case that where Calvin dealt explicitly with the question of the relationship between Christ as Word and Scripture as Word he integrated the two as fully as possible. Just as he underlined the importance of the knowledge of the truth about God to the experience and worship of God so he applied the same principle to the encounter with Christ. There can be no true faith in Christ without a proper understanding of His power and office.[3] Once again it can be seen that for Calvin there can be no experience of God which

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1) eg. "He never fully integrated and related systematically the faithful man's acceptance of the authority of the Bible *en bloc* with faith as directed exclusively toward Christ." Dowey, *op. cit.* pp 161-2 cf P Lehmann, 'The Reformer's Use of the Bible' *Theology Today*, 3, (1946), pp 328-44. and P Lobstein 'La Connaissance Religieuse d'après Calvin', *Revue de Theologie et de Philosophie*, 42, (1909), pp 53-110.
2) See RA Muller 'The Foundation of Calvin's Theology: Scripture as Revealing God's Word', in *Duke Divinity School Review*, 44, (1979), pp14-23.
3) "Hence it follows that a bare and confused knowledge about God must not be taken for faith, but that which is directed to Christ, in order to seek God in Him; and this can only be done when the power and office of Christ are understood." *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3: 12

does not involve the rational nature of humanity, rather the experience of God involves the use of the reason to grasp the truth about God. In this way Scripture is vital to the experience of Christ, for only by a right understanding of Christ, perceived from the Scriptures, is it possible to find communion with Him.[1] It is this insight which lay behind Calvin's argument that Christ can only be received as He is 'clothed' with His gospel.

> This then is the true knowledge of Christ, if we receive him as he is offered by the Father: namely clothed with his gospel. For just as he has been appointed as the goal of our faith, so we cannot take the right road to him unless the gospel goes before us. And there, surely, the treasures of grace are opened to us; for if they had been closed, Christ would have benefited us little. Thus Paul yokes faith to teaching as an inseparable companion.[2]

Thus, to reject the Gospel or to refuse to obey the Word of God is to reject Christ Himself.[3] Christ has no commerce with us, nor we with Him apart from Scripture.[4]

It is worth noting that Calvin also argued the inverse point to this; just as Christ can be known only from Scripture, so also Scripture is to be read with a view to finding Christ in it.[5] In fact he could go so far as to claim that

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1) "Indeed, there is no intercourse with Christ save for those who have perceived the right understanding of Christ from the Word of the Gospel." *Institutes* 3.6.4
2) *Institutes* 3.2.6.
3) *Gospel of John* 12:48
4) *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 11:27
5) "The Scriptures should be read with the aim of finding Christ in them. Whoever turns aside from this object, even though he wears himself out all his life in learning, will never reach the knowledge of truth." *Gospel of John* 5:39 cf "When it (Scripture) is not taken as referring to Christ, its one aim and centre it is distorted and perverted." *2 Corinthians* 3:16

there is not a single word in Scripture which does not draw the believer to Christ.[1]

There was also a deeper theological reason for the way in which Calvin integrated Christ as Word and Scripture as Word in his theology. The conjugation of the two is a function of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity and his understanding of Christ's role as Mediator[2] Christ, Who has always been the Mediator between God and humanity, mediates not only in the reconciliation between the two but also in the giving of all teaching.[3] Thus, the Spirit by Whom the Law and the prophets were given was the Spirit of Christ and Christ Himself is the fountain of all the teaching of Scripture.

> '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, and all who thereafter ministered the heavenly doctrine.[4]

The result of this argument is, of course, that there cannot *a priori* be any conflict between faith in Christ and faith in Scripture since they are both manifestations of the Word of God. In fact it is interesting to note that

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1) See the preface to Olivétan's New Testament in *Calvin's Commentaries*, translated and edited by J Haroutunian, p70.
2) On Calvin's dual use of the term 'Mediator' see Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, p 67-73.
3) "We are thus to understand that since the beginning of the world God has held no communication with men but through the intervention of His eternal Wisdom or Son.....As He is the Mediator of reconciliation, by whom we are accepted of God, and the Mediator of intercession, through whom the way is opened for us to call upon the Father, so He has always been the Mediator of all teaching, because by Him God has always revealed Himself to men." *Epistle to the Galatians* 3:19
4) *Institutes* 1.13.7 cf *Institutes* 4.8.5 and *Gospel of John* 14:24.

Calvin's discussion of the need for Scripture is, in fact, analogous to that on the need for the mediation and Incarnation of Christ. In both it is human weakness and inability to rise up to and comprehend God which necessitates the giving of the Word of God.

This *a priori* argument, however, only partially obviates the difficulty posed above; it is one thing to argue in principle that there can be no opposition between faith in Christ and the acceptance of the Scriptures as authoritative, it is another to show in practice that agreement between faith in the Person of Christ and the acceptance of the authority of a book. The cogency of Calvin's argument in fact rests on three crucial points. The first is his notion of progressive revelation, that is the argument that the revelation of God in the Old Testament was not only dependent upon the mediation of Christ but was also itself a manifestation of Christ, albeit in shadows and types, so that the revelation of Christ in the flesh stands as the confirmation and conclusion of all previous revelation recorded in Scripture. From this follows the second point - that is the unity of Scripture, or the argument that all the books within the canon, since the Spirit of Christ was the author of them all, do in some way point to Christ.[1] The third point is of the greatest importance in this context, that is the way in which the authority of Scripture is recognised.

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1) Here it is instructive to compare Calvin's position with that of Luther. Luther, as is well known, held that the test of a genuine book of the Canon lay in whether or not the book preached Christ. (Preface to the Epistles of James and Jude. *Works of Martin Luther* VI p478) Calvin, however, for all his stress on finding Christ in the Scriptures never allowed that this could become a test of Canonicity

In Calvin's theology there is no ultimate discrepancy between belief in Christ and acceptance of the authority of Scripture because they are both a part of the way in which the believer is engaged by God. Accordingly, the way in which the believer is engaged is of the greatest significance. The engagement of the believer is demonstrated in his/her recognition of Scripture's authority.

The recognition of the authority of Scripture for Calvin did not rest on rational principles or arguments, which could in his opinion only ever have a secondary function in showing Scripture's authority[1]. Rather, respect for the authority of Scripture is based primarily on the recognition that God speaks in Scripture, or to put it another way, that in reading Scripture the believer is somehow dealing with God Himself[2]. Thus Calvin opened his discussion on this subject in the *Institutes* by arguing that Scripture will receive true respect only when it is regarded as the living words of God.

> When that which is set forth is acknowledged to be the Word of God, there is none so deplorably insolent - unless devoid also of both common sense and of humanity itself - as to

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1) "If very many people hold the Word of God in such contempt that it has scarcely any value, and if many are unmoved by any fear this circumstance arises from the fact that they do not consider that they have anything to do with God." *First Epistle to the Thessalonians* 2:13

2) This is not to deny that such rational arguments have a place in supporting belief in Scripture, Calvin's point is rather that such arguments are not sufficient to establish such belief. "Unless this certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgment, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments, to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps. For unless this foundation is laid, its authority will always remain in doubt. Conversely, once we have embraced it devoutly as its dignity deserves and have recognised it to be above the common sort of things, those arguments - not strong enough before to engraft and fix the certainty of Scripture in our minds - become very useful aids." *Institutes* 1.8.1

> dare to impugn the credibility of Him who speaks. Now daily oracles are not sent from heaven, for it pleased the Lord to hallow his truth to everlasting remembrance in the Scriptures alone. Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard.[1]

The key point to this argument is the way in which the Scriptures are brought to the centre of the way in which God deals with humanity. In Scripture, God 'accosts' men and women and deals with them so as to affect all their inner senses.[2] The sense of dealing with God in reading Scripture is to shape the way in which the Scriptures are read, it is only the conviction that in this book God Himself speaks to the believer which will ensure that the Scriptures are read with proper reverence.[3]

Calvin argued that to read Scripture is, in a sense to encounter God, to encounter His Word, living and active, and, significantly, the recognition of the authority of Scripture has many marks in common with the recognition of the presence of God. Most notably, the Scriptures are recognised as the Word of God by their ability to engage the person who reads them.

> Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated (*αὐτόπιστον*);

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1) *Institutes*1.7.1
2) "Whenever the Lord accosts us by His Word, He is dealing seriously with us to affect all our inner senses. There is therefore no part of our soul which should not be influenced." *Epistle to the Hebrews* 4:12
3) "You will never come to read it well prepared unless you bring to it reverence, obedience and willingness to learn (*docilitas*) A proper reverence arises from the conviction that it is God who speaks with us and not mortal man." *Second Epistle to Peter* 1:20

hence it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit. For even if it wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon out hearts through the Spirit. Therefore, illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own nor anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean: but we subject our judgment and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork....we feel that the undoubted power of his divine majesty lives and breathes there. By this power we are drawn and inflamed, knowingly and willingly, to obey him, yet also more vitally and more effectively than by mere human willing or knowing. [1]

According to Calvin, Scripture is self-authenticating. Just as, in a notable departure from the practice of Scholastic theology, Calvin never included in his work any attempt to prove by rational argument the existence of God, since the knowledge of God arises only from God's own action upon the individual, so also the authority of Scripture could not be based upon rational proof, but is known only by God's action through Scripture, that is Scripture's own power to affect the believer.[2] Thus, the authority of Scripture can not rest on the teaching of the Church or any other external authentication, rather Scripture itself exhibits clear evidence of its own truth.[3] The comparison between reading Scripture and reading the Classics shows that while the Classics have the ability to delight

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1) *Institutes* 1.7.5
2) *Institutes* 1.8.13
3) *Institutes* 1.7.2

and allure it is only Scripture which has the power to penetrate to the heart and so produce a radical change in the person who reads it.[1]

More than this, Scripture, according to Calvin, has the power to draw and take up the person who reads it, to draw from them an obedience and knowing which is greater than any human obedience and knowing, that is, it has the power to engage him/her in a living relationship with God.

But, perhaps the greatest parallel between the recognition of the authority of Scripture and the encounter with God lies in Calvin's argument on the role of the Spirit. It has already been shown that, according to Calvin, despite the objective nature of God's manifestation of Himself in Creation and to each individual, the recognition of this presence of God is possible only as the Spirit engages the attention of believer and gives him or her the capacity to know God. In the same way, the recognition of the authority of Scripture is

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1) "Now, this power which is peculiar to Scripture is clear from the fact that of human writings, however artfully polished, there is none capable of affecting us at all comparably. Read Demosthenos or Cicero; read Plato, Aristotle and others of that tribe. They will, I admit, allure you, delight you, move you, enrapture you in wonderful measure. But betake yourself from them to this sacred reading. Then, in spite of yourself, so deeply will it affect you, so penetrate your heart, so fix itself in your very marrow, that, compared with its deep impression, such vigour as the orators and philosophers have will nearly vanish. Consequently, it is easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavour, breathe something divine." *Institutes* 1.8.1 cf. "For he who has tasted only a little of the teaching of the Gospel is more inflamed and feels much greater energy in that small measure of faith than if he had known all Plato." *Gospel of John* 16:29

possible only by the testimony of the Spirit who draws the believer,[1] penetrates his/her heart and gives him/her the ability to realize that this is the Word of God.[2]

In this way, according to Calvin the reading of Scripture and the recognition of its authority is a part of the experience of dealing with God which is, as has already been seen, central to his view of the experience of the believer. Far from there being a discrepancy between faith as the acceptance of the personal Christ and as acceptance of the revelation given in Scripture, the two aspects are here made to work together. The believer can approach Christ only as God deals with him/her through Scripture, bestowing a true knowledge of Christ and His work of salvation, and to receive Christ implies also obedience to His Word in Scripture. That very obedience to Scripture and acceptance of its authority is itself something which the Spirit of God draws from the believer as He engages him/her in the experience of God.[3]

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1) See *Institutes* 1.7.5. above.

2) "the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded." *Institutes* 1.7.4

3) This, of course, leaves open a further aspect of Calvin's argument. For he went on to state that Scripture has authority, not only because God acts through it, but also because He is its author. The Spirit dictated to the human authors of the Scriptures what they were to say (*Institutes* 4.8.8). It is clear that for Calvin, the Bible had authority also because he regarded it as a 'compendium of supernaturally imparted information.' (Brian A Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New*, p63) Lack of space makes it impossible to deal in full with the question of Biblical inspiration, but the following comment may be made. Whilst undoubtedly, belief in God's action through Scripture requires belief that God also inspired its authors, it does not require belief in full verbal inerrancy, a notion which, as Gerrish and Lehmann (Paul Lehmann, 'The Reformers Use of the Bible' in *Theology Today*, 3, (1946), pp 328-344) have shown Calvin drew from the Medieval understanding of Scripture.

How does God engage the rational nature?

By the Word God engages the rational nature of men and women; that is He overcomes the fear of Him which results from the *sensus divinitatis* and the conscience, enables men and women to grasp the truth about Him and so draws them into a right relationship with Him. To say this raises the further question of how God engages the rational nature of the believer and, following from that two further questions of what happens to the believer as God acts upon him/her and of what s/he experiences as this happens. Calvin's answer to this question has three different aspects. First the Word clarifies the thinking about God, second it shows forth Christ and thirdly it arouses faith in the believer.

First, the Word clarifies the believer's thinking about God. This can best be seen from Calvin's own preliminary discussion on the place of Scripture in the knowledge of God in the *Institutes* where he compares natural men and women to people of poor sight, unable to read even the most beautiful of books. The point of this analogy is that the revelation of God in Creation is objective but because of their own blindness men and women are unable to recognise it as such. In this situation, Calvin argued, Scripture functions like a pair of spectacles, clarifying the previously confused knowledge of God.

> Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognise it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.[1]

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1) *Institutes* 1.6.1

This metaphor of the spectacles, which Calvin repeated elsewhere,[1] is an interesting one, not only does it suggest that Scripture, standing as a corrective to the dullness of human vision, enables men and women to see in Creation God's revelation of Himself, it also clearly implies that the Scriptures are something through which the Christian is able to look at the world and so find in Creation a true knowledge of God. One part of the role of Scripture, therefore, is to teach men and women how to find God in Creation and to enable them to value God's Creation properly.[2]

The second point has already been mentioned and so can be touched upon briefly. The Scriptures show forth Christ, that is, the teaching of Scripture so forms the understanding of Christ as to make possible the encounter with Him. Thus, Calvin can claim that although Christ is no longer present as a man on earth in the Gospel he shows Himself to us face to face.[3]

Thirdly, by clarifying the thinking about God and showing forth Christ, the Word arouses faith in the believer, or, more accurately, God arouses faith in the believer as the Spirit seals the promises of the Word, given in Christ upon the

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1) *Institutes* 1.14.1
2) "We must strive onwards by this straight path if we seriously aspire to the pure contemplation of God. We must come, I say, to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from his works, while those very works are appraised not by our depraved judgment but by the rule of eternal faith." *Institutes* 1.6.3
3) *Luke* 2:30

heart of him/her.[1] For Calvin, as might be expected, the experience of faith is at the very heart of the experience of God. Thus the astuteness of his description of the latter is to a large extent dependent upon the astuteness of his description of the former. In discussing the relation of faith to the reason and the Word of God Calvin made a number of important points.

First, in his discussion of the relationship between faith and the Word Calvin made very clear the important point that faith is not an innate human capacity which might be directed to some object other than God. Rather, faith, as Calvin used the term, stood always for a fully Christian faith in God. As such it is totally dependent upon the Word of God, it has only one object, which is the Word and it is impossible for it to exist without the Word.[2] Calvin's point was not merely that without the Word faith lacks its proper object, for this would imply that faith is, in fact, an innate human capacity which then fastens upon the Word; rather his argument was that without the Word faith ceases to be faith at all and becomes instead nothing other than credulity or error.[3] Faith is not, therefore, for Calvin a human capacity, it is something which God creates in the believer through the agency of the Word.

Equally, however, in speaking of the creation of faith, Calvin did not speak only of the Word. The Word can not arouse faith unless the Spirit 'purges' the human

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1) *Institutes* 3.2.6-7; 3.2.33
2) *Epistle to the Hebrews* 4:2
3) "Therefore if faith turns away even in the slightest degree from this goal toward which it should aim, it does not keep its own nature, but becomes uncertain credulity and vague error of mind." *Institutes* 3.2.6 cf "If it (faith) passes in the slightest degree beyond the limits of the Word, it at once ceases to be faith." *Gospel of John* 20:29. V Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin*, p 6.

mind of its darkness,[1] that is faith is only possible as the Spirit reforms the human capacity to receive the Word of God. Accordingly, to speak of the engagement of the rational nature in faith is not to speak simply of God's use of the human capacity for reason as it already existed, but rather to speak of the Spirit's re-formation or even re-creation of the human ability to know God which occurs as the reason is brought under the power of the Word. This leads to a preliminary description of the nature of faith in Calvin's theology, faith is that new capacity for the knowledge of God which the believer experiences as God engages him/her through the Word. Put another way, faith is the re-ordering of the human personality which the believer experiences as s/he is taken up by Word and Spirit. Faith is the form of the experience of God seen from the human point of view.

For Calvin the engagement of the rational nature (as well as all other aspects of the human personality) manifests itself primarily in the experience of faith. This means that to understand the nature of the engagement through the Word one must consider Calvin's understanding of the nature of faith. Furthermore, this also means that Calvin's understanding of the way in which God shapes the believer's experience is to be found in his description of the nature of faith. And finally this means that the answer to the question 'what is faith in Calvin's understanding'? has originally to be sought away from his formal definition that it is the knowledge of God's benevolence and located rather in the realization that, since faith grows out of God's engagement of the person, the understanding of faith belongs to the realm of experience rather than conception. Its origins in God's work of regeneration are ultimately

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1) *Institutes* 3.2.33

mysterious[1] and the nature of faith itself is not so much to be comprehended by reason as perceived by experience.[2]

The other side to this argument, however, is the fact that any description of the nature of faith in Calvin's theology must take account of his use of the idea of knowledge in his formal definition of faith. This is especially the case here, when concerned with the role of the rational nature. In 1539 Calvin made a significant alteration to his definition of faith as given in the *Institutes*. The edition of 1536 followed Luther in arguing that to have true faith is to put all one's hope and trust in God and to confidently expect the fulfilment of all the promises of Scripture. This is opposed to the mere semblance of faith which simply acknowledges the existence of God and the truth of the narratives about Christ.[3] From 1539 onwards, however, Calvin used a different definition of faith, which included the idea of knowledge, and every subsequent edition of the *Institutes* used the following definition.

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1) "When the Lord breathes faith into us He regenerates us in a hidden and secret way that is unknown to us. But when faith has been given we grasp with lively awareness not only the grace of adoption but also newness of life and other gifts of the Holy Spirit." *Gospel of John* 1:13
2) "No one can well perceive the power of faith unless he feels it by experience in his heart." *Institutes* 3.20.12. "Christ's words show that nothing relating to the Holy Spirit can be learned by human reason, but that He is known only by the experience of faith." *Gospel of John* 14:17
3) It reads "The other is the faith whereby we not only believe that God and Christ are, truly acknowledging Him as our God and Christ as our Savior. Now this is not only to adjudge true all that has been written or is said of God and Christ: but to put all hope and trust in one God and Christ, and to be so strengthened by this thought that we have no doubt about God's good will toward us. Consequently, we have been persuaded that whatever we need, either for the use of the soul or the body, He will give us; we await with assurance what ever the Scriptures promise concerning him; we do not doubt that Jesus is our Christ, that is Savior." *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1536 2.2 Battles p43.

> Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.[1]

The use of knowledge in Calvin's definition of faith emphasises again the importance of the rational nature to his understanding of the Christian faith, however it is important to ask what Calvin meant by knowledge in this context. It is clear from above that he did not mean simply the knowledge of the fact of God's benevolence. Such an understanding would, in fact, imply the use of the rational nature to keep the believer at a distance from God, God being known only by the means of knowledge of facts about Him. In fact, as has already been seen, faith for Calvin had to do with God working through the Word to re-order the human personality. God is known therefore by His ability to re-shape the inner life of the believer. In faith the believer both knows the fact of God's benevolence and is aware of the effect upon him/herself of the presence of God, hence the importance of the experience of faith to the comprehension of faith.[2] It is this perception which lies behind Calvin's argument on the nature of the knowledge of faith.

> When we call faith knowledge, we do not mean a comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man's mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. Even where the mind has attained, it does not comprehend what it feels. But while it is persuaded of what it does not comprehend by the very certainty of its persuasion it understands more than if it perceived anything human by its own capacity.

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1) *Institutes* 3.2.7
2) The precise nature of this will be explored in the next chapter.

Paul, therefore, beautifully describes it as the power "to comprehend...what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge". He means that what our mind embraces by faith is in every way infinite, and...this kind of knowledge is far more lofty than all understanding. Nevertheless the Lord has "made manifest to his saints" the secret of his will, which had been "hidden for generations". For very good reason, then, faith is frequently called 'recognition'...but by John 'knowledge'. For he declares all believers know themselves to be God's children...But they are more strengthened by the persuasion of divine truth than instructed by rational proof....those things that we know through faith are nonetheless absent from us and go unseen. From this we conclude that the knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension. [1]

As a description of knowledge pure and simple this passage is confusing. Phrases such as 'the mind does not comprehend what it feels' or 'this knowledge is more lofty than all understanding' seem, at first, to make the description less, rather than more, clear. Calvin's point is that faith is both fully rational, in the sense that it fully involves the rational nature, albeit only the rational nature as cleansed and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and also more than rational, both in the sense that the experience of faith involves more than simply the rational nature, it also draws in all other aspects of human nature, and in the sense that the human mind cannot fully comprehend what it knows by faith. The knowledge of faith, therefore, includes recognition and persuasion and an awareness of the presence and work of God as much as it does comprehension. Thus in this passage also Calvin described the nature of the engagement of the rational nature; in faith the reason of the believer is taken up and used by God Himself as He draws him or her to Himself.

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1) *Institutes* 3.2.14

The Use of Reason

There remains one final point to be considered. What for Calvin constitutes the right and the wrong use of the human capacity for reason? The most general answer to this question has already been suggested by the idea of engagement. The proper operation of the rational nature occurs when the believer is engaged by and responding to the activity of God and reason is abused when it is used without a proper reference to God, thus setting up the man or woman over against God. The nature of this right and wrong use can however be described more specifically and this description is an important part of the wider description of the way in which God shapes the believer's experience. As God engages the believer's reason He shapes the way in which the reason is used so that this responds properly to Him.

What characterises the right use of reason?

1) Teachableness

According to Calvin, the reason is properly used when the believer shows him/herself to be teachable - that is attentive and obedient to the Word of God. Calvin used the idea of teachableness (*docilitas*) most often in connection with what might be called a preliminary stage on the way to faith, or alternatively a preparation for faith,[1] however, it will be shown that the idea of *docilitas* can also be applied more generally to the continuing attitude which Calvin expected the believer to have to the Word.

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1) It is in this connection that the idea is most often considered in the secondary literature see WH Neuser, 'Calvin's Conversion to Teachableness', in *Calvin and Christian Ethics: Papers and Responses presented at the Fifth Colloquium on Calvin and Calvin Studies*, and Shepherd, *op. cit.* pp108-117.

The term *docilitas* is derived from the verb *doceo* - to teach - and so can be, and frequently, is translated into English as 'teachableness' or 'readiness to learn'; indeed it is often connected by Calvin with a willingness to be taught. However, as its connection with the English word 'docile' makes clear, *docilitas* does not refer simply to intellectual learning, but rather to a willing submission to the authority of God.

Before proceeding to a detailed examination of the nature of *docilitas* in Calvin's thought, one preliminary and major point needs to be made. Even when Calvin did view *docilitas* as a preparation for faith, even this preparation is not within the abilities of men and women, rather *docilitas* for Calvin shows the way in which God Himself prepares men and women for faith and produces within them the fundamental disposition which is both caused by and essential to the experience of faith.

> Therefore the beginning of conversion is such, that God, without having been called or sought, by His own iniative seeks us who are wandering and going astray; that He changes the inflexible desires of our hearts so that He may keep us open to His teaching. (*quos nos sibi dociles habeat*)[1]

This quotation already shows what, for Calvin, lay at the very heart of *docilitas*, openness and attentiveness to God, what he called a godly desire to learn from God Himself[2].

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1) *Acts of the Apostles* 9:5

2) "From this we learn that those who ask at the mouth of the Lord and offer themselves to Him to be ruled and taught never go away empty.....Whoever therefore is truly prepared to learn, the Lord will not deny his godly desire; for He is the best and most faithful of masters, if only He has pupils prepared to study and to learn (*dociles ac studiosos*). We need not fear therefore that He will allow us to lack wise counsel, if only we are attentive to hear Him and to not refuse to embrace whatever He may teach us." *Acts of the Apostles* 2:38

Calvin used *docilitas* of those people who, although they may not be actual believers, are receptive to the Word of God, or, in the Commentaries upon the Gospels, the teaching of Christ. One example of this comes in Calvin's comments upon the story of the encounter on the road to Emmaus; although the disciples there showed an ignorance which Calvin described as blameworthy, by their *docilitas* they allowed Christ to remove their error and so were brought to faith.[1]

In *Institutes* 3.2.5 Calvin calls this preparation for faith a form of 'implicit faith', contrasting it sharply with what he refers to as the 'sheer ignorance' involved in the Roman Catholic understanding of 'implicit faith'. In his understanding this idea can be described variously as involving *docilitas*, being ready to learn or willing to hearken to God and what he calls 'reverent attention which disposed them (that is some of the characters in the Gospels) to submit themselves willingly to Christ.' These two ideas of being *docilis* and of reverent and submissive attention to Christ again highlight what is the central notion in this conception of a preparation for faith - that the attention is focussed upon Christ[2] and the mind prepared to receive His teaching. Thus, for two disciples the first step towards *docilitas* was to regard Christ as prophet and teacher[3] and Zacchaeus was prepared for faith in

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1) *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 24: 14
2) or alternatively the Word of God. "..Gentiles, who had experienced the teaching of the Law, and, although they were not yet imbued with true godliness, were nevertheless worshipping the God of Israel, and being eager to learn, did not reject the things that they knew to be taken from Moses and the prophets....such docility was an entrance to faith, and indeed, a kind of beginning of faith." *Acts of the Apostles* 17: 17
3) *Gospel of John* 1: 38

that he was moved by God to desire to see Christ.[1] When in the Acts of the Apostles the Christians at Thessalonica were praised for being ready to receive the Word Calvin commented that this is the way to enter faith - to be ready to follow, to renounce fleshly understanding and to show oneself *docilis* and obedient to Christ.[2]

Thus, the idea of being made receptive to Christ's teaching and authority lies at the very heart of Calvin's conception of the preparation for faith. Without this necessary preparation the Gospel will not be properly received.[3] The preparation and its implications can, however only be fully understood when it is realised that this is not a purely intellectual affair but a very practical preparation which involves not only noetic receptivity but also humility and obedience. *Docilitas* can only be achieved when the believer has been stripped of his/her pride and is only a true reaction to the Word of God when the believer responds with obedience. Thus in commenting upon Paul's Damascus Road vision Calvin explained the fact that he fell to the earth as the beginning of his humbling which would bring him to *docilitas* and make him ready to hear the voice of Christ.[4] The purpose of the entire Damascus Road experience was, according to Calvin, to break Paul's pride and make him pliable and willing to follow.

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1) *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 19 1-10
2) *Acts of the Apostles* 17:11 cf "It is in a way the beginning of faith when minds are prepared to receive teaching. Such an entrance to faith is here dignified as faith, that we may learn how highly God esteems reverence for His Word when he confers so great an honour on the teachableness of those who had not yet been instructed." *Gospel of John* 4:39
3) "For as it is useless to sow seed in an uncultivated field, so the doctrine of the Gospel is thrown heedlessly away unless the hearer has first been broken in and duly prepared to be obedient and teachable." *Gospel of John* 3:3
4) *Acts of the Apostles* 9:4

Similarly the prison keeper at Phillippi had to be stripped of his pride that he might submit to God. The experience of the earthquake led him to *docilitas* and obedience.[1] Moreover in Zacchaeus' obedience to the command of Christ to come down from the tree, Calvin saw a sign of the power and direction of the Spirit; for Zacchaeus also *docilitas* and obedience were the beginning of faith.[2] For the Samaritan woman, on the other hand, the beginning of *docilitas* was repentance[3]

As has already been said, it would be a complete misunderstanding of Calvin's position to imagine that *docilitas* is applicable only to those who are being prepared for faith. Rather it remains true of the believer also that his/her wisdom should be based upon the foundation of teachableness.

> For our wisdom ought to be nothing else than to embrace with humble teachableness, and at least without finding fault, whatever is taught in Sacred Scripture.[4]

Teachableness therefore denotes a fundamental attitude and willingness to be taught which Calvin expected all Christians to display in their dealings with God.[5]

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1) *Acts of the Apostles* 16:29
2) *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 19:5
3) "Not only does the woman modestly acknowledge her fault, but she is ready and prepared to listen to Christ's teaching, which she rejected before, and desires it and demands it of her own accord. Repentance, as I have said is the beginning of true teachableness." *Gospel of John* 4:19
4) *Institutes* 1.18.4 cf *1 Corinthians* 1:18 "We must bring a ready teachableness; we must listen hard and pay attention if we want to progress properly in the school of God. Most of all, we need patience until the Spirit makes plain what we seemed to have often read or heard." *John* 14:26
5) "To bring this about we must be teachable, and from day to day labour to seek new help in the Word to strengthen our faith with it." *Sermons in Ephesians* 2:19-22 p.225 cf p254 and *James* 1:21 *Institutes* 4.1.5, 4.3.1 *Psalm* 119:98

2) Reason and the Affections

The second point about the proper use of the rational nature will, in fact be considered more fully in the third chapter and so will only be touched upon here. Calvin argued that the engagement of the rational nature can never be separated from the engagement of the other aspects of human nature, thus reason that is used properly will be reason that is used in such a way that the believer is not 'left cold' by his/her knowledge but is rather deeply moved and affected by it.[1]

> We have given first place to the doctrine in which our religion is contained, since our salvation begins with it. But it must enter our hearts and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us... For it is a doctrine not of the tongue but of life. It is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affections of the heart...With how much better reason, then, shall we detest those trifling Sophists who are content to roll the gospel on the tips of their tongues when its efficacy ought to penetrate the inmost affections of the heart, take seat in the soul, and affect the whole man a hundred times more deeply than the cold exhortations of the philosophers![2]

Thus, for example, at the end of the first book of the *Institutes* Calvin offered his readers some guidance on the proper way to view God's work in Creation and so to learn something about God as Creator. The main theme of this section was that men and women should not coldly pass over the power of God displayed in

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1) "Faith is not a cold notion, but one that kindles the heart to love Christ." *First Epistle to Peter* 1:8

2) *Institutes* 3.6.4

Creation, but rather should learn to apply what they learned to themselves so that they are moved by what they know and learn to trust, praise, call upon and love God.[1]

3) Being raised above the world.

One final point about the right knowledge of God and therefore the right use of reason remains to be made. For Calvin the use of reason in the knowledge of God always implied the idea of being lifted by God above the world.

> The first approach to proper knowledge of God is this, if we go out of ourselves and do not measure Him by our own mental capacity, and, what is more, do not form any mental pictures of Him according to our carnal understanding, but set Him above the World, and distinguish Him from created things. The whole world has always been far removed from such a sober outlook, because there is always this perversity innate in men, to spoil the glory of God with the things that they have made. For as they are carnal and earthly they wish to have one who corresponds to their own nature. Secondly, in conformity with their audacity they make Him of such a nature as they can grasp... the man who does not ascend above the world grasps empty shadows and appearances instead of God. Moreover, unless we are lifted up to heaven with the wings of faith, we must necessarily die away in our own thoughts.[2]

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1) "Therefore, to be brief, let all readers know that they with true faith have apprehended what it is for God to be Creator of heaven and earth, if they first of all follow the universal rule, not to pass over in ungrateful thoughtlessness or forgetfulness those conspicuous powers which God shows forth in his creatures, and then learn so to apply it to themselves that their very hearts are touched." *Institutes* 1.14.21 cf. "There remains the second part of the rule, more closely related to faith. It is to recognised that God has destined all things for our good and salvation but at the same time to feel his power and grace in our selves and in the great benefits he has conferred upon us, and so to bestir ourselves to trust, invoke, praise and love him." *Institutes* 1.14.22

2) *Acts of the Apostles* 17:24

What Calvin meant by this idea was essentially that the 'otherness' of God should be acknowledged. Thus God is not to be measured by the capacity of the human mind, but rather the believer should recognise that the nature of God can not be grasped by human comprehension.

What characterises the wrong use of reason?

In general, of course, the wrong use of reason bears the opposite characteristics to the right use of reason. Thus, when the reason is used wrongly, rather than showing him/herself to be teachable, the man or woman uses his/her reason to set him/herself up over against God and instead of knowing God in such a way that his/her heart is touched, he or she falls prey to a cold rationalism which uses only the rational nature, in isolation from all other aspects of the human personality. More specifically however the wrong use of reason can be illustrated with reference to Calvin's concerted attack upon that form of knowledge which he called 'speculation'.[1]

'Speculation' itself was always a highly pejorative term in Calvin's theology as can be seen from the various adjectives which he used alongside it. At best he dismissed it as 'bare speculation',[2] at worst it was variously described as

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1) It is worth noting that although 'speculation' has been chosen here as a good example, it was not the only word which Calvin used to denote this wrong attitude. His use of 'curiosity' has a great deal in common with speculation. See *John* 18:38, 20:31; *2 Corinthians* 12:4; *1 Timothy* 6:3 and *Deuteronomy* 18:9

2) *Gospel of John* 17:21

frigidis (cold/idle),[1] *otiosus* (idle),[2] *carnale* (carnal),[3] *inanis* (empty), [4] *vagas* (vague),[5] and *pravas et noxias* (wicked and harmful).[6] However, the most interesting point about this term is the way in which the evils which apparently characterised speculative knowledge in Calvin's mind had three basic points in common.

First, 'speculation' in Calvin's writings refers to knowledge, and in particular knowledge of God, which is intrinsically useless. This idea can be seen especially from his attacks on Scholastic theology; one of his main complaints against the theology of the Scholastics centred around the fact that they concerned themselves with useless controversies and rather than with the kind of teaching which would build up godliness. This, he argued was nothing but idle speculation.[7]

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1) *Institutes* 1.2.2
2) *Institutes* 1.13.1 & 1.14.4
3) *Institutes* 1.13.1
4) *Institutes* 1.5.9 & 1.14.4
5) *Institutes* 2.12.4
6) *Institutes* 1.14.4
7) "We should remember that this is the rule by which all doctrines are to be tried; that those which tend to edification may be approved but those that prove themselves material for fruitless controversies are to be rejected as unworthy of the Church of God. If this test had been applied over several centuries, then, although religion might have been corrupted by many errors, at least there would have been less of that devilish art of disputation, which goes by the name of scholastic theology. For that theology is nothing but contentious and idle speculations with nothing of value in them." *First Epistle to Timothy* 1:4 cf "*Ματαιλογία* is the opposite of all useful and solid teaching, so that it includes all trifling and frivolous speculations which have nothing in them but empty bombast, because they contribute nothing to godliness and the fear of God, such is the whole of scholastic theology as it is found today in Popery." *Epistle to Titus* 1:10 See also *Gospel of John* 3:4

Second, speculation for Calvin implied the use of reason which treated knowledge as a purely human enterprise. Thus the attempt to talk about God beginning with purely human questions is called speculation[1] More generally, speculation is a knowledge which has no restraint, which attempts to move beyond the knowledge of God which He has himself disclosed;[2] that is a knowledge in which the decisive factor in the content of the knowledge is the human desire to know rather than what God has revealed.[3]

The third and closely related point is that speculation is associated with a refusal to know God as He manifests Himself. In this way, according to Calvin both the stupidity and the arrogance of human nature is demonstrated, that in seeking to know God men and women prefer their own empty and vain imagination to the reality of God's self-revelation.[4] The result of this is that, for Calvin, speculation is associated above all with knowledge which, since it refuses to come to terms with God's self-manifestation is a purely human enterprise and

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1) Such as, for example, 'what is God' *Institutes* 1.2.2 or the order and number of angels, *Institutes* 1.14.4 or whether Christ would still have become a man had redemption not been necessary. *Institutes* 2.12.4
2) "Wherefore let this passage act as a restraint upon us, to repress the speculations which are too wild and wanton in us, when we desire to know what God would have concealed from us. This is the rule of sound and legitimate and profitable knowledge, to be content with the measure of revelation, and willingly to be ignorant of what is deeper than this." *Harmony of the Pentateuch* Exodus 33:18
3) "But my readers must now be requested not only to pardon me for abstaining from subtle speculations, but also themselves willingly to keep with the bounds of simplicity. Many have itching ears; and in our natural vanity, most men are more delighted by foolish allegories than by solid erudition. But let those who shall desire to profit in God's school, learn to restrain this perverse desire of knowing more than is good for them, although it may tickle their minds." *Harmony of the Pentateuch*, Deuteronomy 12:4
4) *Institutes* 1.4.1. Quoted above.

lacks the vital element of being engaged by God Himself. Speculation is therefore cold and idle as opposed to the living experience of being engaged by the encounter with God.

> Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself but as he is towards us; so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain high-flown speculation. [1]

Thus, in its concern with useless questions, its purely human origin and its coldness, speculation epitomized for Calvin the wrong use of reason, reason as it is used not to respond to God but either without reference to God or to set the self up over against God.

Conclusion

Calvin's teaching on the place of reason in the experience of God contains a number of significant points which are still relevant to modern work on the nature of experience and in particular of religious experience. The most important lies in the fact that he was able to speak of the role of reason in the experience of God at all. A major trend in modern thought has been the tendency to speak of reason as having a purely secondary role in experience, that of interpretation and explanation.[2] Much of this can be traced back to

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1) *Institutes* 1.10.2 cf *Institutes* 1.2.2 and *Institutes* 1.5.9

2) A classic example of this school of thought is William James, who allowed reason a role only in giving account of religious experience and therefore of giving religion a public rather than a purely private status. He concluded that all intellectual operations are secondary in religious experience. "But all these intellectual operations, whether they be constructive or comparative and critical, presuppose immediate experience as their subject matter. They are interpretative and inductive operations after the fact, consequent upon religious feeling, not coördinate with it, not independent of what it ascertains." William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p 433.

Kant's critique of theoretical reason and his attack upon speculative metaphysics as explored in the Introduction. Calvin, however, was able to speak of the role of reason in the experience of God because of two important differences in his approach to the concept. The first had to do with both the depth and the breadth of his understanding of the subject of experience. A great deal of modern thought on the question tends to confine the experience of God solely to those encounters when the subject is made aware of the presence of God. This approach almost inevitably makes the understanding of experience both superficial and narrow; the experience of God is confined to the believer's own awareness and is associated only with short-lived occurrences. Calvin, on the other hand, because he viewed experience as related to all of the interaction between God and the believer and because of his insistence that the believer deals with God in every aspect, of life was able to view the believer's attempts to reason and to understand not as somehow supplementary to the 'real' experience but as itself a part of experiencing God.

The second difference between Calvin and modern day understanding of the experience of God has to do with his view of the activity of God. It will be seen throughout this thesis that Calvin laid great stress on God's activity and on the fact that in his/her experience of God the believer is caught up in that activity. This stress enabled him to speak of God's active renewal and reformation of the believer's rational nature. Thus, despite his teaching on the catastrophic effect of the Fall on the human ability to grasp the truth about God and in particular about His benevolence, Calvin could still speak of the role of reason because he taught that God recreates that ability. In the creation of faith God recapacitates men and women for the entire relationship with Him and this includes the reformation of reason.

One further point is that Calvin was able to speak of the role of reason in the experience of God because of his belief both in the fact that God's activity in the human life is aimed at a particular purpose and in the fact that the reason has a particular function within that purpose. According to Calvin God works within the believer's experience to shape his/her life and experience to a specific end; that the believer might be fully oriented to Him. This will in part be the subject of the final chapter of this thesis and so can be mentioned only briefly here. It was Calvin's belief that the reason has a role in orienting the person to God which was the foundation of much of what he had to say about the rational nature. Thus this insight into the way in which the reason can play a part in the direction and orientation of the life was of the greatest importance.

Finally, it has often been argued that Calvin gives the reason an unduly prominent role in his anthropology. It should however be noted that the nature of the subject matter of this chapter will have made this prominence of the rational in Calvin appear greater than is actually the case; the next two chapters will show that Calvin also had a great deal to say about the role of the affections and the moral life in the believer's experience of God.

CHAPTER THREE

The Engagement of the Affections

Whoever is moderately versed in Scripture will understand by himself, without the admonition of another, that when we have to deal with God nothing is achieved unless we begin from the inner disposition of the heart.[1]

One of the most pejorative adjectives which Calvin used in conjunction with any knowledge which claimed to be knowledge of God was the term 'frigid' (*frigidus*); one of the worst condemnations that he could pronounce upon such knowledge was to say that it was cold in that it had no effect upon the believer.[2] This has, in part already been indicated in the previous chapter where it was shown that one of the undesirable characteristics of speculative knowledge according to Calvin was the fact that it was frigid.[3]

It is worth noting that the Latin word *frigidus* can mean not only cold but also lifeless, lacking in energy,[4] and it would seem that this was the understanding of the term which was most on Calvin's mind when he used it. Frigid knowledge for Calvin implied that knowledge which lacks life and energy, or, more

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1) *Institutes* 3.3.16
2) cf "Here then, lies the significance of Calvin's frequent attacks on *frigidity*: knowing for Calvin was frigid if it lacked that involvement of the affections which distinguishes really knowing from merely knowing. It is worth noting that the vocabulary of Calvin, commonly considered one of the colder figures in our cultural heritage, included almost no word more pejorative that 'frigid'. He wanted genuine knowledge, especially religious knowledge, to be *hot*." WJ Bouwsma, 'Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing' in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 17, (1982), p205.
3) See Chapter Two p48
4) *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* records eight definitions of the word *frigidus* of which the eighth includes the ideas of having no energy or vigour, failing to produce the effect intended and lacking in ardour or passion.

specifically, that knowledge which fails to impart life and energy to the one who experiences it. Thus he frequently opposed frigid knowledge to a knowledge which is living, that is a knowledge which creates an animated faith in the believer[1] and which imparts to him/her vivacity and energy.

Central to this sense of a living faith was the idea that faith touched and affected the very centre of human life, the inner affections of the heart and so calls forth from the believer a proper response to God.

> The Scripture has good reason to repeat everywhere what we read here about the living knowledge of God. For nothing is commoner in the world than to draw the teaching of godliness into frigid speculations....
>
> Granted that Plato was groping in the darkness; but he denied that the beautiful which he imagined could be known without ravishing a man with the admiration of itself, this in *Phaedus* and elsewhere. How then is it possible for you to know God and yet be touched by no feeling? Nor does it proceed only from God's nature that, if we know Him, we immediately love Him. For the same Spirit who enlightens our minds also inspires our hearts with an affection corresponding to our knowledge.[2]

This quotation demonstrates admirably the two different aspects of what characterised a 'living' knowledge of God for Calvin. The first mark of a 'living' knowledge lay in the sense of being touched by feeling, that is a sense that not simply the rational nature was involved in knowing God, but rather that the knowledge touched the believer at a deeper level than the merely rational. In this knowledge all of human life was brought into play. Thus a 'living'

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1) "For faith is not a naked and frigid apprehension of Christ, but a living and real sense of His power which begets confidence." *First Epistle to John* 2:27
2) *First Epistle to John* 2:3

knowledge of God had to do with depth and the involvement of the whole human personality, rather than simply the rational nature in the relationship with God.[1]

Secondly, a living knowledge of God had to do quite literally with the giving of life; that is it calls forth from the believer a new way of living, an aspect of human life which had not previously existed. The Spirit inspires in the believer an affection corresponding to his/her knowledge. This had far deeper implications than simply the arousal of certain emotions. Calvin described such knowledge as the lighting of a fire, the creation of a fever of love.[2] A true knowledge of God animates the believer's affections and in so doing creates in him/her a new way of being in relationship to God. The believer is, henceforth, bound to God not simply by rights or duty but by his/her own love and desire for Him.

Further, as this quotation also shows there are, according to Calvin, two main reasons why the affections have such a vital part to play in the knowledge of God. The first has to do with the nature of God Himself and a fitting response to Him. If the recognition of beauty in earthly things draws from men and

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1) "With how much better reason, then, shall we detest these trifling Sophists who are content to roll the gospel on the tips of their tongues when its efficacy ought to penetrate the inmost affections of the heart, take its seat in the soul, and affect the whole man a hundred times more deeply than the cold (*frigidae*) exhortations of the philosophers." *Institutes* 3.6.4

2) "Let us remember that it is the true fruit of heavenly teaching, whoever may be its minister, to light the fire of the Spirit in men's hearts, to refine and purify, yes, to consume, and to whip up a true fever of love for God, and snatch all men up to heaven." *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 24:32

women a response of admiration and love, thus involving the affections, how much more should the recognition of the nature of God draw such a response from them. The second and more important reason has to do with the role of the Spirit in the way in which men and women come to know God. It has already been emphasised that, according to Calvin men and women can know God only as the Spirit gives them the capacity to do so, here can be seen at least a part of Calvin's teaching on what is involved in the Spirit's gift to the believer of a new capacity for knowing God, the Spirit creates in the believer a new way of living in relation to God by inspiring within him/her not only rational knowledge but also love.

This can be seen in particular from Calvin's description of the work of the Spirit in the believer as it is given in the beginning of Book 3 of the *Institutes*. There he described what he called the 'secret energy'[1] of the Spirit by which the benefits of Christ are communicated to the believer. The wide-ranging description of the activity of the Spirit in the Christian's life included the following points. The Spirit makes the believer fruitful to bring forth buds of righteousness. He restores and nourishes the believer into vigour of life. He inflames the believer's heart with the love of God and with zealous devotion[2]. In short He gives to the believer a new way of living.

> For by the inspiration of his power he so breathes divine life into us that we are no longer actuated by ourselves, but are ruled by his action and prompting.[3]

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1) *Institutes* 3.1.1
2) *Institutes* 3.1.3
3) *Institutes* 3.1.3

The aim of this chapter is to examine Calvin's teaching on the nature and function of the affections within the experience of God. In dealing with the affections we come to what is commonly regarded as the very heart of the experience of God - the way in which such an experience touches the believer at a level which is deeper than the merely rational. Moving to this heart of the experience of God also highlights the dangers inherent in dealing with this subject which were mentioned in the first chapter in particular the danger of subjectivity. In this case this would mean dealing with the engagement of the affections solely by examining the feelings and emotions experienced by the believer. Thus an author who deals with this area might fall into the trap of speaking of the experience of God simply in terms of the arousal of certain emotions and in so doing will not attempt either to critically appraise such arousal and the place of the emotions in human life or to integrate his understanding of such experience within his/her understanding of God and the wider question of divine human interaction.

This chapter will show, however, that Calvin's exposition of the affections was fruitful primarily because he avoided this trap. In this the sense of the life-giving nature of the knowledge of God was of great importance, for when Calvin spoke of the engagement of the affections he did not mean simply the arousal of particular emotions but rather the way in which the Spirit in engaging the affections creates in the believer a new life and a new way of living in relation to God. This chapter will therefore aim to critically explore Calvin's description of the dynamics of this new way of being in relation to God.

The Affections

The first question to be asked is this, what is the meaning of the term 'the affections'. The answer to this question is complicated by the fact that, as will be seen, in discussing human nature Calvin used vocabulary drawn from two separate, and in fact incompatible, anthropological and psychological models. This not only resulted in a certain amount of confusion in his terminology, it also, as will be seen, had an effect upon his explanation of the nature of the affections. It has not, therefore, been possible simply to follow Calvin's own terminology in discussing this concept, rather the term 'the affections' has been chosen because of its breadth. In Calvin's own day the term 'the affections' was used primarily to refer to the passions and emotions, however it can also be used to refer to the broader idea of the inclination of the soul either towards or away from an object of knowledge,[1] an idea which Calvin himself referred to by means of the idea of the heart. The understanding of the affections which will be used in this thesis is, therefore, as follows. The term 'the affections' refers to that human activity in inclining towards and desiring that which is known, or conversely in inclining away from and being averse to that which is known. In the specific context of the knowledge of God the affections refer to that response whereby God is not simply known but rather the believer is inspired to love Him, to desire His presence and to devote him/herself to Him, it is the active response inspired in the believer by the

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1) Thus Jonathan Edwards defined the affections as the "more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul." commenting that God had endued the soul with two faculties, the first being the reason, "by which it is capable of perception and speculation" and the second the affections " by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined *to* them, or is disinclined and averse *from* them." Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, p 24.

activity of the Spirit of God.[1] Thus it will be seen that the difference between speaking of the reason and of the affections is not a difference between one aspect of human life and another, but rather between speaking of only one aspect of human existence and speaking of the whole of human life as it is lived out before God. The question of the affections is the question of the relationship of the whole person to God, therefore the engagement of the affections refers to the way in which the whole person is drawn towards God.

The two traditional anthropologies[2]

Calvin was heir to two distinct anthropological and psychological models of human nature. The two models can be characterised as belonging to the Scholastic tradition and the Augustinian tradition. Calvin drew upon both of these models, but did not ultimately align himself with either one or the other.

The predominant anthropological model of Calvin's day was that adopted by the Scholastic theologians, which Calvin himself probably first encountered at the

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1) See Calvin's commendation of David because "he did not coldly philosophise upon God's precepts, but devoted himself to them with earnest affection." *Psalms* 119:98

2) On the anthropological models see NS Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition*, pp110-9 and 'Will and Intellect in the New England Mind' in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 29, (1972), pp 515-558. However, it should be noted that although Fiering provides a useful exposition of the two traditions, his comments on Calvin specifically are inaccurate in that he assigns him simply to the Augustinian model and fails to note the continuing influence of the Scholastic model.

Collège de Montaigu.[1] It can be traced back to Aquinas's adoption of Aristotelian psychology. According to this model human nature consists of both the soul and a compound of body and soul.[2] The soul-body compound, is the locus of sensation, and therefore is referred to as the sensitive soul, while the higher soul is named the spiritual or rational soul. The soul is essentially simple but is capable of two distinct operations, called faculties, which are the faculties of cognition and appetition (that is inclination).[3] The cognition of the higher soul is the reason while its appetition is the will. This model, therefore, made little use of the idea of the affections, referring instead to the appetition or the will; the will being the capacity of the higher soul to incline towards or desire an ideal. Aquinas himself always held that the will and the reason are united in their activity, they include one another in their acts because the reason understands that the will wills while the will wills that the reason understands.[4] Moreover, the will and therefore free choice (*liberum arbitirum*) are under the control of the reason;[5] since the will

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1) Ganoczy notes that while at Montaigu, although he quite possibly had no real contact with Scholastic theology, it is known that Calvin studied psychology, along with logic, metaphysics, ethics, mathematics, physics, and astronomy. A Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, pp 173-4.
2) *Summa Theologicæ* 1a lxxv 4
3) *Ibid* 1a lxxviii 4 According to Gilby the psychological faculties are classified as follows. The faculty of cognition in the sensitive soul includes the external senses (sight, hearing, taste smell, touch) and the internal senses such as imagination and memory while in the spiritual or rational soul it is reason. The faculty of appetition in the sensitive soul includes sensuality, concupiscible and irascible, and in the higher soul it is the will. *St Thomas Aquinas: Philosophical Texts*, p214.
4) *Ibid* 1 lxxxii 4
5) "Choice is materially an act of the will, formally an act of the reason. The decision or judgement, drawn by the reason as a conclusion, is followed by choice in the will." *Ibid* 1a-2ae xiii 1c and ad 2

naturally inclines towards the good, it will always choose what the reason judges to be best.[1] Thus the will is perceived as the human capacity to incline towards a rationally conceived good. This is the position which is known as Scholastic Intellectualism.[2]

However John Duns Scotus, and others who followed him, promulgated a rival theory of human nature. Whilst retaining the basic conception of the faculties of the soul, they objected to the intellectualism inherent in the above theory and argued that, with the exception of God, nothing can move the will except the will itself. Thus, rather than being under the control of the reason the will is viewed as being self-determining. Fiering quotes the best known example of the reasoning of this school, the story of Buridan's ass. An ass placed between two equally desirable bales of hay at an equal distance from each will be unable to make a choice between the two on an intellectual basis; an arbitrary choice made by the will is therefore the only alternative to the ass remaining paralysed by indecision.[3] This is the position which is known as Scholastic Voluntarism. It is worth noting that although these two positions of Intellectualism and Voluntarism are commonly seen as being opposed they both work on the same psychological model of a soul which is capable of distinct faculties and even those who held to the Voluntarist position still believed that the will is to a

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1) "Mind influences will as a final cause, for a good understood is the object of will and acts like an end." *Ibid* 1a lxxxii 4
2) Of Calvin's contemporaries, Fiering names Cajetan and Beza as adherents of this position. 'Will and Intellect' pp 523-4
3) Fiering, *Ibid*, 536-7.

certain extent dependent upon the reason to find a proper object for volition, that is to know what is the best for the will to incline towards.[1]

The second of the two traditional anthropologies can be traced to the work of Augustine. Augustine differed from the Scholastic view in that he saw the will, not as a rational appetite, nor as confinable to one particular operation of the soul, but rather, the will came to be synonymous with the inner essence of the whole man. He argued that the will is, in fact, the whole soul as active.[2] Moreover, because the will was not perceived as one particular operation of the soul, the terms 'will', 'love', 'soul' and 'heart' could all be used interchangeably. Thus, for example Augustine referred to a 'right will' as 'good love' and a 'wrong will' as 'bad love', arguing that the source of evil in a human life is not intellectual misjudgement but love which is misdirected, right will is the same as love which is directed to a good source and wrong will is love which is directed to a bad source.[3] In this tradition it is the fundamental disposition of the will, or the heart, which decides what kind of person a man or woman is, hence Augustine could argue that the only way to really know him was to know what was in his heart, for it is in the heart that a person is whatever he or

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1) Obermann, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* p165.
2) Augustine, *Retractions*, 1: 15: 3.
3) "The right will is, therefore, well-directed love, and the wrong will is ill-directed love. Love, then, yearning to have what is loved is desire; and having and enjoying it, is joy; fleeing what is opposed to it, is fear; and feeling what is opposed to it, when it has befallen it is sadness. Now these motions are evil if the love is evil; good if the love is good." Augustine, *City of God*, 14: 7.

she is.[1] Accordingly, it is the heart or the will which is fundamental to salvation; the will's ultimate orientation, either towards or away from God decides the individual's status before God.

This difference in the conception of the will had one important result. In this tradition the question of the will was not simply a question of whether a person could make a free choice, or the extent to which the judgments of the reason control the will, but rather the far wider question of the way in which the person was oriented either toward or away from God.

It is worth noting that on this particular point of the will's orientation, the Augustinian understanding of human nature is very close to the Biblical view of a person as a psychosomatic unity at the centre of which is the heart. The Biblical writers frequently used the idea of the heart to stand for the fundamental aspect of the human personality, the whole person as s/he stands in relationship to God. For example, the heart is used as the invisible inner aspect of a human, which represents the true person and which only God can see.[2] The heart is the source of understanding,[3] of

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1) "But many people who know me, and others who do not know me but have heard of me or read my books, wish to hear what I am now, at this moment, as I set down my confessions. They cannot lay their ears to my heart, and yet it is in my heart that I am whatever I am. So they wish to listen as I confess what I am in my heart, into which they cannot pry by eye or ear or mind." *Confessions* 10: 3: 4

2) "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." 1 Samuel 16: 7 "You are those who justify yourself before men, but God knows your hearts" Luke 16: 15 cf 1 Thessalonians 2: 4 Romans 8: 27

3) God "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" 2 Corinthians 4: 6 cf Matt. 13: 15

willing'[1] and, most importantly, of the moral and religious life.[2] In Scripture also, therefore, one of the basic questions of the relationship with God is the question of orientation, that is using biblical terminology the question of whether or not God has been given the 'heart' of the believer.[3]

An initial, superficial reading of Calvin's writings would seem to show that he was indebted solely to the Scholastic tradition of anthropology, since it was this description of human nature which he adopted in his own formal expression of his anthropology. In accordance with this tradition he argued for the existence of two distinct faculties in the human soul, the understanding and the will, the function of the former being to lead and govern the soul, and of the latter being to follow the judgements of the former,[4] thus apparently reproducing exactly the Scholastic Intellectualist model. It is, however, important to note that Calvin distinguished his view from this model in one major aspect, he argued that, in fact, this was a proper description of the nature of men and women only before the Fall.[5]

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1) "Each one of you must do as he has made up his mind (*καθὼς προῄρηται τῇ καρδίᾳ*) 2 Corinthians 9:7 "Settle it therefore in your minds (*ἐν ταῖς καρδιαις*)" Luke 21:14 "it has not been of my own accord" literally 'not from my own heart' Numbers 16:28 cf 24:13
2) "I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts" Jeremiah 31:33 "O Lord.....keep for ever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of thy people, and direct their hearts towards thee." 1 Chronicles 29:18
3) See for example the frequent commands to turn to or serve or obey God 'with all your heart.' Deuteronomy 30:10; Joshua 22:5; 1 Samuel 12:20&24; 1 Kings 8:48; Psalm 119:2; Joel 2:12;
4) *Institutes* 1.15.7
5) *Institutes* 1.15.8

In fact, despite his formal agreement with the Scholastic tradition, Calvin was also influenced by the Augustinian model and this influence had the greatest importance for the way in which he understood the engagement of the affections. Although Calvin argued formally for the existence of two faculties in the human soul, of which the reason is the more dominant, in describing the nature of human existence after the Fall he assigned a far more important role to the affections. The influence of the Augustinian model upon Calvin can be seen in the following ways.

First, Calvin differed from the Scholastic model in his estimate of the effects of the Fall upon the human personality. The Scholastic conception of human nature normally resulted in a relatively mild view of the effect of sin on human nature. By positing a higher soul, in which the faculties of reason and will were included, this model was used to suggest that the evil which any person did was the result of the lower appetites dominating the higher soul. The higher soul, it was suggested, although weakened by sin, was not totally corrupted and thus is still capable of directing the person towards good.[1] Thus men and women possess the ability to choose freely between good and evil although it is not possible for them to perform good without an infusion of Grace.

Calvin, however, rejected outright the differentiation between the sensitive and the rational soul. In doing so he also rejected the idea that the root of sin in the human personality lies in the lower passions, and that the higher soul

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1) See for example Duns Scotus, *In Sententias* II xxix i (*Opera omnia* XIII 267f) and Calvin's arguments in *Institutes* 2.2.4

(and therefore the reason and the will) were only weakened and not totally corrupted by the effects of sin. He argued that the human experience of conflict within the personality between the desire to do good and to do evil arises, not because of the existence of two different souls, but rather because sin has vitiated the reason and the will, it is a conflict which exists actually within the reason and the will themselves.[1]

Thus, according to Calvin, there is no higher soul which is untouched by the corruption which resulted from the Fall, rather, after the Fall sin is both rooted in the very centre of the human personality and affects every aspect of it.

> For this reason, I have said that all parts of the soul were possessed by sin after Adam deserted the fountain of righteousness. For not only did a lower appetite seduce him, but unspeakable impiety occupied the very citadel of his mind, and pride penetrated to the depth of his heart. Thus it is pointless and foolish to restrict the corruption that arises thence only to what are called the impulses of the senses; or to call it the "kindling wood" that attracts, arouses and drags into sin only that part which they term sensuality.[2]

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1) "We ought to repudiate those persons who would affirm more than one soul in man, that is, a sensitive and a rational soul, because there is nothing firm in their reasonings, even though they seem to be asserting something probable, unless we want to torture ourselves in trivial and useless matters. They say that there is great disagreement between organic motions and the soul's rational part. As if reason itself did not also disagree with itself and were not at cross purpose with itself, just like armies at war. But since this disturbance arises out of depravity of nature, it is wrong to conclude from this that there are two souls, just because the faculties do not agree among themselves in befitting proportion." *Institutes* 1.15.6

2) *Institutes* 2.1.9 cf "The Papists, in our own day, grant that the nature of man has become depraved, but they extenuate original sin as much as possible, and represent it as consisting merely in an inclination to (cont)

It was in line with this argument that Calvin took issue with the Scholastic interpretation of the Biblical idea of *flesh*. When the Biblical writers refer to *flesh* as opposed to *Spirit* they are speaking, not of the lower, sensual part of human nature, but of the whole of human nature as corrupted by evil and contrasted with the holiness of the Spirit.[1]

This leads to the second way in which Calvin's understanding of the human personality differs from that of the Scholastics. According to Calvin, the corruption caused by sin vitiated every aspect of the personality and above all, it affected the nature of the will. Although before the Fall the will had been

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that which is evil. They restrict its seat besides to the inferior part of the soul and the gross appetites; and while nothing is more evident from experience than that corruption adheres to men throughout life, they deny that it remains in them subsequent to baptism. We have no adequate idea of the dominion of sin, unless we conceive of it as extending to every part of the soul, and acknowledge that both the mind and the heart of man have become utterly corrupt. The language of David sounds very different from that of the Papists, *I was formed in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.* He says nothing of his grosser appetites, but asserts that sin cleaved by nature to every part of him without exception." *Book of Psalms* 51:5. See also *Institutes* 2.2.2 and 2.3.1

1) "Flesh means in this place not the body but but the soul and consequently every part of it. The Popish theologasters are stupid to restrict it to that part which they call sensual, for Christ's argument must in that case have been the inept one that we need a second birth because a part of us is corrupt. But if flesh is contrasted to the Spirit as something corrupt to what is sound, the crooked to what is straight, the defiled to the holy, the polluted to the pure, we may readily conclude that the whole of man's nature is condemned in one word. Christ is therefore saying that our understanding and reason are corrupted because they are carnal and that all the affections of our heart are depraved and wicked because they too are carnal." *Gospel of John* 3:6

under the control of the reason,[1] after the Fall it is the will which is the most fundamental aspect of the human personality. The chief seat of sin is in the will[2] as is the origin of conversion[3]. This means that Calvin, like Augustine, taught that it is the orientation of the will, either towards or away from God, which decides the fundamental question of the relationship with God. This can be seen in his use of a simile drawn from the Augustinian tradition to describe the relationship between God and the human will.

> Somewhere Augustine compares man's will to a horse awaiting its rider's command, and God and the devil to its riders. "If God sits astride it," he says, "then as a moderate and skilled rider, he guides it properly, spurs it if it is too slow, checks it if it is too rough or too wild, subdues it if it balks, and leads it into the right path. But if the devil saddles it, he violently drives it far from the trail like a foolish and wanton rider, forces it into the ditch, tumbles it over cliffs, and goads it into obstinacy and fierceness.[4]

The point of this simile, as Calvin describes it is, is that all who are not under the influence of the Spirit of God are the willing captives of the

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1) "Accordingly, the integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word, when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker." *Institutes* 1.15.3
2) *Institutes* 2.2.27
3) *Institutes* 2.3.6 see below
4) *Institutes* 2.4.1. Although Calvin believed that this simile originated from Augustine himself McNeil and Battles (LCC) attribute it instead to the Pseudo-Augustinian writing *Hypomnesticon* The same simile was used by Luther in his *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by Packer and Johnston pp 103-4

Devil,[1] that is, they are caught up in sin, not against their own will but because their personality is so oriented against God that they willingly commit evil.

> The chief point of this distinction, then, must be that man, as he was corrupted by the Fall, sinned willingly, not unwillingly, or by compulsion; by the most eager inclination of his heart, not by forced compulsion, by the prompting of his own lust, not by compulsion from without."[2]

A third way in which the influence of the Augustinian model upon Calvin can be seen lies in the way in which he used the idea of the heart. Like Augustine Calvin could, on occasion, use 'heart' and 'will' interchangeably, most notably in his discussion of the nature of conversion. In *Institutes* 2.3.6., for example, in describing conversion Calvin clearly regards the idea of the direction of the heart to righteousness and that of the conversion of the will as alternative descriptions of the same act. Thus, for Calvin also, the 'heart' could mean the

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1) "the will, captivated by Satan's wiles, of necessity obediently submits to all his leading. For those whom the Lord does not make worthy to be guided by his Spirit he abandons, with just judgment, to Satan's action....The blinding of the impious and all iniquities following from it are called "the works of Satan." Yet their cause is not to be sought outside man's will, from which the root of evil springs up, and on which rests the foundation of Satan's kingdom, that is, sin." *Institutes* 2.4.1

2) *Institutes* 2.3.5 cf "Men would never be disposed to any goodness if they were not guided and directed to it, and even forcibly drawn to it by the Holy Spirit. For there is so much rebellion in us that we are not only weak and feeble as the papists imagine, but also utterly contrary to God until he has cleansed us. And this is what he means, in saying by his prophet Ezekiel that the hearts which were formerly of stone shall be changed into hearts of flesh, which means that he will soften them and cause them to bow in submission." Sermon on Ephesians 1:15-18. *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* p 83 and "For the apostle does not teach us that the grace of a good work is bestowed upon us if we accept it, but that He wills to work in us. This means nothing else than that the Lord by His Spirit directs, bends and governs our hearts and reigns in us as our own possession." *Institutes* 2.3.10.

'will' understood as the centre of the human personality, the whole person as s/he stands in relationship to God.

This use of the idea of the heart can be seen in Calvin's discussion of the knowledge of God. A true knowledge of God, he argued is one which involves not merely the mind of the believer but also his/her heart.[1] This argument is very closely connected with that noted at the beginning of this chapter about the life-giving nature of the knowledge of God. As might be expected, a knowledge which touches the heart and one which is life-giving show the same characteristic marks. First the believer cannot claim to have really received the Word of God until that Word has touched and affected him deeply by touching even his/her heart.[2] Secondly, the contrast between knowledge associated with the head and that associated with the heart is not simply between a rational and an emotional knowledge but between one which is dead, in that it has no effect upon the believer, and one which is living in that it calls forth from the believer a new way of living in relation to God. When the knowledge of God touches the heart of the believer a new union is created between Christ and the believer, henceforth s/he is bound to Christ by his/her own affection.

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1) "And here again we ought to observe that we are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart." *Institutes* 1.5.9 cf "it is not enough for us to have the doctrine of God fluttering in our brain, but..it must be well established in our hearts, so that our life (as I said before) may supply the proof that we have been well instructed." Sermon on Ephesians 4:20-24 *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* p429

2) "How then are we to receive the Word of life? First, it cannot properly be gained unless it be implanted, and put down roots in us.....He insists there must be a lively implanting, an effective union with our hearts." *Epistle of James* 1:21 cf "There is certainly no purpose in promulgating doctrine, if God does not put it into our hearts.....any doctrine is useless until God engraves it with His finger on our hearts." *First Epistle to the Thessalonians* 5:23

> There is, however, one thing more which we ought to note well in St. Paul's saying that Christ must dwell in our hearts. For many men have him in their mouth, and even also in their brain, as they hear him, and they think they acquit themselves well when they can prattle about him, but in the meanwhile there is no living root in them. It is not enough then to have some vague knowledge of Christ, or to engage in airy speculations, as they say, and to be able to talk a lot about him, but he must have his seat in our hearts within, so that we are unfeignedly joined to him, and with true affection.[1]

This use of the idea of the heart accords with that of the will which has already been described. Just as conversion, for Calvin, implied the re-orientation of the will towards God, so a knowledge of God which touches the heart is one which implies the inner nature of the believer has been changed, such that now s/he is given to Christ.

Thus, despite his formal agreement with the Scholastic tradition, Calvin was, in some ways closer to the position of Augustine and the Scriptures. The fact that Calvin could follow both traditions in this way suggests that he failed to recognise that the Bible, as well as the Augustinian tradition, used a very different model to the 'faculty psychology' which he had learnt from the Scholastics,[2] and this resulted in a certain amount of confusion in his

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1) Sermon on Ephesians 3:14-19 *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* pp 291-2 cf "They embrace the Gospel greedily, but soon after fall away. They lack a living feeling (*affectus*) to confirm them in steadfastness.....For unless the Word penetrates the whole heart and puts down deep roots there will be no steady flow of moisture to make faith persevere." *Harmony of the Gospels* Matthew 13:19

2) cf the comments of Bouwsma "Without giving up the hierarchy of discrete faculties he had absorbed from "the philosophers", he struggled to come to terms with a conception of human being as a mysterious psychosomatic unity dependent on the "heart". Although he recognized the importance of the biblical heart, his effort to identify it with one or another of the traditional faculties, as we have seen, suggests that he often failed to understand that it represented a radically different conception of (cont)

descriptions of human nature. The clearest example of this confusion can be seen in his attempts to explain why the Biblical writers frequently referred to the heart, which he associated with the affections, as the source of thought as well as feeling.

> The word 'heart' is the rendering of the Vulgate; it is also the reading of some Greek manuscripts. It is not very important for the Hebrews frequently use it of the rational part of the soul; though more strictly, being the seat of the affections it means the will or the appetitive part of the soul.[1]

The Engagement of the Affections

The view of human nature and the understanding of the effect of sin upon that nature which has just been described had a profound effect upon Calvin's view of the nature of conversion and therefore of the engagement of the affections. In particular it served to underline the radical nature of conversion. This can be seen in two ways.

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the personality. The result was considerable confusion." WJ Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, pp 131-2.

1) *Epistle to the Ephesians* 1:16 cf "In Scripture *the heart* is sometimes taken as the seat of the affections. But here, as in many other places, it means the so-called intellectual part of the soul." *Gospel of John* 12:40; *Harmony of the Gospels* Matthew 14:24; Deut 29:4 "By the word *heart* Scripture sometimes means the mind." *Acts of the Apostles* 16:14 "*Hearts* here is used to mean conscience, or the innermost part of the soul. He means that a man is acceptable to God only if he brings Him holiness of heart. This means not merely outward holiness, but also inward." *first Epistle to the Thessalonians* 3:13 "Now this word "heart" in holy Scripture sometimes signifies all the lusts, desires and will of man; and sometimes also his understanding. But since here St. Paul has distinguished between a man's understanding and his mind and heart, we may well conclude that he meant to add will, together with all the analysing and debating we have in ourselves in respect of the judging of good and evil; and finally our whole intelligence, and the rational faculty that reigns in us." Sermon on Ephesians 4:17-19 *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* p 416

First, Calvin insisted, as seen above, that sin has vitiated the whole of human nature and that therefore conversion implies the renewal of the whole personality including that part of human nature which the Scholastics regarded as most excellent, the reason. Calvin's view of conversion was, therefore, far more radical than was that of the Scholastics; for him conversion was a complete reversion of what had been a total alienation from God which affected all of human nature - mind and heart.[1]

Secondly, Calvin made it clear that although the reason was caught up in the alienation from God and therefore in the reversion of that alienation, the focus of conversion lay, not with the reason but with the affections. For Calvin, as for Augustine, the fundamental question in the relationship with God was that of the orientation of the heart of the believer, either for or against God. "When we have to deal with God" he claimed "nothing is achieved unless we begin from the inner disposition of the heart."[2] Conversion, for Calvin, implied a fundamental change in this inner disposition of the heart and this view of conversion was intrinsic to his view of the place of the affections in the relationship with God. Conversion, viewed as a change in the basic inclination

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1) "We must note here the renewal which is demanded of us. It is not that of the flesh only, as the teachers in the Sorbonne explain this word to mean the lower parts of the soul, but of the mind, which is our most excellent part, and to which philosophers ascribe the pre-eminence. They call it *τὸ ηγεμονικόν*, the regulative principle, and maintain that reason is a queen of utmost wisdom. Paul, however, pulls her down from her throne, and does away with her by teaching us that we must be renewed in *mind*. However much we flatter ourselves, Christ's words are still true that the whole man must be born again if he wishes to enter into the kingdom of God, for in both mind and heart we are entirely alienated from the righteousness of God." *Epistle to the Romans* 12:2

2) *Institutes* 3.3.16

of the human heart marked the beginning of the engagement of the total affections of the believer such that s/he is completely oriented to God.

> When the apostle tells the Philippians he is confident "that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6), there is no doubt that through "the beginning of a good work" he denotes the origin of conversion itself, which is in the will. God begins his good work in us, therefore, by arousing love and desire and zeal for righteousness in our hearts; or, to speak more correctly, by bending, forming, and directing, our hearts to righteousness.[1]

This, then, is Calvin's basic conception of conversion, a change in the orientation of the human heart. Thus, he could describe the way in which a person is brought to God as 'an effectual movement of the Holy Spirit'; the fruit of this movement of the Spirit being a change in the person's will; his/her heart is formed to a desire for God and obedience[2]. The change which this makes in the personality can be seen as an inversion of the effects of sin. Just as the result of original sin was that men and women desired evil so the result of conversion is that they desire good.[3]

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1) *Institutes* 2.3.6.
2) "As far as the manner of drawing goes, it is not violent so as to compel men by an external force; but yet it is an effectual movement of the Holy Spirit, turning men from being unwilling and reluctant into willing. Wherefore it is false and impious to say that only the willing are drawn, as if a man will yield obedience to God at his own motion. For when men follow God willingly it is what they already have from Him, who has formed their hearts to obey Him." *Gospel of John* 6:44
3) "It is the Lord's doing that the will conceives the love of what is right, is zealously inclined toward it, is aroused and moved to pursue it. Then it is the Lord's doing that the choice, zeal and effort do not falter, but proceed even to accomplishment; lastly, that man goes forward in these things with constancy and perseveres to the very end." *Institutes* 2.3.9

How does God engage the Affections?

Conversion, for Calvin, represented a change in the orientation of the human heart such that the believer is inclined towards righteousness; this conversion is the beginning of the total engagement of the believer's affections. This raises again the questions raised in the previous chapter in relation to the reason. How does God engage the affections of the believer and following from this two further questions of what happens to the believer as God acts upon him/her and of what s/he experiences as this happens. Calvin's answer to these questions is to be found in the way in which he saw the work of Word and Spirit as differing aspects of God's one action of self-presentation to humanity.

The affections are engaged as Word and Spirit work together in a human life and so God's self-presentation bears fruit because the believer does not merely understand His Word but is also deeply affected by it because of the grace of the Spirit. This raises again the theme of the life-giving nature of the true knowledge of God which was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Word and Spirit working together bring to life in the believer a new way of being in relation to God, sloth and coldness toward Him are overcome[1] and a desire to serve Him is brought to life.[2] It is this which explains Calvin's continual

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1) "And therefore let us note that when we have had our ears dinned with God's Word to show us our duty, and not only been instructed in it, but also exhorted and spurred on, yet there will always be some sloth, coldness and carelessness in us, rendering the doctrine of little use to us until God touches us with his Holy Spirit." Sermon on Ephesians 3:13-16 *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* p 273

2) "The external preaching of the Word is of itself unfruitful, except that it mortally wounds the reprobate, so as to render them inexcusable before God. But when the secret grace of the Spirit quickens it, all the senses will inevitably be so affected that men will be prepared to follow whithersoever God calls them." *Commentary upon the Gospel of John* 1:43

emphasis upon both Word and Spirit, it is not sufficient for God simply to address men and women outwardly by His Word, for it is only the inward influence of the Spirit which can bring to life this new way of being.[1]

> God works in his elect in two ways: within, through his Spirit; without through his Word. By His Spirit, illuminating their minds and forming their hearts to the love and cultivation of righteousness, he makes them a new creation. By his Word, he arouses them to desire, to seek after, and to attain that same renewal. In both he reveals the working of his hand according to the mode of dispensation. [2]

Conversely, the opposite point must also be made. Just as the work of the Word without the Spirit is insufficient so also Calvin never speaks of the work of the Spirit without the Word. The engagement of the affections represents not simply the animation of love and desire in the believer, but rather the quickening of love and desire for the God who is known in the Word. The engagement of the affections by the Spirit of God is a part of the way in which the believer is taken up by the encounter with God through His Word, which was explored in the previous chapter. As seen then, the engagement of the affections cannot be isolated from the way in which God takes hold of the rational nature of the believer. This shows again the importance to Calvin of involvement of whole person.

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1) "So in this prayer we ask that, with all impediment removed, He may bring all mortals under His command, and lead them to consider the life of heaven. This is partly the effect of the Word of preaching, partly of the hidden power of the Spirit. He would govern men by His Word, but as the voice alone, without the inward influence of the Spirit, does not reach down into the heart, the two must be brought together for the establishment of God's Kingdom. So we pray that God will show His power in both Word and Spirit, that the whole world may willingly come over to Him." *Commentary upon the Harmony of the Gospels* Matt 6:10 cf *Commentary upon the Book of Isaiah* 35:4

2) *Institutes* 2.5.5

The affections are engaged, therefore, by God's action upon the whole person as He both addresses him/her outwardly by the Word[1] and touches his/her heart within to arouses the desire for righteousness.

Faith and the Affections

In Chapter Two it was shown that for Calvin the engagement of human nature by God manifests itself primarily in the experience of faith and that therefore the answer to the question what does the believer experience as God engages him/her is to be found principally in Calvin's account of faith. It was also shown that Calvin argued that faith is not a human capacity but is rather God's own re-creation and re-ordering of human life such that men and women are re-capacitated for His presence and activity[2]. This argument must now be reiterated with respect to the engagement of the affection, for this is, as will be shown, vital to the cogency of Calvin's description of the experience of faith.

In describing what he called the force and nature of faith[3] Calvin used some very wide-ranging terms and definitions; although he formally defined faith as knowledge he also argued that it either directly involves, or is inseparable from, not only knowledge but also trust,[4] confidence,[5] assurance,[6] obedience,[7]

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1) On the encounter with God through the Word see Chapter Two pp 92-104
2) See Chapter Two pp 108-111f.
3) *Institutes* 3.2.1
4) *Epistle to the Hebrews* 11.6
5) *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3:12
6) *Institutes* 3.2.36. *Epistle to the Colossians* 2:2
7) *Institutes* 1.6.2. *Epistle to the Romans* 1:5

self-denial and commitment,[1] yielding the self wholly to God,[2] reverence[3] a sense of Christ's power[4] burning affection,[5] and a good conscience.[6] Clearly, therefore, a true understanding of Calvin's view of the nature of faith needs to be comprehensive, it should make clear both why and how such wide-ranging dispositions and actions are intrinsic to the nature of faith.

The multi-faceted character of faith in Calvin's understanding is directly attributable to his understanding of the engagement of the believer's affections. According to Calvin, faith is shaped above all by God's engagement of the affections, or as he normally expressed it in this context, of the heart of the believer.

In this argument Calvin showed the depth of his disagreement with the Scholastic theologians concerning the nature of faith. The foundation of the Scholastics' distinction between unformed and formed faith lay in the idea that faith resides in the intellect,[7] and that although love for God might 'form' this act of the intellect in believing, the capacity for the love of God is not, in fact, essential for faith itself.[8] Thus, in Scholastic theology it was possible for a person who experienced neither fear of God nor piety to still have that faith which is necessary for salvation.

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1) *Harmony of the Gospels* Matt. 21:32
2) Sermon on Ephesians 1:15-18. *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians*, p84.
3) *Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* 2:10
4) *First Epistle to John*
5) *Harmony of the Gospels* Matt. 11:12
6) *Gospel of John* 15:10 *Genesis* 17:3
7) Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II.IIae.iv.2.
8) Hence Aquinas could argue that living faith and lifeless faith are not two distinct habits, for love pertains to the will while faith pertains to the intellect. *op. cit.* II.II.iv.4

Calvin, however, contended that in this argument the Scholastics had completely misunderstood the nature of faith which is not a matter simply of intellectual assent, but which also involves the heart.

> "that very assent itself - as I have already partially suggested, and will reiterate more fully - is more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition (*affectus*) than of the understanding."[1]

More importantly, he also argued that the Scholastics had failed to understand the nature of faith because they had failed to consider its source. Faith is not a human attainment but a gift of the Spirit and its nature is therefore formed by the working of the Spirit in a believer's life. True faith is a fruit of the Spirit's engagement of the believer's affections. Hence in opposition to the Scholastics' argument that faith could exist independent of a 'pious inclination' although it could be 'formed' by such an inclination, Calvin asserted that, in fact, faith is inseparable from such an inclination.[2] The very heart of faith lies in the Spirit's re-shaping of the believer's affections such that s/he is oriented towards God.

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1) *Institutes* 3.2.8 cf "But let us note that the seat of faith is not in the head but in the heart. I am not going to argue about the part of the body in which faith is located, but since the word *heart* generally means a serious and sincere affection, I maintain that faith is a firm and effectual confidence, and not just a bare idea.....
True faith ought to kindle the heart with a zeal for God's glory in such a way that it pours forth its own flame." *Epistle to the Romans* 10:10

2) "They are speaking foolishly when they say that faith is "formed" when pious inclination is added to assent. For even assent rests upon such pious inclination - at least such assent as is revealed in the Scriptures!" *Institutes* 3.2.8

This raises again the argument made in Chapter One, that the key to understanding the believer's experience of God in Calvin's theology is the understanding of the nature and activity of the God who is experienced. Accordingly his description of faith is shaped by his understanding of the way in which the Spirit is active in faith. In the experience of faith the Spirit works through the engagement of the believer's affections to re-create and re-order his/her life so that a correspondence is created between the nature and activity of God and the nature of the believer's experience. Thus faith, for Calvin, represented a transformation in the inner life of the believer which fundamentally altered his/her stance before God and had profound implications for the shape of his his/her life in the world. In particular the experience of faith, as it was associated with the engagement of the believer's affections, or as Calvin usually expressed it the changing of the believer's heart, gave to his/her life the following dynamics.

The first has already been commented upon several times and therefore need only be mentioned here. Faith, since it represents a change in the inner disposition of the heart, is inseparable from an attitude of love and reverence toward God.[1] In faith, God is not simply known, but as the Spirit re-orients the believer's heart He becomes the object of the believer's devotion. According to Calvin, to have faith is to be acquainted with the goodness of God, and it is impossible to know this goodness without being touched by it, therefore faith involves not

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1) "Faith is not a cold notion, but one that kindles in our hearts love to Christ." *First Epistle to Peter* 1:8 cf "Faith is always connected with a seemly and spontaneous reverence for God, because we do not have a true belief in the Word of God, except when it is attractive to us and worthy of our devotion." *Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* 2:10.

simply knowing God but giving the self wholly to Him.' Thus Calvin can describe the 'true way of faith' as being not simply to assent to God when He speaks, but to aspire after Him with burning affection and great effort.[2]

Secondly, Calvin associated the heart with depth, with the very centre of the personality, and therefore in viewing faith as a matter of the heart he associated it with depth of belief. Faith is not mere opinion or assent to the Gospel,[3] rather, to have faith is to be convinced to the very depth of one's soul.[4] Thus, when Calvin argued that true faith does not exist until the Word of God has been received by the heart he meant that true faith is not a matter of knowledge only, but also of confidence and assurance.

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1) "But at the same time we must also note that under this word 'faith', he comprehends the whole service of God. For it is impossible that, once being acquainted with his goodness as he has shown it to us in the person of his only Son, we should not be totally ravished to our heavenly Father. Behold, God draws us out of the pit of confusion and death and opens to us the gate of the heavenly kingdom, and tells us that he will take us for his children. How can we hear and believe this without being wholly given to him, forsaking the world and hating the evil that is in ourselves, because it separates us from him. You see then how the word 'faith' means a yielding of ourselves wholly to God." Sermon on Ephesians 1:15-18 *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* p84 cf "But how can the mind be aroused to taste the divine goodness without at the same time being wholly kindled to love God in return? For truly, that abundant sweetness which God has stored up for those who fear him cannot be known without at the same time powerfully moving us. And once anyone has been moved by it, it utterly ravishes him and draws him to itself." *Institutes* 3.2.41

2) "And we learn from these words what is the true nature and way of faith - that men assent to God when He speaks, not coldly and out of mere duty, but aspiring after Him with burning affection and so to say breaking through by a vehement effort." *Harmony of the Gospels* Matthew 11:12

3) *Institutes* 3.2.1

4) "We have no access to God unless we are convinced in the depth of our souls that God is so as not to be carried around hither and thither by all kinds of opinions." *Epistle to the Hebrews* 11:6

> It now remains to pour into the heart itself what the mind has absorbed. For the Word of God is not received by faith if it flits about in the top of the brain, but when it takes root in the depth of the heart that it may be an invincible defence to withstand and drive off all the stratagems of temptation. But if it is true that the mind's real understanding is illumination by the Spirit of God, then in such confirmation of the heart his power is much more clearly manifested, to the extent that the heart's distrust is greater than the mind's blindness. It is harder for the heart to be furnished with assurance than for the mind to be endowed with thought.[1]

Accordingly both assurance and confidence are integral to Calvin's description of faith. He argued that trying to separate faith from assurance and confidence is like trying to separate heat and light from the sun.[2] This, for Calvin was the significance of Paul's metaphor of 'the sealing of the Spirit',[3] this also had to do with a correspondence between the activity of God and the believer's experience. Since God's promises are certain the acceptance with which the believer receives the promises should correspond to that certainty by its totality. It is the Spirit who in sealing the promises of the Word upon the believer's heart creates that total, unwavering acceptance.[4] As the seal on an

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1) *Institutes* 3.2.36 cf "And it will not be enough for the mind to be illumined by the Spirit of God unless the heart is also strengthened by his power. In this matter the Schoolmen go completely astray, who in considering faith identify it with a bare and simple assent arising out of knowledge and leave out confidence and assurance of heart." *Institutes* 3.2.33

2) "In the word 'assurance' he distinguishes faith from opinion. For that man truly knows God who does not vacillate or waver in doubt, but stands fast is a firm and constant persuasion. This constancy and stability Paul frequently calls *πληροφίαν* (he uses it here also), and always connects it with faith, for undoubtedly it can no more be separated from faith than heat or light from the sun." *Epistle to the Colossians* 2:20 cf *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3:12

3) See Ephesians 1:13 & 4:30 and 2 Corinthians 1:22

4) "Here we should note first the relation that Paul requires between God's gospel and our faith. Since all that God says is utterly certain, he wants us to receive it into our minds with a firm and unwavering assent. Secondly we should note that, since this degree of certainty is (cont)

ancient letter testified to its authenticity, so the Spirit's sealing of the promises of God on the believer's heart gives him/her the conviction that these promises also are true.[1] Thus, it is the work of the Spirit on the believer's heart which shapes his/her conviction.[2]

Thirdly, Calvin's association of faith with the re-ordering of the heart led him to argue that faith is inseparable from obedience. The reorientation of the heart, of which faith is the fruit, results also in an acceptance of the rule of God. Thus Calvin could argue that the Word can only truly be said to have taken root in the believer's heart when s/he is led to keep that Word.

> And we must note the conjunction here: it is necessary first to hear and then to keep. For since faith comes from hearing, this is also the beginning of the spiritual life. Again, because hearing on its own is like an evanescent look at a mirror, as James puts it (1:23), He adds the keeping of the Word, which is equivalent to an efficacious reception, when it strikes root in the heart and bears fruit.[3]

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beyond the capacity of the human mind, it is the office of the Spirit to confirm within us what God promises in His Word. That is why He is called Anointing, Earnest, Strengthener, Seal." *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 1:21

1) Sermon on Ephesians 4:29-30 *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* p 469

2) "The true conviction which believers have of the Word of God, of their own salvation, and of all religion, does not spring from the feeling of the flesh, or from human and philosophical arguments, but from the sealing of the Spirit, who makes their consciences more certain and removes all doubt." *Epistle to the Ephesians* 1:13

3) *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 11:27

In another sense, Calvin argued also that faith is obedience to the call of God in the Gospel.[1] However, his main argument was that faith is inseparable from obedience to God in every aspect of life. It is worth noting that in Calvin's thought faith and obedience are related to each because they are both the fruit of the way in which the believer is taken up by God, hence the relationship between them is not a simple one where the one leads to the other. Rather, Calvin could argue both that faith leads to obedience[2] and that obedience is the root of faith.[3]

The Affections and the Christian Life

Finally it is important to consider Calvin's teaching on the role of the affections in the Christian life. What for Calvin constitutes the right and the wrong operation of the affections? Once again, as with the reason, the most general answer to this question has already been suggested by the idea of engagement, the proper operation of the affections occurs when the believer is engaged by and responding to the experience of God and the improper operation of the affections occurs when they are not properly referred to God and so set up the man or woman over against God. Similarly the analysis of faith which has been offered also points to a similar understanding of the proper operation

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1) "We are to note here also the nature of faith. It is referred to as *obedience*, because the Lord calls us by the Gospel, and we answer Him by faith as He calls us. So, on the other hand the source of all our wilful disobedience of God is unbelief....Faith is properly that by which we obey the Gospel." *Epistle to the Romans* 1:5

2) "But in particular He commends faith, the well-spring and origin of holy obedience." *Harmony of the Gospels* Matthew 12:48

3) "But not only faith, perfect and in every way complete, but all right knowledge of God is born of obedience." *Institutes* 1.6.2

of the affections - this has to do with the creation of a proper stance of the believer before God. Once again, however it is both possible and important to be more specific about Calvin's understanding of the right and wrong operation of the affections. The human capacity for self delusion is more prevalent in dealing with the affections than in dealing with any other aspect of human life, hence the following question is vital to a proper understanding of the experience of God. What are the perceptible consequences for the believer of the Spirit's engagement of the affections? To put the same question in another way, what particular operation of the affections may be taken as signifying that the believer has been truly engaged by God and is not deluding him/her self. One further question arises from this, granted that faith, for Calvin, had to do with the creation of a proper stance before God, what are the dynamics by which the believer is drawn into and maintained in that stance?

What characterises the true operation of the affections

From the beginning of this chapter it has been noted several times that for Calvin the engagement of the affections is characterised by a sense of being brought to life, that a true knowledge of God calls forth from the believer a new way of living in relation to God. This sense of being brought to life is vital to the understanding of what characterises a true experience of God. It has already been noted that in the engagement of the affections love and desire for God are brought to life, however this was not all that Calvin had to say on the subject.

The Fear of the Lord

According to Calvin men and women who have not been drawn into a proper relationship with God are characterised by sloth and apathy in relation to Him

and in particular in relation to His righteousness and judgement. Caught up in the habit of sinning they become indifferent to the evil that surrounds them[1] and lose all sense that God Himself is concerned with the way in which they act. Such people might be said to be asleep, unaware of and unconcerned about the likelihood of the judgement of God, they live their lives without reference to Him. At the heart of this sleep, according to Calvin is a profound contempt for God.[2] They deny, not the existence of God, but the nature of God's dealings with men and women, His righteousness, His power over their lives and His right to exercise judgment.[3] That is, they deny the reality of God's activity in the world and attempt to live without reference to Him.

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1) "The effect of the habit of sinning is, that men grow hardened in their sins, and discern nothing, as if they were enveloped in thick darkness." *Psalms* 14:2 cf "It is God's just punishment of the wicked that fatness envelops their hearts, so that after they have closed their eyes, in seeing they see not." *Institutes* 1.4.2

2) "What is the source of this 'sleep'? Surely a profound contempt of God. This heedless indifference is frequently laid by the prophets to the charge of the ungodly, who await not merely the last judgment but also our daily judgments without any apprehension, they have no hesitation in promising themselves peace and every good fortune. And so they fall into this deadly apathy, because they do not see the immediate fulfilment of what the Lord declares will take place." *First Epistle to the Thessalonians* 5:3 cf "The cause of their careless indulgence in the gratification of their lusts, is their base contempt of God. He who duly reflects that God will be his judge, is so much alarmed by this reflections, that he dares not bless his soul while his conscience accuses him of guilt and of being given to the practice of sin." *Psalms* 10:3

3) "Whatever right knowledge God instils into them they partly stifle it by their malice against him, and partly corrupt it, until religion in them becomes torpid, and at last dead. They may not plainly deny the existence of a God, but they imagine him to be shut up in heaven, and divested of his righteousness and power; and this is just to fashion an idol in the room of God....And when God is dragged from his throne, and divested of his character as judge, impiety has come to its utmost height." *Psalms* 14:1

The first characteristic of the true operation of the affections is the end of this sloth and apathy, or, put another way, the awakening of the fear of the Lord. The Spirit's engagement of the affections brings to life not simply and love and desire for God but also that reverence toward Him which Calvin claimed is composed of both honour and fear. This fear of God had to do with the idea already mentioned several times throughout this thesis, the sense of dealing with God in everything which is done.[1] The new way of being in relation to God is marked by a sense that this God with whom one has to do is concerned with human evil[2] and by the recognition that God will be active in judgment. Thus, as has previously been noted, it is a characteristic mark of the experience of God for Calvin that the holiness and power of God is perceived as a threat to human existence, the believer is forced to recognise his/her sinfulness before God's holiness and vulnerability before His power.

Thus, by the Spirit's engagement of the his/her affections, the believer is drawn into that dynamic of knowledge and existence which is described at the

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1) "Therefore, let the fear of the Lord be for us a reverence compounded of honor and fear. No wonder if the same mind embraces both dispositions! For he who ponders within himself what God the Father is like towards us has cause enough, even if there be no hell, to dread offending him more gravely than any death. But also - such is the wanton desire of our flesh to sin without restraint - in order to check it by every means we must at once seize upon this thought: that the Lord, under whose power we live, abhors all iniquity. And they who, by living wickedly, provoke his wrath against themselves will not escape his vengeance." *Institutes* 3.2.26

2) "Would to God that this manner of speaking had the effect of teaching us to summon ourselves before his tribunal; and that, while the world are flattering themselves, and the reprobate are trying to bury their sins in forgetfulness by their want of thought, hypocrisy, or shamelessness, we might be led to shake of all indifference and stupidity by reflecting on this truth, that God, notwithstanding, looks down from his high throne in heaven, and beholds what is going on here below.!" *Psalms* 14:2

beginning of the *Institutes* whereby the knowledge of God and of self are so closely bound together as to be inseparable and in recognising the majesty of God the believer recognises also his/her own depravity. To truly experience God is, therefore, to be touched by a sense of both dread and wonder.

> Hence that dread and wonder with which Scripture commonly represents the saints as stricken and overcome whenever they felt the presence of God. Thus it comes about that we see men who in his absence normally remained firm and constant, but who, when he manifests his glory, are so shaken and struck dumb as to be laid low by the dread of death - are in fact overwhelmed by it and almost annihilated.[1]

Calvin clearly believed that this experience could be distinguished from the experience of fear known as the *sensus divinitatis* which was explored in the previous chapter.[2] There it was seen that the sense of the power of God can lead to a fear of Him and a dread of His judgement which prevents the recipient from responding properly to God. Rather s/he either flees God or falls into idolatry. There are, Calvin claimed, two kinds of fear, one which causes the one who experiences it to attempt to escape God and one which by affecting the heart promotes obedience and reverence.[3] A superficial reading of Calvin on this subject would seem to show that he assumed that it would be relatively simple to distinguish between these two kinds of fear, or at least showed little awareness that such a distinction might be made difficult by the nature of experience itself, for he appears to give little guidance as to how the two

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1) *Institutes* 1.1.3
2) Pages 66-70
3) "There are two kinds of trembling; one by which they are terrified who hate and flee from God, and another which affects the heart, and promotes obedience, of those who reverence and fear God.....even believers tremble at the promises when they embrace them with reverence." *Isaiah* 66:2

might be distinguished. However, Calvin showed a greater depth of understanding of the problem of distinguishing between two similar experiences than might at first appear to be the case. The main distinction between the two which he described comes not from the way in which they are experienced but from their relationship to faith and the proper stance before God. The *sensus divinitatis* is totally incompatible with faith, for it takes away from its recipient any desire to approach God. The true fear of the Lord however is a necessary part of the experience of faith which ensures that trust in the mercy of God is not presumptuous but reverent.[1] To truly experience faith according to Calvin is to be caught between an awareness of the wrath of God and an awareness of His mercy.[2]

Humility

A direct consequence of this is the second characteristic of the true operation of the affections - humility. There can be little doubt that Calvin considered humility to be fundamental to the proper stance of the believer before God; this can be seen, in particular in his approval of Augustine's statement that the

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1) "Here he fitly joins the boldness of faith that rests upon God's mercy with the reverent fear that we must experience whenever we come into the presence of God's majesty, and by its splendour understand how great is our own filthiness." *Institutes* 3.2.23

2) "From the other side we see that God, while not ceasing to love his children, is wondrously angry toward them; not because he is disposed of himself to hate them, but because he would frighten them by the feeling of his wrath in order to humble their fleshly pride, shake of their sluggishness, and arouse them to repentance. Therefore, at the same time they conceive him to be at once angry and merciful toward them, or toward their sins. For they unfeignedly pray that his wrath be averted, while with tranquil confidence they nevertheless flee to him for refuge." *Institutes* 3.2.12

first, second and third precept of the Christian religion are humility.[1] There appears at first, however, to be difficulties in Calvin's description of humility, for he insists upon a humility so radical as to amount to self-abasement of the most negative kind. Most problematic of all is his insistence that even the slightest commendation of men and women's abilities represents not only arrogance but also a diminution of the honour of God.[2] At times it appears that Calvin is saying that God can be glorified only by the denigration of others.

Once again, however, it is important to recognise that Calvin is, in fact describing the dynamics of the divine-human relationship. True humility arises only when a man or woman sees him/herself in relation to God.[3] Thus Calvin is not arguing that God can only be magnified if men and women are despised but rather is speaking of the way in which the believer is to relate to God. True

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1) *Institutes* 2.2.1 cf "If we wish to live in the nurture of God, we must take care to order our instincts in humility, and let ourselves be led as lambs by their shepherd." *James* 1:21 and *Ephesians* 5:8

2) "Nothing, however slight, can be credited to man without depriving God of his honor, and without man himself falling into ruin through brazen confidence." *Institutes* 2.2.1 cf "Hence infer that true godliness consists in having our senses brought into a state of obedience to God, and in making no boastful or wicked claims for ourselves. The nature of faith is to yield obedience to God, and to listen to him attentively and patiently when he speaks. But when we are puffed up and carried away by a vain confidence in ourselves, we have no piety or fear of God; for we cannot make even the smallest claim for ourselves without despising God." *Isaiah* 66:2

3) "Whence comes it that men live, that is, imagine that they live, and are swelled with vain confidence in their wisdom or strength, but because they know not God? Accordingly, until God reveal himself to us, we do not think that we are men, or rather, we think that we are gods; but when we have seen God we then begin to feel and know what we are. Hence springs true humility, which consists in this, that a man makes no claims for himself, and depends wholly on God." *Isaiah* 6:5

humility is not self-delusion, attempting to deny that one has any abilities whatsoever,[1] but is the submission of the heart to God which arises from the recognition of the greatness of the need for God.[2]

An exclusive love for God

A further characteristic of the true engagement of the affections, according to Calvin, is the exclusive love of the Christian for God. Not only is the Christian to abandon all love for self and all self-concern in his/her devotion to God[3], s/he is also to abandon all love for anything outside of God Himself. The true believer is content with God alone[4] and will do nothing which does not

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1) "At this point, then, let us not contend against God concerning our right, as if what is attributed to him were withdrawn from our well-being. As our humility is his loftiness, so the confession of our humility has a ready remedy in his mercy. Now I do not claim that man, unconvinced, should yield himself voluntarily, and that, if he has any powers, he should turn his mind from them in order that he may be subjected to true humility. But I require only that, laying aside the disease of self-love and ambition, by which he is blinded and thinks of more highly of himself that he ought, he rightly recognize himself in the faithful mirror of Scripture." *Institutes* 2.2.11

2) "The gateway to salvation does not lie open unless we have laid aside all pride and taken upon ourselves perfect humility; secondly,..the humility is not some seemly behavior whereby you yield a hair of your right to the Lord, as those who do not act haughtily or insult others are sometimes called humble in the sight of men, although they rely upon some consciousness of excellence. Rather, this humility is an unfeigned submission of our heart, stricken down in earnest with an awareness of its own misery and want. For so it is everywhere described by the Word of God." *Institutes* 3.12.6

3) "This is also evidence of great progress: that, almost forgetful of ourselves, surely subordinating our self-concern, we try faithfully to devote our zeal to God and his commandments." *Institutes* 3.7.2

4) "Whoever really grasps what fellowship with God is will be abundantly satisfied with it alone, and no longer burn with other desires... Therefore, only he has progressed in the Gospel who reckons himself happy in communion with God and rests in that alone. He puts it before the whole world and is ready for its sake to give up everything." *First Epistle to John* 1:4 cf *Galatians* 1:4 and *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 1:31

glorify Him.[1]

The final question which Calvin faced in connection with the engagement of the affections was the role of the emotions in the experience of God. Do emotions such as fear, grief, joy and anger have a part to play in the Christian's experience. Faced not only with the old philosophy of Stoicism but also with the people to whom he referred as the 'new Stoics' Calvin defended the Christian's experience of such emotions.[2]

In doing this he made three basic points. The first was that these affections were a part of human nature as God originally created it, and cannot possibly therefore be said to be intrinsically evil. Rather, since they come from God Himself, such feelings are good in themselves, it is only when they are immoderate that they can be said to be evil.[3] The second appealed to the

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1) "Now the great thing is this: we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory." *Institutes* 3.7.1

2) "Those, therefore, who demand of the godly a stoical indifference to suffering and insensibility to pain, *ἀπάθειαν καὶ ἀναλησίαν*, lest they should resist the decree of God, are greatly in error." *Epistle to the Romans* 9:2 cf "The faithful are not logs of wood, nor have they so divested themselves of human feelings as to be unaffected by sorrow, unafraid of danger, unhurt by poverty, and untouched by hard and unbearable persecutions. Hence they experience sorrow because of evils, but it is so mitigated by faith that they never cease at the same time to rejoice." *First Epistle to Peter* 1:6

3) "Now that mad philosophy must be repudiated which requires men to be utterly impassive (*stupidos*) in order to be wise. The Stoics of long ago must have been devoid of common-sense for they used to keep all feelings away from a man.....Let us indeed know that the feelings, which God has placed in human nature, are in themselves no more corrupt than the Author Himself; but that they must be appraised first in relation to the occasion, and secondly as to whether they preserve the limit of moderation. Certainly the man who denies that we must rejoice in the gifts of God is more like a stock or stone than a man." *Acts of the Apostles* 8:2 cf *Epistle to the Philippians* 2:27; see also *Harmony of the Pentateuch* Exodus 32:19

example of Christ Himself,[1] and secondarily to that of other Biblical characters,[2] who experienced these same emotions when faced with sorrow and death, thus to condemn the experience of fear and grief etc is to condemn Christ Himself.[3] And thirdly Calvin argued that strong feelings, and in particular the ability to be moved to either anger or sorrow by the actions and plight of others, are an important part of the work of a pastor.[4]

What characterises the false operation of the affections?

The false operation of the affections can in general be said to bear the opposite characteristics of the true operation, just as was the case with the

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1) "But as this verse says that Christ was not immune from human passions, so we also gather that those passions are not in themselves vicious so long as they are not intemperate." *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 6:8 cf "Those who pretend the Son of God was immune from human passion do not truly and seriously acknowledge Him as a man." *Harmony of the Gospels* Matt. 26:37

2) For example Paul, "Paul acknowledges that the death of Epaphroditus would have been bitter to him, and he recognizes that God had spared him in restoring him to health. Therefore he does not claim the *ἀπάθειαν* of the Stoics, as if he were a man of iron and exempt from human feelings..... Christian patience is very different from philosophical obstinacy, and still more from the stubborn and fierce sternness of the Stoics. For what virtue would there be in patiently enduring the cross, if there were in it no feeling of pain and bitterness? But when the consolation of God overcomes that feeling, so that we do not resist, but rather willingly give our back to the rod, we then offer God an acceptable sacrifice of obedience." *Epistle to the Philippians* 2:27

3)" For if all weeping is condemned, what shall we judge concerning the Lord himself, from whose body tears of blood trickled down [Luke 22:44]? If all fear is branded as unbelief, how shall we account for that dread with which, we read, he was heavily stricken [Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33]? If all sadness displeases us, how will it please us that he confesses his soul "sorrowful even to death" [Matt. 26:38]?" *Institutes* 3.8.9

4) "But it belongs to a godly pastor to weep within himself before he makes others weep, to suffer in his own secret heart before he gives any open sign of his wrath and to keep to himself more grief than he causes to others. We must take note of Paul's tears which by their abundance testify to the tenderness of his heart which was more heroic than the ironheartedness of the Stoics. For the more tender the love is the more it is worthy of praise." *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* 2:4

use of the reason. Thus, when a man or woman's affections are brought to life in a false manner s/he will show sloth, apathy and pride. The false operation of the affections can be more specifically illustrated, however, with reference to a theme which was explored in the previous chapter. In chapter two it was shown that Calvin argued that all order in the World is dependent upon God and that to be separated from God is to fall into disorder while to be reunited with Him means the restoration of order.[1] Calvin applied this idea of order even to the inner life of men and women. In particular he argued that the danger always exists that the passions and emotions of men and women might give way to what he called disorder, or sometimes undisciplined excess (*ατακτια*).

> We do not condemn those inclinations which God so engraved upon the character of man at his first creation, that they were eradicable only with humanity itself, but only those bold and unbridled impulses which contend against God's control. Now all man's faculties are, on account of the depravity of nature, so vitiated and corrupted that in all his actions persistent disorder (*ἀταξία*) and intemperance threaten because these inclinations cannot be separated from such lack of restraint. Accordingly, we contend that they are vicious. Or, if you would have the matter summed up in fewer words, we teach that all human desires are evil, and charge them with sin - not in that they are natural, but because they are inordinate. Moreover, we hold that they are inordinate because nothing pure or sincere can come forth from a corrupt and polluted nature."[2]

The source of disorder in the life of men and women, Calvin claimed, is the human heart.[3] It is, therefore, hardly surprising that he associated the

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1)) See pages 72-5.
2) *Institutes* 3.3.12 cf "Therefore such anxieties are not at all evil in themselves, but they are bad because of *ἀταξία*, that is, undisciplined excess." *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 7:33
3) "The affairs of this world are never so well ordered that many things are not enveloped in darkness; that never is there so much light (cont)

emotions with disorder, not because they are, in themselves, corrupted, but because the heart, in which they are seated has been perverted. Disorder exists where men and women live, not according to the rule of God but rather according to their own desires and convenience,[1] that is where their hearts have not been brought under the reign of God and they are ruled instead by their own passions. Thus, according to Calvin, human passions obstruct the rule of righteousness unless God Himself gives them order as He arranges both the thoughts and the feelings of the believer.[2]

In describing how the affections are to be ordered under the rule of God Calvin showed how indebted he still was to the Scholastic ideal of a personality ruled by the higher faculty of reason. Whilst admitting the intrinsic difficulty of

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that many things do not remain obscure. I am speaking about the life and actions of men. In the second part of the sentence he explains what is the cause of the darkness and disorder, so that everything is not plain now. It is, of course, because there are extraordinary secret places and very deep recesses in the human heart." *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 4:5

1) "In the first place, he uses the word *disorderly* to apply not to those who lead a dissolute life or whose reputation is stained by flagrant misdeeds, but to idlers and nonentities who do not have any honorable or useful occupation. This is truly *ἀταξία* (disorder), not to consider the purpose for which we were formed and not to order our lives with this end in view, for it is only when we live in accordance with the rule of God that our life is set in order. Apart from this ordering there is nothing in human life but confusion." *Second Epistle to the Thessalonians 3:6* cf *First Epistle to John* 2:16

2) "The opposite of the Kingdom of God is complete *ἀταραξία* (disorder) and confusion: nor is anything in the world well-ordered unless He arranges its thoughts and feelings, by His controlling hand *Harmony of the Gospels* Matt. 6:10 cf "All virtues, all good and well-regulated affections, proceed from the Spirit, that is, from the grace of God and the renewed nature which we have from Christ." *Galatians* 5:22 and *Colossians* 3:15

exercising control over the affections'[1] he assumed not only that this was possible, but also that it was desirable. A well-regulated life, he argued, is one which is obedient to reason.[2] Thus, just as the mark of the image of God in Adam was the fact that the affections were ordered by reason,[3] so also now a good and righteous life can be characterised as one in which the reason restrains the appetites of the man or woman.[4]

Calvin's overly optimistic assumption that the reason should be able to control the affections was, undoubtedly a weakness in his analysis of the affections. However, this theme also demonstrates one of the great strengths of his handling of the engagement of the affections, the way in which this theme was made a part of the wider question of the activity of God in the human life and the response of the believer to that activity. For in considering this theme also, Calvin was still concerned with his over-all theme of the proper stance of

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1) "For it is given to many to control their hands and feet, but it is really extremely hard to manage all the affections, so that perfect self-restraint and purity reign in the soul as well as in the body." *Acts of the Apostles* 15:10

2) "Temperance, as Plato teaches, sets right the whole mind of man. It is as if he had said, 'Let them be well-regulated and obedient to reason." *Epistle to Titus* 2:6

3) "Accordingly, the integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word, when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to the exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker." *Institutes* 1.15.3

4) "As the whole economy of a good and righteous life depends upon our being governed and directed by the light of understanding, David has justly taught us in the beginning of the psalm, that folly is the root of all wickedness. And in this clause he also very justly declares, that the commencement of integrity and uprightness of life consists in an enlightened and sound mind." *Book of Psalms* 14:2 cf "In dumb animals, only the instinct of nature reigns: reason should hold sway with men, and restrain their appetites." *Epistle of Jude* 10

the Christian before God. The great evil of inner *ἀταξία* for Calvin lay in fact that it prevents the Christian from maintaining the proper stance before God. For the final outcome of inner disorder is that rather than reason ruling the affections, a state of affairs which Calvin saw as being linked with God's reign over the believer, the affections in effect rule the Christian, such that s/he is subject to his/her own emotions and desires rather than to the Spirit of God.

This analysis of the evil of *ἀταξία* was closely linked with another important question. What are the signs of inner disorder in a person's life? How can it be seen that a person's inner life is so disordered? The answer, for Calvin lay in the idea that such a person is prey to his/her own emotions and feelings such that it is his/her own inclinations and desires which rule his/her life rather the Spirit of God. This can be seen in his analysis of the experience of Christ. For the key difference between the experience of Christ and that of other men and women for Calvin was not that Christ did not experience such emotions, but that He was not subject to them, that is, His experience of them did not lead Him to rebel against God.

> Yet the weakness of the flesh which Christ took on Himself must be separated from ours, for it was very different. None of our feelings are free of sin, for they all exceed the limit and proper moderation. Though Christ was troubled by sadness and fear, yet He did not rebel against God, but remained composed in the true rule of restraint. There is no wonder, since He was innocent and pure of all stain, that the emotion was displayed in Him, although it witnessed to human infirmity, was pure and unsullied. From the corrupt nature of men nothing flows out but trouble and rottenness. So let us keep the distinction; Christ in his fear and grief was weak, but without any spot of sin, while all our emotions, bubbling out to excess, are sinful.[1]

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1) *Harmony of the Gospels* Matt. 26:37

Finally, a more specific comment can be made, internal disorder shows itself in anxiety. It has been shown that faith is the primary manifestation of the engagement of the affections according to Calvin. It is therefore to be expected that the false operation of the affections will result in its opposite. What is interesting to note is that Calvin frequently characterised the opposite of faith not simply as unbelief but as anxiety, that inner struggle between hope and fear which, as with the other signs of disorder, has the result of preventing a proper stance before God of sincere submission.[1] True faith, for Calvin, was always associated with inner peace, lack of faith with anxiety.[2] It should be noted that Calvin was not suggesting that the Christian will never be anxious, but rather that his/her anxiety is a sign that s/he has not been fully engaged by God and therefore that is should spur him/her on in the struggle for faith. To press on despite one's anxiety is a path to victory.[3]

Conclusion

Calvin's teaching on the role of the affections in the experience of God has a genuine contribution to make to modern day understanding of the nature of the

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1) "We can only serve God aright with tranquil minds. Those who toss with anxiety, who struggle with themselves, as to whether they find Him propitious or hostile, whether He welcome their service or reject it, those, in a word, who are floundering between hope and fear, are very concerned and busy over their worship of God, but in no sense submit to Him in sincerity, from the heart." *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 1:73

2) "Also, there are very many who so conceive God's mercy that they receive almost no consolation from it. They are constrained with miserable anxiety at the same time as they are in doubt whether he will be merciful to them because they confine that very kindness of which they seem utterly persuaded within too narrow limits.....There is no right faith except when we dare with tranquil hearts to stand in God's sight." *Institutes* 3.2.15

3) "He who, struggling with his own weakness, presses toward faith in his moments of anxiety is already in a large part victorious." *Institutes* 3.2.17.

experience of God. It has been seen that in his own day it was of great significance that Calvin acknowledged the role of the affections in faith, in contrast to the Scholastic teaching of the day he grasped the fact that there is something deeper to human life than the merely rational which has its part to play in the relationship with God. Hence his argument that it is not enough to know about God, unless that knowledge touches and affects the inner person.

When considering what Calvin has to teach modern day thinking on the subject, however, it is not his acknowledgement of the role of affections which is significant, so much as the breadth of his understanding of the part which they have to play. It was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter that in dealing with the question of the affections one comes to what is commonly perceived as the very heart of the experience of God. Indeed, there exists the possibility of speaking of the experience of God in such a way as to deal only with the affections and the way in which they are aroused in an encounter with God. This is a direct result of the development in the understanding of experience which was noted in both the Introduction[1] and during the conclusion of Chapter Two[2]. The attempt to identify a mode of experience untouched by the activity of the reason in fact leads to a concentration on the supposedly pre-rational realm of feelings. This leads almost inevitably to the understanding of experience being reduced to an attempt to analyse the arousal of certain emotions. The result of this reduction is a distortion of the understanding of

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1) See pp 13-7
2) See pp 122-4

experience, not only because it excludes the rational but also because the understanding of the affections themselves is narrowed and perverted.

By contrast the great strength of Calvin's understanding of the affections lay in the breadth of his view of the affections and their role. He was able to relate the engagement of the affections to his wider understanding of the activity of God in human experience just as he was also able to relate the role of reason to that activity. Once again it was the breadth and the depth of his understanding of the nature of the experience of God which made his analysis so perceptive. Since he included within the purview of the experience of God the whole realm of divine human interaction and because he argued that the believer deals with God in every aspect of life Calvin was able to present the engagement of the affections not simply as evidence of short-lived encounters wherein the believer was aware of the presence of God, but rather as being a part of the wider picture of the way in which God deals with each believer.

In this, once again, it was Calvin's view of the activity of God which was vital to the astuteness of his argument. For Calvin considered the affections from the point of view of the way in which God is active in engaging the affections of the believer so as to shape his/her stance before Him and his/her activity in the World. Thus the engagement of the affections also is understood as a part of the way in which God recapacitates men and women for the relationship with Him. Just as with the reason, it was his insight into the way in which the affections can play a part in the reorientation of the life to God which shaped and deepened Calvin's view of the affections.

Furthermore, it was Calvin's view of the activity of God in relation to the affections which also gave depth and subtlety to his understanding of faith. Faith is not a simple experience in Calvin's theology, the complexity of his grasp of the subject is due at least in part to his understanding of the affections and the way in which God works through them to form the believer's experience.

The one weakness of Calvin's understanding of the affections lay in his insistence that the reason should rule over the affections and that it is only as a result of sin that this does not happen. In this assumption Calvin followed the usual teaching of his day. It could be argued that this assumption led to a distortion of Calvin's teaching on the engagement of the affections, in that he viewed the result of the total engagement of the affections as being that the reason would once again rule totally over the affections, an unattainable ideal and furthermore a result which appears unsound from a twentieth century perspective. It should, however, be noted that even this weakness did not, as might be expected lead Calvin to underrate the importance of the affections in the experience of God.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Engagement of the Moral Life

The beginning of right living is spiritual, where the inner feeling of the mind is unfeignedly dedicated to God for the cultivation of holiness and righteousness.[1]

It is clear from what has already been said that the engagement of the reason and the affections in Calvin's theology can not be separated from the important question of the Christian's life in the world. Calvin was clear that as a man or woman is caught up in the activity of God and touched and drawn by that activity, this will have profound implications for his/her own life and activity. Thus, we come now to the question of the Christian's moral life. The change from studying the engagement of the reason and the affections to that of the moral life opens up an entirely new set of questions to be considered. Since it represents a change from studying solely the inner life of the believer before God to considering also the outer life and how this is related to belief in God, it introduces the vital question of the true relationship between the Christian's experience of God and his/her life in the world. It is commonly held that the only true vindication of the reality of the former is a change for the better in the latter[2]. What is less common is an authentic delineation of the dynamics which hold the two in a relationship which makes the one dependent upon the other.

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1) *Institutes* 3.6.5
2) See for example *The Dictionary of Christian Theology*, p205.

In addition, the study of the moral life introduces the equally complex question of the moral value of the Christian's activity. In particular it raises the problem of reconciling talk of the Christian cultivating holiness and righteousness, as Calvin put it in the quotation given above, and the traditional Reformed emphasis on justification by faith and the sinner's constant need of forgiveness. Furthermore there is the problem which was expressed by Stanley Hauerwas in his book *Character and the Christian life* when he noted that one of the main dangers which faces those who attempt to specify the shape of the Christian life in the world is the continual possibility that the specification might become an end in itself, a programme to be achieved which is separate from the response to Jesus Christ.[1]

This chapter will therefore consider the following questions. What did Calvin have to say about the moral life of the believer? How did he see the relationship between justification and sanctification and the most important question, how did he relate the struggle for goodness to the response to Jesus Christ?

The Moral Life

The first question to be asked, however, concerns the term 'moral life', which is not taken from Calvin and which is, in one sense, artificial. Calvin did not believe in the existence of a 'moral life' in men and women which was somehow distinct from all other aspects of human life. Rather, as will be seen, when he

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1) Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics*, p 182.

discussed the question of the moral life of humanity, that is the question of sanctification, he referred to the renewal of the entire person[1] and thus to the way in which the experience of God takes up and renews not simply one aspect of human nature, but its entirety, reason, affection and outer actions.

> This is added by way of explanation, so that we may know what is the meaning of the sanctification of the whole man. It is when he is kept *entire*, or pure and undefiled, in spirit, soul and body, until the day of Christ.....For how is the whole man *entire*, except when his thoughts are pure and holy, his affections all honourable and well-arranged, and when too his body devotes its energies and service to good works alone? The philosophers hold that the faculty of understanding is like a mistress, while the affections are the means of exercising command, and the body renders obedience. We now see how well everything corresponds. Only if a man harbours no fancy in his mind, has no ambition in his heart, and does nothing with his body that is not approved by God, is he pure and entire. Because Paul in this way commits to God the keeping of the whole man with all its parts, we are to infer from this that unless we are guarded by His protection, we are exposed to countless dangers.[2].

Thus, it should always be born in mind that for Calvin, as distinct from the Scholastic theologians, the question of the moral life is not a question of human nature or human possession of righteousness, but rather of the way in which the life of a person is re-shaped and renewed by the experience of God.

It is this argument which has influenced the use of the term 'moral life' as opposed to, for example, 'moral nature' to express this aspect of the engagement

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1) "The word *sanctification* includes the whole renewal of man." *First Epistle to the Thessalonians* 5:23
2) *First Epistle to the Thessalonians* 5:23

of the believer. The idea of 'life' expresses the active renewal of the whole person, where that of 'nature' would suggest a static attribute of the man or woman which somehow exists independent of the experience of God. Thus, the term, the moral life, should not be taken to indicate a single, isolated, aspect of human nature, but rather, *the whole person*, reason, affections and outer action, as s/he is involved in the struggle for goodness and the renewal of life and as the experience of God re-forms and renews him or her.

The question of the engagement of the moral life is, therefore, for Calvin, not a question of the possession of virtue but is rather the question of the re-shaping of the whole of a person's life in relationship to God; that is the question of the way in which a person is touched by and drawn up into the activity of God. A deeper understanding of the exact implications of this statement can be gained by studying two points which are of greatest importance to the understanding of sanctification in Calvin's theology; the question of the nature of sin and the question of his teaching on the ultimate goal of sanctification.

In Chapter Two Calvin's argument on the nature of sin was examined[1]. In particular it was shown that for Calvin the essence of sin had to do with the breakdown of the relationship with God. The original nature of the divine-human relationship, as expressed in the idea of the image of God, was one in which men and women oriented themselves to God in thankfulness, that is one in which

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1) See p 63f See also 'A Mirror of God's Goodness: A Key metaphor in Calvin's doctrine of man' in Brian A Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New*, pp 150-59.

the shape of their lives was determined by the relationship with God. According to Calvin, men and women reflect the glory of God both because of the excellence bestowed upón them by God and by their conscious acknowledgment of those gifts and the Giver from Whom they came. The central dynamic of such a life is therefore gratitude to God and the openness to His activity which follows from such gratitude.. The essence of sin and the root of the Fall, however, was expressed in the idea of unfaithfulness, that is a questioning of God's Word which led to rebellion, pride and ungratefulness, and a turning away from God and a setting up of the self over against God. Thus sin is not only the inversion of the image of God it is also the cause of a breakdown in the proper dynamics of life. Instead of living in gratitude and openness to God and therefore being shaped by the activity of God, men and women, by their ingratitude set themselves up over against God and are shaped instead by their own attitudes and activity. The heart of sin is the loss of the proper, thankful orientation to God.

It was this understanding of sin which enabled Calvin to answer one of the greatest questions raised by the doctrine of sin. What are we to make of the apparent natural goodness of some men and women as compared with others while taking seriously the assertion that all men and women are caught up in the corruption of sin. As Calvin himself put the question, we must either make the good man (Camillus) equal to the bad (Catiline) or the good must be an example proving that nature is not utterly devoid of goodness.[1] Calvin answered this question with two points, of which the second is the more important.

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1) *Institutes* 2.3.4

But because, however excellent anyone has been, his own ambition always pushes him on - a blemish with which all virtues are so sullied before God they lose all favor - anything in profane that appears praiseworthy must be considered worthless. Besides, where there is no zeal to glorify God, the chief part of uprightness is absent; a zeal of which all those whom he has not regenerated by his Spirit are devoid.[1]

Thus, Calvin argued that all human virtue, no matter how perfect it might appear to men and women is touched by the stain of self-righteousness, but also, more importantly, that at the heart of true righteousness lies, not the question of virtue at all, but rather the question of zeal to glorify God. In this way he effectively changed the question with which he was dealing. What is at stake, he argued, is not the question of whether or not men and women can be good, that is the static question of whether men and women can possess righteousness, but rather the question of the way in which they relate to God, that is the dynamic question of orientation. Without this proper orientation the chief part of righteousness is absent. Thus, even the person who appears from a human perspective to be virtuous may, in fact, be living a corrupted life if s/he lacks the basic dynamic to living which comes from grateful openness to God. Such a person, because s/he fails to relate properly to God, lacks a zeal to glorify Him and has therefore turned away from God in a search for self-righteousness.

This is the significance of Calvin's argument that, no matter how perfect a person's life might appear to be it can only be said to be truly righteous if it

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1) *Ibid*

is founded upon the worship of God.[1] The idea of worship in Calvin's theology has a much wider significance than is commonly understood, it encompasses not only the attribution of praise to God but also the far more general question of the proper attitude and actions towards God through out life. Thus, calling upon God in times of trouble is described as the 'chief part' of worship.[2] The question of the engagement of the moral life is, at heart, a question of the way in which the believer's life is oriented to God, the Christian life involves not a search for virtue *per se*, but a creation of harmony between God and the believer[3] which comes from the believer's gratitude and openness to God.

Secondly, the fact that for Calvin the engagement of the moral life had to do with the re-shaping of a person's life in relationship to God can be seen from the importance he attached to the concept of sincerity or as he called it of *rondeur*. Calvin used the concept of *rondeur* to express the nature of that perfection towards which the Christian ought to aim. His use of this concept is interesting because it clearly expresses a perfection of a life which is good not because the person concerned is virtuous in and of him/herself but rather because s/he is perfectly oriented to God and open to His activity. Thus Calvin could argue that the fountain of true righteousness is the love of God, for the only true test of righteousness is not the inherent goodness of the person

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1) "For even though the life of man be replete with all the virtues, if it is not directed to the worship of God, it can indeed be praised by the world: but in heaven it will be sheer abomination, since the chief part of righteousness is to render to God his right and honor, of which he is impiously defrauded when we do not intend to subject ourselves to his control." *Institutes* 3.3.7

2) *Institutes* 3.20.13

3) "The object of regeneration, as we have said, is to manifest in the life of believers a harmony and agreement between God's righteousness and their obedience." *Institutes* 3.6.1

concerned but the way in which his/her actions are related to God. It is only 'voluntary obedience', that is obedience which is based on the love of God rather than fear of Him, which pleases God,[1] for this is righteousness which is based on openness to Him. The mark of false righteousness, on the other hand, is hypocrisy, obedience which is forced and servile and not therefore a true expression of the inner person, or actions which fail to correspond to a profession of love for God.

This openness to the activity of God implies a complete lack of hypocrisy on the part of the believer. Thus where Job is described in Scripture as being 'perfect', (RSV 'blameless') Calvin preferred to use the term *rondeur*, explaining that this is the true meaning of the Biblical idea of perfection, when there is no hypocrisy in the believer's life, but rather that s/he is the same on the outside as s/he is within and, perhaps more importantly, that in dealing with God s/he holds nothing back but rather unfolds before Him his/her heart, thoughts and affections.[2]

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1) "Now, when it is said, 'unto them that love me', the fountain and origin of true righteousness is expressed; for the external observation of the Law would be of no avail unless it flowed from hence. And praise is given to love rather than to fear, because God is delighted with none but voluntary obedience, but He rejects that which is forced and servile.....But because hypocrites also boast that they love God, whilst their life corresponds not with the profession of their lips, the two things are here directly connected; viz, that they true servants of God love Him, and keep His commandments, ie make effectual proof of their piety." *Harmony of the Pentateuch* Deuteronomy 5:9

2) "Or ce mot en l'Escriture se prend pour une rondeur, quand il n'y a point de fiction, ne d'hypocrisie en l'homme, mais qu'il se monstre tel par dehors comme il est au dedans, et mesmes qu'il n'a point d'arriere boutique pour se destourner de Dieu, mais qu'il desploye son coeur, et de toutes ses pensees et affections, qu'il ne demande sinon de se consacrer à Dieu, et s'y dedier du tout." *Sermons sur livre de Iob* CO 33:27

Another way to describe the nature of *rondeur* would be to call it whole-heartedness, the final completion of God's engagement of the heart which was described in the previous chapter. The heart of the believer is so completely captivated by God that s/he serves Him with all of his/her heart. Thus, preaching on the idea of serving God with all one's heart, Calvin argued that this demands that the heart itself should be *rond*, in other words that nothing should be kept back from God and He should be served without reluctance.[1] To fail to be sincere is to offer God only half of one's heart.[2]

It is worth noting that the great importance of the idea of sincerity, or *rondeur*, to Calvin was based, at least in part, upon his conviction that the Christian deals with God in everything. This again emphasises that *rondeur* had to do not with the inherent righteousness of the believer but rather the way in which s/he is related to God. Because the Christian has to deal with God, who

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1) "Moyse ne parle simplement de l'affection: mais il veut que le coeur soit rond et pur. 'Tu me servira donc de tout ton coeur et de toute ton ame.' c'est à dire, en integrité: que nous ne soyons point doubles, comme on en verra d'aucuns qui auront quelque belle monstre, mais cela s'escoule tantost: et puis il y a quelque arriere boutique, qu'ils ne serviront à Dieu qu'a regret. Il faut donc que le coeur se desploye devant Dieu, et que nous luy presentions nos pensees, et nos desirs, et que nous tendions à luy. Voilà comme il sera servi et honoré: voire, non pas à notre guise, mais selon sa Loy" *Sermon on Deuteronomy 26:16-19 CO* 28:284 cf "The whole heart is integrity, that is when we deal not hypocritically with God, but desire from the heart to give up ourselves to him." *Book of Jeremiah* 24:7

2) "What is said here particularly of riches, may be applied to all faults of any kind with equal propriety: as God always values highly sincerity, and abominates the two faced character, men are entirely deceived if they think He will be satisfied with half of their hearts. All profess with their lips that God is only given true service by whole hearted devotion, but they deny it in their deeds, when they try to reconcile two contradictory principles." *Harmony of the Gospels* Matthew 6:24

can never be deceived, sincerity is of the utmost importance.[1]

> The Prophet here reminds us that we must not act feignedly with God; for men are ever disposed to trifle with him. We indeed see what almost the whole world is wont to do. God graciously meets us and is ready to receive us unto favour, though we have a hundred times alienated ourselves from him; but we bring nothing but hypocrisy and disguise: hence the Prophet declares here distinctly, that this dissimulation does not please God, and that they can hide nothing, who only pretend some sort of repentance by external signs, and that what is required is the serious and sincere feeling of the heart. This is what he means by the whole heart; not that perfect repentance can be formed in men, but the whole or complete heart is opposed to a divided heart: for men well understand that God is not ignorant; yet they divide their heart, and when they bestow some portion on God, they think that he is satisfied; and in the meantime there remains an interior and some hidden perverseness, which separates them far from God. This vice the Prophet now condemns, when he says, *Turn with the whole heart.* He then shows that it is an hypocrisy abominable to God, when men keep the greater part of their heart, as it were, closed up, and think it enough, if only they bring, so to speak, some volatile feeling. [2]

This then, is the final goal of the Christian life, according to Calvin, or, as he put it, 'the target to be set before our eyes at which we earnestly aim'[3], that the believer comes to a whole-hearted and unfeigned orientation to God and that this orientation becomes the basis of a new way of living.

> For in the first place, he everywhere commends integrity as the chief part of worshipping him. By this word he means a sincere simplicity of mind, free from guile and feigning, the opposite of a double heart. It is as if it were said that the beginning of right living is spiritual, where the

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1) "Plato also teaches correctly that *ὁσιότης* (holiness) lies in the worship of God, and that the other part, righteousness, relates to men.....He warns us that both ought to be sincere; because we have to do with God, whom no pretence will deceive." *Epistle to the Ephesians* 4:25
2) *Book of Joel* 2:12-13
3) *Institutes* 3.6.5

> inner feeling of the mind is unfeignedly dedicated to God for the cultivation of holiness and righteousness.'

This orientation may be contrasted with Calvin's understanding of sin. The heart of sin for Calvin consists in turning away from God, setting the self up over against Him, being oriented away from Him. The engagement of the moral life represents a reversal of this turning away from God, a growing openness to His activity, so that more and more of the life is drawn into the dynamic relationship with God and the believer comes to be so oriented to Him that it might be said that the whole heart had been given to Him.

The Engagement of the Moral Life

In Scholastic Theology

In his book *The Forerunners of the Reformation*[2] Heiko Oberman argued that after the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius two main questions determined the shape of the debate on justification throughout the whole of the Medieval period. These two questions concerned the effects of the Fall, that is original sin and the manner in which a person has to be harnessed by Grace to be set upon and kept on the way to salvation. It is the answers which the different Medieval theologians gave to these two questions, and especially the second, which form the background to Calvin's teaching on the engagement of the moral life of the believer.

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1) *Ibid*
2) H Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Theology Illustrated by Key Documents*, p 128.

In the era following Augustine's debate with Pelagius concerning the nature of justification, it was generally accepted that no man or woman could save him/her self without the aid of divine help or grace.[1] The debate, however, centred on two different questions concerning the relationship between this grace and the believer. The first had to do with the proper disposition for justification and in particular with the preparation for justification. The question which concerned the theologians may be posed as follows, is justification preceded by a preparation on the part of the sinner, and if it is is this preparation a work of grace or a purely human act. A development in the understanding of this subject can be seen, for example, in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas who changed his basic understanding of this question.[2] Although he always argued that there was a proper disposition necessary for justification he began by teaching that the person can prepare him or herself by virtue of his or her unaided abilities[3] His mature position, however concluded that such preparation was a work of grace.[4]

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1) "Seeing that what is given to a man apart from his merits, is said to be given to him gratis: and since the divine assistance given to man anticipates all human merit, as we have said; it follows that this assistance is bestowed on man gratuitously, and therefore is fittingly known by the name of *grace*." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book III Part II Chapter CL

2) See Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, Vol I, pp 81-2 and 85-6

3) Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, II dist. xxviii q. 1 a. 4.

4) "It can be clearly seen from what has been said, that man is unable to merit God's assistance. For everything is in the position of matter in regard to what is above it. Now matter does not move itself to its perfection, but needs to be moved by another. Therefore man does not move himself to the effect of obtaining divine assistance, for this is above him: rather indeed is he moved for this purpose by God. Now the motion of the mover precedes the movement of the thing moved both logically and and causally. Consequently the divine assistance is not given to us because by our good deeds we previously move ourselves to obtain it, but rather do we advance by our good deeds, because of God's prevenient help." *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III:II:CXLIX.

The nature of the disposition necessary for justification was almost invariably discussed in terms of the axiom *facienti quod in se est Deus non denegrat gratiam* (God does not deny grace to the man who does what is in him), the origin of which can be traced back to the *Ambrosiaster*. There the axiom is linked to both the mercy and the justice of God - out of His mercy God accepts those who seek refuge with Him, it would contradict His justice if He rejected them.[1]. A person seeks refuge in God not by performing acts which actually merit His acceptance but by doing everything which is possible within the limits of the human condition. This is described as 'doing what is in him/her'. For example, according to Biel, a Christian, in order to do what is in him/her, must conform his/her will to the *regula fidei*, repent and resolve to turn from sin in the future. God, because of His justice will infuse His Grace into everyone who thus does his/her best.[2] The essential principle encapsulated in this axiom can be summarized as follows, both human beings and God have their respective rôles to play in justification; when the human has fulfilled his or her part in penitence, God will fulfil His.[3] While no-one held that the moral efforts or preparation of men and women fully merited God's grace (in technical terms were meritorious *de condigno* worthy of divine acceptation on it's own account) many held that they were graciously regarded by God as meritorious in a metaphorical sense (*de congruo* although not strictly meritorious nevertheless an appropriate ground for justification.)[4]

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1) *PL* XVII
2) Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, pp131-2.
3) McGrath, *Ibid*, p83.
4) *Ibid*, pp 109-119.

The theologians of the *via moderna* school gave their own particular interpretation to this idea. Central to the Nominalist understanding of God's dealings with men and women was the idea of the covenant; they argued that God, being absolutely free, could have established physical and moral laws other than those which are now operative. When God's power is viewed absolutely (*de potentia absoluta*) He is able to do anything which does not involve an inherent contradiction. However, God has bound Himself to act in specific ways and when His power is viewed from the standpoint of creation and revelation (*de potentia ordinata*) the order which God has instituted can be seen to be totally reliable. According to this view the actual value of anything, be it an object or action, is dependent not on it's own inherent value, but rather upon the value which God Himself ascribes to it. The application of this idea to the merit of human action can be seen, for example, in the writings of Robert Holcot (†1349) a Dominican Friar and student of William of Occam.

The statement, man assisted by grace can earn eternal life by his own full merit, can be understood in two ways. It can be understood according to the natural value of man's action or according to its contracted value. Man would earn salvation according to natural value if his merit were, by its very nature and existence, such that eternal life would be suitable payment for it. According to contracted value, the value of one's merit would be determined by legal arrangement in the way that a small copper coin which, in natural value, has not the same weight or worth as a loaf of bread is assigned this value by the law of the land.

Now if we understand man's merit according to the first interpretation, the natural goodness of our works does not earn eternal life fully (*de condigno*) but only partially (*de congruo*), since it is appropriate that if man has done all that he can with his finite resources God should reward him with His infinite resources.

But according to the second understanding of merit we can say that our works are fully worthy of eternal life, not because of any merit inherent in the acts themselves but because of grace, since our Lord has established that he who does good works in a state of grace shall receive eternal life. Therefore, through the law and grace of our ruler

> Christ we merit eternal life by our own full merit (*de condigno*)[1]

The analogy which Holcot used here was a popular one among the Nominalists,[2] and illustrates well their understanding of the way in which human merit could have value in God's sight. Just as a copper coin has little inherent value, but can be assigned a far greater one by the law of the land, so also although human acts have little or no inherent value judged by the absolute standards of God, they can nevertheless be said to have value because God has created a covenant with men and women under which their acts are accepted as being meritorious. Thus the distinction between the inherent value of moral acts and their value as imposed by God permitted the theologians of this school to interpret the axiom *facienti quod in se est Deus non denegrat gratiam* as implying a positive rôle for men and women in their own justification while apparently safeguarding themselves from the charge of Pelagianism.

However, the justification of the Christian in this understanding has little or no reference to the Incarnation and death of Christ. According to Biel, for instance, the divine-human covenant is such that God will reward the efforts of the person who does what is in him or her with grace irrespective of whether this pertains under the Old or New Covenant. It can be seen from the quotation given above that the reference to Christ (who is significantly described as *ruler* rather than *saviour*) is hardly intrinsic to the overall argument. The

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1) Robert Holcot, 'Lectures on the Wisdom of Solomon', in Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, p143.
2) See McGrath, *op. cit.*, p87-8.

central point to the argument is God's covenant to accept the works of men and women as meritorious, with no real connection to the life and death of Christ.

Thus, it can be seen that the teaching of the Medieval theologians centred around the idea of a covenant which was seen as a legal contract to which both God and men and women were in some way bound; the sole role assigned to Christ in this understanding was as a kind of exemplar to whom men and women were expected to conform.

The second question with which the Medieval theologians were concerned had to do with the nature of grace and how it is possible for divine grace to be present in a sinful human soul. In the *Sentences* Lombard argued that the love by which people loved God and their fellows and thus merited salvation was the spirit of God working within them without their aid or volition.[1] Aquinas, however, opposed Lombard and argued that if an act was to be understood as being truly that of the person performing it it must arise from a disposition which truly belonged to him or her.[2] Thus, according to Aquinas, grace is a quality of the soul, infused by God, by which God moves the soul towards good.[3]

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1) Peter Lombard, *Sentences* Book 1 distinction 17. See Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p 31f.
2) Gilby, *Theological Texts*, p214.
3) "Now He so provides for natural creatures, that not merely does He move them to their natural acts, but He bestows upon them certain forms and powers, which are the principles of acts, in order that they may of themselves be inclined to these movements, and thus the movements whereby they are moved of God become natural and easy to creatures, according to Wis. viii i: *she ordereth all things sweetly*. Much more therefore does He infuse into such as He moves towards the acquisition of supernatural good, certain forms or supernatural qualities, whereby they may be moved by Him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good; and thus the gift of grace is a quality." *Summa Theologiæ*, Q. 110 art. 2.

Using Aristotelian philosophy he argued that grace is present in the soul in accidental not substantial form. In other words the theologians of the Medieval period, in particular as they were influenced by Aquinas, objectified the nature of grace. By arguing that grace can be present in a soul, Aquinas in effect taught that grace is a substance to be infused into a believer rather than being a description of the activity of God. This argument would almost appear to imply that grace becomes the possession of the believer. It certainly ensured that the question of the divine-human relationship was answered in the static terms of nature and whether or not an individual possessed grace rather than in the active terms of the way in which God moves in the life and experience of each individual.

The Engagement of the Moral Life according to Calvin

Calvin's approach to the question of the engagement of the moral life was in complete contrast to that of the Scholastic theologians. Rather than making Christ external to the process in Calvin's understanding He was entirely central to the Christian's experience and furthermore Calvin viewed the process not in the static terms of the believer's possession of 'grace' seen as an objective presence in the soul, but rather in terms of the active formation of the the life of a Christian after the pattern of Christ. Central to both of these new approaches to the moral life was Calvin's conception of the union with Christ.

> First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason, he is called "our Head" [Eph 4:1], and "the first-born among many brethren" [Rom. 8:29]. We also, in turn, are said to be "engrafted into him" [Rom. 11:17], and to "put on Christ" [Gal 3:27];

> for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.[1]

According to Calvin, all the benefit of being a Christian and therefore all moral development is the fruit, not of an infusion of grace as such, nor of unaided human struggle, but rather of the union with Christ. Only as the Christian is united with Christ does s/he come to share in all that He has to offer and thus to be shaped by the grace of God. In this way the great strength of Calvin's understanding of the engagement of the moral life can be seen, that is that he views it *Christologically*; Christ Himself becomes the centre of both the order of salvation and the believer's moral struggle and this has profound implications for Calvin's view of the Christian's experience as will be seen.

In order to understand Calvin's conception of the engagement of the moral life it is therefore essential to understand his conception of the union with Christ. As Wendel points out[2], Calvin defined his thought on this subject in the course of his debate with André Osiander; Osiander argued that Christ justifies the believer so fully that s/he becomes really righteous and that the union with Christ implies that Christ dwells essentially within the believer so that His divinity mingles with the humanity of the Christian. It was the concern to refute Osiander which led Calvin to emphasise that the union does not imply the

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1) *Institutes* 3.1.1.

2) Wendel, *Calvin*, pp 234-42. Wendel here gives a useful summary of the change in the language which Calvin used to describe the union which occurred during the course of the debate with Osiander.

transfusion of Christ's essence into the Christian.[1] However, while he defined clearly what the union is *not*, Calvin was less clear when it came to the question of what the union is. It is perhaps this which accounts for the fact that those who have commented upon his work in recent years have paid little attention to the question. Willis, although he tackled the subject of the relationship between Calvin's Christology and his ethics, made little mention of the union between Christ and the believer.[2] Wendel concluded that the union is, in his words 'a purely spiritual one'[3] but said little more about it, while Hauerwas suggested that the idea of a 'mystical union' "is ultimately but a way of centring the Christian life at its source - Jesus Christ - and his continuing relation to the believer."[4]

Such conclusions, however, fail to take into account the great importance which Calvin himself apparently attached to the notion of the 'mystical union'; he called it the *fin* of the Gospel[5] and stressed that he accorded it the greatest importance.[6] This importance is based upon two main points, first the union

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1) *Institutes* 3.11.5 cf *Gospel of John* 17:21
2) Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, Chapter 5 pp 132-152.
3) Wendel, *Ibid*, p 238.
4) Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, p 187.
5) "Car quand sainct Paul veut definir en bref la fin de l'Evangile, et son vray usage, il dit que sommes appellez pour communiquer à nostre Seigneur Iesus, pour estre unis tellement avec luy, que nous y soyons incorporez, et qu'il habite quant et quant en nous, et que nous soyons conioints ensemble d'un lien inseparable." Sermons sur l'Epitre a Tite 1:7-9 *CO* 54:442-3
6) "Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts - in short, that mystical union - are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body - in short because he deigns to make us one with him." *Institutes* 3.11.10 cf 3.1.3

with Christ lies for Calvin at the very heart of the believer's relationship with God, and secondly it is the union which gives shape to the believer's experience, not simply of God but also in a more general sense, the experience of life in the World. The question of the union with Christ is therefore of the greatest of importance for this study, for it was by the use of this notion that Calvin showed how it is that Christ is determinative of the believer's experience.

The key to understanding Calvin's conception of the union with Christ in fact lies in his statement, quoted above, that as long as a believer is separated from Christ everything which Christ suffered and did for the salvation of men and women would be of no value. The union with Christ, therefore, has to do with the way in which Christ communicates His benefits to the believer, it is in being united to Christ that the Christian receives from Him everything to do with the new life.

Central to this is Calvin's understanding of Christ as One Who acted and Who received gifts from the Father not on His own behalf but on behalf of believers.[1] In particular he emphasised this teaching in relation to Christ's reception of the Spirit. This is exemplified in his exegesis of the baptism of Christ; although Christ could be said to have received the Spirit on that occasion, this occurred not for His sake, but for the sake of His people.

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1) "He did not enrich himself for his own sake, but that he might pour out his abundance upon the poor and needy." *Institutes* 2.15.5 cf *Institutes* 2.15.2

> But when he wished to make Himself known to the world, He began with Baptism. He therefore received the Spirit on that occasion not so much for Himself as for his people. And the Spirit descended visibly that we may know that in Christ dwells the abundance of all gifts of which we are destitute and empty.[1]

For Calvin, the baptism of Christ implied that Christ received the Spirit in order that the Spirit might flow from Him to all those who are joined to Him. Thus, Christ is said to be a 'channel' through Whom the Spirit flows to all believers.[2]

It is this idea of Christ receiving the Spirit that He might enrich believers which begins to explain the idea of the union with Christ. It is when believers are united with Christ that they can then receive from Him the enrichment of the Spirit.[3] Here it is important to emphasise the active nature of this enrichment, the believer receives not a static possession or change in his/her condition, but rather, through the Spirit Who flows from Christ s/he is invigorated, given the power to live a new life.

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1) *Gospel of John* 1:32
2) "But I subscribe rather to the opinion of those who say that we are watered with the graces which were poured out on Christ. For not only as God does Christ bestow upon us what we receive from Him, but as the Father conferred upon Him what would flow to us through a channel. This is the anointing which was liberally poured upon Him that He might anoint us all along with Him." *Gospel of John* 1:16
3) "As has already been clearly explained, until our minds become intent upon the Spirit, Christ, so to speak, lies idle because we coldly contemplate him as outside ourselves - indeed, far from us. We know, moreover, that he benefits only those whose "Head" he is [Eph. 4:15], for whom he is "the first-born among brethren" [Rom. 8:29], and who, finally, "have put him on" [Gal. 3:27]. This union alone ensures that, as far as we are concerned, he has not unprofitably come with the name of Savior. The same purpose is served by that sacred wedlock through which we are made flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone [Eph. 5:30], and thus one with him. But he unites himself to us by the Spirit alone. By the grace and power of the same Spirit we are made his members, to keep us under himself and in turn to possess him." *Institutes* 3.1.3

> A visible symbol of this sacred anointing was shown in Christ's baptism, when the Spirit hovered over him in the likeness of a dove [John 1:32; Luke 3:22]. It is nothing new, and ought not to seem absurd that the Spirit and his gifts are designated by the word 'anointing' [1 John 2:20, 27]. For it is only in this way that we are invigorated. Especially with regard to heavenly life, there is no drop of vigor in us save what the Holy Spirit instills. For the Spirit has chosen Christ as his seat, that from him might abundantly flow the heavenly riches of which we are in such need. The believers stand unconquered through the strength of their king, and his spiritual riches abound in them. Hence they are justly called Christians.[1]

One of Calvin's favourite analogies to explain the union was taken from Paul, the union with Christ, he argued, is like the grafting of trees, at stake is not simply conformity to Christ's example but the transference of power between Christ and the Christian,[2] in this union the Christian draws the nourishment for his/her spiritual life from Christ. Thus for Calvin, the union with Christ is about the efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection for each individual believer.[3] In commenting on Galatians 2:20 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' he put it like this,

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1) *Institutes* 2.15.5
2) "Our ingrafting signifies not only our conformity to the example of Christ, but also the secret union by which we grow together with Him, in such a way that He revives us by His Spirit, and transfers His power to us." *Epistle to the Romans* 6:5
3) "The disparity between the grafting of trees and our spiritual ingrafting will at once be evident. In the grafting of trees the graft draws its nourishment from the root, but retains its own natural quality in the fruit which is eaten. In spiritual ingrafting, however, we not only derive the strength and sap of the life which flows from Christ, but we also pass from our own nature into His. The apostle desired to point quite simply to the efficacy of the death of Christ, which manifested itself in putting to death our flesh, and also in the efficacy of His resurrection in renewing within us the better nature of the Spirit." *Epistle to the Romans* 6:5

> He does not live by his own life but is animated by the secret power of Christ, so that Christ may be said to live and grow in him. For as the soul quickens the body, so Christ imparts life to His members. A remarkable statement, that believer's live outside themselves, that is, in Christ. This can only be if they hold true and genuine communication with Him (*veram cum ipso et substantialem communicationem*). Christ lives in us in two ways. The one consists in His governing us by His Spirit and directing all our actions. The other is what He grants us by participation in His righteousness, that, since we can do nothing of ourselves, we are accepted in Him by God.

For Calvin, therefore, the mystical union was a description, not simply, of the way in which Christ and the believer are related but also of the way in which Christ works in the believer through the Holy Spirit; he argued that the union implied that Christ works in such a way that the believer draws all of his/her strength from Christ.[1] The union is a spiritual bond between Christ and believer created by the power of the Holy Spirit.[2] As such it has a profound and complex relationship with the believer's experience of God.

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1) "You see then that Jesus Christ does not need to come down from heaven to make us members of his body, or to diminish his own flesh to make us grow out of him and to be formed out of him. For all that is done by the wonderful power of his Holy Spirit. We do not draw anything from the flesh. or from the body with which he once clothed himself, for that is in heaven, in order that we should be fashioned like unto glory that is now in him. Notwithstanding, he works in such a way that we have all our strength continually from him. And just as trees draw both their flowers, their leaves, and their fruits from the root, and just as the body of a man feels its strength flow down from the head, so we feel the virtue of the union that is between us and our Lord Jesus Christ; and yet he always continues in his full state." Sermon on Ephesians 5:28-30 *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* p 603-4 cf "We are one with Christ; not because He transfuses His substance into us, but because by the power of His Spirit He communicates to us His life and all the blessings He has received from the Father." *Gospel of John* 17:21

2) "The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself." *Institutes* 3.1.1

First, as Calvin frequently asserted the nature of the union with Christ is such that the only way to understand it is to be united to Christ. It has already been shown that the engagement of the rational nature is a part of the experience of God, thus as the believer is caught up in the movement of God s/he comes to understand more about His nature and activity. So it is with the union with Christ; to be united with Christ is not simply to be enabled to draw life and vigor from Christ Himself it is also to be enlightened. The person who experiences the way in which Christ gives him or her life is also the person can truly begin to comprehend the meaning of the union with Christ.

> For the drift of these words is that we cannot know by idle speculation what is the sacred and mystic union between us and Him and again between Him and the Father, but that the only way to know it is when He pours His life into us by the secret efficacy of the Spirit. And this is the experience of faith which I mentioned just now.[1]

The union is understood, therefore, only by the person who feels its effects. However, the union has a second and more important connection with the believer's experience of God. It has already been seen that, by the union with Christ the believer is invigorated with the life of Christ, in this way his/her actions and experience and taken up and conformed to the pattern of Christ.

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1) *Gospel of John* 14:20 cf "He describes the power and nature of faith, that it is the knowledge of Christ, and that, too, not bare or indistinct, but such that the power of His resurrection is felt. *Resurrection* he puts for the completion of redemption, so that it also involves within it the idea of death. But as it is a little thing to know Christ crucified and raised from the dead, unless you apprehend also the fruit of this, he speaks expressly of efficacy. Christ therefore is rightly known, when we feel how powerful His death and resurrection are and how efficacious they are in us. Now all things are there furnished to us: expiation and destruction of sin, freedom from guilt, satisfaction, victory over death, the attainment of righteousness and the hope of a blessed immortality." *Epistle to the Philippians* 3:10 cf "Let us labour more to feel Christ living in us, than to discover the nature of that communication." *Epistle to the Ephesians* 5:32

Thus, it is by the union with Christ that, according to Calvin, Christ becomes determinative of the believer's experience. Furthermore, it is also by the union with Christ that Christ comes to determine the moral practices of the believer, the way in which s/he acts in the world. The precise nature of this determination of the Christian's experience and action will be explored in the next section.

The Union with Christ and the Christian Life

The Union with Christ was, for Calvin, an explanation of the way in which Christ works in the believer and of the way in which the life and activity of the believer is taken up and renewed by God. By the union the believer's life is conformed to the pattern of Christ. Thus the union is clearly fundamental to dealing with the two questions with which this chapter began, the problem of reconciling talk of a Christian cultivating holiness, or the doctrine of sanctification, with the doctrine of justification by faith and also the danger that any specification of the shape of Christian living might become an end in itself, separated from the response to Jesus Christ. Moreover, as already stated, the union is also vital the Calvin's understanding of the way in which Jesus Christ becomes determinative of the Christian's experience. The task of this section is, therefore, to consider Calvin's explanation of the way in which the union shapes the Christian's experience and to ask how effectively it allows him to deal with these problems.

The relationship between justification and sanctification was already a source of some discussion and disagreement, not only between the Catholics and the Reformers, but also amongst the Reformers themselves. Luther's doctrine of the alien righteousness of Christ given to the believer who is totally passive and

who remains a sinner, had long attracted the accusation that it encouraged moral laxity despite his frequents statements to the contrary. It was the idea of the alien righteousness of Christ which was the most characteristic feature of Luther's early doctrine of justification.[1] In his sermon *Two Kinds of Righteousness* which probably dates from around 1519, Luther distinguished between what he called *alien* righteousness and *proper* righteousness. The first is the righteousness instilled into the Christian from without, it is that righteousness which is actually Christ's, but which through faith becomes the Christian's[2] The second is, in fact, the product of the first, that is the fruit of the real presence of Christ in the life of the believer.[3] It is important to note that this argument is based upon the idea of the real and redeeming presence of Christ. The distinguishing mark of faith, according to Luther, is that is 'grasps' Christ and through him his benefits. At the heart of this notion was Luther's own understanding of the union with Christ, which he explained using the analogy of marriage; just as in a marriage the bride and bridegroom are united and share all that they have, so in the 'marriage' between

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1) McGrath *op. cit.* Vol 2 p 12
2) "Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours; rather, he himself becomes ours.....This is an infinite righteousness, and one that swallows up all sins in a moment, for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ. On the contrary, he who trust in Christ exists in Christ; he is one with Christ, having the same righteousness as he. It is therefore impossible that sin should remain in him." Luther 'Two Kinds of Righteousness' in *Luther's Works*, Grimm (ed) p 298
3) "The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness....
This righteousness is the product of the righteousness of the first type, actually its fruit and consequence, for we read in Gal. 5 [:22]: "But the fruit of the spirit [ie of a spiritual man, whose very existence depends on faith in Christ] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."Luther, 'Two Kinds of Righteousness', *Ibid* p 299-300

Christ and the Christian the believer takes the righteousness of Christ, while He accepts the sin of the believer'.

Thus, in Luther's teaching there was no real distinction between justification and sanctification, both alien righteousness and proper righteousness are the fruit of the marriage with Christ. It has, however, been argued that in later Protestantism the two were increasingly distinguished from each other. How far this is in fact the case, is a matter of some dispute[2]. What is clear is that the union with Christ was more and more neglected and that later Reformers tended to argue that the believer is justified by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit. Despite attempts to hold the two together it was perhaps inevitable that this development should ensure that they came more and more to be seen as two distinct acts. Melancthon, for example, increasingly emphasised the idea of alien righteousness which is imputed to the believer, interpreting justification as being 'accepted as righteous.' In addition to this he also argued that Christ gives us His Holy Spirit who produces in us that which is akin to God.[3] Bucer, on the other hand, developed a doctrine of double justification, in the first a man or woman's sins are forgiven and righteousness imputed to him/her on the

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1) "The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh [Eph 5:31-32]. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage.....it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own." Luther 'The Freedom of a Christian' *Ibid* p 351

2) McGrath, *op. cit.* Vol 2 p 24 cf Engelland, *Melancthon on Christian Doctrine*, Manschreck (ed) p xxxix-xl.

3) Melancthon, *Loci Communes 1555*, no. X and XIII.

basis of his/her faith in Christ, in the second, by the power of the Spirit s/he is made righteous on the basis of his/her works.'

Calvin, however, avoided completely this tendency to separate justification and sanctification. Having discussed the nature of faith in the 1559 *Institutes* he then turned to the question of the believer's regeneration by faith; he introduced the topic as being one of the effects which we feel from faith's possession of Christ.[2] Thus, right from the outset of the discussion the context of the believer's regeneration is stated as being the fruit of the union with Christ. Under the heading of regeneration he treated the topics of both newness of life and free reconciliation, or sanctification and justification and thus introduced one of the key aspects of his thought on the subject, that the justification and the sanctification of the believer are bound together by the fact that they are both the results of incorporation into Christ.

In this way, just as with Luther, it was Calvin's use of the idea of the union with Christ which allowed him to emphasise that justification and sanctification are inextricably intertwined. Since the only source of both is Christ Himself, the one cannot be had without the other.[3] To claim justification without a

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1) Martin Bucer, *Commentary on Romans*, Preface Section 8.
2) *Institutes* 3.3.1.
3) "Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify.... Although we may distinguish them, Christ contains both of them inseparably in himself. Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces. Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other. Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness." *Institutes* 3.16.1

renewal of the life would be to tear Christ into pieces.[1] Thus, justification and sanctification for Calvin, were related, not as two separate events, but as the two consequence of the one divine act, the incorporation into Christ.

The engagement of the moral life in Calvin's understanding is, therefore, a fruit of the union with Christ. As such, according to Calvin, it is experienced as an outworking of that union in the Christian's life. In this way Calvin developed an idea which was drawn from Luther's description of the union with Christ. According to Luther, by the union the Christian experiences an exchange between him/her and Christ. The presence of Christ does not simply bring him/her justification, it also purifies him/her. In Calvin's theology the way in which sanctification occurs is explained slightly differently. The Christian experiences not simply the redeeming presence of Christ but a particular form of fellowship with Him, fellowship with His death and resurrection . Accordingly the engagement of the moral life is experienced a mortification and vivification.

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1) "From this we also gather that we cannot be justified freely by faith alone, if we do not at the same time live in holiness. For those gifts of grace go together as if tied by an inseparable bond, so that if anyone tries to separate them, he is, in a sense, tearing Christ to pieces. Accordingly, let the man who aims at being justified by God's free goodness through Christ take note that this cannot possibly be done, unless at the same time he lays hold of Him for sanctification; in other words he must be born anew by His Spirit to blamelessness and purity of life." *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 1:30

In the *Institutes* Calvin expressed this as follows. The experience of repentance consists of two distinct parts. The first involves putting off the old nature and denying the old disposition, this is known as mortification[1] The second involves the renewal of human nature such that the mind and heart both desire righteousness and this leads to the performance of good.[2] Both of these come only through participation in Christ.

> Both things happen to us by our participation in Christ. For if we truly partake in his death, 'our old man is crucified by his power, and the body of sin perishes' [Rom. 6:6], that the corruption of original nature may no longer thrive. If we share in his resurrection, through it we are raised up into newness of life to correspond with the righteousness of God.[3]

The engagement of the moral life, according to Calvin, far from being separated from the response to Jesus Christ, is possible only as the believer comes to partake in Christ's death and resurrection.

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1) Thus mortification is described as follows, "It is a very hard and difficult thing to put off ourselves and to depart from our inborn disposition. Nor can we think of the flesh as completely destroyed unless we have wiped out whatever we have from ourselves. But since all emotions of the flesh are hostility against God [cf Rom. 8:7], the first step toward obeying his law is to deny our own nature." *Institutes* 3.3.8

2) Vivification is described as follows, "Afterward, they designate the renewal by the fruits that follow from it - namely, righteousness, judgment, and mercy. It would not be enough duly to discharge such duties unless the mind itself and the heart first put on the inclination to righteousness, judgment and mercy. That comes to pass when the Spirit of God so imbues our souls, steeped in his holiness, with both new thoughts and feelings, that they can rightly be considered new." *Institutes* 3.3.8

3) *Institutes* 3.3.9

When these two themes of mortification and vivification are examined more closely, it can be seen that they share one important aspect, both, according to Calvin, have to do with the conformation of the Christian's experience and activity to the pattern of Christ. Thus they are concerned, not with the static question of the possession of righteousness but rather with the question of God's activity in the believer's life, with the way in which the Christian is taken up and renewed by his/her experience of God. In this lies the answer to the question as to what precisely Calvin meant by the ideas of mortification and vivification, they are descriptions of the way in which the believer experiences God's renewal of his/her life; as this occurs each Christian must expect to see in his/her own life the pattern of both death and resurrection.

Thus can be seen one important aspect of the union with Christ; it shows the integral relationship between the theme explored in the previous chapter, the engagement of the affections, or the re-orientation of the personality toward God, and the engagement of the moral life. The affections of the believer are only truly engaged as s/he participates in the death of Christ, that is as his/her old affections are put to death by the power of the death of Christ working in him/her, and in the resurrection of Christ, that is as his/her affections are brought to the new life of proper orientation to God by the power of Christ's resurrection.

The nature of vivification has, in fact already been described. It is that invigoration with the power of Christ which the Christian receives by virtue of being united with Him. There is just one key point which needs to be emphasised, it is in the nature of vivification that for Calvin the engagement of the moral life has to do not simply with the Christian's own attempts to

conform him/herself to the pattern of Christ, but rather with the righteousness which the resurrection of Christ confers[1]

Mortification is the putting to death of the old way of life. In speaking of mortification Calvin was able to pay full attention to one important aspect of the engagement or orientation of the human personality. Under sin, the personality is already formed that is the person is already oriented *against* God. His/her affections and desires are already formed, and these are turned to things other than God. This will which is oriented against God, Calvin, following Paul named the *old man.* Mortification is, therefore, the putting to death of such affections, it is the denial of the will which is oriented against God and as such it is necessary aspect of renewal.[2]

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1) "Further, as we explained above that the mortification of our flesh depends upon participation in his cross, so we must understand that we obtain a corresponding benefit from his resurrection. The apostle says: "We were engrafted in the likeness of death, so that sharing in his resurrection we might walk in newness of life" [Rom. 6:4]. Hence in another passage, from the fact that we have died with Christ [Col. 3:3] he derives proof that we must mortify our members that are upon the earth [cf Col. 3:5]. So he also infers from our rising up with Christ that we must seek those things above, not those on earth [Col. 3:1-2]. By these words we are not only invited through the example of the risen Christ to strive after newness of life; but we are taught that we are reborn into righteousness through his power." *Institutes* 2.16.13

2) "The second effect of Christ's death upon us is this: by our participation in it, his death mortifies our earthly members so that they may no longer perform their functions; and it kills the old man in us that he may not flourish and bear fruit. Christ's burial has the same effect: we ourselves as partakers in it are buried with him to sin. The apostle teaches that "we have been united with Christ in the likeness of his death" [Rom. 6:5], and buried with him.....into the death" of sin [Rom. 6:4]; that "by his cross the world has been crucified to us and we to the world" [Gal. 2:19; 6:14]; that we have died together with him [Col. 3.3]. By these statements Paul not only declares exhorts us to exhibit an example of Christ's death but declares that there inheres in it an efficacy which ought to be manifest in all Christians, unless they intend to render his death useless and unfruitful." *Institutes* 2.16.7

Mortification is two-fold according to Calvin, that is it has both its inward and its outer aspect.[1] Thus, in mortification Calvin was able to include not only self-denial, but also what he termed the 'outer' experience of the Christian,. that is the experience of struggle and affliction in life,[2] what Calvin called the experience of bearing the cross. Once again, in his use of this theme, the breadth of Calvin's understanding of the experience of God can be seen. In accordance with his argument noted previously that the Christian deals with God in every aspect of life, he contended that God uses the difficulties and struggles of life to bring about mortification of the old man. Indeed he went so far as to argue that all Christians would inevitably experience a very difficult life.[3] But whereas the non-believer is afflicted

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1) "There is, however, a two-fold fellowship and communication in the death of Christ. The one is inward, which the Scripture usually calls the mortification of the flesh, or the crucifixion of the old man....The other is outward, what is termed the mortification of the outward man. This is the bearing of the cross.....For after comprehending also the power of His resurrection, Christ crucified is set before us, so that we may follow Him through tribulations and distresses; and hence the resurrection of the dead is expressly mentioned, that we may know that we must die before we live. This is the continual meditation of believer's so long as they sojourn on the earth." *Epistle to the Philippians* 3:10

2) "The word 'dying' or 'mortification' has a different meaning here than in many other passages of Scripture. For it often means self-denial, by which we renounce the lusts of the flesh and are renewed into obedience to God. Here it means those afflictions that make us meditate on the end of this present life. For the sake of clarity we may call the former meaning internal mortification and the latter external. By both we are conformed to Christ, directly by the one and indirectly by the other." *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 4:10

3) "For whomever the Lord has adopted and deemed worthy of his fellowship ought to prepare themselves for a hard, toilsome, and unquiet life, crammed with very many and various kinds of evil." *Institutes* 3.8.1

solely because of his/her own sin, for those who participate in the cross of Christ this very struggle becomes a part of their sanctification.[1]

Thus, the theme of cross bearing teaches that the 'outer' experience of the Christian also is conformed to the pattern of Christ by means of the union with Christ. Such cross-bearing is, according to Calvin, essential to lead the believer to trust in God's power, to develop patience and obedience in him/her, to allow him/her to experience the faithfulness of God and to create within him/her hope for the future.[2] Once again the importance of Calvin's argument that the Christian deals with God in every aspect of life can be seen. Even the struggles of everyday life are a part of the experience of God, the way in which God deals with men and women to bring about their sanctification.

The Third use of the Law

There remains one further aspect of Calvin's view of the engagement of the moral life to be considered. It is well known that Calvin emphasized that the law of God has a continuing role to play in the life of the Christian believer as a norm and guide to Christian living. The law, according to Calvin, has three

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1) "Suffering is called the mortification of Christ only in relation to believers for when the wicked endure the afflictions of this present life their fellowship is with Adam, whereas the elect have participation in the Son of God so that all their miseries that are in their own nature curses are made helpful for their salvation." *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 4:10 cf "By communion with him the very sufferings themselves not only become blessed to us but also help much in promoting our salvation." *Institutes* 3.8.1

2) *Institutes* 3.8.1f

functions; it shows God's righteousness,[1] it restrains the unbeliever from doing wrong because of his/her fear of its punishment,[2] and it's third and principal use, which pertains to the life of the believer.

> The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper use of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God [Jer. 31:33; Heb. 10:16], that is have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law in two ways.[3]

The law, according to Calvin, provides for the believer both an instrument to discover the nature of God's will and an exhortation to obey it.

A superficial reading of what Calvin had to say on the subject might be thought to show that in so emphasising the continuing validity of the law for believers he opened himself to the charge of operating with two different norms for the Christian life, Christ and the law and so returned again to the problem mentioned at the beginning of this chapter of producing a specification of the Christian life which is separated from the response to Jesus Christ. In actual fact, Calvin's teaching on the third use of the Law is both inextricably intertwined with his argument which has just been explored and is essential to his teaching on the engagement of the moral life, for it is by the third use of the Law that Calvin answered the vital question concerning the actions of the believer, what does the man or woman who has been engaged by God actually do?

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1) *Institutes* 2.7.6
2) *Institutes* 2.7.10
3) *Institutes* 2.7.12

The union with Christ and the third use of the Law are, in fact, both a part of the action of God by which he gives shape to the believer's life, restoring it to true order. As such they are intimately related. It has already been shown[1] that according to Calvin, Christ, the Word of God is the source of all order in the World and that it is in being gathered to the Word of God that all humanity is brought to a proper relation and order. Accordingly, the result of the engagement of the moral life should be the restoration of order in that life. To live a life which is not in accordance with the rule of God is to fall into disorder while to life under the rule of God is to order one's life according to its original purpose and so to live a well-ordered life.[2]

The model for this well-ordered life, to Whom all believers ought to conform is Christ Himself, Who has been given to men and women as a pattern and example.[3]

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1) See Chapter 2 p 72-5

2) "In the first place, he uses the word *disorderly* to apply not to those who lead a dissolute life or whose reputation is stained by flagrant misdeeds, but to idlers and nonentities who do not have any honourable or useful occupation. This is truly *αταξια* (disorder), not to consider the purpose for which we were formed and not to order our lives with this end in view, for it is only when we live in accordance with the rule of God that our life is set in order. Apart from this ordering there is nothing in human life but confusion. It is worth noting this point lest anyone should do as he pleases apart from the a legitimate call from God. For God has marked out human life in such a way that each man is to give himself to the service of his neighbours. Anyone, therefore, who lives for himself alone without being of any service to the human race, and indeed who is a trouble to other people and of help to noone, is rightly to be regarded as *αταχτος* (disorderly). *Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* 3:6

3) Sermon on Ephesians 4:23-6 cf "And to wake us more effectively, Scripture shows that God the Father, as he has reconciled us to himself in his Christ, has in him stamped for us the likeness to which he would have us conform.....Scripture draws its exhortation from the true fountain. It not only enjoins us to refer our life to God, its author, to whom it is bound; but after it has taught us that we have degenerated from the true origin and condition of our creation, it also adds that Christ, through whom we return into favor with God, has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our lives." *Institutes* 3.6.3

The Christ to Whom men and women ought to conform their lives is the same Christ Who, as the Word of God is the source of all oracles and the origin of all the teaching of Scripture.[1] Thus, Christ and the Law, far from being two different norms for the Christian life are both aspects of the same norm, given to men and women by the mediation of the Word of God. Both the union with Christ and the third use of the Law are a part of the one action of God in engaging the moral life of the believer, the Law and the union with Christ work together in the believer's life. The law in all its parts points forward to Christ.[2] Christ, in turn gives the law substance, that is, gives life to what would otherwise have been dead,[3] and, Calvin argued, the Gospel differs from the law only in that it shows the same thing more clearly.[4] Accordingly, to be conformed to the pattern of Christ, or to be united to Christ, implies not freedom from the law but a new desire to fulfil the law.

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1) See p 78f
2) "Indeed every doctrine of the law, every command, every promise, always points to Christ. We are therefore to apply all its parts to Him.....The law in all its parts has reference to Christ, and therefore no one will be able to understand it correctly who does not constantly strive to attain this mark." *Epistle to the Romans* 10:4
3) "What is certain is that the Evangelist means that in the Law there was merely the outlined image of spiritual blessings, but that they are shown their wholeness in Christ. Whence it follows that if you separate the Law from Christ nothing remains in it save empty shapes.... Christ is the soul which quickens what would otherwise have been dead in the Law" *Gospel of John* 1:17 cf "Without Christ the Law is empty and insubstantial." *Gospel of John* 5:38
4) "But the gospel did not so supplant the entire law as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised, and gave substance to the shadows.....From this we infer that, where the whole law is concerned, the gospel differs from it only in clarity of manifestation" *Institutes* 2.9.4

> It is the Lord in whom we act virtuously. "Let him give what he commands, and command what he wills". To be Christians under the law of grace does not mean to wander unbridled outside the law, but to be engrafted in Christ, by whose grace we are free of the curse of the law, and by whose Spirit we have the law engraved upon our hearts.[1]

There is, according to Calvin, one unchangeable rule to which the believer is to conform, which is the rule given by Christ, but this is to be found in the law which Christ gave as well as in His own example.[2] Thus, he can describe the purpose of the law as being to mould a person's life, both inwardly and outwardly.[3]

Furthermore, it is by the Law that the important question of what the believer is actually to do is answered. Throughout this thesis it has been stressed that Calvin argued that God is at work in the believer's life to engage him/her in a living relationship. It has been shown that in so doing God recreates every aspect of human life so that it stands in a proper relationship with Him. In particular, in the previous chapter it was shown that in engaging the affections God both arouses the love of the believer and also calls forth a new way of living in relationship to Him. The engagement of the moral life has to do with the shape of that new way of living as it is lived out in the World.

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1) *Institutes* 2.8.57
2) "But if no one can deny that a perfect pattern of righteousness stands forth in the law, either we need no rule to live rightly and justly, or it is forbidden to depart from the law. There are not many rules, but one everlasting and unchangeable rule to live by." *Institutes* 2.7.13
3) "Through the law man's life is molded not only to outward honesty but to inward and spiritual righteousness." *Institutes* 2.8.6

It is by obeying the Law of God that the believer's actions are related to God and therefore are a part of the engagement of his/her moral life. For it is in the Law, and especially in the Law as it is summed up in the Ten Commandments, that the believer discovers the will of God and by acting out what is commanded there, expressed the image of God in his/her own life.[1] Thus, by means of the Law a relationship is established between the actions of the believer and the activity of God - one of obedience. God seeks, not virtue *per se* but obedience to his will.[2]

Thus, it is from the Law that the believer deduces what s/he is to do in order to conform his/her life to that which God requires. It could be argued that in explaining the Law in this way Calvin fell into the trap of legalism, that is of interpreting the Law as a series of external commandments which the believer must fulfil. Thus, the Christian life is perverted into a matter of conformation to particular standards laid down by God.

It was his explanation of the way in which the Law is to be interpreted which, in fact, prevented Calvin from expounding legalism. For it can be seen from the way in which he interpreted the Law that he did not see it as a series of external commandments to be obeyed, but rather as a part of the way which men

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1) "Now it will not be difficult to decide the purpose of the whole law: the fulfilment of righteousness to form human life to the archetype of divine purity. For God has so depicted his character in the law that if any man carries out in deeds whatever is enjoined there, he will express the image of God, as it were, in his own life." *Institutes* 2.8.51
2) "On the other hand, the Lord, in giving the rule of perfect righteousness, has referred all its parts to his will, thereby showing that nothing is more acceptable to him that obedience." *Institutes* 2.8.5

and women deal with God Himself. It was this sense of dealing with God in the Law which lay at the root of Calvin's argument that the Law makes a total claim upon men and women because it comes from God, who is concerned, not with outward appearances but with purity of heart.[1] In interpreting the Law, Calvin argued, the believer is not to be concerned with with what he called 'narrowness of words'[2] that is simply with the substance of particular commandments, but rather with the deeper question of why God gave a particular commandment.

> Now, I think this would be the best rule, if attention be directed to the reason of the commandment; that is, in each commandment to ponder why it was given to us. For example, every precept either commands or forbids. The truth of each sort comes to mind at once, if we look into the reason or purpose. The purpose of the Fifth Commandment is that honor ought to be paid to those to whom God has assigned it. This, then is the substance of the commandment: that it is right and pleasing to God for us to honor those on whom he has bestowed some excellence; and that he abhors contempt and stubbornness against them. The intent of the First Commandment is that God alone be worshipped. Therefore the substance of the precept will be that true piety - namely the worship of his divinity - is pleasing to God; and that he abominates impiety. Thus in each commandment we must investigate what it is concerned with; then we must seek out its purpose, until we find what the Lawgiver testifies there to be pleasing or displeasing to himself.[3]

Interpreting and obeying the Law are not therefore simply about the legalistic question of what God commands but rather the deeper question of why He gave a particular commandment. In his/her interpretation of the Law the believer should seek to discover what pleases God and to live accordingly.

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1) *Institutes* 2.8.6
2) *Institutes* 2.8.8
3) *Institutes* 2.8.8

The Law, Calvin argued is divided into two parts which express the two aspects of the believer's duty, that duty which relates to God and which will be considered more fully in the next chapter, and that duty which relates to men and women.[1] In the *Institutes* Calvin derived from the Ten Commandments an exposition of the shape of the believer's life in the World. In accordance with the principle set out above each commandment was interpreted in such a way as to demonstrate in the broadest manner what please God. The second half of the Ten Commandments, those which lay out the believer's duty to others Calvin interpreted so. The believer owes reverence, obedience and gratefulness to those placed over him/her,[2] s/he is to be concerned always for the good of others,[3] s/he is to live in modesty and purity[4] and to be content with his/her lot, desiring only honest and lawful gain.[5] S/he must practice the truth[6] and banish from his/her heart all desire which is contrary to love.[7]

The fact that Calvin dealt with the believer's moral practices and particular with his/her relations with others virtually exclusively under the heading of the Law highlights one of the main difficulties in his handling of the subject. While there were several helpful points in the way in which he dealt with the concept of Law, most notably its close relationship with the union with Christ, its importance in establishing a relationship between the actions of the believer and God and its consequent place within the orientation to God, the

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1) *Institutes* 2.8.11
2) *Institutes* 2.8.35-8
3) *Institutes* 2.8.39-40
4) *Institutes* 2.8.41-4
5) *Institutes* 2.8.45-6
6) *Institutes* 2.8.47-8
7) *Institutes* 2.8.49-50

fact that the major point at which he gave attention to the believer's relationship with others was under the heading of Law must be judged unfortunate. It has been clear throughout this thesis that Calvin's understanding of the experience of God was highly individualistic in that it concentrated almost entirely upon the relationship of the individual with God and paid hardly any attention to the corporate aspect of the experience, or to the way in which the experience affects the relationship with others. To deal with the relationship with others almost exclusively under the heading of Law can only add to the individualism. For all Calvin's argument that the Law plays a role within the orientation to God, this means that he was concerned with a renewed relationship with others only as it is commanded by God rather than as it is created by God as an inherent part of the re-shaping of the relationship with Him. A more balanced argument would have also dealt with the relationship with others elsewhere and demonstrated more fully that as the relationship with God is renewed so also the relationship with others is recreated.

The right and the wrong use of the Moral Life

There remains one final question to be answered, what in Calvin's theology, characterises the right and the wrong use of the moral life. The answer to this question, especially as it concerns the wrong use of the moral life has already been touched upon in this chapter. It has already been argued that, according to Calvin, at the heart of true righteousness lies, not the question of the virtue of the person concerned, but rather that of his/her relationship to God. "Where there is no zeal to glorify God the chief part of uprightness is absent."[1] Thus for Calvin, the moral life is wrongly used when a man or woman

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1) *Institutes* 2.3.4

seeks to set him/herself up against God by attempting not to serve God but rather to establish his/her own virtue.

This point can be seen more clearly when it is examined in its positive aspect, that is, when we ask the question, what, for Calvin characterises the right use of the moral life. The answer again has to do not so much with what the man or woman concerned actually does, but rather with whether he/she aims to establish his/her own virtue or to worship God. The true aim of the moral life, for Calvin should be to reflect the image of God. It has already been shown that the purpose of the union with Christ is to conform the believer to the pattern of Christ, the result of this, for Calvin is that the believer comes to bear again the image of God which Adam lost when he fell.[1]

Thus, it is of greatest importance to understand precisely what Calvin intended to convey by the idea of the *Imago Dei*. In his exegesis of Genesis 1:26, Calvin began by affirming, as against the greater part of traditional exposition of the verse, that 'image' and 'likeness' are, in fact, intended to convey the same idea, in accordance with the Hebrew custom of parallelism. Therefore he explained the phrase 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness' as referring to men and women as being like God or representing the image of God. The *Imago Dei* in Calvin's theology has to do with the extent to which men and women reflect the likeness of God.

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1) "Now we see that Christ is the most perfect image of God; if we are conformed to it, we are so restored that with true piety, righteousness, purity and intelligence we bear God's image" *Institutes* 1.15.4

This can be seen from the fact that Calvin would often refer to the image using the metaphor of a mirror; for example, when in Colossians 3:10 it is said that the new nature of a Christian is being renewed in the image of its Creator, Calvin commented,

> Hence too, we learn both what is the end of our regeneration (that is, that we may be made like God and that His glory may shine forth in us) and also what is the image of God which Moses speaks of; that is the rectitude and integrity of the whole soul, so that man represents as in a mirror, the righteousness and goodness of God.[1]

Similarly, when in Colossians 1:15 Christ was described as 'the image of the invisible God' Calvin again took this to mean that Christ was in some way a mirror for the majesty of God.[2] The image, for Calvin, has to do with the way in which men and women reflect the glory of God.[3]

This, of course, raises the question as to how men and women reflect the glory of God. The answer to this question can be seen in Calvin's definition of the *Imago Dei* as it was experienced by Adam before the Fall.

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1) *Epistle to the Colossians* 3:10, cf "Adam was at first created in the image of God, so that he might reflect as in a mirror the righteousness of God." *Epistle to the Ephesians* 4:23
2) "The sum is, that God in Himself, that is in His naked majesty, is invisible: and that not only to the physical eyes, but also to human understanding; and that He is revealed to us in Christ alone, where we may behold him as in a mirror." *Epistle to the Colossians* 3:10
3) "Nevertheless, it seems that we do not have a full definition of 'image' if we do not see more plainly those faculties in which man excels, and in which he ought to be thought the reflection of God's glory." *Institutes* 1.15.4

> Accordingly, the integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word, when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to the exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker.[1]

The image of God in Adam was to be seen not just in his possession of right understanding and properly ordered affections, but also in the way in which he related his own excellence to what God had bestowed upon him. In acknowledging that his gifts were bestowed him upon by God, Adam also acknowledged that they existed only because of his relationship with God. He could be said to have been made in the image of God only because God was active in his life. Thus, in Calvin's view the *imago Dei* has to do not only with an endowment but also with a relationship[2]. What is at stake in discussing the image and therefore the engagement of the moral life is the question of the way in which the believer orients him/herself to God.

What characterises the right use of the moral life is therefore, the conscious acknowledgement on the part of the believer that whatever virtue s/he might display is the fruit of the re-shaping of his/her life by his/her experience of God. Only in this way can s/he be said to render to God the honour which is His due and thus to have founded his/her life upon the worship of God.[3]

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1) *Institutes* 1.15.3
2) Gerrish, 'The Mirror of God's Goodness: A Key Metaphor in Calvin's view of Man', in *Readings in Calvin's Theology* p 115.
3) "For even though the life of man be replete with all the virtues, if it is not directed to the worship of God, it can indeed be praised by the world; but in heaven it will be sheer abomination, since the chief part of righteousness is to render to God his right and honor, of which he is impiously defrauded when we do not intend to subject ourselves to his control." *Institutes* 3.3.7

Self-denial

The second characteristic of the right use of the moral life which can be mentioned is self-denial. This, Calvin argued, is a plan by which God shapes the lives of believers and one which is even more explicit than is the plan set out in the Law.[1] It is important to note precisely what Calvin meant when he spoke of self-denial. He did not mean self-denial in the negative sense of either simple abstinence or self-denigration; rather self-denial in Calvin's thought had a positive function. In denying him/herself the believer not only turns from his/her own goals and desires in life, s/he turns to God.[2] To deny yourself is to abandon yourself into the hands of God

> This is also evidence of great progress: that, almost forgetful of ourselves, surely subordinating our self-concern, we try faithfully to devote our zeal to God and his commandments. For when Scripture bids us leave off self-concern, it not only erases from our minds the yearning to possess, the desire for power, and the favor of men, but it also uproots ambition and all craving for human glory and other more secret plagues. Accordingly, the Christian must be surely so disposed and minded that he feels within himself it is with God he had to deal throughout his life. In this way, as he will refer all he has to God's decision and judgement, so will he refer his whole intention of mind scrupulously to Him. For he who has learned to look to God in all things that he must do, at the same time avoids all vain thoughts.[3]

It is the sense of dealing with God in everything which was central to this understanding of self-denial. The Christian refers everything which s/he does to God because s/he is aware that s/he deals with God in all.

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1) *Institutes* 3.7.1
2) "The denial is far reaching: that, renouncing our own intelligence and bidding farewell to all the affections of the flesh, we are prepared to be reduced to nothing so that God may live and reign in us." *Harmony of the Gospels* Matthew 16:24 cf *Institutes* 3.7.1
3) *Institutes* 3.7.2

Conclusion

The key to understanding Calvin's concept of the engagement of the moral life and the key to understanding the great strength of his argument on the subject lies in the concept of engagement itself. Throughout this thesis it has been clear that, according to Calvin, human capacities are properly used only when their use is part of the way in which the believer responds to God. By contrast those same capacities are abused when they operate apart from the response to God; for in such circumstances they are used to set the human up over against God. This is particularly the case in dealing with the engagement of the moral life; in fact it might be said that a key problem in a specifically Christian study of the moral life is the problem of response. A writer who attempts to discuss this subject must demonstrate that the Christian's struggle for a moral life represents a response to God and not a turning away from Him in a search for self-righteousness.

It is precisely this demonstration that the struggle for a moral life represents a response to God which can be seen throughout Calvin's argument. For the central part of his argument is concerned with the way in which God Himself engages the life of the believer and the believer's own struggle is a part of that engagement. Thus, once again, it was Calvin's view of the activity of God which was vital to the astuteness of his argument. For he emphasised the dynamic way in which God actively moulds the life of the believer rather than the static question of the believer's own possession of righteousness. In particular in this instance it was his perception of God's activity in and through Jesus Christ which enabled him to demonstrate so successfully that the engagement of the moral life represents a response to God. Furthermore, the idea of the union with Christ enabled him also to show that not only is the

Christian's encounter with God determined by Christ, but also his/her experience of God understood in the broader sense of the way in which s/he interacts with God in all of life is similarly determined by Christ Himself.

By the union with Christ the Christian's moral life is caught up in the activity of God and so the struggle for goodness is experienced as participation in God's saving act in Jesus. By mortification and vivification the believer participates in the death and resurrection of Christ and so is moulded in His image.

Furthermore, the breadth of Calvin's understanding of the experience of God can again be shown to be important. Because the Christian is seen to be interacting with God in everything, the whole of life is seen to be a part of the way in which God moulds the believer's life. In this way also the engagement of the moral life is made a response to God rather than a turning away from Him.

There was, however, one major weakness in the way in which Calvin dealt with the question of the engagement of the moral life. As already mentioned he dealt with the question of the Christian's relationship with others only as love for others is commanded by God, not as love for others is created by God. Although the idea of a new relationship with others is often implicit in what he had to say, it is rarely dealt with explicitly. Thus, Calvin failed to demonstrate that a new relationship with others is an inherent aspect of the believer's reorientation to God.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Shaping of the Believer's Life

> *But true religion must come first, to direct our minds to the living God. Thus steeped in the knowledge of him, they may aspire to contemplate, fear, and worship, his majesty; to participate in his blessings; to seek his help at all times; to recognize, and by praises celebrate, the greatness of his works - as the only goal of all the activities of this life.* [1]

In his Prefatory Address to Francis I, Calvin set out his original purpose in writing the *Institutes*. This purpose was, he claimed, to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness or piety.[2] In speaking of zeal for religion Calvin was, of course, concerned with that fervour for God and the service of God which is the fruit of the experience of Him and His engagement of the believer. Thus, Calvin's purpose in writing the *Institutes* might be said to be that, by means of an understanding of the nature of God and the way in which He is active in human experience, those who experience God might be properly formed by that experience.

This concern that those who are engaged by God might be properly shaped by that experience was therefore central to Calvin's understanding of theology. For it was, at least in part, by understanding God's disposition towards him/her and the nature of His activity within the arena of his/her experience that the believer was to come to true godliness. It was also this concern

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1) *Institutes* 2.8.16
2) *Institutes* LCC p9

that the believer might be properly shaped which is the subject of this chapter. Thus far, this thesis has examined Calvin's concept of the experience of God from a number of different aspects, most notably by exploring human life in its rational nature, its affections and its moral life. In this concluding chapter it will seek to examine the way in which the experience of God affects the believer seen as a whole person, and in so doing will endeavour to give full weight to Calvin's stated purpose in writing the *Institutes* - that the believer might be shaped to true piety.[1] The main question which it will seek to examine is, therefore, in what way the encounter with God should shape the believer and, in particular, what kind of formation should according to Calvin, follow from the experience of God as it has already been described.

This question may be divided into three subsidiary questions. The believer is to be shaped to what Calvin called 'true piety', and the nature of true piety must therefore be examined; what, according to Calvin, are the distinguishing characteristics of the life towards which the believer is to be shaped? This must include the question of the proper shape of the believer's life in the world and must, therefore, take into account the question of the believer's own activity before God. Secondly, the way in which the believer's life is to be shaped must be examined; what are the forces exerted upon him/her which give shape to his/her life? And thirdly,

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1) It is noteworthy that in recent years commentators upon Calvin have been more willing to pay attention to this statement than was previously the case. See for example Brian Armstrong, 'The Nature and Structure of Calvin's Thought according to the Institutes: Another Look', in *John Calvin's Institutes: His Opus Magnum*. pp 59-60

the role of the understanding in the shaping of the believer will be examined. For Calvin this was inevitably the question of doctrine. In the statement given he assumed that it was necessary for the believer to understand doctrine in order for his/her life to be properly shaped by his/her experience of God; what then is the role of doctrine in the shaping of the believer's life and what is the relationship between the experience of God and the promulgation of doctrine?

Furthermore, this chapter will also seek to show that Calvin's concern wasthat those who experience God might be shaped to true piety, and that this was the foundation of the continuing power and relevance of his theology. This can be attributed to two main points. First, as will be seen, the concept of being shaped to piety gave coherence to his theology, functioning to exclude from consideration all subjects which did not serve this overall purpose. Secondly, and more importantly, the continuing power of Calvin's theology rests on his realisation that the task of theology is to seek to understand the way in which God is active in human affairs in order that the believer might respond appropriately to this activity. Because of this his theology presents the reader with two arresting concepts: a description of God which emphasises not only His holiness and righteousness but also His sovereign activity and which therefore continually confronts the believer with the claims of God upon his/her life; and also a claim that to experience God is a transforming experience, for to experience God is to experience a demand for total spiritual and moral transformation.[1]

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1) *Institutes* 3.6.4

Central to all of this is Calvin's continual emphasis on the activity of God, and it is this which must be explored first.

The Doctrine of Providence

There is a sense in which Calvin's continual emphasis on the activity of God[1] reached its culmination in his doctrine of Providence; for in expounding this doctrine, not only did he emphasise the ceaseless nature of the activity of God, he also took this emphasis to what appears, at first, to be its logical conclusion - that this activity is expressed in *government*, in the regulation of everything which occurs on earth by the omnipotent power of God.

> And truly God claims, and would have us grant him, omnipotence - not the empty, idle, and almost unconscious sort that the Sophists imagine, but a watchful, effective, active sort, engaged in ceaseless activity. Not indeed, an omnipotence that is only a general principle of confused motion, as if he were to command a river to flow through its once-appointed channels, but one that is directed toward individual and particular motions. For he is deemed omnipotent, not because he can act, and yet sometimes ceases and sits in idleness, or continues by a general impulse that order of nature which he previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation. [2]

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1) "But when the Prophet says *they rested*, he wishes to mark the variety of human events. For sometimes they are so tranquil, that we think God is taking some repose, and is completely at rest in heaven: not that he ever ceases, but because we do not perceive the agitations, which plainly show his virtue to consist in motion and in action." *Commentary upon Ezekiel* 1:24

2) *Institutes* 1.16.3 cf "For God can never rest; he sustains the world by his energy, he governs everything however minute, so that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without his decree." *Commentary upon the Book of Ezekiel* 10:17

Thus, Calvin continually emphasised that the doctrine of Providence is concerned with God's sovereignty, His active control of all events. Providence is only truly understood when it is seen to comprehend not simply God's knowledge of everything which happens on earth, but also His active direction and command of such events. Providence, Calvin argued, pertains not simply to God's eyes but also to His hands.[1] Therefore the pious mind will recognise the 'ever present hand of God' behind every event whether seemingly good or bad.[2]

It is clear, therefore, that Calvin's doctrine of Providence was in the first place a statement about the nature of God, His activity and His relationship with the World and only as a consequence of the statement about the nature of God was it also a statement about the nature of events which occur in the World. To deny Providence is to deny aspects of the nature of God which Calvin perceived as vital - His activity in the World and His power to govern. It was Calvin's contention that not to regard any event as the result of the providential reign of God would be to imagine that God sits in idleness and to cast aspersions on His power.[3]

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1)The Eternal Providence of God in *Calvin's Calvinism*, (H Cole trans), p. 224, cf *Institutes* 1.16.4.
2) *Institutes* 1.16.2
3) "To own that God made the world, but maintain that he sits idle in heaven, and takes no concern in the management of it, is to cast an impious aspersion upon his power; and yet the idea, absurd as it is, obtains wide currency amongst men. They would not say, perhaps, in so many words that they believed that God slept in heaven, but imagining as they do, that he resigns the reins to chance or fortune, they leave him the mere shadow of a power, such as is not manifested in effects; whereas Scripture teaches us that it is a real practical power, by which he governs the whole world as he does according to his will." *Commentary upon the Psalms* 135:6

Calvin's doctrine of Providence and especially his extreme insistence on God's predestining control of all events in history raises a number of vital and very difficult questions, in particular the question of what, if any, sense can be made of human freedom and of genuine contingency in human events, and the very difficult question of a benevolent God who apparently controls and even governs that which is clearly evil. Such questions can only be dealt with after the internal coherence of Calvin's explanation of the doctrine has been explored, along with its effect upon his understanding of the experience of God and the way in which this shapes the life of the believer.

In the 1545 tract 'Contre la secte phantastique et furieuses des Libertins qui se nomment Spirituelz,'[1] which is commonly considered to be his most carefully delineated explanation of Providence[2], Calvin considered the doctrine under three aspects. The first aspect had to do with what he called a 'universal operation' which is, in fact the 'order of nature'. By this order God manages all creatures according to the conditions and properties bestowed upon them in creation.[3] In this way God governs the natural world; thus, when believers see the sun, moon and stars moving in their courses, they are to know that it is the hand of God which guides them and that it is His power which makes everything happen. The second

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1) *CR* 35: 148-248

2) See for example Francois Wendel, *Calvin: the Origin and Development of His Religious Thought*, p 179; Reardon *op cit* p 529f and Etienne de Peyer 'Calvin's Doctrine of Divine Providence', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 10, (1938), pp 30-45.

3) "Premierement il y a une operation universelle, par laquelle il conduict toutes creatures, selon la condition et propriete qu'il leur a donee a chacune en les formant. Ceste conduicte n'est sinon ce que nous appellons l'ordre nature" *CR* 35: 186

aspect of God's operation in the World has to do with His dealings with human beings, whether to help, correct or punish them. By this operation He not only causes all creatures to serve His goodness, helps His servants and punishes the wicked, He also chastises the faithful by means of difficulties and troubles.[1] Thus Calvin taught that prosperity, adversity, good and bad weather, abundance, famine, war and peace are all works of God. Where the non-believer sees only the work of fortune in these things, the Christian will see God's special ordinance. The third aspect of God's operation in the world has to do with His government of the faithful, living and reigning in them by the Holy Spirit.[2]

Thus, the central claim of Calvin's doctrine of Providence, and certainly the most important from the point of view of this thesis, was the claim that events and circumstances which occur in the world, whether they appear to an observer to be just or evil, are the outcome of God's will and direction. Moreover, it is important to note that Calvin's belief in God's control of everything extended even to the suggestion that He regulated the most

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1) "La seconde espece ou facon par laquelle Dieu opere en ses creatures, est qu'il les faict servir a sa bonte, iustice et iugement, selon qu'il veut maintenant aider ses serviteurs, maintenant punir les meschants, maintenants esprouver la patience de ses fideles ou les chastier paternellement." *CR* 35:187

2) "La troisiesme espece de l'operation de Dieu gist et consiste en ce qu'il gouverne ses fideles, vivant et regnant en eux par son sainct esprit." *CR* 35:190

wicked actions of men and women,[1] even these are under the control of God.[2] In this way the doctrine of Providence clearly has the greatest relevance to the question of the Christian's experience of God, and that not only because according to the doctrine s/he is to interpret all things which happen to him/her in a particular way, as the direct outcome of God's providence, but also because, as will be seen, this doctrine was for Calvin very closely related to piety and therefore to the whole question of the way in which the experience of God shaped the believer's life.

It is not possible, within the limits of this thesis, to examine every aspect of the doctrine of Providence. Therefore it will be considered only in its relationship to the Christian's experience and in particular in its relationship to his/her understanding of that experience and the way in which that understanding shapes piety. In this way it will be shown that whatever difficulties Calvin's delineation of this doctrine might raise when

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1) "All who are created by the Lord are likewise *appointed* by him for a fixed purpose. He does not throw down men at random on the earth, to go wherever they please, but guides them all by his secret purpose, and regulates and controls the violent passions of the reprobate, so as to drive them in whatever manner he thinks fit, and to check and restrain them according to his pleasure.....Hence also we are taught to ascribe to the secret judgment of God all violent commotions, and this yields wonderful consolation; for whatever attempts may be made by wicked men, yet they will accomplish nothing but what the Lord has decreed." *Commentary upon the Book of Isaiah* 13:3 cf *Commentary upon the Book of Jeremiah* 42:11-12

2) "Hence again we infer what has been formerly observed, that nothing takes place at random or by chance, but that everything is governed by the hand of God. Again, though wicked men may rage and may be hurried forward in blind attack, still God puts a bridle on them that they may promote his glory. Therefore, when we see that wicked men throw everything into disorder, let us not think that God has laid the bridle on their neck, that they may rush forward wherever they please; but let us be fully convinced that their violent attacks are under control." *Commentary upon the Book of Isaiah* 7:19

it is considered as a general statement of God's relationship with the World, the power and vitality of the doctrine of Providence can be seen in its effect upon piety.

The relationship between Providence and the experience of God in Calvin's theology was not a simple one. For all his insistence on God's ultimate control of events he also argued that the doctrine of Providence is to be maintained despite the fact that God's providential control of events is not apparent to men and women. Rather, so 'deep and mysterious' are the judgements of God that frequently it seems that all justice is overthrown, evil persons prosper while the good are powerless.[1] There is a sense, therefore, in which Calvin accepted that fortune does rule the events of the world, not because he believed that this was actually the case, but because he accepted that men and women are not able to discern the hand of God at work purely by considering the events themselves. To the human mind events are fortuitous.[2] Although the Christian believes on the basis of Scriptural

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1) "Were things under our own management, we would entirely invert the order which God observes; and, such not being the case, we perversely expostulate with God for not hastening sooner to the help of the righteous, and to the punishment of the wicked. It strikes us as in the highest degree inconsistent with the perfections of God, that he should bear with the wicked when they rage against him, when they rush without restraint into the most daring acts of iniquity, and when they persecute at will the good and the innocent... When anything in these may not agree with the general ideas of men, we ought to contemplate it with reverence, and remember that God, for the better trial of obedience, has lifted his deep and mysterious judgments far above our conceptions." *Commentary upon the Book of Psalms* 92:5

2) "Yet since the sluggishness of our minds lies far beneath the height of God's providence, we must employ a distinction to lift it up. Therefore I shall put it this way: however all things may be ordained by God's plan, according to to a sure dispensation, for us they are fortuitous. Not that we think that fortune rules the world and men, tumbling all things at random up and down, for it is fitting that (cont)

teaching that the Providence of God is at work, His actual rule of the Universe is hidden.'

In this way Calvin's doctrine of Providence and his understanding of faith were intimately related. For faith, according to Calvin, is a transforming experience which radically alters not only the believer's relationship with God but also his/her relationship with the world; in particular it transforms his/her understanding of the events which occur in the world. As already stated, Providence cannot be demonstrated from the events and circumstances of the world; the life of the believer is, in a real sense, as unpredictable as that of the unbeliever. Providence, far from being apparent from the Christian's experience, can be perceived only by those who regard the events around them with the eyes of faith in the light of the teaching of Scripture. In accepting the teaching of Scripture the believer accepts that, whatever outward appearances might seem to suggest, God is sovereign over all that happens.

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this folly be absent from the Christian's breast! But since the order, reason, end, and necessity of those things which happen for the most part lie hidden in God's purpose, and are not apprehended by human opinion, those things, which it is certain take place by God's will, are in a sense fortuitous. For they bear on the face of them no other appearance, whether they are considered in their own nature or weighed according to our knowledge and judgment." *Institutes* 1.16.9

1) "His wonderful method of governing the universe is rightly called an abyss, because while it is hidden from us, we ought reverently to adore it." *Institutes* 1.17.2 cf "Calvin's doctrine of providence, so far from being inferred from the visible tokens of God's presence, is in fact developed *despite* God's hiddeness. We do not invariably *see* that God's hand is at work. We *believe* it on the basis of the Word." Brian A Gerrish, 'To the Unknown God: Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God', *The Journal of Religion* 53, 3, (July 1973), p 282.

> Suppose a man falls among thieves, or wild beasts; is shipwrecked at sea by a sudden gale; is killed by a falling house or tree. Suppose another man wandering through the desert finds help in his straits; having been tossed by the waves, reaches harbor; miraculously escapes death by a finger's breadth. Carnal reason ascribes all such happenings, whether prosperous or adverse, to fortune. But anyone who has been taught by Christ's lips that all the hairs of his head are numbered will look farther afield for a cause and will consider that all events are governed by God's secret plan.[1]

It was because faith thus transforms the believer's relationship to world events and his/her own circumstances and in particular because it has a radical effect upon his/her understanding of those events and circumstances, that faith in Providence also had profound implications for piety according to Calvin. It was this doctrine which both shaped and gave vitality to Calvin's understanding of piety. For the power of Calvin's concept of piety lies in the sense that the Christian is shaped by and responds to the activity of God who is *fons omnium bonorum* in every aspect of life.

Without belief in Providence, Calvin argued, the believer is left with an inactive God, a God with whom s/he has nothing to do and a God therefore who is unable to shape his/her life.[2] Belief in the active God of Providence on the other hand, is belief in a God with whom one deals at all times and in all circumstances.[3]. Thus, Calvin argued that without belief in

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1) *Institutes* 1.16.2 cf "For seeing that we are slow and dull, experience by no means suffices to attest the favour of God towards us, unless faith, arising from the Word of God be added." *Commentary upon the Book of Genesis* 35:1

2) See Chapter One pp 35-7

3) "What good is it to profess with Epicurus some sort of God who has cast aside the care of the world only to amuse himself in idleness? What help is it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do?" *Institutes* 1.2.2 cf Chapter One p 34

Providence, not only is faith 'cold and barren'[1] but God Himself would be made into nothing other than an idol. The knowledge of God means nothing without a heartfelt conviction of His Providence, for it is only the sense of God's active judgment and government and of dealing with this God in every area of life which will instill reverence and subjection into the believer.[2]

In this way Providence was vital to Calvin's understanding of the relationship of the Christian to God Who is active in the World; and he was equally convinced of the consequences of that belief for piety. For Calvin argued that the stance of the believer is shaped at a fundamental level by the belief that God is actively governing his/her life. As will be seen it was this belief in God's active sovereign judgment which gave to piety its twin aspects of reverence and love. For Calvin was clear that Providence is only truly understood when by his/her understanding the believer is lead to relate to God properly, that is to allow his/her knowledge of God's providential care to shape his/her stance before God and in the world.

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1) "Moreover, to make God a momentary Creator, who once for all finished his work, would be cold and barren, and we must differ from profane men especially in that we see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception." *Institutes* 1.16.1

2) "Now, God would be merely like an idol, if, contented with an inactive existence, he should divest himself of his office as judge. Whoever, therefore, refuse to admit that the world is subject to the providence of God, or do not believe that his hand is stretched forth from on high to govern it, do as much as in them lies to put an end to the existence of God. It is not, however, enough to have some cold and unimpressive knowledge of him in the head; it is only the true and heartfelt conviction of his providence which makes us reverence him and keeps us in subjection to him." *Commentary upon the Book of Psalms* 10:4

The true lesson of the doctrine of Providence, according to Calvin, was therefore that the Christian interacts with God in every aspect of life and should, therefore, learn humility, fear and reverence.

> Therefore no one will weigh God's providence properly and profitably but him who considers that his business is with his Maker and the Framer of the universe, and with becoming humility submits himself to fear and reverence.[1]

The doctrine of Providence was, therefore, at the heart of Calvin's belief that the Christian deals with God in everything. The basic question which the doctrine of Providence poses and which Calvin's understanding of piety attempts to answer is, therefore, *what is the proper way for the Christian to act under the Providential care of God?*

This being said, the following question must be raised. Granted that Calvin's doctrine of Providence had a profound effect upon piety and in particular shaped the life of the believer by means of the realisation that s/he deals with God in every aspect of life, this hardly justifies of itself the extreme insistence on God's sovereignty and the willingness to claim that God commands and controls that which is evil. In particular it fails to justify a doctrine which propagates a vision of God which is so contrary to that which is seen in Christ. If the cross of Christ is permitted to shape the understanding of God, then the central view of God in Christianity cannot be that of a God who commands and controls events to the extent Calvin

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1) *Institutes* 1.17.2

argued but must rather be that of a God Who in Christ permitted the evil of human life to cause Him suffering, that is, a God Who voluntarily restricts His power and allows Himself to become subject to the will of men and women.

The basic weakness of Calvin's doctrine of Providence lay in his assumption of a choice between two extremes, either total sovereignty or an inactive God. He failed to take account of the possibility of a God Who is active in the world and in particular in the lives of believers, demanding from them total transformation, whilst still restricting His power in such a way as to allow them genuine freedom. The sense of dealing with God in everything and the power of Calvin's concept of piety is not dependent upon the belief that God controls everything but only on the belief that He is active in all aspects of the believer's life, working to bring about the desired end of the shaping of his/her life.

Piety and the Orientation to God

The concept of piety or godliness lies at the heart of this chapter. Calvin's original statement of purpose in writing the *Institutes* was centred on the idea of the believer being shaped to true piety. Thus it is vital to consider his understanding of the nature of piety. In general Calvin used the concept of piety to describe that inner stance or disposition which governs, or 'gives birth to'[1] the outer actions of religion by which the believer lives out his/her faith before others.[2] 'Piety', therefore, for

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1) *Institutes* 1.2.1
2) cf "For the reformer, piety is essentially an inward and spiritual disposition, without which no act of devotion, no form of prayer or penance, no partaking of the sacrament can be in harmony with the divine will." Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, p202.

Calvin, described the *inner* disposition of the believer, his/her inward nature as it is formed by the relationship with God and as it governs his/her outer actions.

Most importantly, 'piety' denoted that inner disposition which is fundamentally a response to what is known of God. The one definition which Calvin did give of piety was brief, especially when the importance of this concept is considered. However, brief as it is, it is substantial enough to expose those attributes which were at the heart of his understanding of the subject. 'I call "piety"', he said 'that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces.' [1] Thus, it could be said that piety for Calvin was a compound of the twin attributes of reverence and love, both of which are, at heart, a response to the activity of God[2]. The true meaning of piety therefore rests upon the activity of God to which it is a response.

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1) *Institutes* 1.2.1
2) "The fluidity of Calvin's language about true religion tends to crystallize in a two-fold concept of piety as reverence and love, corresponding to a twofold concept of God as Lord and Father." Brian A Gerrish, 'Theology within the Limits of Piety Alone', in *The Old Protestantism and the New* p204. and cf "If we are not mistaken, we can now affirm that piety is the fundamental virtue of Calvin's spirituality. It springs from a personal knowledge of the living God and Christ. It constitutes a special attitude of the soul that believes in God, not with a theoretical and passive 'historical faith', but with a faith that is truly trusting. Its principal characteristic is its childlike trust which is animated by feelings of love for and fear of the heavenly Father." Ganoczy, *op. cit.* p 205.

Piety is a fruit of the believer's sense of God's Providence, the realisation that God is *fons omnium bonorum* Who cares for and governs the World. Thus, turning around the statement made earlier, it might be said that piety is that inner disposition or stance before God which is appropriate for one who realises that s/he lives under the Providential care of God Who is *fons omnium bonorum.*

This stance before God is, according to Calvin, a compound of reverence and love, both of which are induced by what is known of the activity of God. It is the combination, or as it might be better put, the tension between and balance of these two attributes which shapes the way in which the believer stands before God. Far from being mutually exclusive, according to Calvin, both are necessary in order that the one might counter-balance the other; the believer is, in fact, caught between them, his/her life moulded by both the love and faith which draws him/her to God and the reverence which causes him/her to fear God.

In Chapter Three the importance within the relationship with God of the believer's love for Him was explored. There it was shown that in Calvin's theology God is active in engaging the affections and so uses the believer's love for Himself to shape his/her stance before Him and his/her activity in the world. It was also shown that Calvin argued that the relationship with God would be vitiated by fear of the judgement of God and that only the recognition of His benevolence can give men and women a basis for their dealings with Him. This argument did not prevent him from making use of the idea of the fear of the Lord. Just as true wisdom, according to Calvin, involves not simply knowledge of God but also knowledge of oneself as one

exists in relation to God, so piety is also based in part upon a recognition of one's own state, one's poverty and weakness when one stands before God. It has already been shown that for Calvin the doctrine of Providence and the acknowledgement of God as *fons omnium bonorum* comprehends a recognition not simply of the goodness of God but also of His majesty and justice. Thus a true recognition of one's position before God inevitably involves a sense of fear and dread of the God who is active in judgement. Accordingly Calvin both readily embraced and made frequent use of the concept of the fear of the Lord.

> Then, when the apostle teaches us that we should 'work out our own salvation in fear and trembling' [Phil. 2:12], he demands only that we become accustomed to honor the Lord's power, while greatly abasing ourselves. For nothing so moves us to repose our assurance and certainty of mind in the Lord as distrust of ourselves, and the anxiety occasioned by the awareness of our ruin. In this sense we must understand what is said by the prophet: 'I, through the abundance of thy goodness, will enter thy temple; I will worship....in fear' [Ps. 5:7p]. Here he fitly joins the boldness of faith that rests upon God's mercy with the reverent fear that we must experience whenever we come into the presence of God's majesty, and by its splendour understand how great is our own filthiness.'

Indeed it is notable that Calvin clearly stated that the knowledge of God in Scripture and in Creation invites us to fear God and only after having experienced that awe before Him then to learn to trust Him.[2]

This might appear to represent a contradiction in Calvin's argument, indeed the tension between these two points, that fear is necessary to a proper

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1) *Institutes* 3.2.23
2) *Institutes* 1.10.2

stance before God and yet can vitiate the relationship with Him led Calvin to make the somewhat awkward argument that such fear as is awoken in the believer is not 'violent and servile' but rather 'voluntary' and such as leads the believer to desire to serve God.[1]

It was however, the argument that trust in God does not eliminate fear of Him in the believer, but merely counter-balances it, which gave substance to Calvin's concept of being shaped to true piety. For it is the continued presence of dread before the judgement of God which provides an edge to the relationship with God and prevents it from degenerating into something which is too familiar and comfortable to be appropriate. Furthermore, the continued influence of the fear of God ensures that the inner stance of the believer remains an accurate reflection of his/her position before God as described in the doctrine of justification, always in imminent danger from God's judgement and saved only by God's justifying mercy.

The pious man or woman will therefore experience both the love and trust which attracts him/her to God and the fear and reverence which is provoked by the recognition of God's majesty and splendour. Piety can therefore be

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1) "'Fear' contains in it the idea of subjection, when men devote themselves to God, because His terrible majesty keeps them in their proper place. Hence results worship, which is the proof of piety. But we must observe that the fear enjoined in this passage is voluntary, so that men influenced by it desire nothing more than to obey God. When I stated, therefore, that God brings us under the yoke by a sense of His power and greatness, I did not understand that a violent and servile obedience is extorted from us; I only wished to affirm that men cannot be induced to obey God, before they have been subdued by fear; because their innate corruption always carries with it a contempt for religion and a spirit of licentiousness." *Commentary upon the Harmony of the Pentateuch* 1:421 Deuteronomy 6:13

described as the proper inner disposition of one who recognises the Providence of God. However, it is clear that Calvin was concerned, not only with the inner attitude of the believer, but also with the way in which his/her belief shaped his/her outer life. Thus to discuss the full implications of his understanding of the experience of God it is necessary to use a concept which is both broader than that of piety, but which also embraces piety and its implications. This brings into play the concept already used throughout this thesis, that of the orientation to God.

In Chapter One the question was asked, what did Calvin mean when he spoke of the knowledge of God. This question was answered in terms of the concept of *engagement*; a true knowledge of God according to Calvin is one which engages the believer in a living relationship with God. This theme was then explored in Chapters Two to Four in connection with three facets of human life, the reason, the affections and the moral life. In this discussion one theme was touched upon several times, that is the question of a proper orientation of the human life to God. Thus, for example, in Chapter Two it was shown that for Calvin the proper use of the reason had to do with a proper orientation to God; when the reason is used well it is used to consciously acknowledge the goodness of God, while the bad use of reason following the Fall had to do with the failure to recognise the benevolence of God. This in turn vitiates the relationship with God, as the predominant attitude of a person toward Him becomes fear rather than worship. In Chapter Three it was shown that for Calvin the fundamental question of the relationship with God had to do with the orientation of the heart, either away from or towards God. And in Chapter Four it was shown that

fundamental to Calvin's understanding of sin was a loss of the proper orientation to God.

It is therefore important at this point to explore and analyse more fully the concept of the believer's orientation to God and its place in a proper understanding of Calvin's conception of the divine-human relationship and the way in which God shapes the divine-human relationship. When the question is asked, what according to Calvin was the original purpose of human life, the answer given by most commentators centres around the idea of gratitude,[1] however this chapter will show that this is not a fully adequate description of Calvin's understanding. Although Calvin himself never used the phrase, the idea of being oriented to God sums up the heart of his understanding of the proper divine-human relationship far more accurately than simply the idea of gratitude, although it should be noted that the idea of gratitude is very important to this orientation.

The full implications of the idea of being oriented to God, as well as its importance to Calvin, can best be seen by reference to his teaching on the original nature of the divine-human relationship and the way in which this was corrupted by the Fall. In Chapter One[2] his argument on the content of

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1) "Thus we see that in Calvin's view the key to the whole doctrine of man in creation and destiny is the idea of thankful response to the unbounded grace of God. Nor can we understand the doctrine of creation unless we too are evoked to a grateful adoration of the perfections of God." Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, p 25. cf. "The existence of man in the design of God is designed by thankfulness, the correlate of God's goodness." Gerrish, 'The Mirror of God's Goodness', p 108.
2) Chapter One pp 32f

the knowledge of God was examined and it was shown that, according to Calvin, human knowledge of God is concerned, not with God as He is in Himself, but rather with the way in which God relates to human beings and, in particular, that the fundamental understanding of God for the Christian is concerned with God as He is recognised as *fons omnium bonorum*, that is with God as He actively sustains this world and gives rise to all the goodness which can be encountered within it. Christian knowledge of God begins therefore with what can be known of the way in which God is active in the world.

The opening words of the *Institutes* introduce Calvin's famous maxim that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of humanity are not only the sum of all the wisdom which men and women possess, but also are mutually conditioned[1], that is they spring from and to some extent define each other. It is therefore to be expected that for Calvin the knowledge of humanity, and therefore the knowledge of the purpose of human life, in some sense would be conditioned by this understanding of God's activity as *fons omnium bonorum*.

This is in fact the case as can be seen clearly if Calvin's teaching on the purpose of the knowledge of God as Creator is examined. It must, of course, be recognised that this is the knowledge of God as it would have happened had the Fall of Adam not occurred,[2] and which can now only be experienced

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1) *Institutes* 1.1.1 cf Brian Gerrish 'The Mirror of God's Goodness' p108
2) "Here I do not yet touch upon the sort of knowledge with which men in themselves lost and accursed, apprehend God the Redeemer in Christ the Mediator; but I speak only of the primal and simple knowledge to which the very order of nature would have led us if Adam had remained upright." *Institutes* 1.2.1

when the believer's understanding is shaped by the Word of God! In the fourteenth chapter of the first book of the *Institutes* Calvin summarized his conception of the true nature of the knowledge of God as Creator and in so doing also exhibited something of his understanding of the purpose of human life. God as Creator is to be recognised as the *fons omnium bonorum*; it is to be acknowledged that He has destined all things for the good of men and women. The one who realises this truth should be led to reflect upon the greatness of the Creator[2] and to trust, invocation, praise and love.[3] Above all, s/he should be led not simply to gratitude but so to shape his/her life that every aspect of it is determined by God's activity; that is both by the expectation that God will nourish and sustain the believer by giving to him/her everything which s/he needs, and by the grateful recognition that every good thing already experienced had its source in the goodness of God. In this way the fundamental elements which are to shape the believer's life

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1) "Therefore, that we may apprehend with true faith what it profits us to know of God, it is important for us to grasp first the history of the creation of the universe, as it has been set forth briefly by Moses [Gen., chs. 1 and 2], and then has been more fully illustrated by saintly men, especially by Basil and Ambrose." *Institutes* 1.14.20

2) "Therefore, to be brief, let all readers know that they have with true faith apprehended what it is for God to be Creator of heaven and earth, if they first of all follow the universal rule, not to pass over in ungrateful thoughtlessness or forgetfulness those conspicuous powers which God shows forth in his creatures, and then learn so to apply it to themselves that their very hearts are touched. The first part of the rule is exemplified when we reflect upon the greatness of the Artificer who stationed, arranged, and fitted together the starry host of heaven in such wonderful order that nothing more beautiful in appearance can be imagined." *Institutes* 1.14.21

3) "There remains the second part of the rule, more closely related to faith. It is to recognize that God has destined all things for our good and salvation but at the same time to feel his power and grace in ourselves and in the great benefits he has conferred upon us, and so to bestir ourselves to trust, invoke, praise, and love him." *Institutes* 1.14.22

should be trust in the goodness of God, petitioning of God for what is needed and the thankful acknowledgment of the benefits which come from God. In this way the believer is led to serve God.

> To conclude once for all, whenever we call God the Creator of heaven and earth, let us at the same time bear in mind that the dispensation of all those things which he has made is in his own hand and power and that we are indeed his children, whom he has received into his faithful protection to nourish and educate. We are therefore to await the fullness of all good things from him alone and to trust completely that he will never leave us destitute of what we need for salvation, and to hang our hopes on none but him! We are therefore, also, to petition him for whatever we desire; and we are to recognize as a blessing from him, and thankfully to acknowledge, every benefit that falls to our share. So, invited by the sweetness of his beneficence and goodness, let us study to love and serve him with all our heart.[1]

So, the believer's life is to be shaped by both the expectation and the acknowledgement of God's active generosity and concern. The fundamental significance of human life, for Calvin, had to do with far more than simple

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1) *Institutes* 1.14.22 cf the Catechism of the Church of Geneva, in which the child on being asked about the true means of honouring God replies "To place our whole confidence in him; to study to serve him during our whole life by obeying his will; to call upon him in all our necessities, seeking salvation and every good thing that can be desired in him; lastly, to acknowledge him both with hearts and lips, as the sole Author of all blessings." *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises*, Vol II, p 38. cf "To sum up, man, reduced to nothing in his own eyes, knowing that goodness exists in God alone and nowhere else, and having given up eagerness for his own glory, is not only moved, but also aspires with his whole being to promote the glory of God alone... But He wishes to be known in such a way that we may know that it is He who acts in justice, righteousness, and mercy. For this knowledge produces in us both trust of Him and fear of Him. Therefore the man who really glories in God is the man who has acquired such an attitude of mind that he claims nothing for himself, but rather desires to exalt God alone; who is satisfied with His grace; who finds happiness in His fatherly love; who, in a word, is content with God alone." *the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 1:31

gratitude, rather it was concerned with the way in which the believer allowed every aspect of his/her life to be determined by the relationship with God;

> for to begin with, the pious mind does not dream up for itself any god it pleases but contemplates the only true God. And it does not attach to him whatever it pleases, but is content to hold him to be as he manifests himself, furthermore, the mind always exercises the utmost diligence and care not to wonder astray, or rashly and boldly go beyond his will. It thus recognizes God because it knows that he governs all things; and trusts that he is its guide and protector, therefore giving itself over completely to him. Because it understands him to be Author of every good, if anything oppresses, if anything is lacking, immediately it betakes itself to to his protection, waiting for help from him. Because it is persuaded that he is good and merciful, it reposes in him with perfect trust, and doubts not that in his loving-kindness a remedy will be provided for all its ills. Because it acknowledges him as Lord and Father, the pious mind also deems it meet and right to observe his authority in all things, reverence his majesty, take care to advance his glory, and obey his commandments. Because it sees him to be a righteous judge, armed with severity to punish wickedness, it ever holds his judgement seat before its gaze, and through fear of him restrains itself from provoking his anger... Besides, this mind restrains itself from sinning, not out of dread of punishment alone; but because it loves and reveres God as Father, it worships and adores him as Lord. Even if there were no hell it would still shudder at offending him alone."[1]

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1) *Institutes* 1.2.2 cf "Even though there are innumerable things that we owe to God, yet they may be conveniently grouped in four headings: (1) adoration (to which is added as an appendix, spiritual obedience of the conscience), (2) trust, (3) invocation, (4) thanksgiving. (1) 'Adoration' I call the veneration and worship that each of us, in submitting to his greatness, renders to him. For this reason, I justly consider as a part of adoration the fact that we submit our consciences to his law. (2) 'Trust' is the assurance of reposing in him that arises from the recognition of his attributes, when - attributing to him all wisdom, righteousness, might, truth and goodness - we judge that we are blessed only by communion with him. (3) 'Invocation' is that habit of our mind, whenever necessity presses us, of resorting to his faithfulness and help as our only support. (4) 'Thanksgiving' is that gratitude with which we ascribe praise to him for all good things. As the Lord suffers nothing of these to be transferred to another, so he commands that all be rendered wholly to himself." *Institutes* 2.8.16

It is this which provides the best description of the orientation to God. The term orientation is commonly understood to include the idea of bringing into a clearly understood relationship. To be oriented to God is to bring the whole of one's life into a clearly understood relationship with God, so to live one's life that one is open to His activity and every area of life is determined by one's relationship with Him. The orientation to God might therefore be described as the Christian's active response to the activity of God, the realignment of the whole of life so as to respond properly to the way in which God acts in the World.

Central to this orientation is the question of value, the importance of which can be seen in Calvin's use of the idea in his explanation of the Fall. In Chapter Two it was shown that the Fall for Calvin caused an inversion of the image of God[1]. That is, according to Calvin, men and women were created in order that they might reflect the glory of God. A person reflects God's glory both by the gifts which He bestows upon him/her and also by the conscious acknowledgement of those gifts. At the heart of the Image of God, for Calvin, therefore, lay the concept of attentiveness to Him, and at the heart of attentiveness lay a proper valuation of the gifts of God:

> the first man revolted from God's authority, not only because he was seized by Satan's blandishments, but also because, contemptuous of the truth, he turned aside to falsehood. And surely once we hold God's Word in contempt, we shake off all reverence for him. For, unless we listen attentively to him, his majesty will not dwell among us, nor his worship remain perfect. Unfaithfulness, then, was the root of the Fall. [2]

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1) Chapter Two p 83-6
2) *Institutes* 2.1.4

Thus, it can be seen that for Calvin the Fall was caused, at least in part, by *contempt*. Adam fell because he refused to value properly the gifts of God and no longer regarded the Word of God as worthy of respect. What is more, according to Calvin, this contempt extended also to Adam's view of his place in Creation. Thus, seeking more than he was given, Adam despised God's grace.

> But thereafter ambition and pride, together with ungratefulness arose, because Adam by seeking more that was granted him, shamefully spurned God's great bounty, which had been lavished upon him. To have been made in the likeness of God seemed a small matter to a son of earth unless he also attained equality with God - a monstrous wickedness!....Lastly, faithlessness opened the door to ambition, and ambition was indeed the mother of obstinate disobedience; as a result men, having cast off the fear of God, threw themselves wherever lust carried them.....Adam would never have dared oppose God's authority unless he has disbelieved in God's Word. Here, indeed, was the best bridle to control all passions: the thought that nothing is better than to practice righteousness by obeying God's commandments; then, that the ultimate goal of the happy life is to be loved by him. [1]

The Dynamics of the Orientation to God

There is one major question which arises from the above comments. It has been seen that, for Calvin, the significance and purpose of human life had to do with the way in which a person is oriented to God; this concept of orientation is vital to Calvin's understanding of the experience of God. For according to Calvin God is active in the life and experience of the believer in such a way as to shape him/her to a proper orientation to the activity and being of God. If this is granted it is now important to ask, what are

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1) *Ibid*

the dynamics of that orientation? In other words, what are the means through which God acts to shape the believer's life in correspondence His activity, such that s/he is brought more and more into that living relationship with God by which every aspect of his/her life is determined? As has already been seen, the new orientation is initiated by God's own activity in engaging the believer in a new relationship. The orientation is continued as God works through certain aspects of the believer's life and his/her own activity; these represent the dynamics of the orientation. The question of the dynamics of the orientation has already been touched upon when it was shown that the fundamental elements which, according to Calvin should shape the believer's life should be trust in the goodness of God, petitioning God for what is needed and thankful acknowledgement of the benefits of God. The dynamics of the orientation are therefore faith, prayer and worship, and the role of each of these must now be explored.

Faith and the orientation to God

It has already been shown that in Calvin's theology, faith was the form of the experience of God seen from the human point of view, that is the fruit of God's engagement of the reason and the affections is experienced by the believer as faith. As such, faith is intrinsic to the shaping of the believer's life and his/her orientation to God. To understand this fully it is important to grasp the vital nature of faith in Calvin's theology; to have faith is not simply a static phenomenon, but rather a dynamic experience. Having faith sets the believer within a certain dynamic of believing, and it is this dynamic which shapes and forms the believer.

In this dynamism, the nature of faith corresponds to the dynamic nature of God Himself. There is a vital relationship in Calvin's theology between faith and the activity of God, which forms an important part of the dynamism of faith. For the believer is convinced, not simply of the benevolence of God, but also of the fact that that benevolence will be actively displayed, that it will be exercised towards him/her.

> Faith does not suppose that God can do all things while in the meantime remaining unmoved, but rather locates His power in His continual activity, and applies it in particular to what is effected by His Word. The hand of God, therefore, is always ready to accomplish what He has spoken.[1]

Thus Calvin continually insisted that the only person who can truly lay claim to the title of believer is the one who does not simply believe that God is well-disposed toward him/her, but who also believes that this benevolence will cause God to act for his/her good.[2]

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1) *Epistle to the Romans* 4:21

2) "Here, indeed, is the chief hinge on which faith turns: that we do not regard the promises of mercy that God offers as true only outside ourselves, but not at all in us; rather that we make them ours by inwardly embracing them...Briefly, he alone is truly a believer who, convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father towards him, promises himself all things on the basis of his generosity; who, relying upon the promises of divine benevolence towards him, lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation." *Institutes* 3.2.16 cf "It is not to be thought of in abstraction that God is the Rewarder of those who seek Him, but everyone ought to apply to himself in person the advantage and benefit of this doctrine so that we may know that we are the concern of God, that He is so concerned for our salvation that He will never desert us, that our prayers are heard by Him and that He will be our unfailing Deliverer" *Epistle to the Hebrews* 11:6 and *Institutes* 3.2.15

Faith, in Calvin's theology, therefore, has a particular character. It is the character of faith which explains the strength and vitality of his understanding of the relationship with God and of piety. For, according to Calvin, to have faith is to acknowledge that a given situation is true, that is that the God Who governs the World and all events within it, is not only benevolent towards the believer, but actively seeking his/her good, and to live in accordance with that acknowledgement. If piety can be described as the proper stance of the believer before the God who is *fons omnium bonorum* then faith is the proper stance of the believer before the God whose benevolence is displayed in Jesus Christ. The dynamic of faith corresponds to this expectation of God's active benevolence. To have faith is to live in such a way that God is expected to care for the believer and govern his/her life. The experience of faith shapes piety by leading the believer to give him/herself to God; as Calvin argued, without this acknowledgement true piety is impossible, for it is only the recognition of the goodness of God which will lead the believer to give him/herself wholly to God.

> As we have already seen, unbelief was the fountain and cause of the tempting in Massah, for when the people neither relied on God's providence nor rested on His paternal love, they burst forth into impatience, and at length advanced so far as to think that God was not with them, unless He complied with their wicked lusts. We perceive then, that God cannot be rightly worshipped unless when He has His peculiar attributes acknowledged. Whence, also, it appears that true piety cannot be dissevered from faith, because, if we confess that every desirable good dwells in Him, we shall expect and seek for all things from Him; we shall also patiently and contentedly allow ourselves to be governed by His will, and, in a word, give up ourselves and our lives into His hands.[1]

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1) *Harmony of the Pentateuch* Deuteronomy 6:16 (1:422)

Faith is, therefore, central to the orientation to God because it is faith which, because it acknowledges the goodness of God, causes the believer to shape his/her life according to the expectation of the beneficence of God. Acquaintance with the goodness of God leads the believer to yield him/herself wholly to God.[1]

In this way, faith reverses the contempt which has already been shown to have led to the Fall. For to have faith is to put a proper value on God's Word, to accept that what He says in His promise of mercy is true.[2]

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1) "But at the same time, we must also note that under this word 'faith', he comprehends the whole service of God. For it is impossible that, once being acquainted with his goodness as he has shown it to us in the person of his only Son, we should not be totally ravished in love to our heavenly Father. Behold, God draws us out of the pit of confusion and death and opens to us the gate of the heavenly kingdom, and tells us that he will take us for his children. How can we hear and believe this without being wholly given to him, forsaking the world, and hating the evil that is in ourselves, because it separates us from him. You see then how the word 'faith' means a yielding of ourselves wholly to God." Sermon on Ephesians 1:15-18 cf "But how can the mind be aroused to taste the divine goodness without at the same time being wholly kindled to love God in return? For truly, that abundant sweetness which God has stored up for those who love him cannot be known without at the same time powerfully moving us. And once anyone has been moved by it, it utterly ravishes him and draws him to itself." *Institutes* 3.2.41

2) "True religion flourishes best when men accept firmly that all that comes from God is right and laudable, full of justice and knowledge. For the result is that, according to the obedience of their faith, they embrace His Word, and acquiesce in all His pleasure and work, for the faith that we bring to God's Word (as John says, 3:33) is like our word of acceptance, testifying that God is true, just as unbelief and scorn for His Word are to show Him the most grievous insult." *Gospel of Matthew* 6:9 cf "But faith has a different taste; the property of which is, to hold all the senses of the pious so bound by reverence to the Word, that a single promise of God is quite sufficient." *Book of Genesis* 12:7

Accordingly, Calvin argued that faith honours God while unbelief insults Him.'

Moreover, by causing the believer to give him/herself wholly to God, it is, according to Calvin, faith which makes it possible for God to work in a believer's life and for the believer to experience His blessings, for it is faith which opens the believer's life to the power of God. On the whole, he tended to put this argument more frequently and more strongly in its negative form. Thus he argued that it is lack of faith which rejects God's blessings and causes a person's experience of those blessings to be so poor,[2] and it is weak faith which causes the believer to be at war with him/herself

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1) "No greater honour can be given to God than by sealing His truth by our faith. On the other hand, no greater insult can be shown to Him than by rejecting the grace which he offers us, or by detracting from the authority of His Word. For this reason the main thing in the worship of God is to embrace His promises with obedience. True religion begins with faith." *Epistle to the Romans* 4:20 cf *The First Epistle to John* 5:10

2) "By the expression *open wide*, he (God) tacitly condemns the contracted views and desires which obstruct the exercise of his beneficence. 'If the people are in penury', we may suppose him to say, 'the blame is to be entirely ascribed to themselves because their capacity is not large enough to receive the blessings of which they stand in need; or rather, because by their unbelief they reject the blessings which would flow spontaneously upon them'.....Whence it follows, that the reason why God's blessings drop upon us in a sparing and slender manner is, because our mouth is too narrow; and the reason why others are completely famished is, because they keep their mouth completely shut." *Book of Psalms* 81:10 cf "If all these things were due to faith the fact is established that it is only by faith that a place is given for the goodness of God to reach out to us. We must especially note the clause that says that the promises were received by faith. Although God remains faithful even if we all disbelieve, yet our faithfulness makes the promises invalid, that is, ineffectual." *Epistle to the Hebrews* 11:32

and so prevents God from working in him/her.[1] In this argument, however, Calvin would at times contradict himself, for he was unwilling, ultimately to say that God's power could be restrained or repressed by anything which men or women did. Hence he sometimes argued that it was not so much the case that unbelief prevented God from imparting His blessings but rather that lack of faith made men and women unworthy of receiving them.

> *If thou believedst.* This is said, not only because faith opens our eyes to be able to see God's glory shining in His works, but because our faith smoothes the way for God's power and goodness to be displayed towards us; as Psalm 81:10 has it, 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' Again, unbelief blocks God's way, and as it were keeps His hands shut. For this reason it is said elsewhere, 'Jesus could not perform any sign there because of their unbelief' (Matt 13:58). Not that God's power is bound by the will of men, but because, as far as they can, their malice opposes it, and therefore they do not deserve it to be manifested to them. It often happens that God overcomes such obstacles.

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1) "When our minds are ruled by irregular thoughts we so to say banish God from us so that He cannot accomplish His work in us....The weakness of faith causes this. Pulled this way and that, we fight with ourselves, and while we stretch out the one hand to ask assistance from God, we push away that readily offered assistance with the other hand." *Gospel of John* 11:39 cf "But the first foundation of faith is to embrace the infinite power of God. Also, the first entry into prayers is to rise above all obstacles so that we are firmly convinced that our praying will not be in vain. But because this man thinks of Christ only as a man, his false opinion is corrected. His faith has to be formed, so that he may become capable and fit to receive the grace he asked for. Christ did not openly reprove him in His reply but gave the man back the words he had spoken amiss and so showed him his fault and told him to seek the remedy. For this objection *If thou canst believe* was as good as saying: 'You ask me to help you so far as I am able. But you will find an inexhaustible spring of power in me if only you will bring a large enough measure of faith.' From this we gather the useful lesson, which applies to us all alike, that it is not the Lord's fault if a great abundance of blessings does not flow from Him to us, but it must be imputed to the narrowness of our faith, that it comes drop by drop - sometimes indeed, we do not feel even a drop, because unbelief blocks up our hearts." *Harmony of the Gospels* Mark 9:22

> But whenever He withdraws His hand and does not help unbelievers, it is because they are enclosed within the straits of their unbelief and will not give it entrance.[1]

Indeed, it was the question of lack of faith which displayed the weakness of Calvin's argument in another area also. In describing the nature and function of faith he had, of course, to account for the well-known fact of experience, which he readily acknowledged, that faith, as it is experienced is frequently far from perfect, but rather most people are forced to struggle with doubt and unbelief.[2] The root of the weakness of Calvin's argument lay in his insistence that faith should always correspond to the nature of God, and so, as God's truth is always sure, faith itself should always be sure.[3] In this insistence he laid himself open to two criticisms, one both pastoral and theological and the other purely theological. On a pastoral level Calvin can be criticised quite simply for effectively setting the standard of faith

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1) *Gospel of John* 11:40

2) "Still, someone will say, 'Believers experience something far different: in recognizing the grace of God toward themselves they are not only tried by disquiet, which often comes upon them, but they are repeatedly shaken by gravest terrors. For so violent are the temptations that trouble their minds as not to seem quite compatible with that certainty of faith. Accordingly, we shall have to solve this difficulty if we wish the above-stated doctrine to stand. Surely while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety. On the other hand, we say that believer's are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief. Far, indeed are we from putting their consciences in any peaceful repose, undisturbed by any tumult at all." *Institutes* 3.2.17

3) "As the truth of God is unwavering, so likewise the faith which relies on Him, if it is to be true, must be sure and above all doubt. This is the *πληροφορία*, that is an undoubting conviction by which the godly mind resolves in itself that it is not right to call in question what God who cannot deceive or lie has spoken." *Epistle to the Hebrews* 6:11

too high and for producing a description of faith which fails to correspond to the faith which most people actually experience, except perhaps in their highest moments. This is also a theological criticism, since Calvin was attempting to describe and analyse the Christian's experience of faith, it must be counted a serious fault if he produced a description which failed to correspond to faith as most people actually experience it. The second criticism to which Calvin was open had to do with his failure to take into account the human aspect of faith. It was his insistence that faith should correspond with the nature of God which allowed him to insist that faith should always be perfect; this was, however, done at the cost of effectively ignoring the fact that faith is a human response and therefore subject to all the vicissitudes of human life and experience.

It is at least arguable that Calvin dealt adequately with the first criticism. For not only did he accept that faith as experienced is rarely perfect, he also provided an explanation for why this should be the case. Although faith should always be sure, yet the believer's experience of it is rarely so because s/he is still infected with the disease of unbelief.[1] Thus the

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1) "Therefore the godly heart feels in itself a division because it is partly imbued with sweetness from its recognition of the divine goodness, partly grieves in bitterness from an awareness of its calamity; partly rests upon the promise of the gospel, partly trembles at the evidence of its own iniquity; partly rejoices at the expectation of life, partly shudders at death. This variation arises from imperfection of faith, since in the course of the present life it never goes so well with us that we are wholly cured of the disease of unbelief and entirely filled and possessed by faith. Hence arise those conflicts; when unbelief, which reposes in the remains of the flesh, rises up to attack the faith that has been inwardly conceived." *Institutes* 3.2.18

believer's actual experience is one of division and conflict between faith and lack of faith.[1] As Calvin rightly perceived, at the heart of this conflict is the struggle to believe in the divine benevolence, without which belief, as had already been shown, the believer is alienated from God.[2]

Thus, it might be said that Calvin's description of faith represents not a standard to which the Christian is to conform but rather an ideal towards which the Christian is to aim. The function of his description of faith is, therefore, to provide an exemplar after which the Christian is to model him/herself whilst accepting that the ideal can not necessarily always be reached. It is unfortunate, however, that this is not made clear and that it appears to be only as a concession that Calvin accepts that the Christian's experience of faith will not match his description of it.

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1) "Faith has a double weakness, one which succumbs to the temptation of adversity, and makes us fall from the power of God; the other which arises from imperfection, yet does not extinguish faith itself. However much the mind is enlightened, much ignorance still remains, and however much the heart is established, much doubt still clings to it. The faithful, therefore, are continually at conflict with ignorance and doubt, those vices of the flesh. In this conflict their faith is often severely shaken and distressed, but it finally emerges victorious, so that in weakness itself they may be said to have the greatest strength." *Epistle to the Romans* 4: 19

2) "To bear these attacks faith arms and fortifies itself with the Word of the Lord. And when any sort of temptation assails us - suggesting that God is our enemy because he is unfavorable toward us - faith, on the other hand, replies that while he afflicts us he is also merciful because his chastisement arises out of love rather than wrath. When one is stricken by the thought that God is Avenger of iniquities, faith sets over against this the fact that his pardon is ready for all iniquities whenever the sinner betakes himself to the Lord's mercy. Thus the godly mind, however strange the ways in which it is vexed and troubled, finally surmounts all difficulties, and never allows itself to be deprived of assurance of divine mercy. Rather, all the contentions that try and weary it result in the certainty of this assurance." *Institutes* 3.2.21

Furthermore, this explanation itself illustrates the weakness of Calvin's argument - failure fully to take account of the human dynamic of faith. Since the struggle for faith is always perceived in black and white terms as a struggle for faith, which is seen as solely the fruit of the Spirit of God, and against unbelief which is seen as solely the fruit of the remains of the flesh, Calvin was unable to adequately take account of the way in which the very fight for faith might itself have a part to play in the dynamics by which the believer is oriented to God.

Any attempt to take account of a human dynamic within Calvinist theology lays one open to the charge of synergism and therefore of teaching that the will of God can be frustrated by human action. In failing to take account of the human dynamic of faith, however, Calvin severely weakened his own argument; for if faith is the central aspect of the re-ordering and re-alignment of the human life which orients the believer to the action of God, that is a change in the inward nature of the believer, it is surely to be expected that a part of that re-alignment will be achieved by the Spirit's use of the believer's own actions and struggles as those actions affect the person whom the believer becomes. It is notable that in the quotations given previously Calvin occasionally hinted that the struggle for faith might drive one to the Word of God and to meditate upon the benevolence of God and thus finally strengthen faith, but this is rarely made explicit. The notion that God might be able to use the human aspect of faith itself to orient the believer to Himself is passed over and barely discussed.

Prayer and the orientation to God[1]

As has already been shown, the experience of faith, according to Calvin, sets the believer within a certain dynamic of believing, that is to have faith is to live in such a way that God, Himself, is expected to care for and govern the life of the believer. As such, the experience of faith has its implications not only for the Christian's inner life, but also for his/her outer actions, s/he is to order his/her life in accordance with this expectation. If piety is the proper inner disposition of the believer who acknowledges by faith that s/he lives under the Providence of God, then prayer is such a person's proper action, for it is prayer which acts upon the believer's acknowledgement of God's care.

> But after we have been instructed by faith to recognize that whatever we need and whatever we lack is in God, and in our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the Father willed all the fullness of his bounty to abide so that we may all draw from it as from an overflowing spring, it remains for us to seek in him, and in prayers to ask of him, whatever we have learned to be in him. Otherwise, to know God as the master and bestower of all good things, who invites us to request them of him, and still not go to him and not ask of him - this would be of as little profit as for a man to neglect a treasure, buried and hidden in the earth, after it had been pointed out to him. [2]

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1) cf Ronald S Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, pp 271-295.

2) *Institutes* 3.20.1 cf "Again faith is not an idle thing. It implies that we should resort to God, and that whenever we are stained with any spot, we should pray to him to remedy it, for every need we encounter is meant to be as the pricking with a spur given to us by God to make us come to him. Faith, therefore, involves prayer and supplication. Indeed it implies that we cannot but hallow the name of God by resting upon him and by yielding him all the glory that belongs to him, when we know that he gives us all things of his liberality, looking for nothing from our hands except the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Thus you see how faith involves all that is contained in the first table of the law." Sermon on Ephesians 1:15-18

It is important to grasp precisely what Calvin meant by prayer in this context. When he spoke of prayer Calvin meant a turning to God, what he called a communion with God[1], which seeks Him with the intention of obtaining from Him that which He has promised. In other words, Calvin restricted prayer to supplication and petition, other aspects of praying which might have been included, such as confession and thanksgiving, he included under worship. For Calvin, prayer meant supremely that seeking God and asking of Him what is needed which draws from His bounty for the benefit of the believer. Thus, prayer acts out faith, because it seeks God in the expectation that what faith knows of God will be proved to be true in experience. In particular, prayer seeks God in the expectation of God's promised activity in bestowing what is sought. Prayer is, therefore, the Christian's active response to the way in which God is active in the world.

Not surprisingly, therefore, faith and prayer were very closely linked in Calvin's theology. He both argued that prayer is impossible without faith,[2] and frequently repeated his claim that prayer is the chief exercise of

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1) "For there is a communion of men with God by which having entered the heavenly sanctuary they appeal to him in person concerning his promises in order to experience, where necessity so demands, that what they believed was not in vain, although he had promised it in word alone." *Institutes* 3.20.2

2) "This is true prayer - not the mere idle lifting up of the voice, but the presentation of our petitions from an inward principle of faith." *Book of Psalms* 140:6

3) "To call upon God is the chief exercise of faith and hope; and it is this way that we obtain from God every blessing." *Epistle to the Ephesians* 6:18 cf "The principal exercise which the children of God have is to pray; for this way they give a true proof of their faith." Sermon on 1 Tim. 2:1-2 cf "He commends the faith he mentioned by its fruit; or he shows in what our confidence is chiefly placed; that is, that the godly dare to call on God undauntedly."......the chief trial of our faith is calling upon God." *First Epistle of John* 5:14 and "An ascription to God of the honour due unto his name lies at the foundation of all prayer, and application to him as the fountain of all goodness is the most elementary exercise of faith." *Book of Psalms* 50:14

faith.[3] Indeed, so often did he make this statement that it might be said that, according to Calvin, prayer is faith in action, for only prayer is the proper action which follows from faith in God's promises, the action which, as it were, demonstrates that those promises have been truly believed by acting upon them.[1]. Thus, Calvin could equally well argue that faith without prayer is not simply idle, but dead, for not to pray is, in fact, to demonstrate that one does not truly believe God's promises to be true.[2]

Prayer, then, can be said to be faith in action. One of the great strengths of Calvin's analysis of prayer lay in the way in which he was able to show that this action of the believer is itself a part of the dynamics by which his/her life is shaped and so the orientation to God is brought about. In the *Institutes* Calvin listed a number of reasons why the believer should pray to God, despite the fact that the Providence of God might be expected to be exerted on his/her behalf, regardless of whether or not s/he prayed. Careful analysis of the reasons given shows that in each case the Christian

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1) "For the right way for us to show truly that his promises have been powerful in us, and that we trust to them is that as soon as we are touched by any grief or affliction, we go straight to him and unburden our hearts there, as is said in another passage. [Ps. 50:15; Ps. 62:8] Now we see how we must take advantage of God's Word, by which we are assured that he will never fail us, that is to say, by seeking in him that which he assures us we shall find there. And so the prayers that we offer, are, as it were, keys by which to come to the treasures that God reserves for us and which he will not keep from us. Therefore we must open the way to them by praying." Sermon on Ephesians 6:18-19

2) "Faith, there is no doubt, lies idle and even dead without prayer, in which the spirit of adoption shows and exercises itself, and by which we evidence that that all his promises are considered by us as stable and sure." *Book of Psalms* 145:18 cf "Without prayer faith would become languid and lifeless." *Book of Psalms* 119:58

is exhorted to pray, not because God will then be impelled to act, but rather in order that heart and mind might be more fully oriented to the divine being and action.

> Therefore, even though, while we grow dull and stupid toward our miseries, he watches and keeps guard on our behalf, and sometimes even helps us unasked, still it is very important for us to call upon him: First, that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve him, while we become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred anchor. Secondly, that there may enter our hearts no desire and no wish at all of which we should be ashamed to make him a witness, while we learn to set all our wishes before his eyes, and even to pour out our whole hearts. Thirdly, that we may be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand [cf Ps. 145:15-16]. Fourthly, moreover, that, having obtained what we were seeking, and being convinced that he has answered our prayers, we should be led to meditate upon his kindness more ardently. And fifthly, that at the same time we embrace with greater delight those things which we acknowledge to have been obtained by our prayers. Finally, that use and experience may, according to the measure of our feebleness, confirm his providence, while we understand not only that he promises never to fail us, and of his own will opens the way opens the way to call upon him at the very point of necessity, but also that he ever extends his hand to help his own, not wet-nursing them with words but defending them with present help.[1]

The believer is to pray, therefore, first because it is in praying that his/her affections are more fully engaged by God. Here the dynamics of the orientation, and more importantly the way in which the believers own actions are a part of the those dynamics, are clear. It is faith which, by acknowledging the goodness of God and the truth of His promises, stirs the

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1) *Institutes* 3.20.3

believer to pray' while it is the very action of prayer itself which fires the believer with a desire for God and so engages the affections. Thus, Calvin could call prayer an emotion of the heart which is laid open before God.[2]

Secondly, since to pray is to come before God in all His majesty, the act of praying teaches the believer sincerity before God, that is it promotes

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1) "If we are resting upon the pledge of God's promises and have them thoroughly rooted in our hearts, we shall be stirred up to resort to our God, so that our faith may exercise us in prayers and supplications. And that is why St. Paul having told us that the sword which is essential in the fight against Satan is the Word of God, and that the shield is faith, adds that we ought to fight by our prayers and supplications. Thus we see that they are inseparable things. And the more advanced we are in faith, with the more earnest zeal we should call upon our God, and acknowledge and confess that our salvation lies in his hands, and that we look for all good things from him. And since we are so slothful in that respect, he sets down two words, 'prayers' and 'supplications', the better to express that we must not go to work coldly, or in a way of drudgery, but that we must be touched to the quick to continue at it (as he will add soon after) and to have a true perseverance which does not grow weary." Sermon on Ephesians 6:18-19 cf "He now shows more clearly what is meant by trusting in God, or placing our love and delight in him. For that affection and desire which is produced by faith, prompts us to call upon his name... The context, too, may teach us that faith is not idle or inoperative, and that one test, by which we ought to try those who look for Divine deliverance is, whether they have recourse to God in the right manner." *Book of Psalms* 91:15

2) "But inasmuch as this goal of prayer has already been stated - namely, that hearts may be aroused and borne to God, whether to praise him or to beseech his help - from this we may understand that the essentials of prayer are set in the mind and heart, or rather that prayer itself is properly an emotion of the heart within (*cordis affectum*), which is poured out and laid open before God, the searcher of hearts." *Institutes* 3.20.29. cf "God permits us to reveal our hearts familiarly before him; for prayer is nothing else than the opening up of our heart before God; as the greatest alleviation is, to pour our cares, distresses, and anxieties into his bosom." *Book of Isaiah* 63:16

rondeur[1]. Thirdly, prayer has to do with the proper ordering of the Christian's life under the Providence of God. Not only does it prepare the Christian to receive the gifts of God with fitting gratitude, it also leads him/her to meditate on God's kindness and so increases the delight with which God's gifts are received. Finally it is prayer which makes experience itself a part of the way in which the Christian's faith is shaped and s/he is oriented to God, for it is in praying and in seeing God answer that prayer that the believer is enabled to perceive the activity of God. In perceiving that activity and, in particular the way in which that activity tends towards his/her good, the Christian's faith is strengthened and his/her life oriented more towards the activity of God.

In thus highlighting the relationship between prayer, experience, faith and the orientation to God, Calvin again obliquely acknowledged the way in which the believer's own actions have a vital part to play in the growth of faith and the deepening of the orientation to God. Faith is a human and complex experience which grows not only through God's activity but also through the believer's perception of and response to that activity. Thus the Christian's own struggles and understanding and his/her activity or lack of activity in prayer can increase or decrease the orientation to God.

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1) See Chapter Four pp 180-4 cf "For if we think to be heard by God for our babbling, when at the same time our heart is dead, and our prayers do not proceed from from a well-disposed and earnest mind, we make God like an idol, or like a little babe, whereby we do great wrong to his majesty, and, in short, we only transfigure him according to our own fancy. Therefore it is necessary for our prayers not only to be made with our mouth, but also to come from the bottom of our heart." Sermon on Ephesians 6: 18-19

This last point raises again the difficult question of those times when the providential care of God is far from apparent. For Calvin the experience of such times was intimately connected with the need for prayer, not only because the Christian's proper reaction to doubts about the subject is to unburden him/herself before God,[1] but also because, so he argued, God deliberately afflicts the Christian to teach him/her the need for prayer.[2]

In this way the believer's own act of prayer is a part of the way in which s/he is oriented to God. However, in accordance with Calvin's thinking as expressed elsewhere, this is the believer's action as it is elicited by God Himself. Thus the role of the Spirit in the believer's prayer is vital. Since a man or woman is unable of his/her own accord to pray, or even to desire to pray, it is the Spirit who creates in the believer the zeal to pray

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1) "Of those who impiously prate against God by denying his Providence, there are two sorts. Some openly pour out their blasphemies, asserting that God, delighting in ease and pleasure, cares about nothing, but leaves the government of all things to chance. Others, although they keep their thoughts on this subject to themselves, and are silent before men, yet cease not to secretly fret against God, and to accuse him of injustice or of indolence, in conniving at wickedness, neglecting the godly, and allowing all things to be involved in confusion, and go to wreck. But the people of God, before these perverse and detestable thoughts enter deep into their hearts, disburden themselves into the bosom of God, and their only desire is to acquiesce in his secret judgements, the reason of which is hidden from them." *Book of Psalms* 73:11

2) "Paul has appropriately connected prayers with the anxious desire of the godly, because God does not afflict them with troubles in order that they may inwardly feed on hidden grief, but that they may unburden themselves by prayer, and thus exercise their faith." *Epistle to the Romans* 8:26

as s/he should.[1] Thus Calvin could argue that the very desire to pray which the believer experiences is itself a demonstration of the presence and action of the Spirit.[2] Without the Spirit it is impossible to turn keenness of mind and affection of heart towards God.[3] Although the unbeliever might appear to pray s/he does not in fact do so, for s/he lacks the true sincerity and order in prayer which only the Spirit can give. Only when the Spirit acts can a man or woman pray with the fervency which is fitting.[4]

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1) "And now since we do not have that by our own power, it is necessary for the Holy Spirit to work in us. And therefore by the word 'spirit' may be understood that we are beseeching God to govern us in such a way that he may touch us thoroughly in order that we may pray to him as we ought, while he also accepts our prayers, acknowledging in them signs of his Holy Spirit....Now then, it is most certain that we shall never be earnestly disposed to pray to God, unless he governs us by his Holy Spirit." Sermon on Ephesians 6:18-19 cf "If our petitions arise from personal feelings and not from the pure zeal of the Spirit, we do not make God our judge so much as the servant of our corrupt desire." *Epistle to the Romans* 12:19

2) "Although it may not yet appear in fact that our prayers have been heard by God, Paul concludes that the presence of heavenly grace already shines forth in the very zeal for prayer, because no one of his own accord conceives devout and godly prayers." *Epistle to the Romans* 8:26

3) "But because our abilities are far from able to match such perfection, we must seek a remedy to help us. As we must turn keenness of mind toward God, so affection of heart has to follow. Both, indeed, stand far beneath; nay, more truly, they faint and fail, or are carried in the opposite direction. Therefore, in order to minister to this weakness, God gives us the Spirit as our teacher in prayer, to tell us what is right and temper our emotions. For, 'because we do not know how to pray as we ought, the Spirit comes to our help,' and 'intercedes for us with unspeakable groans' [Rom. 8:26]; not that he actually prays or groans but arouses in us assurance, desires, and sighs, to conceive which our natural powers would scarcely suffice." *Institutes* 3.20.5

4) Unbelievers do indeed blurt out their prayers, but they merely mock God, because there is no sincerity or seriousness in them, or correctly ordered pattern. The Spirit, therefore, must prescribe the manner of our praying. Paul calls the groans into which we break forth by the impulse of the Spirit *unutterable*, because they far exceed the capacity of our intellect. The Spirit of God is said to *intercede*, not because He in fact humbles Himself as a supplicant to pray or groan, but because He stirs up in our hearts the prayers which it is proper for us to address to God. In the second place He affects our hearts in such a way that these prayers penetrate into heaven itself by their fervency." *Epistle to the Romans* 8:26

Worship and the Orientation to God

According to Calvin the fruit of all true knowledge of God is worship, it is not possible for a person to come to know God without being led also to yield worship to Him.[1] This point has frequently been noted by those who comment on Calvin's work.[2] However, this is often mentioned only briefly and little attempt made to analyse the nature and significance of worship in Calvin's theology.[3] Particularly worthy of attention is the breadth of Calvin's understanding of what is involved in the worship of God.

> Let us now see what is meant by the due worship of God. Its chief foundation is to acknowledge Him to be, as He is, the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, power, goodness, mercy, life, and salvation; in accordance with this, to ascribe and render to Him the glory of all that is good, to seek all things in Him alone, and in every want to have recourse to Him alone. Hence arises prayer, hence praise and thanksgiving - these being attestations to the glory which we attribute to Him. This is that genuine sanctification of His name which He requires of us above all things. To this is united adoration, by which we manifest for Him the reverence due to to his greatness and excellency, and to this ceremonies are subservient, as helps or instruments, in order that, in the performance of divine worship, the body may be exercised at the same time with the soul. Next after these comes self-abasement, when, renouncing the world and the flesh, we are transformed in the renewing of our mind, and living no longer to ourselves, submit to be ruled and actuated by Him. By this self-abasement we are trained to obedience and devotedness to his will, so that his fear reigns in our hearts, and regulates all the actions of our lives. That in these things consists the true and sincere worship which God alone approves, and

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1) "Now in summarizing what is required for the true knowledge of God , we have taught that we cannot conceive him in his greatness without being immediately confronted by his majesty and so compelled to worship him." *Institutes* 2.8.1.cf *Institutes* 1.5.9-10

2) See for example T H L Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p56; Charles M N Eire, *The War Against Idols*, p 197 and Brian Armstrong, 'The Nature and Structure of Calvin's Thought according to the Institutes: Another Look', in *John Calvin's Institutes: His Opus Magnum. Proceedings of the Second South African Congress for Calvin Research* p 60.

3) The work of Eire, *Ibid*, is an exception to this and has been helpful in preparing this section.

> in which alone He delights, is both taught by the Holy Spirit throughout the Scriptures, and is also, antecedent to discussion, the obvious dictate of piety. [1]

Far from being confined simply to adoration, true worship for Calvin involved not only those aspects which might be expected such as acknowledgement of who God is, ascription of glory and reverence, but also such aspects as petitioning of God for every need, self-abasement, obedience and devotion to His will. Thus, while Calvin argued that the foundation of worship is the proper honouring of God[2], this on its own is not a sufficient statement of his understanding of the subject; for God is not honoured simply by an inward acknowledgement of His majesty, but rather, He is truly honoured only when the believer re-orders his/her life in such a way that the relationship with God determines every aspect of it[3]. In other words, Calvin'sunderstanding of worship comprehends all the different aspects of life which have been discussed in the concept of orientation. To worship God is to be fully oriented to His being and activity; thus worship lies at

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1) 'Necessity of Reforming' p 127
2) "We perceive, then, that God cannot be rightly worshipped unless He has His peculiar attributes acknowledged. Whence, also, it appears that true piety cannot be dissevered from faith, because, if we confess that every desirable good dwells in Him, we shall expect and seek for all things from Him; we shall also patiently and contentedly allow ourselves to be governed by His will, and, in a word, give up ourselves and our lives into His hands." *Harmony of the Pentateuch* 1:422 Deuteronomy 6:16
3) "*M* What is the true and right knowledge of God?
S When he is so known that honour is paid to him.
M What is the method of honouring him duly?
S To place our whole confidence in him; to study to serve him during our whole life by obeying his will; to call upon him in all our necessities, seeking salvation and every good thing that can be desired in him; lastly, to acknowledge him both with heart and lips, as the sole Author of all blessings." Catechism of the Church of Geneva. *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises* Vol. II p 38

the heart of the orientation and the end result of the orientation is that the believer is brought to fully worship God.

Calvin had no doubt that in worshipping God, men and women are fulfilling the purpose of their Creation, carrying out the act for which, above all, they were created.[1] In fact it might be said that, according to Calvin, to cease to worship God is to cease to be truly human. Thus there is nothing in which men and women should feel a deeper interest than true worship.[2] It was because he believed that in worshipping God men and women are living as they were intended to live, that Calvin could claim also that worship is the first foundation of righteousness.[3] For if to worship is to live in a right

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1) "It is not very sound theology to confine a man's thoughts so much to himself, and not to set before him, as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God, and not for ourselves. As all things flowed from him, and subsist in him, so, says Paul, (Rom. xi. 36,) they ought to be referred to him." Reply to the Letter of Sadolet *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises* Vol I p 33 cf "For we are created to this end, that we may offer soul and body unto God." *Book of Genesis* 12:7

2) "There is nothing in which all men ought to feel a deeper interest, nothing in which God wishes us to exhibit a more intense zeal, than in endeavouring that the glory of His name may remain unimpaired, His kingdom be advanced, and the pure doctrine, which alone can guide us to true worship, flourish in full vigour." *Ibid* p 228

3) "Surely the first foundation of righteousness is the worship of God. When this is overthrown, all the remaining parts of righteousness, like the pieces of a shattered and fallen building, are mangled and scattered. What kind of righteousness will you call it not to harass men with theft and plundering, if through impious sacrilege you at the same time deprive God's majesty of its glory? Or that you do not defile your body with fornication, if with your blasphemies you profane God's most holy name? Or that you do not slay a man, if you strive to kill and to quench the remembrance of God? It is vain to cry up righteousness without religion. This is as unreasonable as to display a mutilated, decapitated body as something beautiful. Not only is religion the chief part but the very soul, whereby the whole breathes and thrives. And apart from the fear of God men do not preserve equity and love among themselves. Therefore we call the worship of God the beginning and foundation of righteousness." *Institutes* 2.8.11

relationship with God, one which honours His majesty, it is impossible for one who fails to render honour to God to claim to be righteous.

Moreover, it is this argument that in worshipping God men and women are fulfilling the purpose of their creation, and that to truly worship God is to be fully oriented to His being and activity, which explains not only the centrality of worship in Calvin's theology, but also the importance he attached to worshipping God in the proper manner.[1] For, if to worship God is to orient oneself to God, then it is of vital importance that a person worships in such a way that s/he conforms to His being and activity. The only alternative which Calvin saw to this was that unthinkable possibility that instead God would be conformed to desires and perceptions of human beings. Therefore, he argued, there are two aspects which are vital to true worship.

First, the worship of God should be spiritual, so that it corresponds with His own nature[1]. By this Calvin meant primarily that worship should be based upon a proper perception of God, that God is to be conceived as He

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1) "There is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a preposterous and perverse worship of God" Reply to the Letter of Sadolet *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises* Vol I p 33 cf "Nothing is more perverted than to invent various ways of worship for ourselves apart from the Word of God." *Gospel of John* 4:20

2) "The sum is that the worship of God must be spiritual, in order that is may correspond with his nature. For although Moses only speaks of idolatry, yet there is no doubt but that by *synecdoche*, as in all the rest of the Law, he condemns all fictitious services which men in their ingenuity have invented. For hence have arisen the carnal mixtures whereby God's worship has been profaned, that they estimate Him according to their own reason, and thus in a manner metamorphose Him." *Harmony of the Pentateuch* Exodus 20:4; (2:107)

is and not represented by any idol. It is this argument which explains the intensity of Calvin's attack upon what he saw as idolatry and, in particular, upon the use of images in Catholic worship. To create any corporeal image of God, even as an aid to worship, is nothing less than a diminution of His honour.[1] Moreover, this also prevents true worship of God, for God is presented as something other than Who He really is.[2] The only true witness of God is God Himself[3].

Secondly, Calvin argued that the worship of God must be carried out according to God's own commands, that is, as it is prescribed in the Word of God[4]. He offered two reasons why this is the case, first because obedience to God's Word establishes God's authority and secondly because men and women are so prone to idolatry that is only by obeying God's commands that they can be kept to true worship.[5]

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1) *Institutes* 1.11.2

2) "He declares, then, that a true image of God is not to be found in all the world; and hence that His glory is defiled, and His truth corrupted by the lie, whenever He is set before our eyes in a visible form....Therefore, to devise any image of God, is in itself impious; because by this corruption His majesty is adulterated, and He is figured to be other than He is." *Harmony of the Pentateuch* Exodus 20:4; (2:108)

3) "God himself is the sole and proper witness of himself." *Institutes* 1.11.1

4) "The one God is not rightly worshipped unless He be separated from all figments. Wherefore it is not enough to make use of His name, unless all corruptions opposed to His word be laid aside; and thence we arrive at the distinction between true religion and false superstitions; for since God has prescribed to us how He would be worshipped by us, whenever we turn away in the very smallest degree from this rule, we make to ourselves other gods, and degrade Him from His right place." *Harmony of the Pentateuch* Exodus 20:3 1:419

5) "For there is a twofold reason why the Lord, in condemning and prohibiting all fictitious worship, requires us to give obedience only to his own voice. First it tends greatly to establish His authority that we do not follow our own pleasure, but depend entirely on his sovereignty; and secondly, such is our folly, that when we are left at liberty, all we are able to do is to go astray." 'Necessity of Reforming' p 128

The great sin of the idolater lies, therefore, in the fact that rather than worshipping in such a way as to conform him/herself to God, s/he attempts to conform God to his/her own desires, and in so doing creates for him/herself a false God.

> A vain defence with which many are wont to gloss over their superstition. For they think that any zeal for religion, however preposterous, is sufficient. But they do not realize that true religion ought to be conformed to God's will as to a universal rule; that God ever remains like himself, and is not a specter or phantasm to be transformed according to anyone's whim. One can clearly see, too, how superstition mocks God with pretences while it tries to please him. For, seizing solely upon what God has testified to be of no concern to himself, superstition either holds in contempt or else openly rejects that which he prescribes and enjoins as pleasing to himself. Thus all who set up their own false rites to God worship and adore their own ravings. Unless they had first fashioned a God to match the absurdity of their trifling, they would be no means have dared trifle with God in this way.[1]

The mark of true worship, however, is that the believer conforms his actions to what he knows of the activity and will of God and in so doing is fully oriented to Him.

Doctrine and the Orientation to God

The final question which remains to be considered is that of doctrine, and in particular of doctrine in its relationship with the question of piety and the way in which the believer's life is shaped in conformity with the activity of God. It is vital to consider Calvin's understanding of the nature and function of doctrine within this context, not only because, as will be seen,

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1) *Institutes* 1.4.3

one of the major criteria which Calvin proposed for ascertaining whether or not a doctrine was correct, was its usefulness or otherwise in promoting godliness and piety, but also because it can be shown that in the past it has been precisely when this context for doctrine has been ignored that Calvin's teaching, especially upon the doctrine of God, has been subject to distortion.[1]

The importance of doctrine to Calvin is clear and well-documented.[2] It is however worth noting that so important was right doctrine in his vision of the Christian faith that he could go so far as to claim that a faulty understanding of doctrine could deprive the believer of a true experience of the grace of God.[3] The importance of doctrine to Calvin is linked, at least partly, to his view of human nature as it was examined in Chapter Two. There it was shown that, according to Calvin, the rational nature is *ἡγεμενικόν*, the governor of the soul and that, therefore, it is the human capacity, by means of reason and

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1) See Brian A Gerrish, 'Theology within the limits of Piety Alone', in *The Old Protestantism and the New*, pp 196-207.
2) See "From the context we learn, that repentance as well as faith proceeds from the truth taught: for how is it that those alienated from God return, confess their sins, and change their character, minds, and purposes? It is the fruit of truth; not that truth in all cases is effectual, but he here treats of the elect: or were they all healable, yet God shews that the use and fruit of his truth is to turn men." *Book of Jeremiah* 26:3. cf "If we do not want to be ungrateful to God, let us rest in that teaching of which the apostles' writings declare they are the authors, since there the highest perfection of heavenly wisdom is manifested to us, which makes 'the man of God complete' (II Tim. 3:17). Let us not think it right to go beyond this. For our height and breadth and depth consist in knowing God's love which is exhibited to us in Christ. This is the knowledge which, as Paul tells us, excels all other knowledge. (Eph. 3:19)" *Gospel of John* 16:12
3) "But Osiander has introduced some strange monster of 'essential' righteousness by which, although not intending to abolish freely given righteousness, he has still enveloped it in such a fog as to darken pious minds and deprive them of a lively experience of Christ's grace." *Institutes* 3.11.5

deliberation, to direct the life. William Bouwsma argued that it was precisely this view of human nature which led Calvin to incline towards what Bouwsma saw as an 'intellectualized' Christianity and which was responsible for Calvin's emphasis on doctrine.[1] However, although this view of human nature undoubtedly had its part to play, it is arguable that there is another deeper reason which lay behind Calvin's emphasis upon doctrine, one which had to do with the nature of doctrine itself. It was seen in Chapter Two that, according to Calvin, God Himself actively fosters the promulgation of truth, both by inspiring those who preach and teach and also by actuating the human capacity to understand.[2] Hence, doctrine in Calvin's understanding had a particular nature and function, which had to do with far more than simply the communication of information. Teaching, which is based upon and informed by the Word of God, is God's own chosen and instituted means by which to build up the Church and deepen and strengthen the faith of individual believers.[3] The function of doctrine,

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1) William J Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, p98.
2) "We are taught to admit the weakness of all out senses, that neither eyes not ears perform their function, except as far as the facility is continually afforded them by heaven. Our members are endowed by nature with their gifts, but to teach us that they are ours at His command, God keeps the use of them in His Hand, and whatever our eyes see or hear from day to day must be reckoned among His gracious gifts. If He did not animate our senses from moment to moment, their whole force would soon disappear.....True discernment between right and wrong does not then depend on the acuteness of our intelligence but on the wisdom of the Spirit." *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 24:16
3) "As explained in the previous book, it is by faith in the gospel that Christ becomes ours and we are made partakers of the salvation and eternal blessedness brought by him. Since, however, in our ignorance and sloth (to which I add fickleness of disposition) we need outward helps to beget and increase faith within us, and advance it to its goal, God has also added these aids that he might provide for our weakness. And in order that the preaching of the gospel might flourish, he deposited this treasure in the Church. He instituted 'pastors and teachers' [Eph. 4:11] through whose lips he might teach his own; he furnished them with authority; finally he omitted nothing that might make for holy agreement of faith and for right order." *Institutes* 4.1.1 cf "For among the many excellent gifts with (cont)

therefore, is to convey the truth about God and in so doing to engage the believer and orient him/her to God.

> There should be daily progress in faith;...Hence the use of teaching is both to initiate the ignorant in Christ and also to confirm more and more those who know Him. Therefore we must pay heed to our duty of learning that our faith may increase throughout the whole of our life...
>
> Moreover, it is noteworthy how faith is confirmed - when Christ's office and power are explained. For the apostle says that he wrote these things (that eternal life is to be sought in Christ alone) in order that they who were already believers might believe - i.e. make progress in believing. It is therefore the duty of the godly teacher, that he may confirm the disciples in faith, to extol the grace of Christ as much as possible, so that we may be satisfied with that and desire nothing more.[1]

Moreover, as this quotation shows, doctrine has a particular function in the engagement of the believer. By explaining to him/her the office and power of Christ, that is, by teaching him/her of his/her need for God, and of the grace shown in Christ, doctrine promotes in the believer openness to the activity of God. It teaches the believer to desire nothing but Christ.

This can be seen from the great stress which Calvin laid upon the idea that a doctrine, in order to perform the function for which God intended it must be

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which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice might resound in them. Let us accordingly not in turn dislike to embrace obediently the doctrine of salvation put forth by his command and by his own mouth. For, although God's power is not bound to outward means, he has nonetheless bound us to this ordinary manner of teaching." *Institutes* 4.1.5 cf *Epistle to the Ephesians* 4:11

1) *First Epistle of John* 5:13

useful.[1] As the Scriptures were given to men and women in order to make them good and not simply to provide them with information,[2] so all teaching which is carried out in the name of Christ is to be tried by the same test - whether or not it will be profitable to those who hear it.[3]

According to Calvin, there was only one true test of usefulness, whether or not a particular doctrine was profitable in that it promoted piety.[4] A doctrine

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1) "Teaching is rightly condemned on the sole ground that it does no good. God's purpose is not to pander to our inquisitiveness but to give us profitable instruction." *Second Epistle to Timothy* 2:14 cf. EH Harbison 'The Idea of Utility in the thought of John Calvin', in *Christianity and History*, p 249-269.

2) "In giving us the Scriptures, the Lord did not intend either to gratify our curiosity or satisfy our desire for mythical and foolish talk; He intended rather to do us good. Thus the right use of Scripture must always lead to what is profitable." *Second Epistle to Timothy* 3:16

3) "The sole aim of a good teacher must be edification and he should give it his whole attention." *Second Epistle to Timothy* 2:14 cf. "A teacher is one who forms and instructs the Church by the Word of truth. Let him that excels in the gift of exhortation regard it as his object to exhort with efficacy." *Epistle to the Romans* 12:6 and "We should remember that this is the rule by which all doctrines are to be tried; those which tend to edification may be approved but those that prove themselves material for fruitless controversies are to be rejected as unworthy of the Church of God." *First Epistle to Timothy* 1:4

4) "In teaching we are always to have regard to usefulness so that all that is not conductive to godliness may be excluded. There is no doubt that the sophists in their rantings about things of no worth boasted of them as highly worthy and useful to know, but Paul does not admit any usefulness except in building up faith and a holy life." *Epistle to Titus* 3:9 cf "The only thing which on Paul's authority truly deserves to be called knowledge is that which instructs us in the confidence and fear of God, that is, in godliness." *First Epistle to Timothy* 6:20 and "He calls it (doctrine) sound because of its effect in instructing us in godliness." *Second Epistle to Timothy* 4:3 and "Paul does not usually give the title of 'teaching' to anything known or learnt unless it produces some advancement in godliness." *Epistle to Titus* 1:9. Harbison, *op. cit.* asserted that there were three different levels to Calvin's understanding of the term 'useful', that is, instrumental in fostering piety, resulting in ethical action and helping to clear up intellectual difficulties. However, (cont)

which does not promote piety has already departed from the way of Christ.[1] More specifically, teaching should be concerned with the orientation to God and the appropriate way for the believer to live, therefore its aim should be to establish its hearers in the fear and worship of God and train them in the virtues of the Christian life.

> *Doctrine which is according to godliness* means the same. For it will be consistent with godliness only if it establishes us in the fear and worship of God, if it builds up our faith, if it trains us in patience and humility and all the duties of love. Thus anyone who does not try to teach profitably, does not teach rightly; whatever display it may make, teaching is not sound unless it tends to the profit of its hearers.[2]

Thus Calvin commented that the highest commendation which can be made of sound teaching is to say that it both unites us to God and carries within itself all that is involved in the true enjoyment of God.[3]

If the function of doctrine is to facilitate the orientation to God, it is to be expected that this will influence Calvin's perception of the subject of doctrine. Thus Calvin argued that there are in fact two main aspects of sound doctrine; the first teaches the believer to look to God in Christ for salvation (and thus

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as McNeill points out, it is difficult to draw a precise distinction between the three in Calvin's thought; fostering piety includes fostering also ethical action and intellectual clarity. 'Comment on The Idea of Utility in John Calvin' *Ibid* p 262f

1) "It is possible not to profess any ungodly or manifest error and yet to corrupt the doctrine of godliness by silly and boastful babbling. For when there is no progress or edification from any teaching, it has already departed from the institution of Christ." *First Epistle to Timothy* 6:3

2) *First Epistle to Timothy* 6:3

3) *First Epistle of John* 2:24

to be open to God's saving activity in Christ) and the second teaches him/her how s/he is to live.

> He distinguishes two parts of sound doctrine. The first is that by which God's grace in Christ is commended to us, so that we know where to look for salvation; the second that by which our life is trained to the fear of God and to innocence.[1]

Put more broadly theology, according to Calvin, is to concern itself with those subjects which teach the believer of his/her weakness and consequent need of God (that is sin and the effects of sin) and of God's activity by Word and Spirit to alleviate that need.[2] Thus Calvin wrote that the sermons in Geneva concerned themselves with the need for the believer to rely entirely upon the mercy of God freely offered in Christ and with the need for sincerity and obedience in God's service.

> As often as we come to the sermon we are taught of the free promises of God, to show us that it is in his pure goodness and mercy that we must entirely repose, that we must not be grounded on our own merits or anything that we can bring on our side, but that God must hold out his hand to us, to commence and accomplish all. And this (as Scripture shows us) is applied to us by our Lord Jesus Christ; and that in such a way that we must seek him entirely.....and that Jesus Christ alone must be our advocate. That, I say, is shown us every day. It is also declared to us that God's service does not consist in imagining foolish devotions...

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1) *Epistle to Titus* 2:1

2) "The principal articles of theology are: The curse pronounced on the human race; the corruption of nature; the mortification of the flesh; the renewal of life; the free reconciliation through the unique sacrifice; the imputation of righteousness, by which the sinner is accepted by God; the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Because these things are paradoxes, they are contemptuously rejected by the common understanding of men. Therefore few advance in the school of God, because hardly one in ten is found who attends to the first rudiments. And why is this, but because they measure God's secret wisdom by their own understanding?" *Gospel of John* 18:38

and that we must serve God in obedience. After, we are shown that we must sacrifice our hearts and our affections in the first place, and that hypocrisy is detestable to him. All this is daily declared. After we are shown how it is we must call upon God. We are shown to what signs we have been baptized and what is the fruit of our baptism all the days of our life and even to our death; and why it is that the Supper is administered. All that, then, is declared to us.[1]

Thus, according to Calvin, the function of doctrine is to teach the believer about the way in which God deals with men and women and the way in which they are to deal with Him. It is, therefore, of central importance to the believer's understanding and interpretation of his/her own experience, the nature of which will be explored in the Conclusion to this thesis.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis it has been emphasised that Calvin's view of the activity of God and especially his argument that God is active within the believer's experience in order to shape him/her to a particular end is vital to his understanding of experience. In this chapter the nature of that shaping has been explored and it has been shown that, according to Calvin, God is active in human experience in order to draw the believer into that relationship which can be described by the term orientation, a relationship in which every aspect of his/her life is determined by the relationship with God. It was this

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1) *CO* 49:661 quoted in T H L Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography*, p 112-3. cf. "If wee knowe what the grace of God is, and rest uppon it, and put the whole trust and confidence of our salvation in it, and if wee knowe what it is to obey him, then shall wee be taught as we ought to bee, and unlesse wee have this, all the speculations in the worlde, are but vanities and lyes." *Sermons of M. John Calvin, on the Epistles of S. Paule to Timothie and Titus*, (pub. 1579) 1 Tim. 4:6-7 pp 380.

understanding that God's activity within human experience has a particular objective which gave depth and coherence to Calvin's understanding of experience. It is also this concept which is central to the final questions which must be asked and which will be considered in the Conclusion, how according to Calvin is the believer's experience shaped by the activity of God and how does Calvin's theology require the believer to interpret his/her experience.

CONCLUSION

"With experience as our teacher, we find God just as he declares himself in his Word"[1]

Experience *per se* was not a central concept in the theology of John Calvin. He never offered a formal examination of experience in and of itself in any of his writings. This does not mean, however, that it can be concluded either that the idea of experience was not important to Calvin, or that the study of his writings has nothing to offer current debate upon the subject. On the contrary, this study hopes to have shown that it was precisely the fact that Calvin did not study the believer's experience in and of itself which in fact resulted in the perceptiveness of his understanding of the subject.

In the Introduction it was noted that experience can be defined as an event through which an individual goes and which affects him/her, or as a continuous succession of such events. The key to understanding experience is, therefore, the notion of being impinged upon or affected by others. It is this notion of affectivity which marks the difference between an experience and an observation; experience implies a sense of being touched by what occurs. Thus the experience of God refers to an occurrence or a continuous succession of occurrences in which God Himself impinges upon the life of the believer and in which the believer is both aware of and affected by this.

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1) *Institutes* 1.10.2

In looking at Calvin's understanding of experience the distinction between the general concept of experience and the concept of an isolated encounter must be emphasised. A great deal of modern work on experience concentrates on isolated encounters which are said to be religious experiences and the way in which these may be described and analysed. As shown in Chapter One Calvin displayed little interest in this sense of experience and failed to provide a precise description of the distinction between a true and false experience of God in this sense. He was, however, deeply interested in the broader sense of experience understood as the way in which the believer is affected by God's activity as it impinges upon him/her. He roundly attacked those who taught that one could know Christ without experience in this sense.

> And this is the place to upbraid those who, having nothing but the name and badge of Christ, yet wish to call themselves 'Christians'. Yet, how shamelessly do they boast of his sacred name? Indeed there is no intercourse with Christ save for those who have perceived the right understanding of Christ from the word of the gospel. Yet the apostle says that all those who were not taught that they must put on him have not rightly learned Christ, as they have not put off the old man, who is corrupt through deceptive desires. Therefore, it is proved that they have falsely, and also unjustly, pretended the knowledge of Christ, whatever they meanwhile learnedly and volubly prate about the gospel. For it is a doctrine not of the tongue but of life. It is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart. Accordingly, either let them cease to boast of what they are not, in contempt of God; or let them show themselves disciples not unworthy of Christ their teacher. We have given first place to the doctrine in which our religion is contained, since our salvation begins with it. But it must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us. The philosophers rightly burn with anger against, and reproachfully drive from their flock, those who when they profess an art that ought to be the mistress of life, turn it into sophistical chatter. With how much better reason, then, shall we detest those trifling Sophists who are content to roll the gospel on the tips of their tongues when its efficacy ought to penetrate the inmost affections of the

> heart, take its seat in the soul and affect the whole man a hundred times more deeply that the cold exhortations of the philosophers!'

This thesis has shown that this experience can best be understood, not when it is studied simply by means of asking what the believer actually experiences; that is a purely phenomenological approach which has little or no theological foundation. Rather experience must be studied by means of an understanding of the way in which God is active in the sphere of life which the believer experiences, that is the arena of experience itself. The means to understanding the experience of God was, therefore, sought in the idea of the knowledge of God, which, it was shown, is in fact ultimately dependent upon the experience of God. It was shown that the concept of the knowledge of God is best understood by means of the notion of engagement, which provided a preliminary description of the nature of God's activity as it impinges upon the life of the believer; God works within the believer's life in order to engage him/her in a living relationship with Himself. This engagement implies a fundamental change in the way in which human life is experienced.

The notion of engagement and the consequent change in the way in which life is experienced was explored in Chapters Two, Three and Four. There it was shown that the engagement consists in the Spirit's re-creation of the human capacity to know God, the knowledge of God being understood not as a purely rational affair, but as involving the whole person. This engagement manifests itself primarily in the experience of faith, which can be said to be the form of the

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1) *Institutes* 3.6.4

experience of God seen from the human point of view. In the experience of faith God works through Word and Spirit to re-order the human personality in such a way that the believer is fitted for a true relationship with God. Hence, as noted at the end of each chapter, the rational nature is shaped to teachableness, the affections to liveliness, fear of God and humility and the moral life to *rondeur*, that is an unfeigned orientation to God.

In Chapter Five this idea of a true relationship with God was described using the concept of orientation; being oriented to God was described as bringing the whole of one's life into a clearly understood relationship with Him, living one's life so that one is open to His activity and so that every area of life is determined by one's relationship with Him. Thus, as Calvin argued, the Christian is to act on the basis that s/he is dealing with God in all of life.[1] The dynamics of this orientation were shown to be faith, prayer and worship.

Thus, Calvin's understanding of the experience of God was concerned with far more than simply the notion of an occurrence which affects the believer. He did not argue only that a person should be affected by the experience of God; he also went on to outline the nature of that effect. His understanding of the nature of the effect was bound up with his understanding of the end towards which God works in the believer's life. Hence he laid emphasis on the fact that a true experience of God is efficacious - it has the power to bring about a desired conclusion.[2] Indeed, the perceptiveness of Calvin's understanding of the

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1) "The Christian must surely be so disposed and minded that he feels within himself that it is with God he has to deal throughout his life." *Institutes* 3.7.2

2) "Since the Thessalonians felt within themselves a divine power which came from faith, they could rest assured that what they heard was not the passing sound of the human voice but the living efficacious doctrine of God." *First Epistle to the Thessalonians* 2:13 *Institutes* 4.17.4

experience of God rests on his delineation of the end towards which God works in each believer's life; for, according to Calvin, the believer experiences the activity of God as He works to re-shape his/her life and to re-capacitate him/her for a true relationship with Himself. Experience itself was of interest to Calvin only in so far as what was experienced affected the believer so as to draw him/her towards this end.

Thus, according to Calvin, to know God is a dynamic experience, for it involves the recognition of God's activity within one's own life. It is this which removes the knowledge of God from the realm of speculation and gives it the vital and practical quality which belongs to true knowledge[1] as well as giving it a sense of wonder.[2] Hence also experience is inextricably intertwined with the right way of knowing God. The only possible way to fully understand the activity of God in the world is to feel the effects of that activity for oneself. Hence Calvin frequently argued that there are many aspects of the Christian life which can only be understood by one who experiences them for him/herself. Faith, for example, can only be truly comprehended by the one who

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1) "By this we are taught not only that by the Son's intercession do those things which the Heavenly Father bestows come to us but that by mutual participation in power the Son himself is the author of them. This practical knowledge is doubtless more certain and firmer than any idle speculation. there, indeed, does the pious mind perceive the very presence of God, and almost touches him, when it feels itself quickened, illumined, preserved, justified and sanctified." *Institutes* 1.13.13 cf 1.10.2

2) "And it mostly happens that believers conceive from the Word only a certain taste of God's power, but experience ravishes them with wonder." *Harmony of the Gospels* Luke 10:17

experiences it,[1] and it is only by the experience of faith that one can understand the power of the Holy Spirit.[2] Similarly the union with Christ can be comprehended only by experience[3] as can the Spirit's testimony to the authority of Scripture[4] and the presence of Christ in the sacrament[5].

Here, however it is important to return to one issue raised in the Introduction to this thesis. There it was noted that, as recent work on the philosophy of experience has shown, that which is experienced cannot be straightforwardly identified with that which is real; rather the existence of perceptual illusion indicates that the self contributes something to the experience by way of inference, interpretation or construction. In other words, experience is, in part an activity of the mind. The concept of experience can therefore, be divided into two different aspects; the first is generally referred to as 'immediate'

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1) "no-one can well perceive the power of faith unless he feels it by experience in his heart." *Institutes* 3.20.12 cf "But there is a far different feeling of full assurance that in Scripture is always attributed to faith. It is this which puts beyond doubt God's goodness clearly manifested for us. But that cannot happen without our truly feeling its sweetness and experiencing it ourselves." *Institutes* 3.2.15

2) "Christ's words show that nothing relating to the Holy Spirit can be learned by human reason, but that He is known only by the experience of faith." *John* 14:17

3) "For the drift of these words is we cannot know by idle speculation what is the sacred and mystic union between us and Him and again between Him and the Father, but that the only way to know it is when He pours His life into us by the secret efficacy of the Spirit. And this is the experience of faith which I mentioned just now." *John* 14:20

4) "Such, then, is a conviction that requires no reasons; such a knowledge with which the best reason agrees - in which the mind truly reposes more securely and constantly than in any reasons; such finally, a feeling that can be born only of heavenly revelation. I speak of nothing other than what each believer experiences within himself - though my words fall far beneath a just explanation of the matter." *Institutes* 1.7.5

5) "Now if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it." *Institutes* 4.17.32

experience, that is the 'given' aspect of experience, that which occurs without the interpretation of the mind, and the second is generally referred to as 'developed' experience, that is experience as it is interpreted by the subject. Since Calvin speaks of experience as a means to understanding it must be asked what awareness he showed of the way in which a person contributes to his/her own experience by way of interpretation and on what basis he taught that the believer should interpret his/her own experience.

Calvin was, of course, well aware of the problem of perceptual illusion. As was demonstrated in Chapter Two, he argued that perceptual illusion is, in fact, one of the results of the Fall, which weakened and corrupted the rational nature of men and women so that they are unable both to distinguish between righteousness and unrighteousness[1] and to perceive God at work.[2] It was this argument which gave a particular twist to his use of the concept of experience.

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1) "For all of us are inclined by nature to hypocrisy, a kind of empty image of righteousness in place of righteousness itself abundantly satisfies us. And because nothing appears within or around us that has not been contaminated by great immorality, what is a little less vile pleases us as a thing most pure - so long as we confine our minds within the limits of human corruption. Just so, an eye to which nothing is shown but black objects judges something dirty white or even rather darkly mottled to be whiteness itself. Indeed we can discern still more from the bodily senses how much we are deluded in estimating the powers of the soul. For if in broad daylight we either look down upon the ground or survey whatever meets our view round about, we seem to ourselves endowed with the strongest and keenest sight; yet when we look up to the sun and gaze straight at it, that power of sight which was particularly strong on earth is at once blunted and confused by a great brilliance, and thus we are compelled to admit that our keenness in looking upon things earthly is sheer dullness when it comes to the sun." *Institutes* 1.2.2.

2) "But although the Lord represents both himself and his everlasting Kingdom in the mirror of his works with very great clarity, such is our stupidity that we grow increasingly dull towards so manifest testimonies and they flow away without profiting us." *Institutes* 1.5.11

The fundamental fact about experience which it is necessary that a person acknowledge in order to interpret it correctly is the fact that God is at work in this sphere of human life. Yet it is precisely this fact to which sin has blinded the majority of humankind. The one thing which the sinner is incapable of perceiving unaided is the activity of God. As demonstrated in Chapter Five it is the Word of God which shows the believer the way in which God deals with men and women and so enables them to perceive the activity of God. Thus experience cannot be understood if it is segregated from the Word of God. Experience isolated from the Word of God cannot give rise to faith,[1] or, by implication, any true knowledge of God It is only when the problem of perceptual illusion is overcome because the believer's interpretation of his/her experience is formed by the Word, that he/she will find that Word and experience agree,[2] for this will mean that the believer's own understanding of the way in which God acts in the lives of believers, which s/he draws from the Word of God becomes a part of the way in which s/he interprets his/her own experience. Hence, although Calvin made a distinction between two different ways of knowing God, what he called a theoretical knowledge from the Word and a knowledge derived from experience, he was clear that God is to be sought first of all in the Word. The implication is clearly that the person who begins by seeking God in the Word will find that s/he experiences God to be as He is found in the Word.

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1) "Faith cannot flow from the naked experience of things, but must have its origins in the Word of God." *John* 20:29

2) "With experience as our teacher we find God just as he declares himself in his Word." *Institutes* 1.10.2. "Hence it follows that the teaching of the Gospel will be beneficial to all the godly, because none offers himself as Christ's disciples who does not in return feel and experience Him to be a faithful and true teacher." *John* 6:37 and "Therefore anyone who opens his eyes by the obedience of faith will see by that very experiment that Scripture has not been called a lamp for nothing." *Second Epistle to Peter* 1:19

The face of God is now employed to describe the sensible effects of his grace and favour; as if it had been said, Lord, make me truly to experience that thou hast been near to me, and let me clearly behold thy power in saving me. We must observe the distinction between the theoretical knowledge derived from the Word of God and what is called the experimental knowledge of his grace. For as God shows himself present in operation, (as they usually speak), he must first be sought in his Word.[1]

In this insistence that experience can be understood only from within its own context Calvin has, I believe, an important contribution to make to the modern day debate upon religious experience. According to Calvin, experience has its place within theology only because it is an arena for the way in which God and men and women deal with one another. This has one direct and major implication for the interpretation of experience. The only person who will be able to truly interpret his/her own experience of God is that person who has first learnt, from the Word of God in Scripture, the way in which God deals with men and women and so has learnt to perceive the nature and purpose of God's activity as it touches him/her in every area of his/her life. It is worth noting that Calvin could also invert this argument and claim that his own experience enabled him to understand the teaching of the Psalms.[2] 'Naked' experience isolated from this context and studied by and for itself has little to offer by way of understanding the ways of God, or, indeed, the nature of men and women.

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1) *Book of Psalms* 27:9 cf *Book of Joel* 3:17 and *Book of Zechariah* 2:9

2) "Now, if my readers derive any fruit and advantage from the labour which I have bestowed in writing these Commentaries, I would have them to understand that the small measure of experience which I have had by the conflicts with which the Lord exercised me, has in no ordinary degree assisted me, not only in applying to present use whatever instruction could be be gathered from these divine compositions, but also in more easily comprehending the design of each of the writers." *Book of Psalms* Authors Preface p xxxix

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