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Chapter One

Introduction

The Origin of This Research Project

The present research on Calvin’s view of the body and sexuality initially arose out of a study of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, where the phrase “the prison house of the body” was first found.¹ My first reaction was that Calvin did not use biblical language, but uncritically used a Platonic concept in Christian theology. Subsequently, many more of these expressions were found throughout Calvin’s writings.² Calvin’s expression leads directly to the main question: can Calvin be called a Platonist with respect to his view of the body?

Before further developing the main research question in some sub-questions and distinguishing some topics for investigation, thus outlining our research, we will first survey some Calvin studies on the body which can help locate the questions that should be pursued in this study.

Calvin Studies on the Body

Of those Christians writing about the body, only a few have done so with reference to Calvin. The first to do so was Margaret Miles, who limited her inquiry to the *Institutes*.³ She sees the organizing principle of Calvin’s theology as “the glory of God.” She analyzes Calvin’s distinctions between soul and spirit, and body and flesh, but is more concerned with “flesh” as the sinful part of humanity. “The body plays no role, for Calvin, either in the corruption of the soul or in its own corruption, but is the helpless victim, along with the soul, of the destructive hegemony of ‘flesh.’”⁴ She concludes, “The effect of Calvin’s idea of the passivity of the body and the activity of the soul is to relieve the body of responsibility for the sinful agenda of the ‘flesh,’ and to demonstrate the permanent integrity of the body in each of the stages of human experience.” Miles mentions the three stages of the body as “the good creation of

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². See the Appendix for a list of 91 of them.
God,” then the “miserable condition as fallen,” and finally “the resurrection of the body.” Her attempt to relate everything to the perceived organizing principle of “the glory of God” makes her discussion seem rather forced. However, the three stages are valid. I have used them myself in chapter 9. The question with Miles’s view, however, remains: is the body in Calvin’s view only passive or does it play a distinctive role in either sin or holiness?

James Goodloe has made a contribution in which he takes issue with Miles’ assertion that “the glory of God” is the organizing principle of Calvin’s theology.6 His conclusion on the meaning of Calvin’s use of “the prison house of the body” is that “it seems to be a common phrase that is not helpful in expressing what Calvin finally says. At best, it is an infelicity. At worst, if taken literally, it indicates inconsistency.”7 Goodloe clarifies the issues of body, soul, and flesh with more insight than Miles. Except for one reference to a Job sermon, which he obtained from a secondary source, Goodloe also restricted his Calvin references to the Institutes. The question is: how typical is the image of the body as a prison house for Calvin’s anthropological vocabulary?

A few authors have written about Calvin’s experience of his own body. In Volume 3 of Émile Doumergue’s Jean Calvin. Les hommes et les choses de son temps, Doumergue relates the illnesses that beset Calvin in quite some detail.8 More recently Charles Cooke wrote on “Calvin’s Illnesses and Their relation to Christian Vocation.” While he does discuss his clinical observations, he says very little about Christian vocation.9 John Wilkinson’s book The Medical History of the Reformers provides detailed information about Luther, Calvin, and Knox.10 His medical commentary has supported and enlarged my understanding of my own research about Calvin’s body.

Graeme Murdock’s emphasis is on clothing and the body in Calvin’s thought and in Reformed communities.11 He writes about Calvin’s opinions and advice on moderation and modesty in dress. Calvin aimed to foster high standards of moral discipline. In his opinion, expensive or extravagant garments were obtained at the cost of the blood of the poor, “for where do the more fortunate get their wealth except from

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7. Ibid., 105.
Luxury in dress was therefore to be avoided. Women were especially targeted for advice against dressing richly. Calvin did not, apparently, believe that wives dressed in finery just to please their husband. Murdock describes Calvin’s influence on the clothing culture of reformed communities in France, where “Through the regulation of revelation, the bodily appetites are seen to be constrained, working ideologically from outer appearance to inner state and back again.” Calvin needed the cooperation of the elders to effect the changes he advocated from the pulpit and in his writings. Murdock’s most recent article traces the developments in France of consistorial oversight of the dress code advocated. The elders were especially concerned with “open bosoms” and “raised hairstyles” of the women. Similar concerns were addressed in Catholic communities. However, “Reformed societies were distinct in both the character of their regulations about clothing and in the determined efforts made to enforce changes to standards of appearance. In Geneva, the consistory’s efforts to proscribe certain forms of dress, hairstyles, and jewelry were clearly informed by concerns about sexuality and social justice.”

Olivier Millet has analyzed Calvin’s experience and interpretation of suffering. The pain of a Christian is meant to loosen the ties that bind him to this world. It is a warning from God, even a form of punishment, and an incitement to fervent prayer. In Calvin’s mind, there is no mystical meaning of corporal suffering and therefore no sense in physical self-castigation. Millet identifies three sources of physical suffering in Calvin. They are: his public calling as a Reformer, his oppressive workload, and his illnesses. The first led to the second, and his illnesses were the result of the workload or were aggravated by it. Calvin experienced his calling as from God, but against his personal inclinations. His recall to Geneva was also something he fought against as being contrary to all his desires. But he overcame these and once more obeyed the call. The workload wore him out and was felt by him to be torture. His illnesses left him emaciated. Millet argues that Calvin contributed to the picture of himself as sufferer because he described his illnesses in his correspondence. He was candid about the details of his illnesses, even to the Duchess of Ferrara. In the sixteenth century illnesses were not at all included in the notion of privacy. Moreover, his illnesses were put on display to the world, as it were, by his biographers Beza and Colladon, as being the result of a way of life that was sacrificial and completely de-

13. Ibid., 488.
16. Ibid., 73.
18. See chapter 4, f.n. 123.
voted to study and subsequently to the task of reforming the church. In this way these writers reinforced for later generations Calvin’s self-perception as a prophet persevering through suffering. Why did Calvin advertise himself, not as a patient servant, but as patient and servant, or even as a suffering servant? Millet points to the cultural model, presented by Guillaume Budé of the ‘philonponoi’ and ‘laboriosia’ (people who take pleasure in their suffering, or those who are capable of carrying their burden), and to the medical model by Desiderius Erasmus of the hero who, while suffering, courageously carries out his mission. Did Calvin see himself, as suggested by Millet, as a Hercul in a corpusculum?

While some contemporary issues regarding the body, such as abortion and euthanasia, were not foremost in the minds of sixteenth century people, they did have concerns about the body, especially about the suffering body. As will be seen in the discussions that follow, various authors have opted for believing Calvin to be either a Platonic thinker or just the opposite. This is usually reflected in the emphasis they put on certain of his writings. The focus of the present study, however, is specifically on the bodily aspect. This study is therefore distinct from those Calvin studies that focus on his anthropology but which do not focus on the human body as such.

Research Question and Outline

The main question underlying the present research, as announced in the beginning, concerns the following aspects of his anthropology: was Calvin a Platonist with respect to the body?

The first sub-question we seek to answer is if Calvin can be called a Renaissance man with respect to the human body in the light of his education in France? What philosophical influences (Platonic, Stoic, or otherwise) were present in the early years? This is the approach of chapter 2, in which we try to capture the culture of Western Europe in the sixteenth century vis-à-vis the human body. On the one hand Renaissance sculptures, paintings, and writings portray the human body in detail and glory. On the other hand it was an age of wars, deformation, and illnesses, which suggest contempt of human life. In this context the viability of Olivier Millet’s suggestion (to understand the portrayal of Calvin’s illnesses from the cultural model of Budé or the medical model of Erasmus) can be weighed.

Following our preliminary survey of the philosophical landscape the focus of chapter 3 is on Calvin’s use of the metaphor of the body as ‘prison house of the soul.’ Important sub-questions are: when does the metaphor surface and what is the frequency of its use in Calvin’s writings? The metaphor could reflect clear notions in

20. Ibid., 60. “Wichtig ist hier, dass Calvins Krankheiten als Folge seiner aufopfernden, ganz den Studien, dann der reformatorischen Arbeit gewidmeten Lebensweise, dargestellt werden.”
Calvin’s mind, but could also have been used casually. Did Calvin read Plato, especially the *Phaedo*, independently or were Platonic concepts and language mediated by others (e.g. Augustine)? The metaphor may be current in other Reformation writings. Mary Potter Engel’s perspectival view of Calvin’s anthropology provides a tool to distinguish the layers, betrayed by or revealed in Calvin’s use of this metaphor.

On the basis of the cultural environment and philosophical background of the sixteenth century, chapter 4 is directed more specifically to the medical theories of the human body, which Calvin may have encountered and even alluded to in some of his writings. Was he acquainted with classic concepts or more recent medical insights? He was acquainted with various physicians from whom he could have learned in close proximity, even at his bedside. Given the state of his personal health, the vicissitudes of his family, and his known public frankness, it is worthwhile to investigate Calvin’s perception of his own physical self. The main question of this chapter is whether or not Calvin’s experience with and expression of his ailments strengthened any Platonic view of the body.

Having studied the cultural, philosophical, and medical language of the body, we move to a more specifically theological inquiry. Given the importance of the concept of creation of man and woman in the image of God and the centrality of the doctrine of the incarnation of God the Son, chapter 5 is systematic-theologically the heart of this thesis. Important questions are the following: What implications does the concept of the image of God have for Calvin’s view of the human (male and female) body? Does the very fact of the incarnation of the divine as such have salvific meaning for our bodies? The historical line of the Scriptures and theological reflection in *loci communes* in the early Reformation suggest a distinction between the body as created, after the fall, in redemption by Christ through his suffering, death, and resurrection, and in the promise of the resurrection from the dead. Special attention will be paid to the question whether or not Calvin also has something to say on the female sex and the image of God.

The account of humanity as being created male and female, and any experience of the body, leads inescapably to the question how Calvin thought of and what he taught on the male and female body as such and in relation to each other. The following chapters are therefore dedicated to marriage, sexuality, and the naked body. Chapter 6 is focused on marriage of man and woman as presented in the creation accounts of the Bible and the exclusive legal relationship of the two sexes in the sixteenth century. How does Calvin view the relation between man and woman in marriage? How did his own experience as a young man, a bachelor, a married man (and only briefly father), and a widower color his ethical thinking? The female perspective of pregnancy and childbirth must also be addressed. Chapter 7 is focused pointedly on sexuality and gender, underlying and permeating the experience of the body. Did Calvin see sexuality as an aspect of human personality or as a bodily function? How did he view the sexual urge as such? Did he encounter and conquer the Augustinian idea of *concupiscientia*? It might be worthwhile to ponder what meaning masculinity and femininity had for Calvin. The aspect of gender also leads us to look into Calvin’s view of homosexuality and of what was called sodomy in his day and age. Chapter 8 is the last leg of our research and an ultimate test of Calvin’s view of the human body.
What does Calvin say when the body is seen in the nakedness in which it was created and in which it appeared to God after the fall? Calvin encountered nakedness in the Bible, in daily life, and in accusations of ethical misbehavior brought before the Consistory. Was there in the Scriptures or in Renaissance culture any hint of a positive view of the naked body? The results of our second Chapter will be considered also in this context.

The challenge of chapter 9 is to give a systematic-theological account of Calvin’s view of the human body from the perspective of theology *stricto sensu* and creation, of the fall and consequent (hereditary) sinfulness, of Christology and soteriology, of pneumatology and sanctification, and finally of eschatology. Is there a bodily aspect to Calvin’s anthropology that does justice to these varied perspectives? Chapter 10 will return to the basic question of the Platonic character of Calvin’s view of the body and offer a corrective to such a view through biblical and theological considerations.

**Approaching Calvin’s Anthropology**

What is an acceptable framework to evaluate Calvin’s own view of the body? In the ancient view, the soul is all-important. In the modern view, the body and its sense experiences are all important. Although systematic theology had not yet developed as in later Reformed orthodoxy, Calvin tried to grasp biblical doctrine and present his findings in an orderly and teachable way. As Richard Muller put it:

> In his career as an organizer of the Reformation in Geneva, he learned theology in the process of preaching and lecturing through the Bible, augmenting his *Institutes* as he preached and lectured, and defending the Reformation and his own theology in long series of tracts and treatises, mostly polemical. [...] Calvin, to make the point simply, was a lot more learned in theology in 1559 as he published his final edition of the *Institutes* than he was in 1536 when he published his first edition.  22

Calvin began the *Institutio* of 1536 with the bold statement “Nearly the whole of sacred doctrine consists in these two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves.” 23 Of course, this leads to the question of the meaning of the human body for the writers of the Old and New Testaments, which were for Calvin the authoritative Word of God, and of whether we can discern, and therefore distinguish between, the features of Calvin’s view of the human body attributable to his cultural context, and the extent of any correcting influence arising from his reading of the Scriptures themselves.

Recent biblical scholarship can help us analyze, for example, Pauline anthropology, on which Calvin seems to draw. To give one example of such scholarship we turn to

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the work of George Eldon Ladd. Paul describes three different kinds of person (1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3). In the words of Ladd, these are:

the psychikos, the natural person (2:14); sarkikos, the fleshly person (3:3); and pneumatikos, the spiritual person (3:1). In this passage the “natural man” is the unregenerate person, the one who is “in the flesh” (Rom 8:9) – i.e. the whole realm of that person’s life is devoted to the human level and as such he or she is unable to know the things of God. The “spiritual man” is the one whose life is ruled by the Holy Spirit. Between these two is a third class of those who are “fleshly” yet who are babes in Christ. They must therefore be “in the Spirit,” yet they do not walk “according to the Spirit.” Because they are babes in Christ, we must conclude that the Spirit of God dwells in them; yet the Holy Spirit does not exercise full control over their lives, and they are still walking “like men” (v3), manifesting the works of the flesh in jealousy and strife. The one who is “in the Spirit” and no longer “in the flesh,” i.e. a regenerate person indwelt by the Spirit of God, has yet to learn the lesson of walking by the Spirit and not by the flesh.24

Ladd offers this description having first discussed the meanings of σῶμα, pneuma, psyche, and sarx. By and large, Calvin’s exposition of the passage is similar in essentials, even if expressed somewhat differently. Ladd understands sarx, flesh, in many cases ethically and not physically. It refers to fallen human nature and not the material constituting the body.25 All the verses in the Pauline letters taken by Ladd as ethical26 are also taken by Calvin in that sense, often using terminology such as, “to be in the flesh means to be endued only with the gifts of nature, without that peculiar grace with which God favors his chosen people” (Rom. 7:5). Or, ‘flesh’ is “all that human nature is, everything in man, except the sanctification of Holy Spirit” (Rom. 7:10). On the Galatians texts (5:13, 16, 17, 19, 24), Calvin states that ‘flesh’ denotes the nature of man, whereas the Spirit denotes the renewed nature. The sins of the flesh listed show clearly that the word flesh is not confined to sensuality. The flesh is the depravity of corrupt nature, from which all evil actions proceed. Calvin’s anthropology seems to fit into this structure.

Calvin’s own thinking about the body is not to be found in one handy chapter in the Institutes, or anywhere else. That in itself says something about the importance, or lack thereof, of the human body in Calvin’s mindset. For him, the mind and reason feature much more prominently than does the body. The idea of a “theology of the body” would be a foreign concept for him. His statements about the body may often be seen as incidental. My primary aim has been to read and present Calvin’s statements on or allusions to the body in their proper context, both within his own works, and in the context of his time and culture. I have illustrated my findings with

25. Ibid., 508, fn. 41.
26. Rom. 6:19; 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:17; 11:18; Gal. 3:3; 5:13, 16, 17, 19, 24; 6:8; Eph. 2:3; Col. 2:11, 13, 18, 23.
frequent quotations from a variety of Calvin sources so that the reader may gain an understanding of Calvin in his own words.

I have approached his writings and sermons from my perspective as a twenty-first century woman of a certain age and experience. Thus, what often seemed surprising at first glance later became more obvious when studied in the context of the sixteenth century. The way history unfolded as a result of Calvin’s teaching may have been quite radical, but Calvin himself was anything but a radical. He was, as we all are, a time and culture bound personality. Still, there are occasions when Calvin’s words need to be interpreted as an expression of his own character rather than his context and culture.

Calvin’s view of man, his anthropology, is concisely stated in his Institutes Book I Chapter V. The main teaching is that humankind was created originally upright in nature, and in the image of God, as discussed in my chapter 5. Calvin further teaches that “man consists of a soul and a body.” He sees these not as two aspects of a functional unity, but as quite distinct. He further discusses the renewal of the image in Christ and refutes some errors regarding the soul and concludes the chapter by discussing free will and human responsibility. All would have been well if man had only persevered in his original state.

John Cooper’s Body, Soul & Life Everlasting is a modern anthropology which, engaging John Calvin in his discourse (though briefly), presents himself as a discussion partner to evaluate the reformer’s view of the body. Cooper argues against views of humankind that reduce humans to the sum total of their molecules, and against those who deny an intermediate state between physical death and the resurrection, as well as those who espouse the extinction-re-creation theory. He explains how modern philosophers and scientists have undermined the traditional dualistic view of human beings and criticizes Calvin as follows:

If traditional Christian dualists have come under attack for their uncritical Platonistic interpretation of the Old Testament, they have suffered no less reproof for their reading of the New. That a large portion of the tradition is uncritically Platonistic is beyond dispute. One need only return to the relevant passages in Calvin’s Institutes for a classic example. Not only does he interpret dualistically such texts as Matthew 10:28 and Luke 23:46, which do seem to imply the separation of soul or spirit and body at death; he also sees metaphysical dualism in numerous verses which merely use the terms ‘body,’ ‘soul,’ and ‘spirit.’ Paul, says Calvin, would not mention the defilement of both flesh and spirit in II Corinthians 7:1 or Peter speak about ‘the salvation of ... souls in I Peter 1:9 ’unless the soul were something essential, separate from the body...’ [ICR 1.15.2]. Calvin appears unaware of the many nonmetaphysical nuances of the anthropological terminology of Scripture [. . .]. He does not consider the possibility that such texts might employ stock expressions and figures of speech from ordinary language which are wholly lacking in anthropologically dualistic implications. It does not occur to him that such words might refer to inseparable aspects or capacities rather than separable substances. He simply finds confirma-

27. ICR 1.15.2. “Porro hominem constare anima et corpore, extra controversiam esse debet.” (CO 2:135).
tion for his own self-consciously Platonistic categories. Thus he is a legitimate target for the charge that his philosophical prejudice caused him to misconstrue the biblical text.\textsuperscript{28}

After examining the Old Testament texts with a view to finding out whether they teach monism or dualism, Cooper concludes on the basis of the discussion about Sheol that the Hebrews also had a dualistic view of humans in spite of a more holistic emphasis:

My own conclusion is that the truth combines elements of the two extremes – that the Hebrew view of human nature strongly emphasizes living a full and integrated existence before God in this world, but that it unquestionably also includes the belief in continued existence after biological death. If I am correct, then Old Testament anthropology is both holistic and dualistic. . . \textsuperscript{29}

In contrast with the Hebrew and Judaic tradition, the New Testament person is less unified and is often described as a dichotomy (body and soul; Matthew 10:28) or a trichotomy (body, soul, and spirit; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). In dichotomy, “humans consist of two dimensions or components, body and soul/spirit. Dichotomists generally take ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ as synonyms. [. . .] Since this view entails that human beings consist of two metaphysically different and separable components, philosophers label it ‘dualism.’ This became the standard doctrine in Western theology and philosophy for more than a thousand years.”\textsuperscript{30} In trichotomy the “spirit is the essential human self which relates to God. Soul is that dimension of persons which mediates and conjoins the spirit with the material body. The trichotomistic view was more popular among the Greek and Alexandrian church fathers who were influenced by Plato, among them Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa.”\textsuperscript{31} In Greek philosophy dualism abounds; the body is evil, something from which to escape, whereas the soul is noble and pure. For Calvin, the “escape from the body” is centered on the eschatological anticipation of the renewed body in the resurrection. The escape is from the weak and sinful body to the renewed and glorified body, not from the body as such. Calvin would agree that our problem is not that we are creatures; our problem is that we are sinners. Christ came to restore our creaturely bodiliness through the resurrection of the body, his own and eventually ours. Thus, the perceived tension between body and soul is attenuated by the resurrection. The Bible portrays the body more favorably than does Calvin. It is the means by which we are in the world, and by which we act in the world. The body of the believer is the place where we meet God and live out our service to him, where we practice our obedience. It is also where we relate to our neighbors and to the rest of creation. We are in relationship to God, our neighbor, and creation by virtue of our bodiliness. Self-awareness is only possible because we are embodied beings. The question which

\textsuperscript{28} John W. Cooper, \textit{Body, Soul, & Life Everlasting} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 104-5.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
Cooper’s discourse triggers is: does Christ’s life and work also in Calvin’s view restore our creaturely bodiliness?

Having touched on the modern focus of the body and sexuality, and some Calvin studies which pay special attention to Calvin’s view of the physical self and suffering, the main question was phrased as: was Calvin a Platonist with respect to the body? The stage is set for the young Calvin to enter: what image of the body did his milieu, culture, and education give him?
Chapter Two

Calvin in The Context of His Culture and Education

The Late Renaissance Context

The sub-questions we seek to answer in this chapter are: can Calvin be called a Renaissance man with respect to the human body in the light of his education in France? What philosophical influences (Platonic, Stoic, or otherwise) were present in the early years? We will try to answer these questions by looking at the data of his intellectual formation. Biographical data and the impact of cultural elements will be combined.

We will proceed from the general to the particular, and therefore start with the general culture. In order to perceive the various influences on Calvin’s theology in general and his view of the body in particular, it is necessary to be familiar with the philosophies and currents of thought that prevailed before and during his lifetime, especially those that relate to the human body. Calvin lived at the end of the French Renaissance era (1509-1564). The Renaissance, the rebirth of the classical spirit, which launched a renewed scholarly interest in classical literature, had originated in Italy and was characterized by a profound reverence for classical antiquity epitomized in the slogan, *Ad fontes!* This slogan was invoked in support of the study of classical literature in the original languages, mainly Greek and Latin but also Hebrew and other ancient languages. Classical Latin, especially that of Cicero and Virgil, as well as Greek were studied with great enthusiasm, not only for content but also for style. Thompson claimed that “Petrarch did more than anyone else of his age to revive Ciceronian Latin; that accomplishment in itself was a major contribution to renaissance humanism.”

Cicero became the benchmark for prose style during the early years of the humanist movement. Ancient texts from what was considered the golden age of classical antiquity were discovered, collected and commented on. Humanist scholars such as Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) could foresee another golden age dawning in the near future, when the task of polishing and publishing the whole ancient treasury of wisdom was completed. Erasmus was not the only one to see a

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golden age. Pierre Viret (1511-1571), a close colleague and friend of Calvin when he lived in Lausanne, thought the golden age had arrived on account of the revelation of the holy Gospel and the restoration of all good sciences and disciplines. Between 1443 and 1484 the Vatican Library increased its number of manuscripts by more than tenfold. Lorenzo Valla’s investigations into the textual errors of the Latin Vulgate had proved it to be an unreliable translation of the Bible. This, in turn, inspired Erasmus to go to the original Greek sources. Erasmus’s Greek edition of the New Testament, published by Johann Froben in 1516, was considered the “consummate scholarly achievement of the sixteenth century.” Erasmus’s New Testament was the text on which almost all of the critical scholarship of the Reformation was based. Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522), a renowned Hebrew and Greek scholar, published a Hebrew Grammar in 1506. The Hebrew language was taught at several universities, giving scholars access to the Old Testament writing.

Classical authors held a high view of man. Of course, a high view of humankind is found not only in the classical Greek and Latin authors but also in the Bible, where the original human beings were made “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27), created to “rule over” the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26, also Ps. 8:3-8). In the climate of the humanist Renaissance this classical view was revived. With it came a greater appreciation for human individuality: “Humanism’s chief gift to art was the idea of the individual’s creative power. From this followed a stress on originality, the ability to ‘pour out new things which had never before been in the mind of any other man’, as Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) phrased it.”

Portraits and Individuality

Individuality was and is eminently expressed in the painted portrait. Thompson regards the appearance of the modern portrait as a sign of the increasing importance of the individual: “Family records, reminiscences of dead ancestors, commissions for portraits and busts multiplied.” The portrait celebrated the uniqueness of each individual person.

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4. As quoted in W. Balke, Calvijn en de Bijbel (Kampen: Kok, 2003), 191. Quotation refers to Le Monde à l’Empire by Viret.
7. Thompson, Humanists and Reformers, 41.
8. Ibid., 340.
9. Hale, Renaissance Europe, 270.
10. Ibid., 124.
Calvin himself had been the subject of several portraits, as well as a surreptitious drawing by a student. From the fact that Calvin was willing to sit for a portrait we may deduce that he did not think it improper to have his likeness preserved for posterity and was aware of his own uniqueness as a person. Calvin approved of two kinds of painting: portraits and landscapes or other natural scenes. There are two portraits of Calvin as a young man, the Portait de la Touraine and Portrait de Hanau, which show him looking handsome and distinguished, almost smiling. About the first, Doumergue discusses its provenance but can only give it a question mark as to its authenticity. Doumergue situates it at the end of his studies at the University of Orléans. The Portrait de Hanau has a notation at the top left hand of “A° 1540,” which would place him in Strasbourg, when he was actively looking for a bride, or had recently married. It shows him well dressed, with clear eyes. This portrait was once thought to have been by Holbein but this is now discounted. It is not even certain that the portrait is of Calvin. It shows a young man looking directly at the artist. It is interesting in the first place because of the mildness of his expression, contrary to general perceptions of Calvin as an austere person, and secondly, for the fact that if we cover the lower part of the painting to omit the hands, it becomes an even more gentle-looking picture of the man. The body language of the raised finger adds a measure of sternness that is not present in the face alone. It is alleged that the lower part of the painting was “completely repainted.” It is possible that the raised finger was an innovation of this second artist. In the likenesses of Calvin as an older person we see what the ravages of time and illnesses have done to him: his beard has gone white-grey, his face is emaciated and he is bent over.

In the Middle Ages “people typically yielded some of their identity to corporations – the church, the state, the feudal society, the guild, the university, and the monastic order.” Or, to borrow Jacob Burckhardt’s words, “Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation – only through some general category.” Burckhardt argued that this consciousness first changed in

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12. Emile Doumergue, Iconographie calvinienne, (Lausanne: Georges Bridel & Cie, 1909), Plate I.
13. Ibid., 10.
14. Jan Weerda, Holbein and Calvin. Ein Bildfund (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1955), 29-31, thinks it is historically possible that Holbein painted Calvin, but that we cannot know for sure. Dyrness, Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 104, states that Holbein lived in England from 1532 till his death in 1543. If this was a continuous sojourn, he could not have painted Calvin. However, Weerda mentions that Holbein made a trip to Basel in 1538 when the opportunity of painting Calvin may have presented itself.
15. Doumergue, Iconographie, 20 “complètement repeinte.”
16. Thompson, Humanists and Reformers, 3.
Italy and man “became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such.”

Ste-Phens contends that Burckhardt had overstated his case, but he conceded that “in respect of artistic personality ... there is evidence to show that the Renaissance did evolve an ideal for the individual.” Thus, with the Renaissance came “an increased sense of individuality and a celebration of uniqueness and individual self-determi-

nation.” Already in Geoffrey Chaucer’s time (1342-1400) there was an appreciation for the individual, as seen in his Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, where all the pilgrims are described in their individuality. Likewise, Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) had already given expression to the idea of individuality: “I am an individual and would like to be wholly and completely an individual.” This trend toward individuality became more pronounced in later times.

The Renaissance Image of Man

Although scholars have, with the benefit of hindsight and much careful research, been able to trace strands of medieval thought into the Renaissance and Reformation eras, the Renaissance men and women themselves saw their age as distinct from the medieval era. They despised their immediate, medieval past in preference for the distant, golden past of the classical era. People experienced joy and optimism at being alive in this exciting time of re-discovering the classics. Yet, their situation with re-

ards to health and nutrition was such that the times inspired no great personal hopes for the future. Illness and early death were the norm. Perinatal mortality rates were high (as much as 25-50% in Europe generally), and many women died in child-

birth. It was the leading cause of death among younger women. Men did not live very long either, though generally longer than women. The specter of death was ever before them: “For the vast majority the future was not a zone where man could proj-

ect with some confidence his own achievements and those of his posterity nor spec-

ulate optimistically about society as a whole: it was filled by the image of death.”

18. Ibid.
20. Thompson, Humanists and Reformers, 3. Italics added.
21. Quoted in William Bouwsma, A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 78. See also footnote 16 where a further quote is given to illustrate Petrarch’s application of this impulse to his conception of God’s solicitude: “He watches over me personally and is solicitous for my welfare. ... He cares for each individual as if he were forgetful of mankind en masse.”
23. King, Renaissance in Europe, 158.
Frequent visitations by the Plague reinforced this unpleasant prospect of death. The preoccupations of the age may also be seen in the so-called ‘Vanitas Paintings’ that showed human skulls and other symbols of mortality, decay, and the transience of life.

Paradoxically, in the face of death lurking in every corner, there was also during the Renaissance an increased optimism regarding human dignity and potential, as illustrated in the art forms of the time. In literature, we only have to look at the titles of works such as Giannozzo Manetti’s *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* (1452) and Pico della Mirandola’s *De hominis dignitate oratio* (1486) to get a feel for the current philosophy of man. Manetti saw excellence in the human body, the soul, and the whole human existence. His *De dignitate* was written as a response to the great medieval Pope Innocent III’s *De Contemptu mundi*, which strove to turn people’s attention away from this life to the afterlife. Pico’s *Oration* is actually more about philosophy and philosophers *per se* than about a detailed view of man, although he places considerable stress on man’s ability to make decisions about his own life:

*[God speaking to man]* The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature.

In Pico’s view, man is the Captain of his own ship, free to determine his own course. By contrast, Calvin advocates staying with the calling God has placed on a man:

For no one ... will attempt more than his calling will permit, because he will know that it is not lawful to exceed its bounds. A man of obscure station will lead a private life ungrudgingly so as not to leave the rank in which he has been placed by God. [...] each man will bear and swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God.

This advice seems to imply that no one should ever try to better himself, or to change his occupation, unless God specifically calls him to do so. Striving for upward mobility would not be a virtue in Calvin’s book. It is possible to read some of Calvin’s own biography in the “discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties” he experienced when he was called to return to Geneva, when he would rather have stayed in Strasbourg: “Whenever I call to mind the state of wretchedness in which my life was spent when there, how can it be otherwise but that my very soul must shudder when any


26. ICR 3.10.6. “quia nec quisquam prorua temeritate impulsus plus tentabit quam ferat sua vocatio, quia sciet fas non esse transsilire suas metas. Qui obscurus erit privatam vita non aegre colet, ne gradum in quo divinitus locatus erit deserat[,] quia in suo vitae genere incommoda, sollicitudines, taedia, anxietates perferet ac vorabit, ubi persuasi fuerint onus cuique a Deo esse impositum.” (CO 2:532).
proposal is made for my return?" It was only after he was once again persuaded that the call was from God, that he would consent to return to the troublesome Genevan church.

It seems possible that Calvin, having read Pico on astrology, had also read Pico on the subject of the dignity of man, even though there appear to be no direct references to *De hominis dignitate oratio*. The editor of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John McNeill, states, “Calvin’s opinions on the religious bearings of judicial astrology are seen [in Bohatec’s *Budé und Calvin*] to be in agreement with those of Pico della Mirandola, the celebrated Christian Neoplatonist of Florence (d. 1494).”

It is clear from Calvin’s writings that he was extremely well read, both in ancient and more recent authors. Reading does not necessarily imply agreement but at this point our concern is with possible influences. Pico’s method was syncretistic, drawing on both biblical and pagan ideas and authors. It is unlikely that Calvin agreed with him on all subjects.

The classical values of proportion, harmony, rationality and regularity were applied to painting, sculpture, and architecture. Popular knowledge about the human body was gained from artists like Leonardo da Vinci, who practiced dissection and drew anatomical sketches. Indeed, artists seemed more preoccupied with anatomical detail than physicians were. Despite the restrictions imposed, Leonardo da Vinci did some dissections and studied the function of muscles in order to understand the human body. There are some two hundred pages of surviving anatomical sketches and writings by Leonardo, kept in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle.

The goodness of creation was acknowledged, over against the gloomier outlook of the Middle Ages. In art we see that acknowledgment of goodness in the rising importance of the lifelike nude. Nudity was one of the foremost characteristics of the art of Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (1475-1564).

For the classical artist and for the Renaissance artist who are interested in human nature and in human life in this world, the nude is the preeminent vehicle in the whole realm of art for confirming and enhancing life itself. It becomes the most significant object in the artist's imagination. Michelangelo understood this point better than any other artist in the Renaissance.

Renaissance art in general was, in contrast with real life, a veritable celebration of life here and now: “Nudity in art was perhaps the quintessential expression of Renaissance humanism, exulting as it did in the beauty, power, and freedom of human beings. Michelangelo’s *David* is triumphantly nude.” It is difficult to imagine, in

28. ICR 1.16.3 footnote 8.
31. Ibid., 4-5.
view of Calvin’s commentaries, that Calvin himself would have appreciated Michelangelo’s *David.* In his view, there was nothing triumphant about nudity. Calvin seems excessively offended by nakedness, especially when we consider how freely the artists of the period portrayed nakedness. Chapter 8 will deal more extensively with Calvin’s views of nakedness. Apart from not appreciating the naked body and linking it with shame, Calvin attached greater importance to the spirit and/or soul. In Against Luxury and License in Geneva Calvin wrote, “Truer than I should like is that saying of the ancients that those who labor so much in developing the body are little concerned with the cultivation of the soul.” For Calvin, the soul was always more important than the body.

**A Paradox?**

This brings us to the question why the Renaissance artist could feature David in such a triumphal way and yet could cherish the metaphor of the body as prison of the soul, for this note of triumph in the statue of *David* is not seen in all of Michelangelo’s works. His sculptures of slaves, intended for the tomb of Pope Julius II but placed unfinished in the grotto of the Boboli Garden, have been seen by Panofsky as symbolizing “the unredeemed human soul, imprisoned in natural passions.” A Neoplatonic interpretation has generally been placed on these slave sculptures. Rookmaaker discusses various interpretations of the slave sculptures, including that of Rodin, who also seems to have a Neoplatonic view: “Each of his prisoners is the human soul, which would like to burst from the shell of its bodily envelope in order to possess limitless freedom.” Rookmaaker, who describes this concept as a “purely humanist interpretation of the meaning of these statues,” concedes that Neoplatonism was frequently “the cloak in which the world view of humanism dressed itself during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. . . . In Platonism as well as in humanism people consider themselves too good to exist as material, ‘external’ persons – in both views this is . . . expressed in the thought that the soul is incarcerated, imprisoned in matter.” This dismal outlook seems to be confirmed by a line of Petrarchan poetry that Michelangelo had written on a sketch page: ‘Death is the end of a gloomy

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32. Calvin identified himself with the person of David to some extent in the commentary on the Psalms, especially in the Preface, as for example, “yet if I have any things in common with him, I have no hesitation in comparing myself with him.” *Commentary to the Book of Psalms,* tr. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), xl. “Car combien que l’ensuyve David de bien loin, et qu’il s’en faille beaucoup que ie soye à accomparer à luy.” (*CO* 31:20-2). In Latin: “Neque enim, quamvis ab eo longissime distem, imo ad multas quibus excelluit virtutes aegre lenteque adspirans contariis vitii adhuc laborem: si quid tamen mihi cum ipso commune est, conferre piget.” (*CO* 31:19-21).


prison.” In his own poetry Michelangelo also expresses similar thoughts: “In the dark jail in which my soul was hidden” and “To rise once more to heaven whence it came, / Your soul descended to its earthly prison.” It is clear that Platonic ideas of the body being a prison house of the soul re-surfaced in Neoplatonism at the time of the Renaissance. Calvin used the metaphor of the body being the prison of the soul, and the thought that the soul needs to be liberated from the body throughout his writing career, starting with his early Christian work, Psychopannychia. He also used these ideas in his Commentaries, in the Sermons, in the Institutes and in other writings.

Calvin’s fellow reformed believers also shared this concept of the prison house. In his dedicatory letter to Concerning Scandals, written to the bereaved Laurent de Normandie, Calvin recounts how bravely and piously his wife died in Calvin’s presence. Among the sentiments she uttered while dying, Calvin records the following: “She declared that she was twice blessed because she had been recently taken out of the accursed jail of Babylon and was now about to be released from the wretched prison house of her body.” This remark shows the pervasive nature of the idea of the body as prison house of the soul. Admittedly, this was uttered in the anguish of death, but she could have used different terminology to express joy at her approaching death.

Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) wrote to Calvin, 14th October, 1554, “I do not despair of us having a conference before my being separated from this mortal prison.” It was meant with the same intent as Calvin used it; in his case, of the mind, rather than the soul.

Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) subscribed to the idea of the body being an earthly prison and even excluded the body from his definition of man: “Man is the soul itself. ... Everything that a man is said to do, his soul does itself; the body merely suffers it to be done; wherefore man is soul alone, and the body of man must be its instrument.” Erasmus expressed similar thoughts in his Education of a Christian Prince:

If there is any evil in the mind, it springs from infection and contact with the body, which is subject to the passions. Any good that the body possesses is drawn from the mind as from a fountain. How unbelievable it would be and how contrary to nature, if ills should spread from the mind to the body, and the health of the body be corrupted by the vicious habits of the mind.

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37. Ibid., 479.
38. Ibid., 482.
39. See chapter 3 and the Appendix.
41. “Non despero nos colloquaturos esse, antequam ex hoc mortali carcere mens discedat.” (CO 15:269).
42. Quoted in Bouwsma, A Usable Past, 87.
43. Ibid., italics in original.
Obviously, Erasmus had not yet considered the possibility of psychosomatic illnesses. He did more emphatically believe that we should take care of our bodies. In his *An-notationes* on Romans 12:1-2 he stated: “. . . we are admonished to take care to treat our bodies in such a way that they are instruments suitable for the divine will and worthy to be presented before his eyes.” Calvin, commenting on the same verse, takes bodies to mean “the totality of which we are composed” and does not draw any inferences as to what that should mean for our actual, physical bodies.

Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540), a Spanish humanist who was acquainted with Erasmus, shares a negative view of the body: “Our souls carry the heavy burden of bodies with great misery and pain; because of bodies, souls are confined to the narrow limits of this earth, where all filth and smut seem to converge.” This view sounds not unlike that of Calvin when he states, “Our body is the receptacle of a thousand diseases – in fact holds within itself and fosters the causes of diseases – a man cannot go about unburdened by many forms of his own destruction, and without drawing out a life enveloped, as it were, with death.” It may have been a hyperbolic statement, but Calvin was well aware of the many diseases in his own body.

A more positive view of the body was expressed by Michelangelo when he painted The Creation of Adam on the vault of the Sistine Chapel (between 1508-12). He interpreted the Genesis account quite literally with respect to the image of God: “Michelangelo has endowed Adam with a perfect anatomical form, one that epitomizes the glory of the Renaissance figure. The muscular, vigorous body encapsulates both strength and elegance. In accordance with Genesis, Michelangelo has directly modelled the figure of Adam on that of God; his hands and legs mirror those of the Father.” Michelangelo presented Adam’s body as something beautiful and glorious. This is the pre-Fall Adam; there is no shame implied about Adam’s bodiliness. Although the figure of God the Father is dressed, Adam is unabashedly and totally nude. It would be interesting to know what Calvin would have thought about this depiction of a pre-Fall Adam showing no sense of shame.

**Calvin’s Education as a Humanist**

The aim of Renaissance education was to attain one’s full potential as a human being through the *studia humanitatis*, which consisted of “grammar (the Latin language learned through its literature); rhetoric (the art of speechmaking but also, more

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47. *ICR* 1:17:10. “quum mille morborum receptaculum sit corpus, imo intus inclusas teneat ac foveat morborum causas, se ipsum homo ferre non potest, quin multis exitiorum suorum formas secum ferat, ac vitam quotidammodo cum morte implicitam trahat.” (CO 2:162).
broadly, of prose composition); poetry; history; and moral philosophy." Care and exercise of the body was not as yet seen as being part of the "full potential" of a human being. As the Renaissance used the term, *studia humanitatis* referred "not to a block of subjects in a curriculum, but to a means or system for humanizing people. . . Finally, the supreme goal of education was not contemplation but citizenship." This ideal of active citizenship, as opposed to a life of quiet contemplation was accepted only reluctantly by Calvin. He did become active in citizenship in Geneva, but not initially by choice. It was the call of God through Farel in Geneva that forced him to be very much engaged in civic life. His recollection was that Farel "went so far as to invoke a curse, that it would please God to curse my rest and the tranquility of my studies that I sought if, in such a great need, I retired and refused to give help and aid." Although Calvin came to recognize the necessity of involvement in civic affairs, he initially agreed only to be a "doctor" or "reader of the Holy Scriptures." Inevitably, he became involved in other concerns, such as the disputation at Lausanne, and later, pastoral work and preaching. In addition, he was involved in the civic affairs of the city of Geneva, assisting in legislative work when required by the city council. His legal training made him the obvious person to help the city council in these matters.

Before 1533, while studying in Paris, Orléans, and Bourges, Calvin had managed to lead a fairly quiet life. The best example of Calvin’s ideal of humanist studies is his work on a classical text, his Commentary on Seneca’s *De Clementia*, which was published on 4th April, 1532. Once he was associated with the rectoral address by his friend Nicolas Cop (c. 1501-1540), presented on All Saints’ Day 1533 in Paris, he failed to enjoy the quiet repose of the purely scholarly life he had hoped to lead, in imitation of other humanist scholars of his time such as Erasmus. The persistent longing of Erasmus for peace devoted to study is not only a personal taste but the ideal of a generation. Calvin was forced to flee Paris and spend time on the run from those who would have persecuted him, and in hiding at other times. Before Calvin became a Protestant in about late 1532 or 1533, he spent a long time in education and other preparation. Traditionally, education at the university included the *trivium* (gram-
mar, dialectic and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and the theory of music). This education was preliminary to any course in theology, canon and civil law, and medicine. In Calvin’s case, we may assume in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that he followed this kind of course. Battles has provided a lucid and informative account of Calvin’s education. Calvin started his university education in 1523 at age fourteen at the University of Paris, initially at the Collège de la Marche. Ganoczy relates that on August 8 of that year, at about the time that Calvin arrived in Paris, the monk Jean Vallière was accused of “conniving with the party of the heretic Luther” and was condemned to death by the Parliament of Paris: he first had his tongue cut off and was then burned alive; Lutheran books were ordered to be burned publicly also. Even if Calvin did not personally witness the event, it must have been widely discussed and commented on at the time. Further public burnings took place in Paris in 1526. This was the climate of repression in which Calvin was educated, in strong contrast to the climate of freedom in Renaissance Italy. It must have been a shocking realization to find out that dissent from Catholic doctrine could mean a cruel end to one’s life. Luther later wrote “The body they may kill...” (Nehmen sie den Leib...), but Calvin was never so nonchalant about human life and certainly would have been horrified at the violence.

It was at the Collège de la Marche that Calvin received an excellent grounding in Latin under the tutelage of Mathurin Cordier (1479/80-1564), a respected and innovative pedagogue. Calvin always remained grateful to his teacher and dedicated his Commentary on 1 Thessalonians to him. Prior to having Cordier as teacher Calvin had “done only the rudiments of Latin.” Calvin owed his superior Latin style to the teaching of Cordier, who was also responsible for reform in the French language, having separated it from the Latin, to the advantage of the French language. Wendel asserts that Calvin became “one of the best Latinists of the sixteenth century; and when he wrote French, too, his language was of a range and elegance comparable to Pascal’s or Bossuet’s. In refinement and taste he comes very near Erasmus.” What Luther did for the German language in standardizing, improving, and promoting it, Calvin did for the French language. Abel Lefranc waxes eloquent on Calvin’s obtaining the certain glory of having created French eloquence. He credits Calvin’s teachers, Mathurin Cordier and Melchior Wolmar (1497-1561), with being instrumental in his having acquired the taste and literary culture to become “one of the most ad-

60. Ganoczy, The Young Calvin, 49.
61. Comm. Thessalonians, 331. “…sic tamen institutione tua deinde fui adiutus, ut progressus, quales-cumque sequi sunt, tibi merito acceptos feram.” (CO 13:526). Note that this was written in 1550, about 27 years after Cordier’s Latin classes. Cordier was by then a Protestant, teaching in Lausanne.
63. Wendel, Calvin, 35.
mired masters of our language. The superiority of Calvin’s style was already recognized by his contemporaries such as Farel and Sturm.

At the end of that first year (1523) Calvin transferred to the Collège de Montaigu and stayed there until he completed the basic course for the licentiate in arts “at the end of 1527 or the beginning of 1528.” Montaigu had been founded by the Dutchman Jan Standonck (1453-1504), who imposed a severely ascetic lifestyle on its students. They had to study for long days and only received very frugal meals. The accommodation was very poor and punishments were harsh. Although Standonck died in 1504, his influence lasted beyond his lifetime. Educational philosophy was in a transition stage between that of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance ideal.

But from the sixteenth century education is in possession of its essential principles. The education of the Middle Age, over-rigid and repressive, which condemned the body to a régime too severe, and the mind to a discipline too narrow, is to be succeeded, at least in theory, by an education broader and more liberal; which will give due attention to hygiene and physical exercise; [...] finally, instead of developing but a single faculty, [...] reason, [it] will seek to develop the whole man, mind and body, taste and knowledge, heart and will.

At Montaigu, education was still practiced in Medieval ways. The influences of Standonck’s regime, which started when Calvin was only fourteen years old, must have made an impact on his thinking about the body. Calvin’s frugal, abstemious habits and neglect of his bodily wellbeing probably started during his Montaigu education.

Calvin thus received a solid education which introduced him to the classical world and its various philosophical streams. Calvin’s early work on Seneca steers our attention to the impact of Stoicism in his thought.

Stoic Influences

The spirituality current at the college of Montaigu “manifested some connections with Stoic ethics. Its exaltation of the spiritual over the corporeal revealed Neoplatonist tendencies, which caused it to consider the body as a prison of the soul and to neglect the fundamental dogma of the resurrection of the flesh.” One of Calvin’s objections to Stoicism was that fear of death was inevitable, as Bouwsma has pointed out. A true Stoic, practicing ἀπάθεια, would not be affected by the prospect of death. But, according to Calvin, “to feel no sadness at the contemplation of death, is rather

65. Ibid., 343 ff. “...un des maîtres les plus admirés de notre language.”
66. Ibid., 351-2.
67. Battles, Interpreting, 49.
70. Ganoczy, The Young Calvin, 59.
barbarism and stupor than fortitude of mind.” Boisset considers Calvin’s thinking to be anti-Stoic, whereas Schaff concluded the opposite. Although it would be too much to say, with Schaff, that Calvin was “a Christian stoic,” some Stoic tendencies can be found in Calvin’s work also. For example, in Stoicism, virtue consisted “in following the dictates of reason, to which the rebellious body and its passions were to be reduced by the will.” Stoic ethics are based on the idea that impulses and desires are to be placed under the control of human reason. Calvin places a high value on reason. In one aspect of Stoicism Calvin certainly did not concur. He did not think it advisable or even possible to suppress all emotions.

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His agreement with the ethical demands of Stoicism comes to expression when Calvin comments on lust, adultery, fornication, and overindulgence of food and wine. In Against Luxury and License in Geneva, Calvin wrote against what he saw as the evils then prevalent: over-indulgence in food and wine, luxury of dress, dancing, and luxurious banquets. Battles considers this unfinished fragment, which he dates at about 1546-1547, to demonstrate

a continuity of Stoic – that is, primarily Senecan – influences on Calvin, extending beyond his early intimacy with that Roman’s teaching. Particularly in the doctrine of frugalitas, of a temperate mean between sensual indulgence and grim austerity, Calvin is supplementing the teaching of Jesus and Paul with the rich and almost Christian insights of Seneca.

Breen lists those Christian insights arising from Stoicism as these: the equality of all men alike before God, the scientific spirit, and the restoration of the received classical texts to their original purity. Also reminiscent of Seneca’s Stoicism is the value Calvin places on the civic order of society. This is reflected in his insistence on obeying the legitimate authorities.

73. Boisset Sagesse et Sainteté, 221. “Mais il faut se souvenir que la pensée de Calvin est anti-stoïcienne...” See also his comments on Calvin’s Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia: “...déjà s’affecte l’anti-stoïcisme de Calvin: il soutient la providence de Dieu contre la notion d’un Dieu qui «se repose en lui, livré à ses seules pensées.»” 248.
76. See also his Lecture #103 on 1 Samuel, “Inter etnicos Stoici praesertim, qui fortissimi videri voluerunt, constantiam fortis hominis existimarat in eo positam esse, ut vir fortis nulla re terreatur, nunquam lacrymotur, nunquam gemitur, sed imperterritus et immotus adversus quoslibet foruneae quam dicebat, insultus maneatur: ideoque flere turpissimum esse dixerunt. Sane fateor modum excedentes condemnationem mereri, atque etiam passiones nostras nimis violentas modum excedere, quoniam a peccato corrupti sumus, iodeque vitiose esse. Sed si queras licet atque homini tristem esse quum Domini manu affligitur, et dicat aliquis non licere, aio insolens esse responsum.” (CO 30:683). Similarly, his commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:13.
Calvin also differentiates himself from the Stoics by denying that their concept of fate is the same as the concept of God’s providence. Charles Partee sums up this difference as follows: “Calvin believes that his view is sufficiently differentiated from the Stoic view of fate by the fact that men deal directly with God as revealed in Jesus Christ rather than with God as merely a causative principle.” It is Calvin’s doctrine of God that makes all the difference in what may otherwise seem similar. Partee concludes his discussion of Stoic similarities and differences in Calvin by stating that Calvin’s view of providence “does not issue in passive and reasoned resignation but in responsible and loving service.” Calvin’s successors have shown themselves to be anything but passive, not least the Kuyperians of more recent times.

Calvin always speaks against the indulgence of the passions. Everything has to be enjoyed in moderation, in a restrained manner, and kept within bounds by the use of reason. He chides those who indulge in excesses of any kind as being like animals. For example, in his commentary on Hosea, and with reference to immoderate drinking, he writes: “Nothing royal now appears in the king’s palace, or even worthy of men; for they abandon themselves like beasts to drunkenness.” What distinguished man from beast was reason. In the pre-Fall situation, Adam “had affections in harmony with reason, had all his senses sound and well-regulated, and truly excelled in everything good” whereas after the Fall men and women were often deprived of reason because of lust, drunkenness, or other kinds of excesses. Petrarch had put similar words in the mouth of Augustine in his Secretum, imaginary dialogues between Petrarch and Saint Augusttine in the presence of Lady Truth:

> When you find a man so governed by Reason that all his conduct is regulated by her, all his appetites subject to her alone, a man who has so mastered every motion of his spirit by Reason’s curb that he knows it is she alone who distinguishes him from the savagery of the brute, and that it is only by submission to her guidance that he deserves the name of man at all. . . . when you have found such a man, then you may say that he has some true and fruitful idea of what the definition of man is.

Seneca was accessible in the recent edition of Erasmus and attractive for his views on rule and authority for Calvin to show his training as a humanist scholar. Certainly, Calvin’s choice of subject for his first major work is significant. Meylan says of Calvin, “The hand that guided his pen obeyed an intellect steeped in humanism in...
general and Stoicism in particular.”
However, Meylan concedes that Calvin’s Stoicism was subconscious rather than intentional. He did not set out to marry his Protestantism with Stoicism. It is also important to remember that Calvin’s age was eclectic; people read and appropriated many different sources, so that no one influence was paramount. Calvin’s age was not one of systematic philosophy. Bouwsma argues from the harshness of his moralism that Calvin “remained emotionally a Stoic.” For Battles also, the evidence “demonstrates a continuing influence of Seneca and the Stoic tradition in Calvin’s ethical teaching and moral discipline of the city [of Geneva].” However, while Calvin had an affinity with Stoic ethical teaching and moral discipline, he was not against showing emotions. He did not want believers to be like the “new Stoics, who count it depraved not only to groan and weep but also to be sad and care ridden.” Calvin continues this section by referring to Jesus’ emotions as recorded in the Gospels, indicating that if it was appropriate for the Son of God to show emotions, believers may also do so.

The Collège de Montaigu was noted for the rigorous and frugal life-style of its students, as well as the harsh discipline, its old-fashioned educational methods, and obscurantism. Pierre Tempête was head of the Collège during Calvin’s time there. He was described by Rabelais as that “grand fouetteur d’enfants.” Erasmus had earlier endured its rigor when he was a student there, and had left in disgust. The food provided was notoriously bad, and the place was ridden with lice and fleas. However, in contrast with Erasmus, Calvin was not there as a pauvre, but as a riche, living out of college in rooms.

Orléans and Bourges: Legal and Other Studies

The next logical step in becoming a priest would have been further specialized study in theology, but Calvin’s ambitious father, Gérard Cauvin, decided at that point that the law would prove more lucrative for him. An additional reason may have been that Cauvin had lost the support of the church dignitaries in Calvin’s birthplace of

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87. Ibid., 56.
89. ICR 3.8.9.
90. Quoted in Breen, French Humanism, 22.
93. See McGrath, A Life, 28.
94. See his Preface to the Commentary on the Psalms. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 1:xl. “Dès que l’estoye ieune enfant, mon pere m’avoyt destine à la Theologie: mais puis apres, d’autant qu’il consideroit que la science des loix communément enrichit ceux qui la suyvent, ceste esperance luy feit incontinent changer d’avis.” (CO 31:22).
Noyon. Calvin depended on them for support and an appointment at the end of his studies. Foreseeing, or fearing, the non-offer of such an appointment, his father ordered him to study law. Being an obedient son, Calvin did so, first at Orléans, then at Bourges. Orléans should have been a pleasant change from Montaigu, but Calvin worked so hard that he neglected his physical well-being. He would study far into the night, then rise again early and review what he had read the previous night. In that way he developed his memory to an extraordinary degree, but the regimen to which he subjected his body weakened his resistance considerably. It was at Orléans that he first contracted dyspepsia (acid indigestion, *imbecillitas ventriculi*), possibly because he took on himself an excessive workload, which in Theodore Beza’s opinion “may have contributed to his premature death.” More will be said about Calvin’s illnesses in chapter 4. Calvin followed the lectures of Pierre de l’Estoile, “without doubt one of the greatest French specialists of his time.” At Orléans, Calvin added the study of Greek, being taught by Melchior Wolmar, to his legal studies. He showed his indebtedness to Wolmar by dedicating to him his *Commentary on Second Corinthians*, appreciating him as a most distinguished teacher.

In spite of the advantages of Orléans and of being taught by de l’Estoile, Calvin was tempted to transfer to Bourges in 1529. Bourges was famous for having been able to gain the services of Andrea Alciati, a “famous Italian jurisconsult.” Calvin went there on the strength of Alciati’s reputation but although he admired him as a scholar, he was put off by his conduct. Alciati was too vain, too pompous, too fond of wine and victuals. This was offensive to Calvin, who always urged moderation in food and drink. In spite of these reservations about Alciati as a person, it was the opportunity of a life-time for Calvin to sit under “one of the most eloquent teachers of the century.” Alciati introduced the best of the Italian Renaissance scholarship to him. It was unfortunate for Calvin that his educational experience of the Renaissance came to him via a man of whom he did not approve. He must have been pleased that in 1529 Wolmar also came to Bourges at the invitation of Marguerite of Angoulême, patroness of the university.

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After the death of his father (26th May, 1531), Calvin felt free to abandon the study of law and concentrate on other studies. At this stage Calvin was still in reasonably good health and was able, after a final visit to Orléans, to walk all the way back to Paris. He was also a keen horse rider. In later life he could neither ride nor walk; he was so weakened from his many illnesses. In Paris he enrolled in the College of Royal Lecturers to study classical literature. The College had been founded in 1530 by King Francis I at the instigation of the humanist Dr Guillaume Budé (1467-1540), a renowned Hellenist. This institution was appointed and financed by the King and thus enjoyed independence from the university authorities. It aimed to “counteract the bigoted spirit which then dominated the Faculty of Theology.”

The famous Dr Budé was a good friend of the Cop family. The young Calvin was an intimate friend of the three sons of Dr Guillaume Cop (d. 1532), the personal physician to King Francis I and professor of medicine at the university. He very likely often met Budé in the Cop home. However, Calvin had already read Budé while still a law student at Bourges. Battles asserts that quantitatively speaking, Budé was “the most impressively influential of all of Calvin’s teachers.” Of course, this does not mean that Calvin was in agreement with all of Budé’s writings. This came to expression in 1536 when Calvin wrote the Dedicatory Letter to King Francis to accompany the first edition of the Institutio. Bohatec has sought to trace the outlines of Budé’s Renaissance theology and argued that in this letter to King Francis, Calvin expressly addresses those issues that Budé himself had raised in writings dedicated to the king. For example, Budé had characterized the protestant doctrines as something new; Calvin countered with saying that the evangelical faith was established in ancient times, but had been buried by godless men, and was restored again through God’s goodness. Similarly, Calvin refutes other disputed points in his letter to the king that Budé had accused the evangelicals of doing or teaching. He must have been disappointed that he was forced to count this great humanist as one of his opponents, seeing as he had learned so much from him.

104. Breen, French Humanism, 61. For his source he refers to Abel Lefranc, La Jeunesse de Calvin, 87.
106. Already in 1546 he could no longer manage a ride from Geneva to Lausanne to condole with Viret on the loss of his wife. See SW, 537, letter dated 22nd February, 1546, “Would that I also could fly thither, that I might alleviate your sorrow, or at least be a part of it. But so long a ride would cause me pain.” “Utinam istuc usque possem ad moerorem tibi levandum advolare, aut certe partem aliquam sustinendam. Sed mihi molesta esset equitatio tam longa.” (CO 12:296).
107. Quoting Dr André M. Hugo in Battles, Interpreting, 51. Breen, French Humanism, 105, mentions Budé’s Annotations in particular.
110. Ibid., 60.
111. Josef Bohatec, Budé und Calvin (Graz: Verlag Böhlaus, 1950), 130.
112. Ibid., 131-137.
In 1533, however, Calvin was still occupied with his studies. He was particularly keen to attend the courses in Greek by Pierre Danès. This is borne out by the fact that he declined an offer of accommodation with the father of his friend Coiffart because of the distance from the Coiffart home to the school of Danès. Despite his warm friendship with Coiffart, he felt the attraction of the school of Danès to be stronger. Unfortunately, because of the summer recess and the outbreak of the plague in the fall of 1531, when Calvin fled to suburban Chaillot, he could not have attended very many lectures by Danès. It was a signal privilege to be taught by Danès, since he allowed himself the luxury of taking only those students whose fathers he knew or those whom he deemed to have the promise of a brilliant future. Calvin must have impressed him as brilliant.

Max Engammare situates Calvin’s Hebrew studies at Basel during 1535 and 1536 under the tutelage of Münster. He consolidated his knowledge of the language in Strasbourg during his stay from 1538 to 1541.

Among his social and university contacts in Paris during the early 1530s were many who discussed Erasmus, Luther, and Lefèvre. His cousin Olivétan (Pierre Robert) had already espoused the Reform movement. However, Calvin was initially resistant to any evangelical, that is, Protestant ideas. For example, he was not yet against celibacy as a way of life. When visiting his friend Daniel’s sister, who was about to take vows, he merely ascertained that she was “submitting her neck willingly to the harness.” He did not attempt to dissuade her from her vocation. This was six years after Martin Luther had already abandoned celibacy (June 1525), as had many of his fellow priests. Much later he describes himself as having been “too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery.” Nevertheless, the influences of these social contacts at university bore fruit in his later life. For example, after the death of Guillaume Budé (1540), his widow moved to Geneva in 1549. Her sons Jean, François and Louis and daughters Marguerite and Catherine came with her or during the years afterwards.

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115. Breen, French Humanism, 133.


117. Ibid., 41.

118. SW, 4:27, dated 27th June 1529 (should be 1533, see fn 113). “...tentavi sororis tuae animum, num jugum illud molliter exciperet, num fracta potius quam inflexa cervicet?” (CO 10:10-11).


assisted Calvin and Beza (1519-1605) in the revision of Olivétan’s translation of the Bible.\footnote{Cottret, Calvin, 99 n. 27.}

Calvin’s formal education came to an end after he had to flee Paris, following the All Saints’ Rectoral address by his friend Nicolas Cop in 1533.\footnote{Wendel dates his conversion at about this time. See Calvin et l’humanisme, 63.} For a while he was able to use an extensive library while he was staying with his friend Louis du Tillet in Angoulême. He also visited the court of Marguerite, where he met Lefèvre d’Étaples, who was by then eighty years old. Beza reports that this good man “was delighted with young Calvin, and predicted that he would prove a distinguished instrument in restoring the kingdom of heaven in France.”\footnote{Beza, Life of Calvin, in SW, i:xxv. “Excepit autem iuvenem bonus senex et libenter vidit, futurum augurans insigne coelestis in Gallia instaurandi regni instrumentum.” (CO 21:123).}

Another event of significance in Calvin’s move away from the Catholic Church was the renunciation of his benefices (4th May 1534), for which he traveled to his native Noyon. If he had not renounced the benefices, he would have been expected to enter the service of the church officially at age twenty-five. This renunciation could denote a decisive break with the Catholic Church after his conversion some six months earlier. Although Calvin nowhere comments on this act of renunciation, it seems that he no longer felt comfortable about being supported by the church that had shown itself so intolerant of reform movements and reformist people. Nor did he want to commit himself to becoming a priest, knowing he would have to toe the Sorbonne party line or be persecuted for deviating from it, as others had. The Sorbonne had burned books of those who deviated, including those of Louis de Berquin (1485-1529) and Erasmus, and had been instrumental in the burning of bodies of those who dared to express “Lutheran” sentiments.\footnote{Breen, French Humanism, 31-36. De Berquin himself, a humanist scholar and translator of Erasmus, was burned in April, 1529, for combating the obscurantism of the Sorbonne theologians.}

Although Calvin certainly continued to learn from books and people, throughout the rest of his life he drew extensively on his early humanist education and extensive reading.\footnote{See Robert D. Linder, “Calvinism and Humanism: The First Generation” Church History 44 (1975), 167-181.} He was not too bashful about showing off his wide reading, especially in his commentary of Seneca’s De Clementia. His dedicatory letter to Claude de Hangest is marked by conflicting emotions of humility and ambition.\footnote{See “Preface of John Calvin,” in Calvin’s Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia, with Introduction, Translation, and Notes, Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), 13. He acknowledges his debt to the de Hangest family, “having as a boy been educated in your house and initiated in the same studies together with you, I am indebted to your most noble family for my first education in life and letters.”} Its penultimate sentence, “Of my success in this undertaking, let others judge; for I dare not make too boastful promises regarding myself, for fear of raising the impression that I am arrogant.”\footnote{Ibid.} In other words, he anticipates success, but does not want to appear arrogant and boast about it. As it transpired, the work received less acclaim than he desired. In his commentary De Clementia, he referred to a host of authors, both ancient and
contemporary, literary and legal. He refers to Erasmus many times though not always with complete approval. At the time of writing his Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia, Calvin is more an emulator than an unconditional admirer of Erasmus.\textsuperscript{128} In his later writings he is also in dialogue with Erasmus, not always approvingly. For example, he rejects as frivolous and lame Erasmus’ exegesis that Paul had been married.\textsuperscript{129} On the other hand, he praises him for translating \textit{λόγος} with \textit{sermo}, rather than the Vulgate’s \textit{verbum}.\textsuperscript{130} He reprimands Erasmus for excusing Origen’s misunderstanding about sin and righteousness.\textsuperscript{131} Mellinghoff-Bourgerie has also listed more than a dozen issues in the \textit{Institutes} where Calvin follows Erasmus.\textsuperscript{132} They relate to the explanation of the Apostles’ Creed in Erasmus’ Catechism.

Calvin is also strongly indebted to another contemporary, Budé, for his erudition in \textit{De Clementia}. He makes numerous references to works such as \textit{Annotationes in Pandectas} and \textit{De asse et partibus eius} and others. His ancient sources are wide-ranging. He produced, in effect, what anyone would have expected of a brilliant, young humanist scholar of Calvin’s intellectual reputation. Battles has examined “The Sources of Calvin’s Seneca Commentary” and has listed no fewer than 101 different authors to which he made reference.\textsuperscript{133} Battles sees in Calvin’s Commentary the beginnings of Calvin the exegete:

The same attention to the close study of the text will later mark Calvin’s Christian writings. The tools of exegesis: grammatical and rhetorical analysis, a wide background in history, philosophy, literature, science, and other studies – these characterize the young Calvin as they will more fully the later Calvin. The ‘creative assimilation’ of his sources is even at this early stage a trait of our author, for he seldom merely parrots his authorities despite a


\textsuperscript{129} “Caeterum hic locus ostendit coelibem tunc fuisse apostolum: nam quod Erasmus ratiocinatur coniugatum fuisse, quia inter coniugatos sui mentionem faciat, leve est ac frigidum, quia posset eadem ratione colligi, fuisse viduum, quia inter viduos de se loquatur.” (\textit{CO} 49:407).

\textsuperscript{130} “Miror quid Latinos moverit, ut τὸν λόγον transferrent Verbum: sic enim vertendum potius fuisse \tauὸ ῶμα. Verum ut demus aliquid probabile sequutos esse, negari tamen non potest, quin sermo longe melius conveniat. Unde apparebat quam barbarum tyrannidem exercuerint theologastri, qui Erasmum adeo turbulente vexarent ob mutatam in melius vocem unam.” (\textit{CO} 47:3).

\textsuperscript{131} “Quod autem dicit, Adam typum gerere Christi, non mirum est: nam etiam in rebus maxime contraribus apparat semper aliqua similitudo. Quoniam igitur ut Adae peccato perditi sumus omnes, ita Christi iustitia reparatur : Adamum non male vocavit Christi typum. Observa autem non vocari Adamum peccati figuram : Christum, iustitiae : \textit{ac si tantum exemplo suo nobis praeirent}: sed alterum cum altero conferrent: ne cum Origene perperam hallucineris, et quidem pernicioso errore. Nam et philosophice profaneque disputat de humani generis corruptelis, et gratiam Christi non modo enervat, sed totam fere delet. Quo minus excusabilis est Erasmus, qui in excusando tam crasso delirio nimium laboraret.” (\textit{CO} 49:97).

\textsuperscript{132} Mellinghoff-Bourgerie, “Calvin, Émule d’Érasme,” 237-240.

demonstrable dependence upon them. The same ‘free literal’ handling of sources will later be observed in his extensive use of such writers as Augustine.134

Valla’s use of the historical-critical method in his writings may have inspired Calvin also.135 Calvin’s later works are perhaps less ostentatiously replete with literary allusions, but nevertheless are still based on and informed by his immense reading. Augustine was his most favorite author in the Institutes, but others are by no means neglected. Babelotzky’s study, to which we will return later, has shown to what extent Calvin drew on Plato.136 Similarly, Lane has examined “Calvin’s Use of Bernard of Clairvaux.”137 Quoting does not necessarily imply approval, although in the case of Augustine and St. Bernard approval is often given. Calvin is happy to cite them with approval when it suits his arguments against the Church of Rome, for example “as Bernard rightly teaches” (ICR 3.21.1), and “Bernard, agreeing with Augustine, so writes” (ICR 2.3.5).

Calvin’s knowledge of the church fathers was tremendously advantageous to him when he attended the Religious Colloquy in Lausanne with Farel and Viret in October 1536. The topic of discussion was the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper and the doctrine of transubstantiation. When the reformers were accused by the Roman Catholic side of contempt for the authority of the church fathers, Calvin spoke up and refuted the accusations by his extensive and impressive knowledge of the church fathers.138 With respect to Augustine, he is able to give, not only the precise number of the Letter quoted, but also where in the letter the relevant passage occurs.139 He said that the church fathers knew nothing of a doctrine of transubstantiation.

Calvin’s View of the Present Life

We now look at how Calvin viewed the present life in general. In contrast with the more exuberant outlook of some contemporaneous artists, Calvin did not exactly celebrate the here and now, at least, not in his formal writings such as the Institutes. He is more concerned with eternal life. From his letters and other evidence it is clear that he did enjoy the pleasures of life as much as could be expected, given the poor state of his health, the demands of the church, and his many other commitments. Engammare has shown that the popular misconception of Calvin, already expressed by Antoine du Val in 1560, as someone who was unable to enjoy the good things of

135. Thompson, Humanists and Reformers, 212-3.
137. See Chapters 4 and 5 of A.N.S. Lane, John Calvin. Student of the Church Fathers, which examine the use and sources of Bernard (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1999).
139. See E.A. de Boer, “Calvijn uit de anonimiteit,” 463.
life, was false. He contends that Calvin’s remarks about human and earthly joys are tied to his theology of creation and his anthropology. Engammare relates Calvin’s enjoyment of food and drink, music, and the company of good friends as being among the earthly pleasures he enjoyed. But what he enjoyed in fact and sometimes enjoined in writing is at odds with what he wrote elsewhere. Engammare quotes in support of the fact that Calvin enjoyed a wide range of pleasures the following passage:

And we have never been forbidden to laugh, or to be filled, or to join new possessions to old or ancestral ones, or to delight in musical harmony, or to drink wine.

However, this statement occurs in the context of a very strong declaration against excess, luxury, squandering, immoderate prodigality, and abuse of God’s gifts. He reminds his readers, “God nourishes them to live, not to luxuriate.” In the 1536 edition of the Institutes, Calvin follows the quotation above with this warning:

True indeed. But where there is plenty, to wallow in delights, to gorge oneself, to intoxicate mind and heart with present pleasures and be always panting after new ones – such are very far removed from a lawful use of God’s gifts.

Calvin seems to be in a continual tension between the enjoyment of God’s fatherly gifts to us and the restriction to a frugal use of them. This comes to expression, for example, in his commentary on the story of the meal that Joseph provided for his brothers, with the fivefold portion allocated to Benjamin (Genesis 43:33-34). Calvin is conflicted between advocating delight and avoiding excesses:

Should any one object, that a frugal use of food and drink is simply that which suffices for the nourishing of the body: I answer, although food is properly for the supply of our necessities, yet the legitimate use of it may proceed further. For it is not in vain, that our food has savour as well as vital nutriment; but thus our heavenly Father sweetly delights us with his delicacies. And his benignity is not in vain commended in Psalm civ. 15, where he is said to create “wine that maketh glad the heart of man.” Nevertheless, the more kindly he indulges us, the more solicitously ought we to restrict ourselves to a frugal use of his gifts.

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141. ICR 3.19.9, “ut meminerint omnes se a Deo ali ut vivant, non ut luxurientur; (CO 2:619).
142. ICR 3.19.9 “ut meminerint omnes se a Deo ali ut vivant, non ut luxurientur; (CO 2:619).
For we know how unbridled are the appetites of the flesh. Whence it happens that, in abundance, it is almost always lascivious, and in penury, impatient. ... Some one, perhaps, will say, that the flesh is more than sufficiently ingenious in giving a specious colour to its excesses; and therefore, nothing more should be allowed than necessity demands. And, truly, I confess, we must diligently attend to what Paul prescribes, (Rom. xiii. 14,) “Make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.” But because it greatly concerns all pious people to receive their food from the hand of God, with quiet consciences, it is necessary for them to know to what extent the use of food and wine is lawful.

It seems from his extract that Calvin used many words to say that he did not know where to draw the line between excess and frugality. Or, if he did know for himself, he did not impose his views on his readers, but wanted them to work out the balance in their life by themselves according to the dictates of their conscience. In the Institutes, Calvin takes Titus 2:11-14 as his basis for informing his readers how to live godly lives as pilgrims in the expectation of Christ’s coming. He sees three parts: “soberness, righteousness, and godliness. Of these, soberness doubtless denotes chastity and temperance as well as pure and frugal use of temporal goods, and patience in poverty.” In determining exactly what is frugal and what is excessive, the believer is to submit and subject himself to “the Holy Spirit so that the man himself may no longer live but hear Christ living and reigning within him.” Calvin puts the responsibility of discernment on the believer; he does not prescribe any rules. He himself seems to have erred on the side of frugality, particularly as far as food was concerned. He allowed himself only one meal a day for most of his life. It must be said that this was partly because he believed to have medical justification for eating so little. And yet, he does appear to have an appreciation for abundance also. In his commentary on Psalm 104:31 he writes:


146. ICR 3.7.1. “at christianæ philosophia illam loco sedecere, spiritui sancto subitii ac subiugari iubet; ut homo iam non ipse vivat, sed Christum in se ferat viventem ac regnantem (Gal. 2, 20).” (CO 2:506).
It is no small honor that God for our sake has so magnificently adorned the world, in order that we may not only be spectators of this beauteous theater, but also enjoy the multiplied abundance and variety of good things which are presented to us in it.\textsuperscript{147}

Even though Calvin possessed a thankful appreciation of the created order, it seems that he was pre-eminently concerned with eternity. Daily life had to be considered in the light of eternity. As Oberman characterizes it:

‘Meditatio futurae vitae’ is not only a spiritual exercise, but designates the appropriate mental attitude or frame of mind with which the Christian ‘sees’ and interprets all events in the world and in his own life, namely in terms of the eschaton, ‘the end.’\textsuperscript{148}

Anything that could take the mind of the believer away from God was suspect. In his \textit{Institutes}, “Meditation on the Future Life,” we see Calvin struggle and vacillate between contempt for this life and affirmation of it. For Calvin personally it may have been true that “the mind is never seriously aroused to desire and ponder the life to come unless it be previously imbued with contempt for the present life,”\textsuperscript{149} but this is not a necessary precondition for all people. An appreciation for the present life can also be a point of comparison with what is to come: the present good compared with the even better future in the life to come. This is how Baars interprets Calvin at this point.\textsuperscript{150} However, Calvin continues to say that “there is no middle ground between these two: either the world must become worthless to us or hold us bound by intemperate love of it.”\textsuperscript{151} For Calvin there seems to be no happy medium, even though he acknowledges that God’s blessings are a foretaste of the glorious future of the believers. The world is worthless because of sin, and yet God provides for us in it with gifts of his fatherly kindness. The kind of contempt for the present life that Calvin wishes to see in Christian believers is one that “engenders no hatred of it or ingratitude against God.”\textsuperscript{152} It is difficult to see where the line is between “contempt” and “hatred.” If we hold the goods of this world in contempt, how far off are we from hating them? Calvin exhorts his readers to “become so disposed and minded that we count it [this life] among those gifts of divine generosity which are not at all to be

\textsuperscript{147} Comm. Psalms, 4:169. “Neque enim hic vulgaris honor est, quod Deus mundum tam splendido ornatu in gratiam nostram instruxit, ut non solum pulcri huius theatri simus spectatores, sed multiplici honorum copia et varietate, quae in eo nobis sunt exposita, fruamur.” (CO 32:96).


\textsuperscript{149} \textit{ICR} 3.9.1 “Sic enim habendum est, nunquam serio ad futurae vitae desiderium ac meditationem erigi animum, nisi praesentis contempitu ante imbutus fuerit.” (CO 2:524).


\textsuperscript{151} \textit{ICR} 3.9.2 “Siquidem inter ista duo nihil medium est: aut vilescat nobis terra oportet, aut intemperato amore sui vinctos nos destineat.” (CO 2:524).

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{ICR} 3.9.3 “qui neque eius odium generet, nec adversus Deum ingratitudeinem.” (CO 2:525).
rejected” but on the other hand we are to be “freed from too much desire of it.” It is in the following section (3.9.4) that Calvin becomes most contradictory. This paragraph, which sounds so other-worldly to the modern mind, has been given the English title “The Right Longing for Eternal Life.” In it Calvin exhorts believers to “betake themselves wholly to meditate upon that eternal life to come. ... The present life can not only be safely neglected but, compared to the former, must be utterly despised and loathed. ... If to be freed from the body is to be released into perfect freedom, what else is the body but a prison? ... Of course [earthly life] is never to be hated except in so far as it holds us subject to sin. ... But in comparison with the immortality to come, let us despise this life and long to renounce it, on account of bondage of sin, whenever it shall please the Lord.”

It seems that Calvin can not quite make up his mind about what his attitude should be regarding the present life. The benefits of God’s fatherly care are to be received in gratitude, but we must loathe and despise this earthly life! To put it in perspective, Calvin wants us to have our attention on the life to come: “At the same time, we should learn to pass through this world since in this way it is not our life that we enjoy at present, but rather a passage through which we must run quickly, until we arrive at the repose of our inheritance.” Running quickly does not, however, mean that we may hasten our own death: “Believers desire death and yet not with such an inordinate desire as to anticipate the day their Lord has fixed for it; for they willingly battle on at their earthly post for as long as the Lord thinks fit, preferring to live to the glory of Christ rather than die for their own advantage.”

Wallace summarizes Calvin’s view of the meditatio futurae vitae as follows:

What we have set before our minds in this meditation on the heavenly life is the supreme good and final goal of human life. The ascended Christ in whom we find our perfect happiness is there in Heaven where our mind is raised by meditatio. It is but natural that we should desire what constitutes for us the supreme good and our highest happiness.

153. ICR 3.9.3 “Huc igitur sensum atque affectum induere nos oportet, ut ipsum reponamus inter minime respuenda divinae benignitatis dona. ... quo silicet extricemur a nimia eius cupiditate...” (CO 2:525).

154. ICR 3.9.4. Emphasis added. “... eo alacriores et magis expediti totos se ad futurae illius et aeternae meditationem conferant... tum vero illa non modo secure negoti potest, sed prae hac penitus contemnenda est ac fastidienda. ... Si liberari a corpore est asseri in solidam libertatem, quid aliud est corpus quam carcer? ... Odio certe habenda nunquam est, nisi quatenus nos peccato tenet obnoxios... Prae futura immortalitate contemnamus, et ob peccati servitutem ei renuntiante, quoties Domino placuerit, optemos.” (CO 2:526).

155. “Et au reste apprenons quant et quant de passer par ce monde, puis qu’ainsi est que ce n’est pas nostre vie que celle dont nous ouissons a present, mais un passage par lequel il nous faut courir viste, iusques a ce que nous soyons parvenus au repos de nostre heritage.” (CO 35:642).


It is faith that enables us to grasp the heavenly realities and bring them down to earth in our daily life. The Holy Spirit raises our hearts to heaven where Christ is in glory. As Calvin explained in his Commentary on Galatians 2:20: "Paul means by [flesh] simply the bodily life. . . . And so the bodily life does not prevent us from possessing the heavenly life by faith."\(^{158}\)

Leith considers the meditatio to be one of the aspects of repentance.\(^{159}\) After discussing some of the same texts as Wallace, he concludes:

> These statements, which indicate that meditation on the future life is essentially the participation in that life here and now, become convincing when placed in the context of countless passages which affirm the value of life on earth. Undoubtedly Calvin was influenced by Platonism, but it is fundamentally wrong to call his doctrine of the meditation on the future life Platonic in contrast to the Hebrew teaching. The point Calvin is endeavoring to make is that the Christian life is life in fellowship with God, not life in the things of earth. This is not world-denying, as subsequent Calvinism proved.\(^{160}\)

Niesel places the meditatio in the context of ethics and the life of discipleship. He comments:

> This extreme devaluation of all things earthly we find also in the mystics; yet the self-renunciation which Calvin teaches is something quite different from the self-emptying which is extolled by the mystics as the way to the highest grade of being. It is a self-renunciation which is oriented to God, to Christ, and to one’s neighbor. . . . The true situation of man . . . is far more worthless than the worst pessimist might suggest. But in so far as we recognize this in Jesus Christ and at the same time come to realize that in this world of sin and death we are called to follow Him, our earthly life receives a relative value.\(^{161}\)

What Calvin taught in the Institutes about loathing and despising this life, therefore, has to be seen in conjunction with what he wrote about the meditation of the future life to bring it into balance. In practice, Calvin did not walk around loathing everything. Engammare shows that Calvin had an eye for beauty, both in homes and in clothing. When he is in the process of trying to find a suitable home in Geneva for Mr and Mme de Falais, he mentions one that has "a great room, with as beautiful a view as you could well desire for the summer."\(^{162}\) His letters prove that he could appreciate beauty in people as well. When he was looking for a wife for himself, he was not expecting to be "smitten at first sight with a fine figure" and declared, "This

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160. Ibid., 81-2.
only is the beauty which allures me, if she is chaste, if not too nice or fastidious, if economical, if patient, if there is hope that she will be interested about my health.”

However, that description does not necessarily mean that he would have taken Idelette as his wife if she had been decidedly ugly. Calvin himself does not comment on Idelette’s looks, but Farel apparently found her “actually pretty.”

After reading Calvin’s prescription for a wife he was probably surprised that his friend had found a pretty wife after all. When it came to looking for a wife for other people, he proved himself not blind to feminine beauty. In a letter to Farel in which he discusses his search for a wife for a young man, he admits the legitimacy of looking for one who is both “beautiful and virtuous” and states that he has considered “two young neighbors of ours of great personal beauty and liberally educated.” Unfortunately, their dowry was “not very ample.”

Not only beauty, but friendship also gave him much pleasure, as did laughter and good conversation. His letters show how much he enjoyed and valued the friendship of colleagues such as Viret and Farel, as well as many others.

Beauty in composition was also appreciated. Engammare mentions the pleasure Calvin gained from his own written compositions, for example, in the foreword to Olivétan’s Bible (1535), which abounds in opposites. Engammare finds it impossible to imagine that Calvin did not experience intellectual pleasure in composing this long list of opposites. Similarly, Battles has shown that Calvin employed an “elevated strophic style.”

His language, which, even though it is presented as prose, can be lined out as poetry, as Battles has done, examining the structures and patterns of several of Calvin’s writings. Only a person who takes delight in language could have composed prose of such poetic quality. It is not difficult to agree with Ganoczy, who comments as follows:

[Calvin] learned not only to construct but also to love clear, logical, and well-balanced sentences. As one reads the truly masterful pages of the Dedicatory Epistle [of the Institutes], one surely has the feeling that in spite of his pure intentions, sincere zeal, and dis-
trust of literary glory, Calvin feels real satisfaction in writing. Discussing, accusing, defending, refuting, demonstrating – he obviously does all of this with the pleasure that a gifted artist feels in his work.\footnote{169}

All the foregoing raises many questions. Calvin clearly delighted to excel, yet was at best ambivalent about this present world – the one in which he would excel. If Calvin was a humanist, exactly what kind of humanist was he? His education was undoubtedly humanist, but Augustijn has argued that Calvin rejected humanism itself.\footnote{170} Nevertheless, he acquired his intellectual formation from his humanistic education and benefited from it.

Conclusions

Calvin lived in a time that both gloried in the human body and was also characterized by a profound sense of unease about the body, as exemplified in the concept of the body being the prison house of the soul. People were aware of their vulnerability in the face of many diseases, and especially the Plague. Memento mori was not just a philosophical idea, but represented daily reminders of death. Calvin’s eschatological concerns may be seen to some extent as resulting from the pervasiveness of death: it would not do to cling too much to life here and now, when death could be imminent. In the absence of detailed medical knowledge, many of the diseases that struck them must have seemed to arrive very arbitrarily. Calvin’s education was both extensive and intensive. It contributed in a major way to his thinking on the human body, often in a negative way. There are similarities between his views and Platonism, but not agreement. Having traced the contents and influences of Calvin’s education, we shall now turn to the way in which Calvin absorbed into his writings the philosophical terminology of the body as prison of the soul and how Calvin suffered in his own body and mind.


Chapter Three

Calvin’s Use of the Prison Metaphor

Introduction

The main question this chapter will seek to answer is: how did Calvin use the metaphor of the body as the prison of the soul, or of the soul needing to be liberated from the body? It also seeks to determine where the influences to Platonic language and ideas may have originated. This is also the place to read Calvin’s exposition of Romans 7:23-24. It will be seen that the use of the metaphor is often accompanied by an eschatological perspective, that of the future, celestial life in the Kingdom of God. Some of the relevant passages using the prison metaphor will be examined in their context.¹ The use of different perspectives to understand the seeming contradictions will be employed along the lines suggested by Mary Potter Engel.² There will be an examination of the origin of his metaphor and particularly whether Plato’s writings were a direct influence on Calvin’s thinking or whether the impulse to use the metaphor arose from the general neo-Platonic atmosphere of the time. It was Plato, through Socrates, who articulated the idea that the human body was the prison of the soul. The metaphor occurs most often in the Phaedo where Plato describes the death of Socrates as a release of the soul from the body. In view of Calvin’s admiration of Augustine on many subjects, a possible dependence on him for the metaphor will be considered.

The Historical Context of Calvin’s Use of the Metaphor

There are various possibilities for Calvin’s frequent use of the metaphor. Calvin could have used the metaphor as a mere figure of speech that was current at the time due to the influence of Neoplatonism, a revival of Platonic thinking. Another possibility is that he could have read the metaphor in Phaedo and adopted it as a legitimate way of talking about the body.

From an examination of Calvin’s writings, we can see that Calvin made extensive use of Plato’s ideas and often mentioned him by name. However, with respect to the body being the prison of the soul, he did not acknowledge the source of the metaphor. It could be that sixteenth century society was so saturated with Platonic thought, that Calvin used ideas about the body as prison for the soul almost subcon-

¹. The appendix contains all the found references to the prison metaphor.
consciously and idiomatically, without making specific references to Plato. This suggests a more subtle impulse. Many of Calvin’s contemporaries and friends were also influenced by Plato’s thinking. Plato was fashionable, and no one needed to be ashamed of being a Platonist. At that time there was an enormous diffusion of Platonic literature. There were introductions to Platonism, translations into Latin, as well as edited texts of the Greek versions. Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) was the first translator of the complete extant works of Plato into Latin, which were completed in 1477 and printed in 1482. His *Platonis Opera latine* was held in the library of the Academy of Geneva, as was the *Platonis Opera graece*.

The circle of thinkers who met in the diocese of Meaux, in France, “a centre for reforming activists in the years 1521–46,” were all thoroughly Platonic, open to Platonic renewal, as they were open to biblical renewal. Marguerite of Angoulême (1492–1549), Queen of Navarre and sister of King Francis, was also influenced by the renewal of Platonic philosophy, as well as by the pro-evangelicals, even though she never left the Catholic Church. It was she who was patroness of the University of Bourges, where Calvin studied. She conducted some correspondence with Calvin. Of his letters to her, only one survives. She was persuaded that Platonic thought could be reconciled with the Christian religion without injury to piety. In his funeral oration for Marguerite, Charles de Sainte-Marthe mentioned that Marguerite’s philosophical education involved not only the writings of Plato and other philosophers, but also the “evangelical philosophy, which is the word of God, by which Marguerite was so well indoctrinated and instructed.”

Like Marguerite, Calvin had been immersed in the study of both the philosophers and the Scriptures, most of it outside the confines of his formal education. Renascent

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11. “… philosophie, que nous ne parlons que de celle qui s’aprend ès escripts de Platon et des autres philosophes, car nous entendons aussi de la philosophie évangélique, qui est la parole de Dieu, des saints et salutaires préceptes de laquelle Marguerite fut, par ses instituteurs, si bien endoctrinée et instruite.” Quoted in Boisset, *Sagesse et Sainteté*, 239.
Platonism appealed to Calvin. Contemporaries of Calvin were also known to use the metaphor of the body being the prison of the soul. In Melanchthon’s eulogy of Martin Luther he mentioned that Luther had left this mortal body as from a prison. In his commentary on the Psalms he mentions the prison of sin. The prison of this life also features. However, compared with Calvin’s more specific use of the metaphor of the body as prison, Melanchthon was very sparse in its use. By contrast, Viret thought of the body as a dwelling. Beza claims that Calvin “was by no means a careless writer,” so it remains a puzzle why he would so often use the metaphor, unless he really accepted the thought of the body as a prison of the soul. It is true that with respect to his own body he never used the metaphor. Neither when he discusses his ailments, nor on his deathbed does he refer to his own body as the prison of his soul. In his correspondence he only uses it when quoting someone else. Selderhuis claims that Calvin saw “his letters as ‘the living image of my soul,’ so that the real Calvin is to be found in his correspondence.” He quotes a letter to Macar. However, Calvin writes there about “this letter” in the singular and therefore does not necessarily mean to apply it to all of his letters. Still, considering the more personal nature of letters, as compared with other writings, it may be significant that the prison metaphor is not used in correspondence. Although people like Calvin expected their letters to be read by more than the addressees, they were more private than his published commentaries and treatises.

16. As proved by a search of Melanchthonis Opera. See fn. 13.
17. Pierre Viret, Pierre Viret d’après lui-même. (G. Bridal & Co., 1911), 27. Writing about Christian physicians: “... le grand désir que j’ai que les uns et les autres conjoignent toujours la doctrine chrétienne avec cette belle science de médecine, afin qu’elle leur soit comme une vraie théologie supernaturelle considérant [ce] que ce peut être que l’âme humaine par la connaissance qu’ils ont des corps, qui n’en sont que le logis, et puis [ce] que peut être Dieu qui est le créateur de l’un et de l’autre.”
20. “... this letter of mine will be the lively portraiture of my heart...” SW, 7:432. “... epistola haec quae viva erit cordis mei imago...” (CO 17:191).
Boisset has argued that for Plato and Calvin, the notion of the body being the prison of the soul is treated differently by each:

From the affirmation of the immortality of the soul, Plato draws the conclusion that the philosopher ought to hate and despise the body; Calvin concludes that the Christian should use the body to ends that are desired by the soul. For the Reformer, the body is the creation of God, and as such, is respectable because it must share in the redemption of the creation. What ought to be “hated” in the body is the pollution of sin; that which, on the other hand, should be esteemed is the promise of the resurrection, of which it is a beneficiary.  

Boisset accurately summarizes Calvin’s position about the body. Plato has no concept of resurrection, only of transmission of souls from one being to another, which held no appeal for Calvin. It is as if Calvin pities Plato:

The ancient philosophers anxiously discussed the sovereign good, and even contended among themselves over it. Yet none but Plato recognized man’s highest good as union with God, and he could not even dimly see its nature. And no wonder, for he had learned nothing of the sacred bond of that union.

Though Calvin was willing to acknowledge truth in what philosophers such as Plato had said, he was sure that the Christian faith offered a better insight into the nature of reality. That is not to deny that Plato knew the temporal nature of the human body as it exists on earth, but he had no concept of a resurrection body.

Gerd Babelotzky has made an extensive study of Calvin’s anthropology and his relationship to Platonic thinking. Babelotzky suggests that some of Calvin’s cita-
tions of Plato came to him via other writers such as Augustine, Budé, or Erasmus.\textsuperscript{25} That is certainly possible. He also points out that Calvin is usually very positive about Plato as a person, and less positive when he uses the adjective “Platonic.”\textsuperscript{26} Babelotzky argues that a comparison between \textit{Phaedo} 79 B ff and ICR 1.15.6, both dealing with the nature of the soul, shows that such an agreement of expressions cannot be the result of chance.\textsuperscript{27} This agreement is not one of verbal similarity but of thematic agreement, which suggests a reading knowledge of \textit{Phaedo} (in Latin or Greek) by Calvin, even if he wrote from memory and did not have the dialogue in front of him.\textsuperscript{28} Breen states that Calvin “knew well” the critical editions of the classics by Erasmus but supplies no documentation to prove this point.\textsuperscript{29} In any case, it appears Erasmus did not translate \textit{Phaedo}.\textsuperscript{30} Calvin could have used Ficino’s Latin translation of \textit{Phaedo}. As noted, both Latin and Greek versions were readily available in the library of the Academy.

While it may seem puzzling that Calvin would make such extensive use of the metaphor, this has to be compared with his eschatological views, which seem to be used, whether consciously or subconsciously, to balance the mostly negative view of the earthly body. The resurrection is a wonderful miracle that results in a real body:

> It is difficult to believe that bodies, when consumed with rottenness, will at length be raised up in their season. Therefore, although many of the philosophers declared souls immortal, few approved the resurrection of the flesh. Even though there was no excuse for this point of view, we are nevertheless reminded by it that it is something too hard for men’s minds to apprehend. Scripture provides two helps by which faith may overcome this great obstacle: one in the parallel of Christ’s resurrection; the other in the omnipotence of God.\textsuperscript{31}

Although the hope of resurrection was an important item of faith for Calvin, he did not want believers to be overly curious or to speculate about the precise nature of life in the resurrection. They should not be engaged in such unprofitable speculations about whether people would stand or sit or walk. They should, rather, be more concerned about getting there.\textsuperscript{32} For Calvin, the certainty and perfection of eternal life is

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 60–61.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{29} Breen, \textit{French Humanism}, 78.
\textsuperscript{30} Erika Rummel. \textit{Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).
\textsuperscript{31} ICR 1.25.3. See also 1.25.7 “Shall we not say rather that at his command bodies will be restored to the vigor which they had lost?” Calvin here makes an analogy with Christ’s resurrection body, which was not a replacement of his crucified body by a different body, but rather a raised up body.
\textsuperscript{32} Sermon on Matthew 5:8–10. “Il y en a beaucoup aujourd’hui qui voudroient savoir par une curiosité non moins impertinente que sotte, quelle sera en Paradis la gloire des fideles, si s’ils seront assis ou debout, s’ils se proumernieront, s’ils iouiront des creatures d’yci bas, quel en sera l’usage, et à quoi tout cela servira. Brief, ils voudront s’amuser à telles speculations qui sont de nul profit, et voudront aller par
of uttermost importance, compared with the miserable state of living in our earthly bodies. Life on this earth is a preparation for life eternal. This is a consistent theme in Calvin.

During the early Christian era, an extremely negative attitude towards the body infected the Christian church through the influence of Greek philosophy. Nelson argues that the “more unified view of selfhood and more positive view of sexuality characteristic of the Hebrews did not have a chance to become rooted adequately in the Christian community.” Physical self-torture, castration, and virginity were honored, sex was disparaged, even in marriage. This attitude was even more extreme than the philosophies that had inspired it. The idea of the body as prison of the soul detracted from integral Christian thinking. Nelson is of the opinion that “the sixteenth century’s Protestant Reformation did not overcome the reigning spiritualistic dualism in Christian thought on matters sexual. [...] Ambivalence about sexuality remained.”

Terminology

The Appendix lists some ninety-one occurrences of the body-prison metaphor. In Calvin’s Latin writings, carcer is the general word for ‘prison’ but he also uses ergastulum, which has been variously translated in the English editions as either peniten tiary or workhouse. In the sixteenth century it referred to a kind of prison to which servants in iron and fetters were sent to make them work. The word ‘penitentiary’ is more commonly used in the USA, whereas workhouse is a British word. Both words convey the meaning of hard labor being involved for its inmates. Calvin often links the concept of prison with being fettered or chained, and with the need or desire to be liberated. We now turn to Calvin’s use of the metaphor in his writings. There are three kinds of usages of the metaphor in Calvin’s writings. The prison (1) can refer simply to the body; (2) it can refer to the sinful nature of human beings since the Fall; and (3) it can refer to our whole worldly existence as opposed to eternal life. Occasion ally these meanings overlap. We shall begin with Calvin’s earliest Christian writings, where the prison is simply the body. Then we shall consider a few examples of

toutes les chambres de paradis, pour sçavoir quel il y fait: et cependant ils ne se soucient point d’en approcher.” (CO 46:800). See also chapter 9.
37. Some translators, such as A. W. Morrison, translator of the Harmony of the Gospels, and T.A. Smail, translator of the commentary on The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964) use ‘workhouse,’ probably under the influence of Dickens’ Victorian novels. The term ‘workhouse’ conveys well the idea that the prisoners were not just sitting passively in prison but were required to work. A Victorian workhouse was for the poor or bankrupt, not necessarily the criminal.
each kind of usage from various sources, such as sermons, commentaries, and the *Institutes*.

The Metaphor in the Context of *Psychopannychia* and the 1536 *Institution*

Although the *Institution*, as the first edition of the *Institutes* was called, was published before *Psychopannychia*, Calvin first wrote the first version of the latter in Orleans in 1534. This Christian polemic on the subject of soul sleep, maintaining that the soul is alert and aware after death, not asleep, was finally published in 1542 in Strasbourg. This proves that although Calvin had already published the 1536 and the 1541 versions of the *Institutes* to considerable acclaim, he still considered the *Psychopannychia* important enough to be published. He wrote it for the enlightenment of those who believed either that the soul died at the death of the body (thnetopsychism), or that the soul lapsed into unconscious sleep (psychosomnolence). Some of those who held these beliefs were associated with the Anabaptists. In Calvin’s “Preface to a Friend,” dated 1534, he writes that the erroneous teaching had been “stirred up by some dregs of Anabaptists” and that he would consider himself a “traitor to the Truth” if he did not write against it. Cottret argues that in writing *Psychopannychia*, Calvin initially “did not in fact write for any reader. Calvin wrote mainly, at least, for himself.” However, his “Preface to a Friend” (1534) clearly shows that he did intend to publish it. He may, indeed, have written it to clarify his own ideas soon after his conversion. That also explains why it was advisable to let him mature his thinking on the topic and defer publication. Indeed, his second “Preface to the Reader” (1536) starts with the admission that he had used “some rather severe and harsh expressions” which he regrets. He still believes, however, that it is “the nefarious herd of Anabaptists, from

38. *Psychopannychia* was written in 1534 in Orleans and sent “to Wolfgang Capito in Strasbourg, who advised against its publication (see CO 10b:45-46; Ep. 1:29). Apart from the fact that Calvin would be able to acquire a deeper knowledge of Scripture on the subject, Capito felt that it was not the right time for publication. ... It is clear from both his letter to Christophe Fabri on September 11, 1535 (CO 10b:52; Ep. 1:22), and his second foreword from Basel in 1536 that he rewrote the first version. ... *Psychopannychia* was not published until 1542 in Strasbourg ...” W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, tr. Lyle D. Bierma (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 151-2. See also CO 21:193.

39. See “Editor’s Introduction” to Benjamin Wirt Farley, *John Calvin. Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 13-343, especially 19-24. However, the “Mennonite scholar Christian Neff denies that the sleep of the soul was ever an official tenet of the Anabaptists anywhere.” (p. 20). See also Chapter 23 of George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 580-614, “Calvin and the Radical Reformation.” Oberman suggests that Calvin may have relied on secondary sources for his understanding of Anabaptist views. See *Initia Calvini: The Matrix of Calvin’s Reformation*, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1991 (Deel 54 # 4), 32, footnote 98. The Seven Articles of Schleitheim, agreed to on 24 February, 1527, do not mention the sleep of the soul.


whose fountain this noxious stream did ... first flow.” 42 Thus, even though Calvin may have been misinformed about the official beliefs of the Anabaptists, he wrote it against what he thought they believed. A further six years elapsed before the work was published. Bucer, who had earlier advised him against publishing it, encouraged him in 1538 to proceed with publication, which even then did not occur until 1542. 43

Citing Job 4:19, Calvin argues for the soul dwelling in the body: “He did not call man a vessel of clay, but says that he inhabits a vessel of clay, as if the good part of man (which is the soul) were contained in that earthly abode.” 44 He mentions the soul as being confined in the body and wanting to be freed from the body: “we will here say something respecting the rest of the soul when . . . it is freed from the body.” 45 Calvin speaks of the soul as “a substance, and after the death of the body truly lives, being endued both with sense and understanding.” 46 People who have died, and are without their bodies, are able to rest with God: “But when they shall be divested of flesh and the desires of the flesh . . . then at length will they rest and recline with God.” 47 Note how closely the flesh, in its weakness, is here related to the desires of the flesh, that is, concupiscence. The implication is that after death, being without a body, the desires of the flesh will no longer bother a person.

The body is definitely portrayed as something to escape from: “As long as it [our spirit] is in the body it exerts its own powers; but when it quits this prison-house it returns to God...” 48 Anticipating what he would later emphasize in his Genesis Commentary, Calvin calls the body “this prison of clay.” 49 Our humble origin as far as the body is concerned is designed to teach us humility, whereas the image of God confers on us the “highest nobility.” 50 Alongside of the prison image are related concepts of “fetters” and “chains.” Typical of these are the following citations: “Declaring, that his better part was held captive by bodily chains and would be freed by death” 51 and “[the soul’s] vigour is not exercised after the fetters of the body are dissolved.” 52 Another citation reveals how Calvin sees the constraining character of the body: “If the body is

42. SW, 3:416. “... sciant me agere cum nequissimo illo Anabaptistarum grege (e quorum scatebris haec primum, ut dixi, aqua profluxit) qui nec sic quidem pro meritis suis tractantur.” (CO 5:173-4).
47. SW, 3:433. “Verum, quum carnem et concupiscientia, ... exeruint: tunc vero demum acueiscunt, et apud Deum resident” (CO 5:188-9).
the prison of the soul, if the earthly habitation is a kind of fetters, what is the state of the soul when set free from this prison, when loosed from these fetters?” This is not a hypothetical question, for Calvin had already (on the previous page) interpreted Paul to mean, “We desire indeed to depart from this prison of the body, but not to wander uncertain without a home.”

In the 1536 *Institution* Calvin uses the prison metaphor four times, three times as *carcer* and once as *ergastulum*. This would seem to suggest that compared with the nine times in *Psychopannychia* he was rather restrained, but it has to be kept in mind that the subject of the treatise is the soul, whereas the *Institution* deals with a number of topics. The context of the first mention in the *Institution* of 1536 is his discussion of “the forgiveness of sins” in the Apostles’ Creed, where the prison denotes the sinful self: “And, as they persistently pursue this repentance (for so they must) as long as they dwell in the prison of their body, thus repeatedly and persistently they obtain that remission.” In the second reference, the prison also refers to the persistence of sin during this life. “For so long as we live cooped up in this prison of our body, traces of sin will dwell in us; but if we faithfully hold fast to the promise given us by God, they shall not dominate or rule.” The third use refers to corruption rather than the body. “But I am only saying that all God’s elect enter into eternal life through faith, at whatever point in age they are released from this prison house of corruption.” The final one refers to Christ’s body in his incarnation. “In this manner, he is said to have descended to that place according to his divinity; not because divinity left heaven to hide itself in the prison house of the body, but because even though it filled all things, still in Christ’s very humanity it dwelt bodily.”

From the foregoing it may be seen that Calvin very early adopted and used the body-prison metaphor. He did so at a point in life when he was not yet as much plagued by bodily illnesses as he was later, although he never really was totally free from ills. Calvin was still steeped in the humanism of his education and did not reform his vocabulary when he was converted, although it might be said that his thinking on this topic became more nuanced in later writings. Whereas in the *Psychopannychia* the prison was just the body, in the 1536 *Institution* it also could be the sinful nature, and in the case of Christ, his whole earthly existence.

53. SW, 3:443. “Si corpus animae est carcer, si terrena habitatio, compedes sunt: quid anima soluta hoc carcere, exuta his vinculis?” (CO 5:196).
56. “Nam quamdiu in hoc carcere corporis nostri claudius degimus, habitabunt in nobis reliquiae peccati; sed si promissionem in baptismo nobis a Deo datam fide tenemus, non dominabuntur nec regnabunt.” (CO 1:113).
57. “. . . sed tantum dico, omnes Dei electos per fidem ingredi in vitam aeternam, quacunque aetatis parte ex hoc corruptionis carcere tollantur.” (CO 1:118).
58. “Qua ratione, eo ipso loco, descendisse dictur secundum divinitatem; non quod divinitas coelum reliquerit, ut in ergastulum corporis se abderet, sed quia, tametsi omnia impletur, in ipsa tamen Christi humanitate corporaliter, id est, naturaliter habitabat et ineffabili quodam modo (Col. 2).” (CO 1:122).
As will be argued in the following, the most common use of the prison metaphor in the totality of Calvin’s works is to denote the fallen nature. In the majority of cases the prison is one of the body or sin/corruption. A few times it refers to this transient life. Occasionally these categories are combined. There seems to be no difference between his use in the commentaries and the sermons or other writings.

Romans on “the body of this death” (1540)

Calvin’s Latin translation of Romans 7:24, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” in his commentary is: “Miser ego homo, quis me eripiet a corpore mortis hoc?” In the Institutes he translated: “Infelix ego, quis me liberabit de corpore hoc morti obnoxio?” There he proceeded: “But if God’s children are held captive in prison (captivi in carcere detinentur) as long as they live. They must be very anxious over the thought of their own peril [...]”. Earlier he interpreted St. Paul as saying “that he is held in miserable bondage (sequ ex vinctum misera servitute detineri) [...]”. Calvin thus connected the apostle’s use of the Greek verb ruomai and possible Latin renderings (e.g. eripere; detiner) easily with the prison metaphor.

Expounding this Pauline exclamation on the body Calvin wrote that the apostle “used the word deliver, in order to show that his deliverance required no ordinary power of God.” The words “body of death” are taken as “the mass of sin, or the constituent parts from which the whole man is formed, except that in his case alone the remnants of sin were left, which held him captive (“quarum vinculis captivus detinebatur”). Calvin further notes that these words are equivalent to St. Paul’s use of the terms “outward man” and “members,” because man has departed from the law of his creation, “and thus became carnal and earthly.” Although man still stands higher than the animals “his true excellence has been taken from him, and what remains is filled with innumerable corruptions, so that, in so far as his soul is degenerate, it may rightly be said to have also changed into his body.”

Significant in Calvin’s exposition is his clear distinction between the way the heathen and the believer look at death. The heathen looks at death as a remedy for the maladies of life. By contrast, the believer looks at death, not as the solution for his contempt of this life but with longing for unbroken communion with Christ. Although Calvin obviously observes that, at first sight, both appear to hold the same attitude until death – looking forward to death – he definitely distinguishes sharply between the spiritual context and the goal of the heathen and the Christian.

59. OS V, 294. See also Appendix, # 1.
60. Cf. Appendix, # 77.
63. COR II/13, 150, ll. 14-15.
64. COR II/13, 150, ll. 16-19.
Commenting on Romans 8:23 (“even we groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”), Calvin writes already with reference to the word adoption that St. Paul uses this term in a non-literal sense (improprie) as “the enjoyment of the inheritance into which we have been adopted.” The promised resurrection is the fulfillment of God’s choosing us as his sons before the foundation of the world.\(^65\) Since death holds us in its chains (“suis vinculis nos ligatos teneat”), the death of Christ, the price of our redemption, is necessary to liberate us.

When Calvin has Romans 7 and 8 in mind, could it be that his use of the prison metaphor is not so much developed from his reading of Plato but from his contemplation of St. Paul early in his expository work?

**Sinful Human Nature as Prison**

A clear example of this category of the metaphor occurs in the commentary on 2 Corinthians (1548). On 5:4 he comments as follows: “But the groaning of believers arises from their knowledge that here they are exiles from their native land and are shut up in the body as in a work-house (ergastulo), and so they count this life a burden because they cannot escape the slavery of sin except by death and so they wish to be elsewhere. . . . That is why our body is called a prison (carcer) in which we are held captive.”\(^66\) It is to be noted that in the letter, the apostle Paul speaks about a tent, which he contrasts with a heavenly dwelling, not a prison. The tent suggests a temporary stay, the heavenly dwelling suggests eternity. In Calvin’s mind, our earthly life in the tent of our body is to be regarded as a temporary arrangement,\(^67\) whereas the heavenly dwelling promised to us will be for eternity, indestructible. Compared with a heavenly abode (John 14:1-3), a tent is but a poor substitute, just as the tabernacle was a temporary arrangement until the temple could be built. Calvin calls this temporary abode a prison. Here he uses the words carcer and ergastulum in the same passage without making much of a distinction. Perhaps he associates ergastulum more with slavery and carcer more with captivity.

For an Old Testament example we turn to the commentary on Isaiah (originally published from lectures in 1551 during Edward VI’s reign), which was revised in 1558 and dedicated to Queen Elizabeth of England as she was about to be crowned on January 15th, 1559. The context of Isaiah chapter 38:10, where Calvin uses the metaphor, is King Hezekiah’s illness and subsequent reprieve to live another fifteen years. “For while death is not desirable on its own account, yet believers ought to ‘groan

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\(^{65}\) COR II/13, 171, ll. 27-32.


\(^{67}\) Ibid., 67. “For just as tabernacle tents are constructed out of slight material for temporary use [. . .] so a mortal body is given to men as a frail hut for them to live in for a few days. [. . .] The adjectives that he applies to this [heavenly] building emphasize its perpetuity.” “Qualiter enim tabernacula ad temporalem usum extruuntur levi materia [. . .] Epitheta, quae adiungit huic aedificio, faciunt ad perpetuitatem melius confirmandam.” (CO 50:61).
continually,’ (Rom. viii.23,) because sin holds them bound in the prison of the flesh.” The reference to Romans was added by the English translator. Calvin’s commentary on Romans 8:23 does not make use of the prison metaphor, although he uses it in the Argumentum. In ‘The Theme of the Epistle,’ that is, before he starts the verse by verse commentary, he makes use of the metaphor: “From this he passes to describe the struggle between the Spirit and the flesh experienced by the children of God as long as they are surrounded by the prison of our mortal body.” It should be noted that this remark on the prison of the flesh is quickly followed by what may be regarded as the other side of the coin: “They are forbidden to ‘mourn as unbelievers usually mourn,’ (1 Thess. iv.13,) and are even commanded to ‘lift up their heads,’ when they are about to depart from the world, because they are received into a happier life.” Indeed, the contrast between this life and eternal life is frequently made by Calvin. The importance of the believer’s destination is presented in the same section of the commentary: “The tendency of the first elements of heavenly doctrine is, that we may learn to sojourn in this world, and to advance swiftly towards the heavenly life.” The happier, heavenly life is what Calvin wants to emphasize in the context of Hezekiah’s mournful account of his illness (Isaiah 38:10-14).

The Body as Prison of the Soul

Whereas the 1536 Institution had only four instances of the prison metaphor, the 1559 version of the Institutes has twelve, but considering it was expanded from six chapters to eighty, that is only a modest increase. The later Institutes contain a much wider range of subjects. The first example in the Institutes (ICR 1.15.2), “that when the soul is freed from the prison house of the body, God is its perpetual guardian” occurs in the same section as the second: “Besides, unless souls survive when freed from the prison houses of their bodies [flesh]...” This section deals with the nature of souls, which are immortal, in contrast to the body, which is corruptible. Here Calvin finds to lie “hidden in man something separate from the body,” that is, the soul. The dualism, a legacy of Greek philosophy, is apparent here. Body and soul are distinct, with the soul being much superior to the body.

For two more examples of the body as prison of the soul we turn to the Treatises against the Anabaptists (1544), where he writes, “First of all he uses an apt expression
in saying that the faithful man is delivered by death from the bonds of his body, as he explains more clearly in another passage (Rom. 7:23; 8:22).” And, “Certainly this mortal body is for us like a prison in order to humble our soul so low as to make it captive to earthly things.” Here we see captivity and the prison in one sentence. In the same Treatise, Calvin writes, “Why do we desire to leave this prison? It is in order to be with the Lord. We know that in his presence we will have true contentment and enjoyment of all good things.” In this latter quotation Calvin stresses the positive outcome of leaving the prison of the body, to have full enjoyment of heavenly delight. Therefore, the prison in that context could also refer to the whole of worldly existence as opposed to eternal life.

The Prison of this Transient Life

Calvin uses the metaphor in the Commentary on 2 Corinthians 10:3, “Here, ‘to walk in the flesh’ means to live in the world or, as he expresses it elsewhere, to be at home in the body [refers to 2 Cor. 5:6]. He [Paul] was indeed shut up in the work-house (ergastulo) of his body, but that did not prevent the power of the Holy Spirit from marvelously asserting itself in his weakness.” Paul is defending his ministry by saying that although he is walking in the flesh, he does not wage war according to the flesh. He wages war against Satan with the weapons of spiritual warfare. The NIV translates, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.” The Greek text has no sense of Paul being “shut up” or in any way confined in his body. It uses the verb “walking around” (περιπατοῦντες). It conveys the idea of moving around in the world, not imprisoned, while not belonging to the world. Calvin goes from ‘walking in the flesh’ (ἐν σαρκί), which he equates with being weak, to being ‘shut up in the body’ which is his term for living in this world. His terminology gives a different picture. Although he quotes Paul’s idea of being “at home in the body,” Calvin does not seem to assign any positive value to it but reverts to the more negative concept of the prison. He does paint a clear picture of the false apostles who only look at the surface of things and judged Paul by what he did not have, i.e. eloquence or good looks, “those endowments which ordinarily win praise or reputation

73. Farley, Treatises, 130 and 133 [Bible reference supplied by the translator, also in next quotation]. Brève instruction contre les anabaptistes “Premièrement il use d’une belle propriété, en disant, que l’homme fidèle par la mort est délivré des liens de son corps: comme il l’exprime plus clairement en un autre passage.” Recueil des opuscules (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003), 629. “Il est certain que ce corps mortel nous est comme une prison, pour abaisser nostre ame si bas, comme captive aux choses terriennes.” Ibid. p. 630.

74. “Parquoy nous desirons de sortir de ceste prison, pour estre avec le Seigneur: nous savons qu’estans en sa compagnie nous aurons vray contentement de tous biens.” Recueil des opuscules (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003), 697.

among the children of this world.” In his exposition he moves from being “at home in the body,” which sounds positive, to his concept of the body as work-house, which sounds negative.

**Combined Usage of the Prison Metaphor**

In the lengthy series of sermons on Job, begun in February 1554, Calvin uses the metaphor about a dozen times. Considering the pitiful state of Job’s body, one might expect many more references to the body as prison over the course of 159 sermons, but the theme of Job is the question of sin and guilt. We shall look at a few of them in Sermon 13 of Job on Chapter 3. In a strong statement, Calvin says “we are locked up in a prison, while being in this life.” Here he references the whole worldly existence as opposed to eternal life. A few pages further he says, “For after having made his complaint, after having wished to be pulled out of this prison of death, he adds, ‘I give thanks to my God.’” This refers to the body as a prison. The ‘prison of the flesh’ is also used in this sermon, “I say that the faithful may well sigh, being vexed to languish in this prison of their flesh.” Here he is preaching about the sinful nature. Calvin continues to explain that the faithful are allowed to wish for death, indeed, they should, for their goal is to be on high, in heaven. Death is not desirable because of illnesses or poverty, but because we are not fully reformed in the image of God and because we have so many imperfections. When we are finally stripped of this mortal body, which is like a hut or a lodge full of all stench and infection, we will be fully reformed in the image of God and he will reign in us and that which is a corruption of our nature will be altogether annihilated. Note that Calvin here varies the metaphor from prison to a hut or a lodge, which is a somewhat less pejorative concept. A hut or a lodge does not imply the constraints and discomforts of a prison. Chains, shackles, and fetters are not associated with a hut or a lodge.

**The Body as a Home**

For a more positive view of the body it is worth quoting at length from Sermon 75:

We should not at all be like fools who make their nest in this world, in such a way that they should never leave it. Therefore we should not at all be too attached to it. For what is our principal home? It is this body here. When a man has large palaces, and the most sumptuous ones in the world, it is certain that he cannot always be there. He doesn’t want to keep himself imprisoned there. So, the dwelling that is the most suitable for each person is his

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76. Ibid.
77. “... nous sommes enserrez en une prison, estant en ceste vie.” (CO 33:166).
78. “Car apres avoir faict sa complainte, apres avoir souhaité d’estre retire de ceste prison de mort, il adiouste, le ren graces à mon Dieu.” (CO 33:169).
80. CO 33:170.
body. And every time we see what fragility there is: what firmness is there? There is nothing but corruption and rottenness. What should we do then? We should strive towards this heavenly building, that is to say that we should ask to be restored in such a way that the Spirit of God would dwell in us, that we would be his temples, and that all that which is now corruptible and transitory in us would be renewed, that we would be in this restoration which is promised to us. … We should pray God to edify us in such a way that we would be his temples, so that by his Holy Spirit he may live in us, and may not at all permit Satan to move us to give him access to us, to nourish our vices and our sins: for by this means he would make of our bodies infected stables. We know that God cannot live in a polluted place. Therefore, if we want him to dwell in us, first of all, we should pray him that he would purge us of all our infections, to the end that he would edify us by his grace, to be true temples of his Holy Spirit.81

This is one of the more positive views of the body among a multitude of negative ones in Calvin’s sermons on Job. The body is our “principal home” and it is “suitable.” However, if there is “nothing but corruption and rottenness” in us, it would seem that Calvin has the resurrected body in mind to be the temple or “heavenly building.” Yet, Calvin does not deny that God lives in us by his Holy Spirit. But he also states that “God cannot live in a polluted place.” He seems to vacillate between the ideal and the real as he perceives it. This is an instance where the application of different perspectives could be useful. From the perspective of being indwelled by the Holy Spirit we are temples; from the perspective of being sinful still, we are a “polluted place.”82

81 “Ne soyons point comme ces fols qui font leur nid en ce monde, en sorte qu’il semble que jamais n’en doivent partir. Que nous n’y soyons point donc attachez. Car quelle est nostre principale maison? Et c’est ce corps ici. Quand un homme aura de grands palais, et les plus somptueux du monde, il est certain qu’il n’y peut pas estre tousiours, il ne se veut pas là tenir en prison. Ainsi le logis le plus propre d’un chacun, c’est son corps: et toutes fois nous voyons quelle fragilité il y a: quelle fermeté y a-il? Il n’y a que corruption et pourriture. Que faut-il donc? Que nous tendions à, ce bastiment celeste, c’est à dire que nous demandions d’estre restaurée tellement que l’Esprit de Dieu habite en nous, que nous soyons ses temples, et que ce qui est maintenant en nous de corruptible et caduque soit renouvelé, que nous soyons en ceste restauration qui nous est promise. … que nous prions Dieu de nous edifier tellement que nous soyons ses temples, afin que par son sainct Esprit il habite en nous, et ne permette point que Satan nous transporte pour lui donner entree à nous, et pour y nourrir nos vices et nos pechez: car par ce moyen il ferroit de nos corps des estables infectes. Or nous savons que Dieu ne peut habiter en un lieu pollu: il faut donc si nous voulons qu’il reside en nous, que premierement nous le prions qu’il nous purge de toutes nos infections, afin qu’il nous edifie par sa grace, pour estre vrais temples de son sainct Esprit.” (CO 34:178).

82 See Engel, Perspectival Anthropology, for various ways in which Calvin may be understood by the use of different perspectives.
dwell there as in a house; not only that it may animate all its parts and render its organs fit and useful for their actions, but also that it may hold the first place in ruling man’s life, not alone with respect to the duties of his earthly life, but at the same time to arouse him to honor God.\footnote{Porro ex scriptura ante docuimus esse substantiam incorpoream; nunc addendum est, quamvis proprie loco non comprehendatur, corpori tamen inditam illic quasi in domicilio habitare: non tantum ut omnes eius partes animet, et organa reddat apta et utilia suis actionibus, sed etiam ut primatum in regenda hominis vita teneat: nec solum quoad officia terrenae vitae, sed ut ad Deum colendum simul excitet.} The emphasis here is more on the nature of the soul, which is seen as being housed in a body, so as to rule a person, rather than on the nature of the body. Calvin seems to be describing the ideal here: the soul animating all its parts and ruling the body. He continues by saying, “Even though in man’s corruption this last point is not clearly perceived, yet some vestige remains imprinted in his very vices.” It could be that when thinking “house” he has a pre-Fall situation in mind, where the soul did rule properly and did honor God appropriately. Augustine also expressed the idea of the soul ruling the body.\footnote{On the greatness of the Soul, XIII, 22.} The abode of the soul becomes a prison only after sin has entered the world. But by God’s grace there is still something in humankind, even after the Fall, that seeks after God.

\section*{Calvin and Plato: A Comparison}

In this chapter our main concern is the metaphor of the body as prison of the soul. We now wish to consider the question as to whether Calvin could have derived the metaphor directly from reading Plato. In both \textit{Phaedo} and Calvin there is talk of being “freed from the shackles of the body.”\footnote{Plato: Complete, 55 (72 e) and 73 (91 e).} Similar expression of chains and fetters are used in Calvin also.\footnote{Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds. \textit{The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters}. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 50 (67 d). Hereafter: \textit{Plato: Complete}. CO 51:758.} However, there are other images and ideas in \textit{Phaedo} that are taken up by Calvin. Indeed, one is struck by the similarity of thoughts and expressions used in \textit{Phaedo} in general (not just the passages quoted in Babelotzky) and in Calvin throughout his writings. Sometimes he disagrees with ideas expressed in \textit{Phaedo}. For example, in \textit{Phaedo} we find, “... there is that theory which you have often described to us – that what we call learning is really just recollection.”\footnote{Plato: Complete, 55 (72 e) and 73 (91 e).} Calvin identifies Plato as the philosopher and refutes that when discussing man’s ability to learn new things, saying: “This prompted Plato to teach wrongly that such apprehen-
sion is nothing but recollection. Hence with good reason we are compelled to confess that its beginning is inborn in human nature.

Calvin also refers to the fact that “Plato sometimes says that the life of a philosopher is a meditation upon death.” This is found in Phaedo: “Ordinary people seem not to realize that those who really apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are directly and of their own accord preparing themselves for dying and death.” This statement is promptly followed in Phaedo by one describing death as “the release of the soul from the body,” a sentiment that is echoed in Calvin’s Institutes, e.g., “If to be freed from the body is to be released into perfect freedom, what else is the body but a prison?” And “that when the soul is freed from the prison house of the body, God is its perpetual guardian.” The expression and/or sentiment of “the release of the soul from the body” occurs more than once in Phaedo, and many times in various ways in Calvin, as has been shown in the first part of this chapter.

Another telling passage in Phaedo is:

Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time when philosophy takes it over his soul is a helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars, and wallowing in utter ignorance. And philosophy can see that the imprisonment is ingeniously effected by the prisoner’s own active desire, which makes him first accessory to his own confinement.

Again, the images of the prison, the chains, and man’s responsibility for his own condition are found in Calvin’s description of the person. Instead of philosophy, however, he points to the final consummation of salvation to set a person free.

The notion of the soul ruling or governing the body occurs in both Phaedo and Calvin. Also, the idea that “a man of this kind is not concerned with the body, but keeps his attention directed as much as he can away from it and toward the soul” will find echoes in Calvin. When he discusses the sixth commandment, “You shall not kill,” Calvin concludes, “But if there is so much concern for the safety of his body, from this we may infer how much zeal and effort we owe the safety of the soul, which far excels the body in the Lord’s sight.” This opinion is not confined to the Institutes. Commenting on Isaiah 30:21 Calvin states, “for no scarcity of wheat ought to

88. ICR 2.2.14 “Quod ut Platonem perperam impulit ut traderet comprehensionem eiusmodi nihil esse quam recordationem, ita nos optima ratione cogit fateri, esse ingenitum humano ingenio eius principium.” (CO 2:398).
89. ICR 3.3.20 “Dicit aliquotes Plato, vitam philosophi meditacionem esse mortis.” (CO 2:450).
90. Plato: Complete, 46 (64 a).
91. ICR 3.9.4. “Si liberari a corpore, est asseri in solidam libertatem, quid alius est corpus quam carcer?” (CO 2:526). And: ICR 1.15.2 “… quam ubi soluta est a carnis ergastulo anima, Deum esse perpetuum eius custodem” (CO 2:335).
92. Plato: Complete, 47 (64 c); 52 (70 a); 64 (80 e); 64 (81 b).
93. Plato: Complete, 66 (82 e, 83 a).
94. Plato: Complete, 63 (80 a), ICR 1.15.6.
95. Plato: Complete, 47 (64 e).
96. ICR 2.8.40 “Quod si tantopere de corporis incolumitate laboratur: hinc colligamus, quantum studii et operae saluti animae debeatur quae in immensum coram Domino praecellit.” (CO 2:295).
terrify and alarm us so much as a scarcity of the word; and indeed, in proportion as the soul is more excellent than the body, so much the more ought we to dread this kind of famine..." Calvin argues that our care for bodily nourishment should at least be matched, if not exceeded, by care for the nourishment of our souls. In his sermon on Micah 2:6-7 he states,

We do well to beg for rain and dew so that the earth may bring forth good things for our nourishment. We acknowledge that God makes his grace flow over us. Now the life of the soul ought to be more precious to us than that of the body. Nonetheless, see how careful we are to give it [the body] its nourishment that is due to it. We do not at all want to receive what God wants to give to us in order to sustain it [the soul], but reject it like ungrateful people.

In Against Luxury and License in Geneva (1546) Calvin writes, “Truer than I should like is that saying of the ancients that those who labor so much in developing the body are little concerned with the cultivation of the soul.” In Phaedo we see the same concern for the care of the soul: “If the soul is immortal, it demands our care not only for that part of time which we call life, but for all time. And indeed it would seem now that it will be extremely dangerous to neglect it.” Calvin similarly emphasized the importance and superiority of the soul as compared with the body: “Furthermore, that man consists of a soul and a body ought to be beyond controversy. Now I understand by the term ‘soul’ an immortal yet created essence, which is the nobler part.” In the same section he writes about the soul, “For surely these passages and similar ones that occur repeatedly not only clearly distinguish the soul from the body, but by transferring to it the name ‘man’ indicate it to be the principal part.” In his lectures on Malachi, Calvin calls the soul “the chief thing


98. SC Vol. 5:53, ll. 37-42. “Nous demandons bien la pluye et la rosée, afin que la terre prenne substance pour notre nourriture; nous congnoissons allors que Dieu fait decouler sa grace sur nous. Or la vie de l’ame nous doibt ester bien plus precieuse que celle du corps. Toutesfoys regardons comment nous sommes sçonneux de luy donner sa nourriture telle qu’il luy appartient. Nous ne voulons point recevoir ce que Dieu nous veult donner pour la substanter, mais le rejetons, comme ingratz.”


100. Plato: Complete, 89 (89 107 c).


102. ICR 1.15.2 “Nam hi certe loci, et similes qui passim occurrunt, non solum manifeste distinguunt animam a corpore, sed hominis nomen ad eam transferendo, praepicuum esse partem indicant.” (CO 2:136). See also Comm. Psalms 103:15, “the soul ... is the principal part of man. “ ... animae, quod tamen potior est pars hominis.” (CO 32:81).
in us ... created from nothing.” Thus, he affirms the creation of the soul (within the body) *ex nihilo* and disagrees with traducianism. In the *Harmony of the Gospels*, Calvin continues this trend by saying that “the soul naturally is superior to the body,” it “exceeds the body,” and “man’s soul is his more excellent part.” These quotations support the view that Calvin agreed with Plato as to the importance of the soul in comparison with the body. However, for Plato the soul is uncreated, immortal, deathless, and not dependent on God.

As has already been observed in the section describing his use of the metaphor in the *Institutes*, Calvin uses the image of “guardian” or “keeper”: “when the soul is freed from the prison house of the body, God is its perpetual guardian.” This is reminiscent of Plato’s *Phaedo*: “I believe that this much is true, that the gods are our keepers, and we men are one of their possessions,” although the association is not as strong as some of the other images.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion it may be asserted that Calvin had a close knowledge of *Phaedo* and likely read it personally. If we agree with Babelotzky that Calvin must at least have read some of the dialogues cited, then *Phaedo* is one of the most likely candidates. The prison metaphor occurs most often in *Phaedo*. *Phaedrus* is the only other dialogue in which the metaphor occurs, only once, with an added simile of oyster and shell: “steadfast and blissful were the spectacles on which we gazed in the moment of final revelation; pure was the light that shone around us, and pure were we, without taint of that prison house which now we are encompassed withal, and call a body, fast bound therein as an oyster in its shell.”

Babelotzky does not find any clear signs of Calvin having read *Phaedrus*. However, there is stronger evidence for some other writings, where Calvin is more specific about the Plato references, as in his commentary on Titus 1:12, where he cites “the second book of Plato’s *Republic*” or on Ephesians 4:17-18 “near the end of the sixth book of the *Republic*.” In these cases it may be that Calvin relied on his phenomenal memory or had the writ-

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104. Traducianism teaches that the soul, the immaterial aspect of our being, is transmitted through natural generation along with the body. See Calvin’s *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, tr. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), 65-67, where he refutes traducianism. (CO 47:56-58). A.S.E. Talsma, *De anthropologie van Calvijn* (Utrecht: C.H.E. Breyer, 1882), maintains that Calvin wavered between traducianism and creationism, p. 104.


ings in front of him. When we consider that Calvin employed the metaphor ninety-one times and that it occurs mostly in *Phaedo*, along with other images and concepts as described above, it might be reasonable to think that Calvin had read *Phaedo*, even if he did not have it in front of him when he referred to it or echoed its sentiments.

Charles Partee has made a study of *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, where he argues that “it is not very remarkable that Calvin is indirectly influenced by the common ‘theological Platonism’ of so much of the Christian thought from the Greek fathers through Augustine and the Renaissance Platonists or that aspects of Calvin’s doctrines ‘resemble’ Plato’s. In this ‘weak’ sense Calvin is not alone in being influenced by Platonism.”111 Although it is true that Calvin sometimes praises Plato, he does not endorse all of Plato’s ideas. Calvin’s idea of the immortality of the soul is strongly linked to the resurrection of the body. Partee concludes, “Calvin looks at the subject of soul and body, immortality and resurrection through the ‘spectacles of Scripture.’ The lens[es] of Calvin’s spectacles were certainly tinted by Platonism here, but the source of Calvin’s view of soul and body is the Scripture.”112 This is a valid conclusion.

Although Calvin feels free to engage Plato on a range of topics, it is noteworthy that in all of his multiple uses of the prison metaphor, he never attributes it to Plato. It is as if Plato never used the metaphor as far as Calvin was concerned. On other topics, Calvin does mention Plato, for example with regard to learning being recollection, and a philosopher’s life being a meditation upon death. In his *Letters* Plato states, “There are three things, soul and body and money. Put in the place of highest honor the excellence of the soul; put next, that of the body, subject, however, to that of the soul; and in the third and last place put the honor paid to money, making it a slave to the body and to the soul.”113 Likewise, Calvin puts riches in perspective compared with the soul, although in this context he does not speak of the body, which he elsewhere114 values as being less than the soul:

Everyone confesses that the soul is more than all riches and delights of the world; yet the sense of the flesh blinds them and they cast their souls knowingly and willingly into destruction. Therefore, lest the world should bewitch us with its charms, let us remember the excellency of our souls. If we consider this earnestly, it will easily shake off the empty imaginings of earthly happiness.115

112. Ibid., 65.
114. *ICR* 1.15.2: “Furthermore, that man consists of a soul and a body ought to be beyond controversy. Now I understand by the term ‘soul’ an immortal yet created essence, which is his nobler part.” “Porro hominem constare anima et corpore, extra controversiam esse debet; atque animae nomine essentiam immortalem, creatam tamen intelligo, quae nobilior eius pars est.” (CO 2:335).
Here again, in elevating the claims of the soul above material wealth, Calvin agrees with Plato. In his *Laws V*, Plato states, “Of all a man has – after his gods – the divinest thing, and the most truly his own, is his soul. ... Again, when a man prefers comeliness before goodness, this also is no other than real and utmost dishonor to the soul. For this estimate pronounces body more honorable than soul, and that most falsely.”

Whereas Plato says that man *has* a soul, in Genesis 2:7 we are taught that man *became* a living soul. Calvin expresses this sentiment in similar fashion. Commenting on this verse he states that Adam’s body “was endued with a soul, whence it should receive vital motion; and that on this soul God engraved his own image, to which immortality is annexed.” This must refer to the original creation. In his Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 and ICR 3.9.4, Calvin mentions the “immortality to come,” which for fallen humanity is a future event. In all his writings body and soul remain distinct entities.

Even though both Plato and Calvin assign greater honor to the soul than to the body, Calvin does not totally discount care for the body. In the *Institutes* he discusses the heavenly aspirations we should have in view of our redemption in Christ, who is already ascended into heaven: “Ever since both our souls and bodies were destined for heavenly incorruption and an unfading crown, we ought to strive manfully [strenue: with energy or vigor] to keep them pure and uncorrupted until the Day of the Lord.” The emphasis here is on our striving to be or become pure. When commenting on 2 Thessalonians 5:23, the emphasis is on sanctification being the work of God: “But if it is the part of God to renew the whole man, there is nothing left for free will. [...] But when he says, sanctify you wholly, he makes him the sole Author of the entire work.” In his concluding remarks on this verse, Calvin states:

For how is the whole man *entire*, except when his thoughts are pure and holy, when all his affections are right and properly regulated, when, in fine, the body itself lays out its endeavours and services only in good works? [...] For then is the man pure and entire, when he thinks nothing in his mind, desires nothing in his heart, does nothing with his body, except what is approved by God.

It is Calvin’s eschatological concern that keeps the prison metaphor in perspective. There is a contrast in Calvin’s thought between the two extremes of sin in the present

118. ICR 3.6.3 “Ex quo et anima nostra et corpus coelesti incorruptioni et immarcescibili coronae destinata sunt, strenue enitendum esse ut pura et incorrupta in diem Domini conserventur.” (CO 2:504).
world and of perfect goodness in the Kingdom to come. Boisset is of the opinion that eschatology dominates Calvin’s thought. However, because of his eschatological vision, Calvin is more concerned with care of the soul than care of the body. Commenting on Psalm 107:20 he writes, “I own, indeed, that it is of comparatively little consequence to us to be the subjects of bodily care, if our souls remain unsanctified by the word of God.” Here Calvin may have been thinking about Paul’s exhortation to Timothy: “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Plato argues not only that the soul is more important than the body, but also that it is to govern the body, since, according to his philosophy, the soul is prior to body. When we compare that with Calvin’s theology, we see there that the Holy Spirit must inspire the soul to rule over the body: “For where the Spirit of God does not yet rule, lusts sometimes so boil that there is danger lest they plunge the soul bound over to them into forgetfulness and contempt of God.” In their fallen state, human beings are unable to govern their bodies rightly. They need the Holy Spirit in their hearts in order to learn not to be ruled by their baser instincts. Thus, for Calvin, it is not enough for the mind to govern the body, as in Plato, because the mind is also corrupted by the fall into sin. The mind must be renewed by the Holy Spirit before it can rightly rule the body and its passions. This is an advance on his position in 1532, when he wrote his Commentary on Seneca’s De Clementia. In it he does not mention the Holy Spirit and he quotes with approval, “We use the mind as ruler, the body rather as servant,” by Sallust. Also, in the next sentence he quotes Quintilian, “Thus our bodies take their movement from the mind alone, and our members are idle until our mind puts them to use.” In the entire commentary on De Clementia, written as a humanistic work before his conversion, Calvin does not feel the need to refer to the necessity for the Holy Spirit.

In Phaedo, Plato makes the argument that men’s souls are confined in their bodies and that the purer the soul, the more readily it departs, after the death of the body, “to that place which is, like itself, invisible, divine, immortal, and wise, where, on its arrival, happiness awaits it, ... and where, ... it really spends time with God.” By contrast, on the death of the wicked, he says, they are “compelled to wander about these places as a punishment for their bad conduct in the past. They continue wandering until at last, through craving for the corporeal, which increasingly pursues

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121. Boisset, Sagesse et sainteté, 139.
123. Plato: Complete, Laws X, 1452 (896 c ff); Timaeus 1165 (34 c).
124. ICR 2.7.11. “Ubi enim nondum regit Spiritus Dei, illic sic ebulliunt interdum libidines, ut periculum sit ne animam sibi obnoxiam in oblivionem contemptumque Dei demergant...” (CO 2:261).
126. Breen, French Humanism, 67, calls the Commentary “the culmination of Calvin’s youthful humanism.”
127. Plato: Complete, Phaedo, 64 (81a).
them, they are imprisoned once more in a body.”128 Here we see an expression of Plato’s idea of the migration of the soul from one being to another as well as being imprisoned. Plato’s argument makes philosophy the liberator of the soul:

Every seeker after wisdom knows that up to the time when philosophy takes it over, his soul is a helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars, and wallowing in utter ignorance. And philosophy can see that the imprisonment is ingeniously effected by the prisoner’s own active desire, which makes him first accessory to his own confinement. Well, philosophy takes over the soul in this condition and by gentle persuasion tries to set it free.129

In speaking of the body, Calvin may use Platonic terminology to describe what he believes the Bible teaches, but he knows that for every believer there is a sure expectation of a blessed after-life which includes a resurrected body. By contrast, in Plato’s view, only a pure philosopher has any chance of being with the gods and a select few other philosophers. Souls that are less pure can only hope to be reincarnated as animals, or, if they return as men, they have to accomplish their purification by starting all over again with philosophy.130 For Christians familiar with the Bible there are only two possibilities open to people: their souls and bodies are either totally lost or totally saved. They do not get an opportunity to re-live their lives in a reincarnation.

When Calvin alludes to, or quotes from Plato, it is often to agree with him, especially on the subject of government. He disagrees with the Platonists on the subject of worship of angels and charges them with “infected the Christian Church with this error.”131 Occasionally he disagrees with Plato. On the subject of sin he writes, “This is why Plato seems to have been compelled to consider (in his Protagoras) that we sin only out of ignorance. ... It is falsely said, therefore, that man sins out of ignorance alone.”132 In his commentaries, Calvin mentions Plato or the Platonists by name fifty three times. His comments range from the complimentary, to the concessive, to the critical. In the first category, the complimentary, we may quote his comment on Isaiah 11:9 (1551) “as Plato has judiciously observed.”133 The concessive may be seen in his Commentary on Psalm 104:29 (1557) “Even Plato knew this, who so often teaches that, properly speaking, there is but one God, and that all things subsist,
or have their being only in him.” An example from the critical category may be seen in the Commentary on John 5:4 (1551) “We must beware of Plato’s silly speculations, for the distance between us and God is too great for us to go to the angels that they may procure grace for us. On the contrary, we must come straight to Christ, that by His guidance, protection and command we may have the angels as helpers and ministers of our salvation.” From these remarks we can see that Calvin had no scruples about criticizing those with whom he disagreed.

In the Institutes of 1559 Calvin mentions Plato by name twenty-one times, although he may hint at Platonic material even more, as the critical editions testify. Some of the agreements and disagreements touch on the same subjects as in the commentaries. For example; “Farewell, then, to that Platonic philosophy of seeking access to God through angels, and of worshiping them with intent to render God more approachable to us. This is what superstitious and curious men have tried to drag into our religion from the beginning and persevere in trying even to this day.” Quite surprisingly, he quotes with approval a prayer to Jupiter and shows how it applies to the Christian:

Plato, on seeing man’s want of skill in making requests of God, which, if granted, would often have been disadvantageous to them, declares this, taken from an ancient poet, to be the best prayer: ‘King Jupiter, bestow the best things upon us whether we wish for them or not, but command that evil things be far from us even when we request them.’ And indeed, the heathen man is wise in that he judges how dangerous it is to seek from the Lord what our greed dictates: at the same time he discloses our unhappiness, in that we cannot even open our mouths before God without danger unless the Spirit instructs us in the right pattern for prayer.


137. ICR 3.20.34. "Plato quem hominum imperitiam videret in votis ad Deum perferendis, quisbus concessis pessime illis saepius consultum fuerit, optimam precandi rationem hanc esse pronuntiat, et veferi poeta sumptam: Jupiter rex, optima nobis et voventibus et non voventibus tribue; mala autem poscentibus quoque abesse iube. Atque homo quidem ethnicus in eo sapit, quod iudicat quam sì periculosum a Domino expetere quod cupiditas nostra dictaverit: simul nostram infelicitatem prodit, qui ne hiscere quidem sine discrimine coram Deo possimus, nisi ad rectam orandi normam nos spiritus instituat." (CO 2:661).
Assessment

Calvin uses the body-prison metaphor ninety-one times in his writings, which is far more than are found in Plato. He seems to have assimilated the thought very thoroughly, using it eight times in one of his earliest Christian writing, *Psychopannychia* (1536), and in most of his other writings, including the final version of the *Institutes*. Calvin frequently recognized that some pagan philosophers had a correct perception of various religious truths. He believed that anything true, though said by wicked men, is from God. Commenting on Titus 1:12 he said, “From this passage we may gather that it is superstitious to refuse to make any use of secular authors. For since all truth is of God, if any ungodly man has said anything true, we should not reject it, for it also has come from God.” With regard to the body as prison metaphor, it may reasonably be concluded that Calvin had direct knowledge of it by his reading of *Phaedo*, but it cannot be proven in an absolute sense.

Augustine

Since Augustine is the most quoted of Christian writers in Calvin’s works, it may be useful to see whether Augustine used and mediated the metaphor. If he did, it could suggest that Calvin acquired the metaphor via Augustine’s neoplatonism. Calvin quotes Augustine liberally, most often with sincere approval. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* of 1559, Augustine is mentioned by name 313 times (not counting where his name occurs in the titles of sections, nor unnamed allusions to his works). By far the greater majority of these mentions are very positive, as in Book IV, writing of Augustine, “whom we quote often as the best and most reliable witness

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138. The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, tr. T.A. Smail (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), 363-4. ”Nam quum omnis veritas a Deo sit, si quid scite et vere ab impiis dictum est, non debet repudiari, quia a Deo est profectum.” (CO 52:415). See also his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Quum autem omnis veritas a Deo sit, non dubium quin Dominus in os posuerit etiam impiis quaecunque veram et salutarem doctrinam continet.” (CO 49:554) and ICR 2.2.15.
139. Boisset, Sagesse et sainteté, 227. “Cette statistique montre que Calvin n’a jamais cessé, de 1536 à 1560, de recourir à la source platonicienne, qu’il a précisé ses emprunts, et qu’il les a augmentés, dans la dernière édition, par rapport à celles de 1543 et de 1550.”
140. Luchesius Smits in his Saint Augustin dans l’œuvre de Jean Calvin (Assen: van Gorcum & Comp. N.V., 1957), 6, has found 4100 points of contact between Augustine and Calvin. He quotes V. Hepp who states, “It is impossible ... to fully understand the *Institutes* if one has not made an intense study of
of all antiquity." There are only nine mentions of Augustine where Calvin feels obliged to disagree somewhat with him, or his way of expressing himself. In the commentaries, Calvin has more frequent occasion to disagree with Augustine, because he tended to allegorize rather freely, and speculate often. Calvin disapproved of both these practices, even if he used them himself sometimes. Some of the disagreements arose from the fact that Augustine did not understand Hebrew and had limited knowledge of Greek. In the New Testament commentaries Calvin finds himself disagreeing with Augustine more often than in the Institutes. Out of 199 mentions of Augustine in all the commentaries, Calvin criticizes him sixty seven times.

Before Augustine became a Christian, he was first an adherent of Manichaeism. Subsequently he became enamored of Neo-Platonism. In Manichaeism, matter, including the body, was seen as inherently evil. Augustine later devoted considerable effort writing against the Manichaeans, but continued to affirm some Platonic ideas. In the City of God he wrote, “The Platonists, indeed, are not so foolish as, with the Manichaeans, to detest our present bodies as an evil nature; for they attribute all the elements of which this visible and tangible world is compacted, with all their qualities, to God their Creator.” Of all the philosophers, Augustine esteemed Plato the most, stating that he was “justly to be preferred to all the other philosophers of the Gentiles.” Nevertheless, Augustine did retract some Platonic ideas that he had endorsed earlier in his life. For example, he withdrew from the Platonic view of the pre-existence of the soul, and also from the idea that acquisition of knowledge is a recollection, or excavation of the knowledge hidden in the mind.

In his Confessions Augustine relates how he spent his youth in sexual immorality. It is also the case that he felt guilty about having done so. As an adolescent he had prayed “Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.” He found it difficult to break the bonds of lust, until he finally was converted. With such a background, Augustine could be expected to be a frequent user of the metaphor of the body being
the prison of the soul, since it took him so long before he freed himself from the lusts of the flesh. On the occasion of his eventual conversion (386), when the voice in the garden told him to “Take it and read,” he opened Paul’s epistles where it said “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Romans 13:13-14). Thus, Augustine’s conversion experience is closely linked with his felt need to mortify the body and put off the sins of the flesh. For him, becoming a Christian meant becoming celibate. He sent his concubine, the mother of his son Adeodatus, back to Africa in 385. He seems to have felt less guilty about abandoning the mother of his son than about some petty thieving from an orchard in his boyhood. At the instigation of his mother, Monica, he prepared to marry an heiress, who was at the time still too young for marriage. Another woman temporarily filled her place. However, the marriage did not take place. At Easter 387 he was baptized and Augustine lived a celibate life for the remainder of his life. In his writings he often equates sex with sin: marriage is good, but virginity is better; even sex in marriage is sinful unless the procreation of children is in view.146

In view of the continued struggle against his sexual inclinations during Augustine’s pre-Christian life, as well as the manner and circumstances of his conversion, one might expect him to have some affinity with the image of the body being a prison house of the soul. But he does not. Not only does he not adopt the metaphor, he repudiates the thought behind it, i.e. he rejects that a pre-existing soul is thrust into the body which it inhabits as into a prison. In Letter 166 he writes, “But that souls sin in another earlier life, and that for their sins in that state of being they are cast down into bodies as prisons, I do not believe: I reject and protest against such an opinion.”147 It must be admitted that his argument in this quotation is really against the pre-existence of the soul rather than against the concept of the body being the prison of the soul. As a Christian, Augustine also wrote against the philosophical teachings of Manichaeism. When writing On the Morals of the Catholic Church (388), in his “Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon,” he addresses the view that the body is the workmanship of Satan and the prison-house of God: “The Manichaeans ... say that human bodies are the workmanship of the race of darkness, and the prison in which the captive deity is confined. Thus Faustus’ doctrine is different from Paul’s.”148 In view of his general approval of Plato, it is significant that in the vast extent of his writings Augustine does not make positive use of this metaphor. This was another way of repudiating Manichaeism. Boisset argues that Augustine’s dogmatic thoughts are


based on Platonic philosophy. He may have retracted some of his earlier, too enthusiastic affirmations of Platonism, but cannot be said to have become anti-Platonic. However, he did not adopt the Platonic idea that the soul exists before the body, nor that the body is the prison of the soul.

In Augustine’s commentary on Psalm 142:8 (141 in the Vulgate), he argues against some writers who identified the prison with “the cave” in the title of the Psalm,

But some have said, that this prison and cave is this body, so that this is the meaning of, ‘Bring my soul out of prison.’ [...] Let God then lead us forth from the body, when He will. Our body too might be said to be a prison, not because that is a prison which God hath made, but because it is under punishment and liable to death. For there are two things to be considered in our body, God’s workmanship, and the punishment it has deserved [...] It is not the body then that maketh the prison, but the corruption.

Augustine also says, in his On the Morals of the Catholic Church (388), that the body is man’s heaviest bond (or fetter, or chain) on account of sin, but he does not say that the body itself is a prison.

Calvin equates the body with the prison much more directly than does Augustine. It is true that Calvin sees corruption as being the cause of the prison-like character of the body, but he is consistently negative about the body, even in contexts where that is not required by exegetical considerations. However, his discussion of created man does not elaborate on the body very much. Calvin allots much more consideration to the soul of man in its “primal worthiness.” In his brief commentary on Psalm 142, Calvin does not refer to those who would see the cave and the prison as the body, nor does he consider Augustine’s rebuttal of them. He is familiar with Augustine’s commentary on the Psalms, since he refers to him eighteen times in the course of his own commentaries on the Psalms (eleven times in order to disagree with him). He could, therefore, have taken the opportunity to dialogue with Augustine about the metaphor and have disagreed also on this point. But he did not do so. So we see that although Calvin himself used the metaphor numerous times, he did not take issue with Augustine when he, Augustine, rejected the notion of the body itself being the prison of the soul in his Reply to Faustus. This could suggest that Calvin did not take the metaphor

149. Boisset, Sagesse et Sainteté, 249. “Or, la pensée dogmatique de l’évêque d’Hippone, repose sur une base philosophique platonicienne. [...] Mais il ne semble pas que l’on puisse affirmer que, de platonicien, Augustin est devenu anti-platonicien.”
151. “Sed inter omnia quae in hac vita possidentur, corpus homini gravissimum vinculum est, justissimis Dei legibus, propter antiquum peccatum, quo nihil est ad praedicandum notius, nihil ad intelligendum secretius.” De Moribus ecclesiae catholicae, I, c. XXII; P.L., I, col. 1328, as quoted in Boisset, Sagesse et Sainteté, 301. “But among all things which are possessed in life, the body is, by God’s most righteous laws, for the sin of old, man’s heaviest bond, which is well known as a fact, but most incomprehensible in its mystery.” Basic Writings of St. Augustine (New York: Random House, 1948), 1:339.
152. ICR 2.1.2 “prima illa dignitas.” (CO 2:176).
very seriously himself, but then his frequent use of the metaphor seems excessive. If we assume that Calvin disagrees with Augustine about the body not being the prison of the soul, then he must not have considered it important enough to discuss his disagreement in that context. At the least, the foregoing suggests that the impulse to use the metaphor did not come to Calvin via Augustine.

In spite of his frequent interactions with Plato’s ideas (on sin, the soul, angels, prayer), Calvin does not acknowledge Plato with respect to the body-prison metaphor. T.H.L. Parker provides the following comment on Calvin’s view of Plato and others:

[Calvin] passed though a strong humanist phase and was [...] familiar in humanist circles. But, although we may infer that his thought at that time was tinged with stoicism and Platonism, his humanism was literary and academic. He may give his heart to the authors of Greece and Rome, but he is very far from becoming their disciple. When he was converted, he measured such of their ideas as he had sampled by the criterion which he now regarded as definitive, the Scriptures, and discarded them. Or rather, if he did not succeed in entirely discarding them, he intended to and kept watch against them. But he saw no need to throw away his literary and academic humanism. Instead he harnessed it to his new purposes. It is very true that his love for the classics now takes second place to the Bible, so he can write: “Read Demosthenes or Cicero, read Plato, Aristotle or the others of that band. [...] But if you then turn to that sacred book, it will, whether you wish it or not, strike you so vividly, so penetrate your heart, so settle in your bones, that beside the efficacy of its influence the power of the rhetoricians and philosophers will almost vanish away.” Nevertheless, he can still turn to Virgil or Horace, Ovid or Plato for a well-turned phrase or telling illustration.153

Calvin must have thought well enough of the metaphor of the body as prison of the soul as a “telling illustration” to consider it appropriate for describing the relationship between the body and the soul. But on other essential doctrinal points he is Biblical rather than Platonic and he denied being a Platonist.154

**Conclusion**

Calvin uses an expression that seems to have been fairly common in his era. For Calvin to use it so frequently throughout his writings suggests that he considered it a legitimate expression. It is difficult to imagine that a careful writer such as Calvin would use the phrase thoughtlessly, although it is still possible that he may have used it simply as an idiom that was current at the time. The Platonic idiom was filled with Pauline content. The eschatological feature of his theology is the broader context of his anthropological statements. The fact that he did not use it with reference to his

own body may indicate that he had not appropriated the metaphor in a personal way. He does not stop to reflect and analyze the metaphor or to discuss whether it is valid. He has no reservations about using it in different ways and in a wide variety of contexts. Whether in writing or in sermons, Calvin did not vary his use of the metaphor. Sometimes the metaphor just refers to our lives as mortals. This is especially the case at the end or near the end of the sermons quoted in the Appendix. At other times he does indeed exhibit a loathing of being in the body and a strong desire to escape it. He appears to assume that all Christian people should long to divest themselves of the body and be eager to be liberated from it by death. Paul’s teaching in Philippians (1:21-24) is indeed that to die is gain. Besides that, it is important to note that Paul was in a Roman prison at the time of writing Philippians. But he also teaches that to live is Christ. Paul does not say: to live is to be imprisoned. He continues by saying that to live means fruitful labor for the Lord, not a loathing of our bodies. It is doubtful that Paul wished us to long for death. Calvin mixes the apostolic teaching of Paul with this questionable, even illegitimate, Platonic teaching of the body being a prison. It is clear that he did not derive this metaphor from Augustine. The question remains whether Calvin mixes the apostolic teaching of Paul with the Platonic idea of the body being a prison. When seen in contrast with his view of the resurrection and eternal life, the negativity of the Platonic prison is balanced with the glory and happiness of life to come.

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155. See # 55, 56, 57, 59, 50, 62, and 64 in the Appendix.
Chapter Four

Calvin’s Adoption of Current Medical Theories and His Experience and Perception of His Own Physical Self

Introduction

The main goal of this chapter is to investigate whether or not Calvin’s experience and expression of his ailments strengthened any Platonic view of the body. To answer this question we will first give an overview of some of the medical theories prevalent in the sixteenth century. When considering whether Calvin was a Platonist with respect to the body, it is pertinent to ask: how did he view what was known of the human body and how did he experienced his own body?

Calvin’s Adoption of Current Medical Theories

In common with his contemporaries, Calvin held to the theories of the traditional medical authorities. Predominantly, they were the theories of the four humors, as taught by Hippocrates (c. 450 – c. 370 B.C.) and Galen (A.D. 129 – c.200). The humoral theory has a long lineage dating back to ancient Chinese culture under Emperor Kien Lung. He commissioned an immense encyclopedia published in forty volumes, called The Golden Mirrors of Medicine:

A study of these works shows that there were two great theories in ancient Chinese medicine, the first being the doctrine of the five elements: earth, fire, water, wood and metal. The body was said to be composed of these five components and it was from this much older doctrine of five principles that the four body humours was probably derived. The second [...] is the idea of [...] the Yang and the Yin.¹

These Chinese theories were forerunners of Hippocratic theories. Hippocrates saw the human body as a whole; the patient was viewed as an individual entity. Stress was laid on securing the co-operation of the patient in fighting disease. If a person was sick, the sickness was due to the imbalance of the four humors.² Hippocrates’ reputation was such that many writings were gathered and published under his name even though he had left no identifiable works. The “Hippocratic Corpus” in-

cludes works like *Epidemics, Prognostic* and the *Aphorisms*. Among the latter, there is one that is of particular interest with respect to Calvin. In the context of discussing the worthy participation of the Lord’s Supper, Calvin writes:

Physical food, when it comes into a stomach occupied by evil humors, and is itself also vitiated and corrupted, harms rather than nourishes. So also this spiritual food, if it enters a soul corrupted by malice and wickedness, casts it down with a greater ruin – not by the fault of the food itself, but because to polluted and unbelieving men nothing is clean.  

This idea is also found in his *Tracts*, in chapter XVIII of *The Adultero-German Interim* entitled “Of the Sacrament of the Eucharist.” Under section 5 Calvin states it this way:

The eucharist has the power of strengthening in spiritual good, for which assuredly there is no room, unless the purging away of sins has preceded. Herein we ought to imitate good physicians, who do not give things which can strengthen and confirm before they have expelled the bad humours from the body; unless they have done this they do no good to the patient, but rather hurt him.

Although there are no direct references to Hippocrates in Calvin’s writings, the comments above are very reminiscent of his *Aphorisms*, Section II # 10: “Bodies that are not clean, the more you nourish the more you harm.” Calvin here applies what was common medical knowledge to the realm of the spiritual in discussing the Lord’s Supper. It is certain that Calvin read Galen and most likely also Hippocrates, and it is very well possible that he read them in the home of the Cop family. The father of his friend Nicholas Cop, the physician to the King, had translated both Galen and

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Hippocrates into French. If Calvin had not personally read the *Aphorisms* by Hippocrates, then they must have been so well known generally that Calvin knew them by reputation.

**Contemporary Physicians**

This theory, afterwards expounded by Galen, was destined to remain a fundamental doctrine in medicine for many hundreds of years. The relationship between the elements and the humors is stated very well by Temkin:

In the process of digestion, food and drink turn into the bodily juices, the humors, of which there are four main kinds: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. They are the nourishment of the body, i.e., of its tissues, which consequently owe their existence to the humors. The elements of fire, earth, and water do not exist as such in the body; they are represented by yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm, respectively. Only air is directly provided through respiration. What is found in the veins is really a mixture of humors, but since the true humor ‘blood’ predominates, the name is also extended to the content as a whole.

Obviously, excess or lack of humors causes disease, as do changes from the normal qualitative makeup of tissues or of organs.

The role of food in maintaining balance of the humors in the body was well understood. Discipline in consumption and even abstinence were regarded as virtues.

As a rule, popular ideas about eating among early moderns themselves came from the Galenic system and the general idea that a balance or equilibrium within the body needed to be maintained through constant vigilance. Dietary advice in the Renaissance is so ubiquitous and so voluminous [. . .]. The goal of all the advice, however, was the same: to adjust diet to a degree of compatibility with the basic humoral makeup of the body in order to produce an ideal mean, a stasis point of temperance, when all factors are precisely balanced for optimum health.

Galen had a great reputation. He was an ardent humoralist who fully accepted the four elements and four humors. His pathology was founded on the Hippocratic doctrine of humors. In the beginning, the four-humors theory was applied in a strictly physical sense only. Galen did develop the Stoic attribution of the varieties of human character to the various admixtures of the four humors, but the names “choleric,” “sanguine,” “melancholic,” and “phlegmatic” were not introduced as describing

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human character until the ninth century by the Arab physician Johannitius (Honein ben Ishak). Allbutt calls Galen “the greatest master of scientific method from the second century to Roger Bacon.”

It is clear that Calvin shared in the general admiration of Galen. In praising God for his creative wisdom, Calvin says,

Likewise, in regard to the structure of the human body one must have the greatest keenness in order to weigh, with Galen’s skill, its articulation, symmetry, beauty, and use. But yet, as all acknowledge, the human body shows itself to be a composition so ingenious that its Artificer is rightly judged a wonder-worker.

This sentiment was quite common during Calvin’s life time. “A wide variety of practitioners argued that understanding the intricacies of the human body was a way of revealing the mastery of God’s work.” Calvin seems to have had a high esteem for physicians. His understanding of medical procedures is reflected in his commentary on Isaiah 38:17, which describes the importance of going to the root cause of illness, rather than treating the outward symptoms:

But we ought rather to imitate skilful physicians, who examine the causes of disease, and give their whole attention to eradicate those causes. They know that outward remedies are useless, even hurtful, if the inward cause be unknown; for such remedies drive the whole force of the disease inward, and promote and increase it, so that there is no hope of cure.

He also commented on 2 Timothy 2:17 by referring deferentially to the authority of his doctor, Benedictus Textor (c.1509-1560), on the subject of gangrene, and stated that Erasmus had mistranslated the passage. In the discussion he also refers, again deferentially, to Galen’s authority. In an extended description of his ills in a letter to Melanchthon, Calvin says of the physicians, “But as I know that they are men of no common skill in their profession, persons of sound good sense moreover, and experienced from a long practice of their art, I not only from motives of politeness pay...”

12. Ibid., 299.
implicit attention to their orders, but even willingly permit myself to be guided by such masters.” 17 Sadly, he did not always take their advice. When he was coughing up blood his doctors and friends all begged him to take a month’s rest, but he would not. 18 He did at one time plan to take a little trip to the countryside on doctors’ orders. 19 At one time Viret begged him to look after himself, “for us and for the Church, even if not out of concern for yourself.” 20 Considering his continued suffering throughout the years, one finds it amazing that he retained this high opinion of the medical profession. In his letter to the Physicians of Montpellier, he calls them “most accomplished sirs whom I sincerely honour.” 21 This high opinion is all the more remarkable because the general opinion was quite the opposite:

The popular image of the doctor was, then, of a man who charged heavily for failing to do his duty, and the figure of the man with a urine bottle in one hand and a bag of gold in the other was already a literary and dramatic stereotype. 22

Interestingly, Calvin’s friend and colleague, Pierre Viret, also had a high opinion of physicians, having been brought back from the brink of death, by their ministrations, after a poisoning. 23 But even the knowledge of Calvin’s highly esteemed physicians, who may have been exceptional, was insufficient for the task of helping him to cure his many health problems.

Calvin also shared Galen’s view of the humors. We have already seen in the quotations regarding the Lord’s Supper that Calvin employed the concept of humors in his teaching. In his letters it is especially in connection with his own state of health that he provides evidence of his adherence to Galen’s doctrine of humors. In a letter to Farel, Calvin writes about his ill health in quite some detail, showing how he had absorbed the current understanding of humors as it related to himself:

17. SW, 6:483, 19th November, 1558. “Quia tamen et artis suae non vulgari scientia et certo iudicio praeditos et longo usu exercitatos cognovi, non tantum officii causa morem gero, sed etiam libenter patior me regi a talibus magistris.” (CO 17:385).
18. “...toutesfois apres y avoir remedié par le conseil des medecins, et s’estre tenu coy bien peu de iours, il se monstra tel que de coustume, et retourna derechef à prescher: combien que tant les medecins que ses amis familiers luy conseilloyent et le prioyent qu’il se reposast pour le moins un mois, afin de mieux remedier au mal commencé. De fait le peu de repos qu’il se donnoit fut cause que encores depuis aux annees ensuivantes il eut le mesme accident deux ou trois fois: où il fut semblablement secouru par les medecins le mieux qu’il leur estoit possible en un tel corps.” (CO 21:89).
Next day, being the Lord’s-day, when I had got a little warm in the delivery of the forenoon sermon, I felt those humours which had gathered in the head begin to loosen and dissolve. Before I could leave the place the cough attacked me, and I was very much troubled with the continual defluxion until Tuesday. On that day, when I was preaching, as usual, and found great difficulty in speaking, owing to the nostrils being blocked up with mucus and the fauces [the passage between the back of the mouth and the pharynx] choked with hoarseness, all of a sudden I underwent a strange sensation; the cough, to be sure, ceased, but rather unseasonably, while the head continued to be crammed with evil humours.\textsuperscript{24}

In a letter to his friend Melanchthon, Calvin gives a detailed description of his illness and the treatment the doctors prescribe regarding food, drink, and other remedies: “They only once attempted to expel the bilious humours from my spleen.”\textsuperscript{25} Calvin suffered from an enlarged spleen at the time. “According to the humoral theory[,] ... the spleen was regarded as the organ which received the unclean matter which accumulated in the region of the liver during disease, especially disease accompanied by fever.”\textsuperscript{26} Five weeks before he died, in a letter to Bullinger, dated 6th April 1564, Calvin again describes his sufferings in order to explain to Bullinger why he could not write sooner. In part, this description reads, “For though the pain in my side is abated, my lungs are nevertheless so charged with phlegmatic humours that my respiration is difficult and interrupted.”\textsuperscript{27} Cooke interprets this as pleurisy and states that “Calvin’s pleurisy had been compounded by what were known in his time as tertiary and then quartan fevers [...]. He had severe sweating at night and then developed a much-feared complication of tuberculosis: namely, hemoptysis or coughing up blood.”\textsuperscript{28} Writing from Ratisbon to send his condolences to Monsieur de Richelbourg, the father of a student who had died of the plague, Calvin compared the deceased Louis with his surviving brother Charles: “Louis, as he was of a more sanguine temperament, was also more lively and cheerful. Charles, who has somewhat of melancholy in his disposition, is not so easily drawn out of himself.”\textsuperscript{29} This description

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{SW24} SW, 4:204, October 1540. “Dio dominico qui proximus erat, quem in concione pomeridiana aliquantum incaluissem, sensi liquefieri humores illos qui caput occupaverant. Antequam illinc discederem, catarrhus me corripuit, qui continuo fluxu usque ad diem Martis admodum me vexavit. Eo die quum de more haberem concionem et magna in loquendo difficultate laborarem, quod et nares fluxione erant impeditae et fauces raucedine quasi praefocatae, sensi subitam commotionem fieri. Stitit enim catarrhus, sed intempestive, quem adhuc caput esset malis humoribus referunt.” (CO 11:83).
\bibitem{SW25} SW, 6:483, 19th November 1558. “Semel duntaxat humores melancholicos ex liene evellere conati sunt.” (CO 17:385).
\bibitem{SW27} SW, 7:363, 6th April 1564. “Quamquam enim sedatus est lateris dolor, sic tamen flegmatibus obruti sunt pulmones ut difficilis et concisa sit respiratio.” (CO 20:283).
\bibitem{SW29} SW, 4:252, thought to be dated approximately April, 1541. “Siquidem Ludovicus, ut erat sanguineus, plus habebat hilaritatis et alacritatis. Carolus, qui in melancholia nonnihil communicat, tanta facilitate se non exserit.” (CO 11:193).
\end{thebibliography}
attests to the fact that for Calvin, as for most people at that time, temperaments were related to the humors. People were classified as manifesting one of four characteristics: sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholy or choleric. Calvin himself was of a choleric temperament, easily roused to anger, as he admitted on his deathbed. Luther claimed that “physical beauty and health and a sound state of the humors” would have been the results of not eating meat before the Fall, instead of “that leprous obesity.” Calvin was not the only reformer to believe in the theory of humors.

The second important theory was pneumatism, which is somewhat more complex. Galen believed that the three cardinal organs were the heart, the brain and the liver, each with its own natural spirit (pneuma) and its own system of conduits, arteries, nerves, and veins respectively. The innate or animal heat, which, ventilated by the lungs and nourished by the blood, kept the body alive, also helped promote coction (the process of food being reduced to assimilable chyle) in the stomach and reduce certain harmful humors. Duffin provides a simplified version of Galenic understanding of nutrition and circulation:

Food is consumed, absorbed, and transformed in the liver into blood with natural spirit. It passes to the lung, where it is imbued with air or vital spirit (pneuma zoticon). It then flows outward, in both arteries and veins, to all the organs including the brain, which employs it to make additional animal spirit (pneuma psychicon), the source of motion. The health of an individual depends on the balance of humours and the strength of the life forces.

When Galen uses the phrases vital spirit and animal spirit he makes a distinction which as such is not found in the biblical language. Yet Calvin uses it when exegeting the biblical text. The theory of pneumatism as adopted by Galen exerted an influence on medieval and Renaissance doctrine. In Calvin’s commentaries we see him subscribe to the ancient concept of a vital spirit. Commenting on Genesis 2:7 “and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” he states, “Whatever the greater part of the ancients might think, I do not hesitate to subscribe to the opinion of those who explain this passage of the animal life of man; and thus I expound what they call the vital spirit, by the word breath.” Likewise, Calvin endorses the general opinion about the relationship of blood to life and spirit in commenting on Genesis 9:4: “But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof” or, in the NIV, “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.” He explains that “the life and the blood are

30. Luther’s Works, Volume 1 Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St Louis: Concordia, 1958), 72.
32. Duffin, History of Medicine, 45. See also the illustrations on p. 44.
33. Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis. Tr. John King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) 1:112. “Quidquid sentiant plerique veterum, subscribere eorum sententiae non dubito qui de animali hominis vita locum hunc expoununt: atque ita flatum interpretor, quem spiritum vitalem nominant.” (OC 23:35). Ancient Chinese medicine refers to the same thing by the name of chi, also known as ki or qi by Eastern philosophies. It is the same force the ancient Vedics of India called prana, and was identified as pneuma by the classical Greeks.
not put for different things, but for the same; not because the blood is in itself the life, but inasmuch as the vital spirits chiefly reside in the blood, it is, as far as our feeling is concerned, a token which represents life." This is a typically Galenic view of blood: “Of the four ancient humours, it alone remains a vital entity, with a status well above that of phlegm or bile of any colour.” Calvin had already come across the concept of the vital spirit when he was commenting on Seneca’s *De Clementia*, where he wrote, “... all living beings consist of four elements and divine spirit. ... It is not unreasonable, then, that Seneca applies to SPIRIT the epithet VITAL.” The concept of the “vital spirit” was still in use in 1815. William Wilberforce, standing by the deathbed of his friend Henry Thornton, said “This is not our friend. This is but the earthly garment which he has thrown off. The man himself, the vital spirit has already begun to be clothed with immortality.” Wilberforce would not have equated the vital spirit with the blood, as did Calvin.

Calvin also seems to subscribe to the concept of coction. In a passage that mentions the “exquisite workmanship in their individual members,” he ends by saying, “Let Epicurus answer what concourse of atoms cooks food and drink, turns part of it into excrement, part into blood, and begets such industry in the several members to carry out their tasks, as if so many souls ruled one body by common counsel!”

Commenting on Genesis 15:15, where God speaks to Abraham in a vision or dream during a deep sleep, he again uses the concept of the vital spirit: “The explanation given by some that he should die a natural death, exempt from violence; or an easy death, in which his vital spirits should spontaneously and naturally fail, and his life itself should fall by its own maturity, without any sense of pain, is, in my opinion, frigid. For Moses wishes to express that Abram should have not only a long, but a placid old age, with a corresponding joyful and peaceful death.”

In the Psalms also, Calvin makes use of the concept of the vital spirit. On Psalm 22:15 he comments, “He means the vigour which is imparted to us by the radical moisture, as physicians call it. What he adds in the next clause, *My tongue cleaveth to my jaws*, is of the same import. We know that excessive grief not only consumes

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34. *Ibid.*, 293. “Quare vita et sanguis, non ponuntur tanquam res diversae, sed unum significant, non quod sanguis per se vita sit: sed quia in eo praecipue vigent spiritus vitales, quoad sensum nostrum quasi tessera vitam repraesentat.” (OC 23:145).
38. *ICR* 1.5.4. “… exquisitum artificium in singulis suis membris… Respondeat Epicurus, quis atomorum concursus eibum et potum coquens, partem in excrementa, partem in sanguinem digerat, ac efficiat ut singulis membris tanta sit industria ad praestandum officium ac si totidem animae communi consilio corpus unum regerent?“ (CO 2:44). Italics in original. Italics may be assumed to be in the CO unless otherwise indicated.
the vital spirits, but also dries up almost all the moisture which is in our bodies.” Calvin here refers to both the vital spirits and the humors, which were thought of as different kinds of moisture. He recognizes the mind-body connection in saying that grief can have physical effects in the body. In Aristotelian-Galenic humoral medicine a hierarchy of vegetative, vital and animal spirits explained living functions from nutrition to imagination. Psalm 34:2 is another place where he has cause to mention the vital spirit: “My soul shall make her boast in Jehovah. The term soul in this place signifies not the vital spirit, but the seat of the affections; as if David had said, I shall always have ground of boasting with my whole heart in God alone, so that I shall never suffer myself to fall into forgetfulness of so great a deliverance.” By the “seat of the affections” Calvin means the heart, as he explained in commenting on the previous verse. Calvin distinguishes between the heart as the seat of the affections and the vital spirit as the soul, or the very life of a person. A further insight into how he understands vital spirit may be found in his Harmony of the Gospels, where, commenting on the parable of the rich man building bigger barns (Luke 12:13-21), he states, “Thou fool, thy soul shall be required. The word ‘soul’ is now used in a different sense. The rich man had addressed his soul as the seat of all his feelings. But now it is used of his very life, of his vital spirit.” In other words, without the vital spirit a person is dead.

This insight into the indispensability of the vital spirit is further reinforced in The Interim, or the Declaration of Religion, of His Imperial Majesty Charles V. In Chapter IX.3 we read:

Whoso, therefore, is not in the communion of this body, is no more quickened by the Holy Spirit unto eternal salvation, than any natural member cut off and torn away from its body is quickened unto natural life, because it is no longer invigorated by the vital Spirit flowing from its one head. Wherefore, we must believe that no one out of the Christian Church and its spiritual communion can obtain eternal life.

44. SW, 3:202. “Qui igitur in communione huius corporis non est, nihil magis spiritu sancto vivificatur ad salutem aeternam quam ullam membrum naturale a corpore suo abscessum atque avulsum ad vitam naturalem: eo quod spiritui vitali ab uno suo capite defluente, non amplius vegetatur. Itaque credendum est, neminem extra ecclesiam christianam et communio nem eis spiritualem vitam aeternam consequi posse.” (CO 7:560).
This analogy of the Holy Spirit with the vital spirit (not Spirit but the human spirit is meant) shows how Calvin habitually utilized the vocabulary and the ideas of the current medical opinion. This is further exemplified in his commentary on 1 Peter 3:19, where he writes about the spirits of the departed being “endued with the life-giving [vital] power of the Spirit.”

Galen’s ideas and theories proved both popular and persistent. In Leonardo da Vinci’s painting of the Last Supper, the apostles were divided into four groups around Christ. Apart from the fourfold interpretation of scripture (literal, allegorical, moral and mystical), there was another way of looking at it:

So pervasive was the doctrine that a man’s health was determined by another four-fold formula, the balance of the humours, that many would have discerned another layer of significance; that the groups represented the choler, phlegm, sanguineness and melancholy that could only be perfectly reconciled in the perfect man.

Galen’s doctrine of vital and animal spirits was also persistent. It survived Vesalius’ demonstration of the absence of the rete mirabile in humans (Galen had assumed its presence on the basis of animal studies). Vesalius was a contemporary of Calvin (1514-1564) and admits to being reluctant to challenge Galen’s theories because his authority was so universally accepted. In the Preface to his book On the Fabric of the Human Body (De humani corporis fabrica), he refers to Galen as “the first man of medicine after Hippocrates” and calls him “this divine man” even when he indicates that he has found him to be in error on certain points. The practice of dissection had been very rare in the thirteenth to the sixteenth century: “As a result, the words of Galen could persist unchallenged. Differences between the cadaver and a Galenic ideal were explained by the imperfection of the (usually criminal) mortal.” Galen’s influence lasted for a century beyond Calvin. In 1628 William Harvey published On The Motion of the Heart, explaining how blood circulated through the lungs and the body. Apparently he had waited ten years before publishing, so reluctant was he to call into question the received wisdom of Galen. However, there had been earlier criticisms of Galen, by Vesalius and, interestingly, by Servetus in Calvin’s time:

Galen’s physiology appealed to the Christian church. His references to the life force were conflated with the ‘soul,’ and his dogmatic formulations were repeated, commented on, and copied for generations. ...The overthrow of Galenic theory was gradual. For example, in 1553, a decade after Vesalius’s great Fabrica, the Spanish physician and cleric Michael

46. Hale, Renaissance Europe, 264.
48. Duffin. History of Medicine, 19.
49. Ibid., 47.
Servetus was denounced as a heretic by the religious reformer John Calvin. Servetus had refuted Galen by announcing that blood did not pass through the cardiac septum but went from the right heart to the left through the lungs—an early description of the pulmonary circulation.50

Although Servetus only expressed the new knowledge as a lengthy metaphorical aside in his theological writings, he was the first person to record a modern understanding of pulmonary respiration.51 Servetus was reviled for having the audacity to speak against Galen. Calvin was, of course, more interested in Servetus’ theological views than in his medical ones. In the framework of the present research the trial and fate of Servetus are of no further relevance.52

The Plague: Disease or Judgment?

A common way of dying was by the Plague, or Black Death as it was also known. During its many outbreaks all over Europe, people were constantly confronted by the reality of death in the form of corpses. For many years people had believed that the Plague was a direct and specific punishment from God for mankind’s iniquity. This was a not unreasonable assumption for those who were familiar with the story of Ashdod, recorded in 1 Samuel 5 and 6. After the Lord afflicted the Philistines with tumors, they sent a guilt offering along with the returning Ark, an offering of golden tumors and golden rats. The plagues on the Philistines were twofold: one of rats (or mice),53 and one of tumors. It was not a bubonic plague, but was clearly a plague sent by God as a punishment for putting the Ark of God on the same level as the idol Dagon. The death of rats, which preceded the onset of the Plague, had not gone unnoticed by ancient people, even if they did not know precisely how the disease had spread. Mortality in the rat population was not a factor in Western Europe, though “Chinese and Islamic sources do occasionally associate mass rodent deaths with the appearance of plague in humans.” Precise knowledge of the bacillus involved only became available during the 1890s.54 In Calvin’s time, they just knew it was contagious, either by touch or by bad air. The air was thought to have been infected, so that just breathing in the air could make you sick if you were susceptible. Those whose humors were out of balance would be more susceptible. The lesson that six-

50. Ibid., 46.
53. English translations favor “rats,” Dutch, French, and German translations have “mice.”
54. Duffin, History of Medicine, 141. See also William Naphy and Andrew Spicer, The Black Death and the History of Plagues 1345-1730 (Charleston, SC: Tempus, 2000), 54.
teenth-century people took from their knowledge of the biblical plagues was that they were a manifestation of the wrath of God on a sinful people. Dr Textor, who wrote a book on what people could do to defend themselves against the plague, also believed that the plague was a manifestation of the wrath of God. In his dedication of his book he stated, “Therefore, this sickness, together with famine, war and other tokens of divine wrath, are the temporal reward for man’s self-centeredness and his denial and rejection of God and his Word.” Nevertheless, Dr Textor did advise people to protect themselves from the plague to the best of their ability, for “it would be tempting God not to use the means he has put at our disposal to use for our good. [...] God... not only guides and directs the sickness but also works through the medicines.”

However, although people thought a plague to be a punishment from God or the gods, there seemed to be no discrimination in its victims: both the “good” and the “bad” suffered and died from it. People became inured to the spectacle of corpses in the street, and the horror of human remains tended to fade. Prominent citizens took to having themselves portrayed on their future tombs as rotting corpses – memento mori – gruesome anatomical reminders of death. By the sixteenth century people had become aware of the link between sanitation and the Plague. Contagion was to be avoided by isolating the sick. Well articulated systems of quarantine were in place in many parts of Europe. In Geneva in 1541 it was determined that, “As for the plague-hospital, it is to be kept entirely separate, and especially in the event of the city being visited by this scourge of God.” Here we see a combination of medical knowledge and theological views combining to formulate policy: people were advised to avoid contact with the sick and those who were sick were urged to confess their sins and repent before they died. In 1545 Calvin writes to Oswald Myconius (1488-1552), a reformer in Zurich and Basel, that

The Lord is sorely trying us in this quarter. A conspiracy of men and women has lately been discovered, who, for the space of three years, had spread the plague through the city, by what mischievous device I know not. After fifteen women have been burnt; some men have even been punished more severely; some have committed suicide in prison; and while twenty-five are still kept prisoners; – the conspirators do not cease, notwithstanding, to smear the door-locks of the dwelling-houses with their poisonous ointment. You see in the midst of what perils we are tossed about. The Lord hath hitherto preserved our dwelling,

55. The book was called De la maniere de Preserver de la Pestilence, published in 1551. For more on Dr Textor, see É. Doumergue, Jean Calvin. Les hommes et les choses de son temps. (Lausanne: Georges Bridel & Cie, 1905), 3510-11.
56. As quoted in Machiel A. van den Berg, Friends of Calvin, tr. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 142.
57. Ibid., 143.
58. Duffin, History of Medicine, 22.
though it has more than once been attempted. It is well that we know ourselves to be under

This text shows the anxiety that the plague brought about, and also the insecurity about how the disease was spread. It is clear that there was by then an understanding of the Plague being spread by contact. Calvin does not seem to be aware of an earlier case of plague-spreading conspiracy, the lengthy trial of which took place in 1530.\footnote{William G. Naphy, \textit{Plagues, Poisons, and Potions: Plague-spreading Conspiracies in the Western Alps, c. 1530-1640} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), chapter 1: “Geneva, Plague and the First Conspiracy” 8-43.}

Beza describes the 1545 event as follows:

For, as if the plague sent from heaven had not sufficiently exhausted the city and its neighborhoo

\footnote{SW, 1:xlvi. “Vita Calvini” Beza must have related this event from secondary sources, as he did not come to live in Geneva until the end of 1558.}
d and its neighborhood, avarice prevailed to such a degree in some poor wretches, whom the richer class

had employed to take care of the sick, and purify their houses, that having entered into a horrid conspiracy together, they besmeared the door-posts and thresholds, and all the passages of the houses with a pestilential ointment, which immediately produced a dreadful plague. They had come under a solemn oath to each other to become the bond-servants of Satan, in the event of being induced, by any tortures, to betray their accomplices. Not a few, however, were apprehended, as well in the city as in the neighbouring districts, and suffered condign punishment.\footnote{Cottret, \textit{Calvin}, 174-177.}

It seems that these people were motivated by severe poverty, at risk to their own health, to take on the tasks of caring for the sick and cleaning and fumigating the houses of people sent to the Plague Hospital. They were called \textit{cureurs} and \textit{cureuses}. After they became suspected of spreading the plague they were called \textit{engraisseurs}. When cleaning the houses of the rich they also had opportunity to rob them of their goods and jewels. The conspirators were further motivated to spread the plague in order to prolong their employment. Their resentment of certain people with whom they may have quarreled sometimes caused them to target specific houses. The willful malevolence of the \textit{engraisseurs} can only be explained by total depravity. It has been suggested that “many of them were Catholics who hated the new Calvinism.”\footnote{That could be an added motivation. However, those of Catholic leanings and practices were regularly admonished to renounce them, and therefore would have had to be secret Catholics.} That could be an added motivation. However, those of Catholic leanings and practices were regularly admonished to renounce them, and therefore would have had to be secret Catholics.\footnote{Anon. “Nova et Vetera. The Plague Plots of Geneva,” \textit{The British Medical Journal}, Vol. 2, # 2428 (Jul. 13, 1907), 100.}
Naphy relates that Geneva put in place many precautions and anti-plague regulations, and appointed the necessary personnel to cope with the plague but seemed “completely [taken] by surprise when the engraisseurs returned in 1543.”\(^\text{65}\) Strangely, during 1543-44 the Genevan magistrates were more concerned to contain the plague than to follow up on complaints of plague-spreaders. It was only in 1545 that they were prosecuted, and then only after other conspirators had made accusations. This is in stark contrast to 1530, when the plague-spreaders were quickly and actively prosecuted and tortured to obtain their confessions.\(^\text{66}\) Nevertheless, the prosecution of 1545 also resulted in the execution of a number of people, as Calvin’s letter to Myconius reveals.

In Graham’s narration, “...on 9 March 1545, Calvin had come to the Council pleading for better treatment for prisoners convicted of spreading the plague by smearing excretion from infected bodies upon doorposts. The whole story sounds like witchcraft trials where people actually believed they had sold their own souls to the Devil. Anyway, the executioner was asked to make sure those being burned were already dead. A small thing, perhaps, but of some consequence at a time of fear and horror at the plague and those convicted of spreading it (empoisonneurs) from house to house.”\(^\text{67}\)

In conclusion, it can be said that Calvin accepted the medical theories handed down to his generation. He did not challenge any current theories. We now proceed with the question of whether Calvin’s experience of his own body contains Platonic traits.

Calvin’s Experience and Perception of his Own Physical Self

The most direct source we have of Calvin’s own body is his correspondence, which abounds in references to his state of health, as well as to his ways of coping with it. While his life started with relative good health, Calvin soon acquired illnesses and conditions that only deteriorated over time. His illnesses “did not come and go in sequence but, rather, were additive.”\(^\text{68}\) He was not cured of any of them, as will be seen in his letter to the physicians of Montpellier, three months and three weeks before he died, “At present all these ailments as it were in troops assail me.”\(^\text{69}\) Only his headaches ceased to bother him after 1560. Cooke thinks that at the end of his final, protracted illness it was septic shock caused by bacteria growing in his blood-

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66. Ibid., 57-9.
stream that was the immediate cause of death. Wilkinson disagrees with him, as “there is no evidence for this and it is quite unrelated to his previous medical history.” He makes the following suggestion:

The most probable cause of Calvin’s death is pulmonary tuberculosis. This accords with the contemporary opinion recorded by Beza, which was presumably the diagnosis of the doctors who attended Calvin. The disease was present amongst the close associates of Calvin for it was recorded as the cause of death of one of his personal secretaries some years later. Also, the occurrence of frequent bouts of coughing and recurrent haemoptysis, together with pleuritic pain, breathlessness and audible physical signs in the chest (‘lungs full of phlegm’) make pulmonary tuberculosis the most likely cause of Calvin’s death.

In an early surviving letter to François Daniel, he mentions that after the journey from Orléans to Paris, he was so tired that he took four days to recover. And this was not a journey on foot! He writes, “Tired with the journey, the day after our drive hither we could not stir a foot out of doors. For the next four days, while I still felt unable to move about, the whole of that time wore away in friendly salutations.” It is not clear why he could not move for four days. It could be he was saddle-sore from four days on horseback. Perhaps he already suffered from an early form of the gout that was to afflict him so much in later life. Or perhaps it was the weakness of his stomach (imbecillitas ventriculi) that had weakened him. Considering he was only almost twenty-four years old, it is surprising to see him so weak already. In another letter to François Daniel, thought to have been written in June or July of 1534, he complains of a “severe attack of diarrhea,” for which he sought the help of a doctor, whom he proceeds to recommend to his friend in Orléans. Wilkinson comments on this as follows:

The weakness of his stomach ... manifested itself in different ways. He was liable to have attacks of acute indigestion especially if he ate too big a meal. He ... usually treats it by rigid fasting. He suffered from attacks of abdominal pain of a griping or colicky nature (tormina ventriculi) which could be very severe. He had chronic constipation for which Beza tells us that he took aloe, a stimulant purgative, to ‘an immoderate degree.’ In modern practice, the use of aloe would not be recommended in a patient who also suffered from haemorrhoids since it does not soften the stool sufficiently. The combination of attacks of abdominal pain and constipation would suggest that Calvin suffered from what is today called ‘the irritable bowel syndrome’, which is recognised as occurring in conscientious subjects working under stress such as Calvin was and did.

71. Wilkinson, Medical History, 75.
72. SW, 4:27. Dated 27th June 1529 [should be 1533, see fn 113 in ch. 2]. “Postridie quam huc appulumus, lassus de itinere pedem extrahere domo non potui. Proximos quatuor dies, cum me aegre adhuc sustinerem, toto fere consumpsi salutandis amicis.” (CO 10: 9) and Ioannis Calvini Epistolae, Vol. 1 (Geneva: Droz, 2005), 72.
73. Wilkinson, Medical History, 64.
Writing from the home of Louis du Tillet at Angoulême after having been forced to flee from Paris, he writes again to Daniel, mentioning, “I am getting on well, and taking into account the constitutional weakness and infirmity which you are well aware of, am also making some progress in study.” Even at this point, his friends were aware of his sickly constitution. In a further letter to Daniel, Calvin writes of a violent cold, “which afterward settled upon the upper gum, so that there was scarce any relief even after nine days, and having been twice bled, with a double dose of pills and several fomentations.” The practice of bloodletting, or phlebotomy, was used since ancient times until as recently as the nineteenth century, even though the basis of the practice was disproved by William Harvey in 1628. Hippocrates used it for inflammatory and other conditions where the physicians suspected an excess of the humor blood, particularly in cases of fever, apoplexy and headache. The bloodletting cannot have done much for Calvin’s cold or his sore gums. Fomentation is the act of applying a warm or medicated liquid, or a poultice or ointment.

There are later mentions of occasions when he suffered abdominal pain. Writing to Jean Macar, a minister working in Paris in 1558, he apologizes for not being as punctual in writing as Macar has been and gives as an explanation for his “laziness” the following statement:

Nearly six weeks have elapsed since I was seized with a pain in my side, which yielding to medical treatment had abated a little its severity, but which again attacked me with such aggravated symptoms, that I am obliged to renounce all active employment. But I am so tired of doing nothing, that, happen what will, I feel that I shall be forced before six days to resume my wonted occupations.

On that same day Calvin also wrote to John Mercer to offer him a professorship of Hebrew at Geneva and mentions that he has been “prevented from writing earlier by a pain in my side.” In 1559 he went through another long period of suffering. He wrote to Farel, “I have been now for upwards of four [sic] months suffering from a quartan ague which has kept me hitherto confined to my bed-room, because my body is emaciated and my physical strength exhausted.” Beza comments on this as follows:

... me et bene agere et pro ea quam nosti desidia nonnihil studendo proficere.” (CO 10:37). The pagination of Vol. 10 re-starts at the beginning of the Letters of the CO.

...corruptus sum vehementi catarrho, qui tanta vi in superiorem gingivam incubuerat, ut duplici phlebotomia bis repetitis catapotiis compluribusque fomentis nono demum die vix fuerit mitigates.” (CO 10:63).

Sesquimensis fere elapsus est ex quo corripuit lateris dolor, qui medicamentos sedates nonnihil remiserat. Tandem ita recruduit ut cessandum fuerit ab omni labore. Sed otiu taedium, quidquid acciderit, ante dies quinquque me ad obeundum munus redire coget.” (CO 17:95).

... doloris latere me prohiberi a scribendo.” (CO 17:94).

But the end of this year was to us the commencement of a greater sorrow; Calvin being seized, in the month of October, with a quartan fever, a disease which we have at length learned, by too sad experience, is justly regarded by medical men as fatal to those who are advanced in years. For although that disease in Calvin’s case continued only eight months, yet it so exhausted his spare body, worn out by labours and exertions, that he never entirely recovered it.79

The quartan ague (febris quartana), a kind of fever, was in Calvin’s time considered to be an illness, not the symptom of an illness. Plato traces the different types of fever to excesses of the Four Elements of Empedocles in the body:

When the constitution is disordered by excess of fire, continuous heat and fever are the result; when excess of air is the cause, then the fever is quotidian; when of water, which is a more sluggish element than either fire or air, then the fever is a tertian; when of earth, which is the most sluggish of the four, and is purged away in a fourfold period, the result is a quartan fever, which can with difficulty be shaken off.80

The thermometer was not invented until the seventeenth century and hardly used until the eighteenth. Thus there was a reliance on observable variations of body temperature to diagnose a fever. Four days later, still suffering, he reports to Peter Martyr (1499-1562), a former Augustinian monk, scholar, and reformed theologian:

Respecting myself, [...] I have nothing to write, except that the violence of my fever has abated. But my bodily strength as well as my vigour of mind has been so much shattered that I do not seem greatly relieved by this mitigation. Nay, I even feel a greater degree of lassitude than when I had to struggle against more violent attacks. The debility of my stomach is especially a cause of suffering to me, and it is increased by catarrh which brings along with it its accompaniment a cough. For as vapours arising from indigestion trouble my brain, the evil reacts in its turn upon my lungs. To all this has been added for the last eight days a pain occasioned by hemorrhoids from which it is not possible to force the blood, as they are of the kind which are commonly termed blind.81

Wilkinson comments as follows: “Later these haemorrhoids did bleed and became ulcerated, and this made horse-riding very uncomfortable and even impossible for him. Beza tells us that during the last five years of Calvin’s life, he occasionally lost considerable quantities of blood from his hemorrhoids. The anaemia produced by this loss of blood in this way would increase his physical weakness.”

A further episode of pains was mentioned in a letter to Bullinger: “I was about to write you ... if my health had permitted; but a pain in my side was too violent to admit of my making any effort.” This becomes a common refrain in the correspondence.

Another kind of ailment relates to his legs. It was recognized already during his lifetime to be gout. Wilkinson’s diagnosis is that Calvin suffered from classical gout. In its acute form, it was called in Greek podagra, since it affected the foot.

In 1559 Calvin mentions “a sharp and violent pain in my leg, which though it is now a little mitigated nevertheless continues to give me great uneasiness.” The next day he mentions the pain in his limbs to another correspondent. Ten days after that he mentions to François Hotman (1524-1590), his former secretary and renowned legal scholar, “I have recovered from my tertian ague, but I can scarcely yet support myself on my legs. Today, however, I preached sitting. By degrees I shall gain strength.” The optimism expressed in the last sentence, rare for Calvin, was to be disappointed. The complaint became so severe that Calvin confesses to Bullinger, “God has put fetters on my feet. The acute pains have ceased, however, but it is with great difficulty I can hobble in my room from my bed to the table. I preached today, but I was carried to the church.” One of the complications from gout is the formation of renal stones due to increased excretion of uric acid in the urine. With exercise, he may have been able to pass the stones more easily, but Calvin got into the vicious circle of needing to exercise because of his stones, but being unable to do so because of the gout that produced the stones. Riding might have helped pass the stones, but that was out of the question because of his hemorrhoids.

Headaches and migraines are another common cause of suffering for Calvin. He mentions them throughout his correspondence. The first time Calvin mentions “the complaint in my head” is from Basel during the time of the plague there in 1538. Doumergue documents fourteen other headaches and migraines that occurred be-

82. Wilkinson, Medical History, 65.
83. SW, 7:189, 24th May, 1561. “...scripturus eram, si passa esset valetudo: sed acrius me infestavit lateris dolor quam ut ferendo labori par essem.” (CO 18:466).
86. SW, 7:37, 16th May, 1559. “...obstitit acerbus et violentus cruris dolor, qui, etsi nunc aliquantulum remisit, non tamen desinit infestus esse.” (CO 17:534).
88. SW, 7:285, 27th December, 1562; “crawl” would have been a better verb to translate “reptando.” “Deus me compedibus ligatum tenet. Cessarunt quidem acuti dolores, sed aegre per cubiculum reptando a lecto transeo ad mensam. Hodie concionem habui, sed in templum delatus.” (CO 19:602). Cooke provides a detailed account of Calvin’s gout and the resulting kidney problems in “Calvin’s Illnesses,” 62-64.
89. For more on his renal stones, see Wilkinson, Medical History, 66-67.
between April 1546 and October 1560. One of them was directly caused by reading a letter that caused him great anguish. Headaches prevented him from visiting a relative of Farel, who was struck by the plague, although he did manage to make him a pastoral visit before he died. A few months after his marriage to Idelette, Calvin extensively describes the illnesses that beset both of them. They include a “stuffing of the head, a malady so frequent with me that it gave me no great concern” (this was on the Saturday). He also mentions cough and “continual defluxion” (Sunday till Tuesday) as well as “the nostrils being blocked up with mucus and the fauces choked with hoarseness,” and “severe indigestion” (Monday). This could be a bad cold or the flu, but it got much worse, as can be seen in the remainder of the letter. Wilkinson’s diagnosis is as follows: “The nature of this infection may have been a benign tertian (vivax) malaria, but the prior upper respiratory tract infection may suggest that it was an acute bronchopneumonia in Calvin’s case, perhaps complicated by malaria.”

In general, Calvin suffered from sub-nutrition and even malnutrition, but he admits to overeating when stressed by anger or anxiety. But this habit of eating comfort food gave him indigestion, which he then would try to cure by fasting. On this occasion, however, in order not to offend the son of his former housekeeper, he chose “at the expense of health, not to occur that offence.” He therefore decided to eat rather than fast. He continues his letter as follows:

On Tuesday thereafter, when the cough ... had ceased, about nine o’clock, after supper, I was seized with a fainting fit. I went to bed; then followed severe paroxysm, intense burning heat, a strange swimming of the head. When I got up on Wednesday, I felt so feeble in every limb and member, that I was at length forced to acknowledge that I was labouring under severe illness. I dined sparely. After dinner I had two fits, with frequent paroxysms afterwards, but at irregular intervals, so it could not be ascertained what particular form it was. There was such a degree of perspiration that nearly the whole mattress was moistened by it. ... At length, whatever may have been the original nature of the disease, it turned into a tertian fever, which at first came on with acute pains, but intermittent at every third paroxysm.

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90. Doumergue, Jean Calvin, 3513-16 and 521.
93. SW, 4:204-5, October 1540. “Die tertia Septembris tenuit me capitis gravedo, malum adeo mihi familiare ut non magnopere commoverer. ... continuo fluxu ... quod et nares fluxione erant impeditae et fauces raucedine quasi praefocatae... excruciatius sum ingent cruditate.” (CO 11:83-84).
95. Ibid., 72.
96. Ibid., 60.
Normally, he would eat only one meal a day, but when he suffered a migraine he would fast for thirty-six hours. For a person who was also suffering from *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, this habit exacerbated severe weight loss or emaciation.

It is interesting to note Calvin’s reaction to this bout of illness so shortly after he was married. He sees his “bodily weakness” as something “ordered on purpose that our wedlock might not be over joyous, that we might not exceed all bounds, that the Lord thus thwarted our joy by moderating it.” Such a statement obviously relates to his desire to stay within bounds, as explained by Bouwsma. There are numerous references in Calvin’s writings about staying within bounds, and not being unbridled.

It was not only joy that he felt had to be kept within bounds. He also feared that his anger would get out of control, which it did from time to time. The humoral theory presupposes that temper was also part of the medical condition. Anger got out of bounds on some occasions. In 1539 he writes to Farel: “There I sinned grievously in not having been able to keep within bounds; for so had the bile taken entire possession of my mind, that I poured out bitterness on all sides. There was of a certainty some cause for indignation, if moderation had only been observed in the expression of it.” Bile was associated with anger in the doctrine of the four humors as it is even now. But today the word is mostly used in a metaphoric sense, rather than a literal, except in medical circles. Calvin struggled to keep his anger in moderation, within bounds. For him it was the “sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1).

In a letter to Nicholas Zerkinden he admits, “I confess that I am irritable, and though this vice displeases me, I have not succeeded in curing myself of it as much as I would wish.” Even on his deathbed he was aware of what he called his “vehemence, which was sometimes carried to excess; my sins, in this respect, I trust, have been pardoned by God also.” Being in continual pain while working incessantly would increase the likelihood of vehemence and irritation.

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incertis horis, ita ut certam formam febris animadvertere non posses. Tantum sudoris ut culcitram fere totam madefaceret. ... Tandem, quaelunque illud genus morbi fuerit, conversum est in febrim tertianam, quae primum acres habuit impetus, sed tertio paroxysmo remisit. ... (CO 11:84).

98. “Une faute y a eu, c’est qu’en l’abstinence il a eu trop peu d’esgard à sa santé, se contentant par plusieurs années d’un seul repas pour le plus en vingt quatre heures, et jamais ne prenant rien entre deux: tellement que tout ce que les Medecins lui ont peu persuader quant à ce point, a esté que environ demi an devant sa derniere maladie, il prenoit par fois quelque petit de vin, et humoit un oeuf environ le midi.” (CO 21:109).


100. SW, 4:204. “Siquidem, ne coniugium nimis laetum esset, Dominus antevertit gaudium nostrum temperando, ne modum excederet.” (CO 11:83).


Boundaries, limits, and moderation were very important to Calvin, except in his work. He considered that his ministry should be dearer to him than his own life. He does not seem to have set himself any limits there. Gordon sees it this way:

This was Calvin’s divided self: the confidence of his calling as a prophet and apostle set against his ever present sense of unworthiness and dissatisfaction. It was this friction that drove him ceaselessly to seek to improve his work, to write clearer, more insightful commentaries, to rework the *Institutes* to enhance their value in teaching, and to travel endless miles of dangerous roads in search of church unity. [...] He was driven to work by the knowledge that his mortal flesh could give out at any moment. Every hour was to be sanctified by the service of God.

When Calvin is ill, he often forces himself to continue to work, but when he feels somewhat better, he feels he cannot get as much work done as he thinks he should. In a letter to de Falais he writes,

As regards health, I was much more feeble when I wrote to you a while ago than I am at present. But being in a good state of general bodily condition, I am unceasingly tormented with a heaviness, which, as it were, suffers me not to do anything. For, besides the sermons and lectures, there is a month already gone in which I have scarce done anything, in such wise that I am almost ashamed to live thus useless.

For many people today, if they could do as many sermons and lectures a week as Calvin presented, they would consider themselves extremely productive! But Calvin was not satisfied with himself unless he did more. He also was a prodigious writer of commentaries, treatises, and letters.

Calvin mentions a severe headache in a letter to Mr de Falais in November of 1546, which he concludes by saying, “I beg to be excused for faults, for I have not been able to revise the present letter, being engrossed by [a] headache with which I have been seized.” It is not clear whether he wrote the letter while he had the headache, or it came on him after he had nearly finished it and so could not revise it. Calvin would normally try to cure his migraines with fasting. Two years later he writes to Farel that

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107. SW, 5:43, this letter was undated, but received by M. de Falais 16th April, 1546. “Quant a la sante, je estois beaucoup plus debile, vous escrivant nagueres, que ne suis a present. Mais estant bien dispose par tout le reste du corps, je suis tormente sans cesse dune doleur qui ne me souffre quasi rien faire. Car oubtre les sermons et lectures, il y a desia un mois que je nay gueres faict, tellement que iay presque honte de vivre ainsi inutile.” (*CO* 12:319-20).

he has been “struggling these days past with pain in the head, and spasms in the stomach, to such a degree as to cause violent convulsion”; this was at the same time as Idelette was “in bed from prolonged illness.” The knowledge of Idelette’s illness is likely to have exacerbated his suffering. The spasms he mentioned would be from his irritable bowel syndrome.

In 1550, writing again to Farel, he says, “All the time that our friend Thomas was here, I was either suffering severely from a cough or annoyed by catarrh. A violent headache is now tormenting me, although it has been easier for the past hour.” Calvin had such a strong sense of duty that he forced himself to continue working when others would be inclined to rest and recover. He continues his letter, “It is well that I am not prevented from labouring, in a kind of way, to discharge my necessary duties; but I usually make but slow progress. Much of my time is wasted, at present, by ill health, which ought to be devoted to useful labour.” Most people, when they speak of “wasting time,” refer to time spent in totally useless or perhaps leisurely activities, not in being ill. Beza tells us in the latter part of his Vita that “not even his headaches [prevented] him from taking his turn in preaching.” Calvin just could not bear to be idle. On his deathbed he continued to work with the help of his amanuenses, saying: “Would you have the Lord find me idle?”

His output both in commentaries and other books was enormous, his preaching schedule extremely demanding, and his correspondence vast. Add to that the pastoral care and practical help he gave to many, such as arranging marriages, finding a housekeeper, and finding a house for the family de Falais etc, we are left astounded that one man, so weak in body, could accomplish so much. In 1551 he writes to Myconius, “I am compelled to dictate these few lines, being confined to bed with a severe headache.” This would prevent most people even from thinking about work, but not Calvin. He is compelled by a strong drive to keep going. To his friends Viret and Beza he writes in 1556: “A headache, arising from a catarrh, forces me to break off my letter abruptly.”

That was at a particularly troubling time for the believers, as the persecutions raged strongly against the Waldenses of Piedmont. The grief and stress that Calvin must have felt could have increased his vulnerability to his weaknesses. As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, he recognizes the mind-body connection in saying that grief can have physical effects in the body (with reference to the vital spirit and Psalm

111. SW, 5:262 “Bene habet quod non desino me utcunque trahere et defungi necessariis officiis. Sed id facio lente, pro more meo. Interim multum temporis absunitur a morbis quod in labores utiles impendi debuerat.” (CO 13:519).
Stresses of various kinds are always conducive to illness, especially if the body is already in a vulnerable condition. Indeed, he experiences himself that severe anger can lead to an “extraordinary paroxysm.”

In 1558 there was another occasion when he mentioned suffering a combination of illnesses:

The bearer will present you my excuses for the shortness of this letter. He partly saw how little I was spared between the attacks of a quartan ague and continual headaches, which give me more pain than the fever itself. Thus worn out by want of sleep night after night, I am forced to dictate from my bed the few words I now write to you.

This feverish illness lasted until the following May (1559). Calvin was revising his Institutes during this time of serious illness, which again shows how committed he was to getting his final version to the printer. During this illness he thought he would die, adding to the urgency of the task. Another headache is mentioned which may well have been the result of anger and distress. Calvin writes to Bullinger that an individual from France has told lies about Calvin, saying that he approved of the insurrectionary movement in France:

Suddenly roused upon hearing this, and calling together my colleagues, I sharply exposed his groundless assertions. More than that, I demonstrated that he himself before he left Paris had been most distinctly informed, how perfectly averse I was to that project.

It is not altogether surprising then that he adds, “a headache prevents me from spinning out my discourse any further.” Later that year he complains once again of a “violent headache.” This one had already lasted two days when Calvin wrote to Bullinger. It was an unsettled time, when Calvin was living under the threat of war and conspiracy in his native France. Wilkinson considers that his headaches and migraines may have been stress-related. The last specifically mentioned headache was in 1560. He was then about fifty-one years old. Wilkinson comments: “... modern experience is that the condition not uncommonly remits after the age of fifty years.” For Calvin, that meant only four years of relief from headaches, but since his other

116. SW, 4:154, 8th October 1539. “Ubi domum redii, correptus sum mirabili paroxysmo...” (CO 10:398). This happened during a vehement debate about Caroli.
117. SW, 6:477, 12th October 1558. “Brevitatem epistolae excusabit nuncios, qui aliqua ex parte vidit quam mihi parum detur relaxationis inter quartanae principia et assiduos capitis dolores, qui mihi plus exhibit molestiae quam ipsa febris. Itaque fessus nocturnis vigilii haec pausa tibi e lecto [partim scribere partim] dictare coactus sum.” (CO 17:361, see footnote 1 therein for bracketed words).
118. SW, 7:105, 11th May, 1560. “Re audita subito commotus adhibitis collegis vanitatem eius acriter refutavi. Imo testatus est se iam Lutetiae certo compersisse ab eo consilio me remotissimum. ... Capitis enim dolor longius sermonem extrahere non patitur.” (CO 18:85).
120. Wilkinson, Medical History, 62.
121. Ibid., 64.
ailments continued unabated, he would hardly experience the lack of headaches as relief.

When his friend Pierre Viret’s first wife was on her deathbed, Calvin wrote to him to say that he would like to come over to Lausanne: “Would that I also could fly thither, that I might alleviate your sorrow, or at least be part of it! But so long a ride would cause me pain.”122 The pain would be from his hemorrhoids, from which he suffered for many years. This made horse riding very painful and limited Calvin’s traveling. He mentions his hemorrhoids even in a letter dictated from his deathbed to the Duchess of Ferrara, along with his other illnesses he is then enduring:

I pray you to pardon me if I employ the hand of my brother in writing to you, in consequence of my weakness and the pains I suffer from divers diseases – difficulty breathing, the stone, the gout, and an ulcer in the haemorrhoid veins which prevents me from taking any exercise, which is the only thing from which I might hope to derive some relief.123

Mentioning the details of his afflictions with such frankness to a Duchess sounds strange to modern ears, but it fitted in with the more earthy views of sixteenth-century life. Notions of privacy only became significant in the eighteenth century.124 His fellow Reformer, Luther, was also very frank about his bodily functions and conditions in his correspondence.125 Some weeks earlier Calvin had mentioned the hemorrhoids in his long letter to the Physicians of Montpellier, who had taken a professional interest in Calvin’s illnesses.

When the physician Sarrazin, on whose directions I principally rely for the re-establishment of my health, presented me not long ago some remedies which you prescribed for the relief of my complaints, I asked him, who had without my knowledge taken that task upon him. He replied that at the request of one of my colleagues, who is at present resident among you, he had drawn up a short abstract of matters connected with my case, in order that you might give me the benefit of your advice.126

123. SW, 7:360, 4th April, 1564. “Madame, je vous prieray me pardonner si je vous escris par la main de mon frere, acause de la foiblesse en laquelle ie suis et des douleurs que ie souffre de diverses maladies, defaut d’alaine, la pierre, la goutte et une ulcere aux vaines esmoroıçques qui mempesche de prendre aucun exercice, auquel seroit toute lesperance dallegement.” (CO 20:278).
125. See chapter 1 of Wilkinson, *The Medical History of the Reformers*, especially page 26, where Luther details his problems connected with constipation in a letter to Melanchthon.
126. SW, 7:358. It would seem that Viret was the colleague referred to. See Robert Linder, “Forgotten Reformer,” *Christian History*, 20:3 (2001), 36. “... Viret moved to Montpellier, where he saw the conversion of nearly the entire faculty of the city’s famous medical college.” Calvin’s friendship with Viret had suffered due to Viret’s “advocating positions unpalatable in Geneva,” as Bruce Gordon put it in his *Calvin*, 325. Perhaps that was the reason Calvin did not mention Viret by name. For a lucid account of the later differences between Calvin and Viret, see, *ibid.*, 323-328.
In his account, Calvin mentions arthritic pains, expectoration of blood, hemorrhoids, quartan ague, acute pains in the calves of his legs, intestinal ascarides (i.e. parasitic roundworms), nephritis, blood in the urine, “At length not without the most painful strainings I ejected a calculus (i.e. stone) which in some degree mitigated my sufferings, but such was its size, that it lacerated the urinary canal and a copious discharge of blood followed.” He also complains, “Add to my other complaints that whatever nourishment I take imperfectly digested turns into phlegm, which by its density sticks like paste to my stomach.”

On his deathbed farewell to the ministers Calvin described his physical state as follows:

It may be thought that I am too precipitate in concluding my end to be drawing near, and that I am not so ill as I persuade myself; but I assure you, that though I have often felt myself very ill, yet I have never found myself in such a state, nor so weak as I am. When they take me to put me in bed, my head fails me and I swoon away forthwith. There is also this shortness of breathing, which oppresses me more and more. I am altogether different from other sick persons, for when their end is approaching their senses fail them and they become delirious. With respect to myself, true it is that I feel stupefied, but it seems to me that God wills to concentrate all my senses within me, and I believe indeed that I shall have much difficulty and that it will cost me a great effort to die. I may perhaps lose the faculty of speech, and yet preserve my sound sense; but I have also advertised [warned] my friends of that and told them what I wished them to do for me, and it is for this very reason I have desired to speak with you before God call me away; not that God may not indeed do otherwise than I think; it would be temerity on my part to wish to enter into his counsel.
No doubt Calvin’s personal experience of watching his parishioners die contributed to his expectations regarding the manner of his own death. He had expected to die before Farel, even though Farel (b. 1489) was some 20 years older than he. During a serious illness of Farel, Calvin had feared that Farel would die, but to his great joy he recovered. Calvin expresses his delight in a letter dated 27th March, 1553: “Since I have buried you before the time, may the Lord grant that the Church may see you my survivor. ... Yet I am not, in the meanwhile, averse, if it should so please God, to your life being so long lengthened out, as to allow me ten years of labour.” Both these wishes were granted Calvin. In fact, he lived and labored another eleven years. Farel died 13th September, 1565.

As far as Calvin’s faculties and power of speech are concerned, he did not lose them on his deathbed as he feared or expected. Beza reports, “He had remained perfectly sensible, and was not deprived of utterance to his very last breath.” Calvin’s life was filled with suffering, especially bodily suffering. Yet this did not make him bitter. It made him all the more dependent on the grace of God: “It is certain that all diseases ought not only to humble us in setting before our eyes our frailty, but also cause us to look into ourselves, that having recognized our own poverty we may place all our trust in his mercy.” This is the advice he gave Mme de Coligny, and we may assume he was giving it to himself also. It is not surprising that confronted with the many ailments, illnesses, and weaknesses of his own body, and “in comparison with the immortality to come,” he advised us to “despise this life and long to renounce it, on account of the bondage of sin, whenever it shall please the Lord.” Nor is it any wonder that he reasons from belief in redemption of the body to an eagerness for death:

For if we deem this unstable, defective, corruptible, fleeting, wasting, rotting tabernacle of our body to be so dissolved that it is soon renewed unto a firm, perfect, incorruptible, and finally, heavenly glory, will not faith compel us ardentely to seek what nature dreads?

peine et qu’il me coustera bien à mourir, et ie pourray perdre le parler que i’auray encore bon sens: mais aussi en ay-ie adverty et ay dict ce que ie voulois qu’on me fist, et par ainsy i’ay bien voulu parler à vous devant que Dieu me retire, non pas que Dieu ne puisse bien faire autrement que ie ne pense: ce seroit temerité à moi de vouloir entrer en son conseil. “(CO 9:891).

131. SW, 5395-6, 27th March, 1553. “Faxit Dominus, quando te ante tempus sepelivi, ut te mihi superstitem videat ecclesia. ... Neque tamen interea, si ita Domino videbitur, tibi tamdiu prorogari vitae finem recuso, ut adhuc decennii labor mihi accedat.” (CO 14:509).

132. SW, 1xcvii. " ... ut neque graviorem spiritum antea duxerit, neque sensu et iudicio, imo ne voce quidem penitus ad extremum usque halitum fuerit destitutus." “Vita Calvini.” (CO 21:68).

133. SW, 7:331, 5th August, 1563. "Il est certain que toutes maladies non seulement nous doivent humilier en nous mettant devant nos yeux notre fragilité, mais aussi nous faire entrer en nous mesmes afin quians congnu nos pouvretés, nous aions tout nostre refuge a sa misericorde." (CO 20:129).


135. ICR 3.9.5. “Nam si cogitemus hoc instabile, vitosum, corruptibile, caducum, emarcicum, putre corporis nostrir tabernaculum ideo dissolvit, ut in firmam, perfectam, incorruptibilem, caelestem denique gloriam mox instauretur: an non ardenter fides expetere coget quod natura reformidat?” (CO 2:526-7).
Perhaps we should take this as hyperbole, since Calvin certainly did not advocate suicide as a means of seeking deliverance from the body.\textsuperscript{136} Even so, while this statement is very positive about the life to come, it remains very negative about the body, both in a theological sense because of sin, and in a physical sense because of pains, illnesses, and limitations.

There is disagreement about Calvin’s request to be buried without a gravestone. Calvin’s last will and testament merely instructs “As to what remains, I wish that, after my departure out of this life, my body be committed to the earth, (after the form and manner which is used in this church and city) till the day of a happy resurrection arrive.”\textsuperscript{137} The more precise directive was apparently given orally. Some think that it is quite in character with Calvin’s humble view of himself and low view of his body that he did not want his grave marked by a gravestone. “Calvin had expressly forbidden all pomp at his funeral. He wished to be buried like Moses, out of reach of idolatry. This was consistent with his theology, which humbles man and exalts God.”\textsuperscript{138} Others see it more as a sign of pride. Engammare states that Calvin “was aware very early that his body could become and object of worship.” He sees it as a request to identify with Moses and other Old Testament prophets.\textsuperscript{139} It is true that this could be evidence of pride. However, Calvin most often identifies himself and fellow preachers with Moses in the sense of enduring opposition, not in the glorious aspect of having talked with God face to face.\textsuperscript{140} It is instructive to read what Calvin wrote about Moses in his Commentary on Jude:

It is beyond dispute that Moses was given burial by the Lord, which is to say, that his tomb was concealed by the unfailing purposes of God. The reason for the hidden tomb is clear to all, namely, that the Jews should not take his remains as material for superstitious practice. [...] This is a stone which we may observe Satan moves in almost every generation – to make the bodies of the servants of God become the idols of deluded men.\textsuperscript{141}


\textsuperscript{137} \textit{SW}, 1:lxvii. “Quod reliquum est, volo post meum ex hac vita discersum, corpus meum terrae mandari eo ritu ac modo, qui in hac ecclesia et civitate usitatus est, dum beatae resurrectionis dies adveniat.” (\textit{CO} 21:163).


\textsuperscript{140} See, for example his Sermon 21 on 2 Timothy: “Voilà Moyse qui estoit devant les autres Prophètes. Or desia la guerre luy a esté dressee, et iamais ce mal n’a cessé. Ainsi, qu’aujourd’hui nous portions en patience, s’il nous faut endurer le semblable: car ce n’est pas raison que nostre condition soit meilleure ou plus aisee que celle de Moyse, et de tous ceux qui l’ont suyvi.” (\textit{CO} 54:245).

Calvin had seen, and had written about, relics of the saints in the Catholic Church, whose remains were venerated. It is not known that any Protestant saints were ever venerated in the same way. Here we see two possibilities for interpreting his wish for an unmarked grave: pride or humility. It could be pride if he thought that the people of Geneva and others would make him into an idol, against the express teaching of the Bible, or at least an object of veneration in the manner of Catholic relics. It could be humility if he simply did not want anyone to visit his grave or lament over him.

Bruce Gordon twice mentions that Calvin was “desperately concerned that he should not become the object of a personality cult.” The first time is in the context of sharing the ministry of the Word with other Genevan ministers. The second time is in the context of his death and burial: “It was Calvin’s wish that he be buried without memorial in order to avoid any form of posthumous personality cult.” Granted that this is the language of modernity, not Calvin, but it does point more to humility than to pride. Engammare has pointed out that Calvin did have a strong self-awareness and sense of calling as a prophet. He aligned himself with such figures as Elijah, Ezekiel, St Peter, St Jude, and others when writing or preaching. Gordon states, “It was the authority which had come from God, he believed, which had elevated him above others, not his person.” However, unless we could look into Calvin’s heart, we cannot determine whether his instructions about his burial are proof of pride or of humility. It may be the case that Calvin wrote so much about the virtue of humility because he knew himself to be prone to the sin of pride. If it was something he had to struggle against all his life, he may well have desired to make a statement that could be interpreted as humility. Some people need to assign their own weaknesses to their fellow men, so if he was aware of his tendency to be proud, he would want to warn others against the sin of pride.

Calvin’s hope was in the resurrection of his body. Calvin’s motivation for purity of life was, that “since both our souls and bodies were destined for heavenly incorruption and an unfading crown, we ought to strive manfully [strenue: with energy or vigor] to keep them pure and uncorrupted until the Day of the Lord.” His farewell letter to Farel shows an attitude of humility: “I would not have you fatigue yourself on my account. [Farel planned to visit and did visit in spite of Calvin’s letter] I draw my breath with difficulty, and am daily waiting till I altogether cease to breathe. It is

142. Gordon, Calvin, 294 and 336. See also his Preface, ix: “Fully conscious of his fame and the spell he cast over his supporters, he feared being made an object of veneration. Nothing would have horrified him more than the monument to the Reformation in Geneva with its enormous image of the Frenchman.”


144. Gordon, Calvin, 336.

145. See Ibid., 76, for an account of Calvin (in 1538) being “humiliated by his overweening pride, crashing to despair on account of his ‘impatienia’ – he could not sleep and was agitated for three days. Calvin’s fragile disposition was clearly exposed. He had had the gall to admonish an experienced man of the church and had been taught a lesson in humility and generosity of spirit.”

146. ICR 3.6.3. “Ex quo et anima nostra et corpus coelesti incorruptioni et immarcescibili coronae destinata sunt, strenue enitendum esse ut pura et incorrupta in diem Domini conserventur.” (CO 2504).
enough that to Christ I live and die; to his people he is gain in life and in death.”

His steadfast hope of the resurrection may be seen as evidence of a practical eschatology.

**Calvin’s Experience of Death Examined**

Calvin’s correspondence reveals how he was affected by death, most often death as it resulted from various illnesses, but also the deaths of martyrs. Calvin was very often saddened by death from the Plague of close friends and of many members of his congregation as well as those who lived further away. While Calvin was still at Strasbourg, the Plague hit the town, and the next year, when he had returned to Geneva, the Plague did the rounds there, followed by further outbreaks later. The ministers who were assigned to visit the victims who were dying at the Plague Hospital were very vulnerable at those times, and could easily contract the disease. The Council decided that Calvin was too important to the wellbeing of the church and the work of the Reformation generally to be allowed to risk his life by visiting the plague victims. His colleague Pierre Blanchet, who had “already volunteered the year before [1542], heroically accepted the task again. […] He died on June 1, a victim of duty.”

It must have been a relief to Calvin that he was exempted from the duty of visiting the dying, as he had confided to Viret that if Blanchet had not volunteered, he would have felt obliged to take the risk upon himself.

**Suffering in the Context of Providence**

As Cottret saw it, “Calvin lived in a world where death, agony, and disease were constantly present and unceasingly appeared. But that did not dull his fear of death. Calvin, indeed, belonged to the category of the anguished.” Bouwsma also describes Calvin as anxious and anguished: “Calvin was a singularly anxious man and, as a reformer, fearful and troubled.” He devotes a whole chapter to Calvin’s anxieties about physical dangers as well as disease and death. While the reader may wonder whether Bouwsma has exaggerated Calvin’s anxiety by gathering all these passages together that bespeak his anxious concerns, it is true that Calvin does seem more aware of the vulnerability and brevity of life.

Innumerable are the evils that beset human life; innumerable, too, the deaths that threaten it. … Now, wherever you turn, all things around you not only are hardly to be trusted but almost openly menace, and seem to threaten immediate death. Embark on a ship, you are


one step away from death. Mount a horse, if one foot slips, your life is imperiled. Go through the city streets, you are subject to as many dangers as there are tiles on the roofs. If there is a weapon in your hand or a friend’s, harm awaits. All the fierce animals you see are armed for your destruction. But if you try to shut yourself up in a walled garden, seemingly delightful, there a serpent lies hidden. Your house, continually in danger of fire, threatens in the daytime to impoverish you, at night even to collapse upon you. Your field, since it is exposed to hail, frost, drought, and other calamities, threatens you with barrenness, and hence, famine. I pass over poisonings, ambushes, robberies, open violence, which in part besiege us at home, in part dog us abroad. Amid these tribulations must not man be most miserable, since, but half alive in life, he weakly draws his anxious breath, as if he had a sword perpetually hanging over his neck?\footnote{152}

This description of potential, life-threatening dangers occurs in the second of two chapters devoted to God’s providence. The knowledge of God’s providence in these dire circumstances is what sustains Calvin. He urges his readers to make use of assistance where available, because that also is part of God’s providence. If he had earlier had the wisdom expressed in this chapter, he might have been more careful of his health and avoided the most serious diseases: “For he who has set the limits of our life has at the same time entrusted to us its care; he has provided means and helps to preserve it.” (ICR 1.17.4). It should be pointed out that in the very same chapter (ICR 1.17.11) Calvin shows us a more positive picture:

Yet, when that light of divine providence has once shone upon a godly man, he is then relieved and set free not only from the extreme anxieties and fear that were pressing him before, but from every care. For as he justly dreads fortune, so he fearlessly dares commit himself to God. His solace, I say, is to know that his Heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by his authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it.\footnote{153}

\footnote{152} ICR 1.17.10. “Innumera sunt quae vitam humanam obsident mala, quae totidem ostentant mortes. ... Iam, quocunque te vertas, quae circa te sunt omnia, non modo ambiguae sunt fidei, sed aperte fere minantur, ac praesentem mortem videntur intentare. Consconde navem, pede uno a morte distas. Equo inside, in lapsu pedis unius vita tua periclitatur. Incede per vias urbis, quot sunt in tectis tegulae, tot discriminis es obnoxius. Si ferramentum in tua aut amici manu sit, exerta est noxa. Quotquot animalia ferocia vides, in tua pennis armata sunt. Quod si vel horto bene munito includere te studeas, ubi nihil quam amoenitas appareat, illic serpens interdum delitescet. Domus assidue incendio subiecta, interdiu tibi paupertatem, noctu etiam oppressionem minatur. Ager grandini, pruinae, siccitati, alisque tempestibus expositus quum sit, sterilitatem, atque ex ea famen tibi denuntiet. Omitto veneficia, insidias, latrocinia, vam apertam, quorum pars nos domi obsident, pars peregre consequuntur. Inter has angustias annon oportet miserrimum esse hominem, quum vitam semivivum anxium et languidum spiritum aegre trahat, non secus ac si imminentem perpetuo serviciis gladium haberet?” (CO 2:162-3).

\footnote{153} ICR 1.17.11. “At ubi lux illa divinae providentiae semel homini pio affulsit, iam non extrema modo, qua ante preebatur, anxietate et formidine, sed omni cura relevatur ac solvitur. Ut enim merito fortunam horret, ita secure Deo sese audiet permittere. Hoc, inquam, solutum est, ut intelligat patrem coelesstem sic omnia sua potentia continere, sic imperio nutuque suo regere, sic sapientia moderari, ut nihil, nisi ex eius destinatione, cadat.” (CO 2:163).
Here trust balances anxiety. Both trust in God’s fatherly care and anxieties about what may or does befall were present in Calvin’s life. Despite cares and harassments, Calvin was also, at the same time, fully aware of God’s providential care, especially towards his elect. He often mentions it in his sermons as well as in his written works. This extends not only to the necessities of life, but also to special delights (ICR 3.10.2).

Luther, who was also beset by many illnesses, though only in later life, had the reputation of being “a joker in society, vivacious and sure, always with a happy face no matter how hard his enemies press him.” Calvin, on the other hand, was often of a disposition to be miserable, which is only to be expected of a man so troubled by disease, discord, contentions, and cares for the church. He could intellectually acknowledge God’s fatherly care and still be anxious in his disposition. More than nine years before his death, he confides to John Wolf, a minister of the church at Zurich, “No doubt they ... are unwilling that the man [Calvin] should live in tranquility, whom they see almost buried under an immense mass of business, distracted by the saddest cares, and harassed by the most importunate demands. One consolation I have is, that from this cruel warfare death will soon procure me my discharge.” Nevertheless, in the company of his friends and confidants, Calvin had ample capacity for cheerfulness, enjoyment, and laughter also. If he had been of a consistently miserable disposition he would not have gained the respect and affection of so many people.

The sixteenth century was one of sickness, early death for many, and recurrent visitations of the Plague. Death was all around for Calvin, also in the demise of family members. He had lost his mother when he was six years old, his father when he was only in his twenties, his infant son at twenty-two days old, and his dear wife after only eight years of marriage (August 1540 – March 1549). When they had been married about two years, Idelette had been “delivered prematurely, not without extreme danger; but may the Lord have a care over us.” It is likely that the extreme danger refers to significant post-partum hemorrhaging, which would account for her subsequent weakness until she died. It could also have been childbed (or puerperal) fever:

Now it is known to be caused by infection of the endometrium by bacteria, especially streptococci. Prior to germ theory, however, childbed fever was an epidemic disease passed from patient to patient. In some practices, childbed fever caused greater morbidity and

mortality than hemorrhage. Historians have shown that it was probably less frequent in mothers attended by midwives, than in those attended by doctors, who attended other patients with infections and used contaminated instruments.\footnote{158}

It is known that Idelette was attended by Dr Benedict Textor, who was the family physician.\footnote{159} Social class was apparently a significant factor in infant mortality: “[W]here family reconstitution studies can distinguish the mortality experience of social classes the infant mortality of higher social classes, if anything, exceeds that of workers and farmers.”\footnote{160} Those whose parents could not afford a physician fared better by having a midwife, because they were less likely to become contaminated with diseases via the physician’s hands. Wilkinson, writing as a medical doctor, thinks the danger to Idelette more probably came “from her general state of health.”\footnote{162} Earlier, Idelette had given birth to two viable children and had not succumbed to the Plague while she nursed her husband through his final illness. It is not clear why her general state of health deteriorated. Calvin frequently worried about Idelette’s state of health, even as she no doubt worried about his. Baby Jacques soon died, and his death added to both of their distress. After Idelette’s final illness and death, Calvin wrote to his closest friends, Viret and Farel, about the manner of her dying and about how he was weighed down with sorrow. He closes his letter to Farel with a prayer as follows:

May the Lord Jesus strengthen you by his Spirit; and may he support me also under this heavy affliction, which would certainly have overcome me, had not he, who raises up the prostrate, strengthens the weak, and refreshes the weary, stretched forth his hand from heaven to me.\footnote{163}

Although it was quite usual for Calvin to conclude his letters with a short prayer for the recipient,\footnote{164} this seems to be the only time he writes an epistolary prayer for himself. On some twenty six occasions\footnote{165} he asks for prayers for himself, in the style of “having commended me affectionately to your kind prayers” and “I pray to be remembered in your prayers.” In the face of increased hostility at Geneva, Calvin asks his friend Farel, “I solemnly beseech you, dear Farel, now to remember me specially

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  \item \footnote{158}{Jacalyn Duffin. \textit{History of Medicine. A Scandalously Short Introduction} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 257.}
  \item \footnote{159}{Wilkinson, \textit{Medical History}, 57. After Textor’s death in 1556, Philibert Sarrazin became Calvin’s physician. He had an excellent reputation which extended well beyond Geneva.}
  \item \footnote{160}{Jan de Vries, “Population,” in \textit{Handbook of European History}, 1400-1600, 1:22.}
  \item \footnote{161}{Ibid.}
  \item \footnote{162}{Wilkinson, \textit{Medical History}, 57.}
  \item \footnote{163}{SW, 5:219, 11th April 1549, emphasis added. “Dominus Iesus te spiritu suo confirmet, et me etiam in hac tanta calamitate, quae certe me fregisset, nisi manum e coelo porrexisset is cuius officium est erigere prostatos, debiles confirmare, lassos reficere.” (CO 13:229).}
  \item \footnote{164}{For example, “May the Lord preserve and direct you in his work.” SW, 4:279, to Viret, 3rd August 1541. “Dominus te conservet ac dirigat ad opus suum.” (CO 11:263).}
  \item \footnote{165}{As counted in the \textit{Selected Works}, i.e. about 3.8% of the total number of letters.}
\end{itemize}
in your prayers.”

Also, in a somewhat indirect way, when he was quite discouraged,

“May the Lord hear your incessant prayers in our behalf.”

Out of 683 published letters in the Selected Works, the overwhelming majority records his prayers for the recipient(s). This number shows that in comparison to all other trials that befell him, the death of his wife was in a unique category. Yet, even during this time of extreme sorrow, Calvin attempted to moderate his grief, as he confessed to Viret: “Although the death of my wife has been exceedingly painful to me, yet I subdue my grief as well as I can.”

He now practices what he commended to Viret when his wife was ill and dying in 1546: “to hold yourself ready to bear with moderation the issue, whatever that may be.”

Calvin did not remember his mother very well, although he remembered her taking him to see the skull of Saint Anne (allegedly) in an Abbey in Orcamps. There is no evidence of him having been very much affected by the death of his father. But after the death of his friend and colleague Augustin Courault, Calvin wrote to Farel, “The death of Courault has so overwhelmed me, that I can set no bounds to my grief.”

The more painful and excruciating thoughts of the night left him utterly exhausted from lack of sleep. On 6th September, 1560, he lamented the death of a fellow minister, Macar, who had died suddenly: “I am overwhelmed with grief for the recent death of our most excellent brother Macar.”

According to the Register of the Company of Pastors, he was “carried off by a malignant fever in the flower of his age.” Another friend’s death also affected him very much: “I am obliged to dictate this letter to you from my bed, and in the deepest affliction from the loss of my dear friend De Varennes, who has hitherto been my principal stay and comfort in all my troubles.” He mentions the death of De Varennes again in a further letter to Beza, along with other tragedies occurring about the same time:

Lest I should have to mourn but for one death, three days after that of my friend De Varennes, the oldest pastor has followed him to the tomb. We have given up all hopes respecting the life of Baduel. Yesterday the wife of our treasurer, after having seemed recovered from the sufferings of child birth, died suddenly of convulsions of the nerves. And


170. SW, 4:99-100, 24th October, 1538. “Coraldi morte ita sum consternates, ut nullum ponere modum moerori possim...Miserrima diei tormenta exciipient acerbiore cruciatus noctis” (CO 10:273).

171. SW, 7:215, 6th September 1560, in the postscript. The editors state in a footnote that it was from the Plague, which would seem to be contradicted by the Register, see next note. “Magno dolore sum oppressus ob recentem obitum optimi fratris nostri Macarii.” (CO 18:277).


not to go on enumerating our losses, Nicholas Ignée was suffocated by a catarrh in the short space of nine hours. It is some consolation that Beraud is gradually recovering, as well as his wife, who was lately very nearly cut off by a premature delivery. She is now, however, doing well, and her child is alive.²⁷⁴

This quotation shows just how tenuous people’s hold on life was. In view of all the things that troubled Calvin, it is perhaps not so surprising that he could exclaim, “And in truth what is there in this world at present which should render us very solicitous about living?”²⁷⁵ Calvin’s sorrow about the deaths of friends and family resulted in physical distress such as sleeplessness, exhaustion, and exacerbation of his illnesses.

Conclusions

Due to his close association with physicians such as Cop, Textor, and Sarrazin, Calvin was probably more informed about medical theories than most people, even most educated people. The extent of his usage of medical theories in his writings demonstrates that he had thoroughly absorbed them. He was, of necessity, particularly well-informed about his own diseases, as shown in his letter to the physicians of Montpellier. Current medical theories underscored the vulnerability of the human body and the instability of emotional life. Thereby it strengthened the biblical insight that man is made of dust. Calvin’s weak state of health did not challenge him to explore a more positive view of the body within the boundaries of the present life.

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Chapter Five

The Image of God and the Body. The Body of Jesus

Introduction

How does the expression of man being created in ‘the image of God’ relate to Calvin’s anthropology and to the main question of whether Calvin can be called a Platonist with respect to his view of the body? Does the concept of the image of God overturn the Platonic elements? A further question for this chapter is: did Calvin include the body when discussing the image of God? Secondary questions are: did Calvin include woman as equally made in the image of God? And, what did he teach about the body of Jesus?

The expression “the image of God” in humankind is introduced in the creation account (Genesis 1:26-27) when God, having prepared a wonderful earth for people to live in, creates the human pair, Adam and Eve. The image is briefly mentioned in Genesis 5:1, after sin has entered the world, and at 9:6, after the Flood. Thus, the image is mentioned as something fundamentally important at three critical stages in the early history of humankind. The Bible does not tell us that sin obliterated the image, although the reality faced by fallen humans indicates that sin did have a deleterious effect on humankind and the creation. The relationships between God and human beings, as well as between the human beings themselves, are distorted and corrupted. The Bible itself does not explain the expression ‘image of God,’ nor is it developed to any extent at all. If God cannot be defined, it should not surprise us that the image of God cannot be defined either, although that has not stopped people from trying. The expression ‘image of God’ is mentioned a number of times in the New Testament, where it usually refers to being transformed in the image of Christ, who is the “express representation” of God (Hebrews 1:3). This chapter will provide an overview of what scholars have written on the subject of the image of God. An examination of how Calvin uses the language of imago Dei in his writings and sermons will follow.

Theological Views of the Image

Many commentators have taken up the biblical phrase “image of God” and developed it in different ways, attempting to elicit its meaning. As Norman Snaith noted, “Many ‘orthodox’ theologians through the centuries have lifted the phrase ‘the image of God’ (imago Dei) right out of its context, and, like Humpty-Dumpty, they have made the word mean just what they choose it to mean.” Augustine located the image of God in the three powers of the soul: memory, mind and the will. Aquinas saw it in man’s intelligent nature. Bernard of Clairvaux also related the image to the will:

Bernard saw the Image of God in men as consisting in man’s freedom of will, which in essence is neutral. What determines the will is man’s reason which decides what is good and what is evil. When at the fall, man lost the virtues created in him, he deprived himself of the ability to will according to true reason.

Luther disagrees with Augustine but is less clear about what the image is, concluding, “When we speak about that image, we are speaking about something unknown.” He suggests, however, that it lies in the superior knowledge Adam and Eve had and in the dominion that they could exercise over the animals. Robert Jamieson locates the image in the “moral dispositions of his soul, commonly called original righteousness (Eccl. vii. 29).” Some commentators locate the image of God in humankind’s spirituality.

On the basis of Genesis 1:28, others have seen it reflected in the dominion given to the first couple as stewards of creation and masters over it. One of the earliest to do so was John Chrysostom, who also allowed that women were included in the command to have dominion. Berkouwer refutes the idea that the image of God

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4. Augustine, On the Trinity, IX-XI. Calvin refutes that idea in the Institutes: “For that speculation of Augustine, that the soul is the reflection of the Trinity because in it reside the understanding, will, and memory, is by no means sound.” ICR 1.15.4 “Nam illa Augustin speculatio minime firma est, animam trinitatis esse speculum, quia in ea resident intellectus, voluntas et memoria.” (CO 2:139). Italics are in the CO unless otherwise stated.
7. Luther’s Works, Volume 1, Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St Louis: Concordia, 1958), 63-4.
9. “It is the spiritual nature of human beings that really puts them in the image and likeness of God.” G. Söhngen, quoted in Westermann, 149. So also Keil and Delitsch, “Man is the image of God by virtue of his spiritual nature, of the breath of God by which the being, formed from the dust of the earth, became a living soul.” Biblical commentary on the Old Testament, tr. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 1:63.
consists in the dominion over the other creatures, and states that Psalm 8 cannot be used to sustain that argument.\textsuperscript{10} Aalders reads “in our image” to mean that man was made “as God’s image.” On the analogy of Exodus 6:2, where God says, “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty,” Aalders concludes:

> Any presentation which makes the human person only something to be compared with the image of God, or the image of God something outside of the person, according to which he was created, does not do justice to the text. That is why we read in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11:7) that man ‘is the image and glory of God.’\textsuperscript{11}

Citing 1 Corinthians 11:7 presents a problem with regard to both man and woman being created in the image of God, for in the verse quoted in Corinthians Paul is specifically talking about the man as compared to the woman, whereas Genesis emphatically indicates that both male and female are created in the image of God, as will be discussed below.\textsuperscript{12} Aalders does not expand on the difference between Genesis and 1 Corinthians and sees dominion as the direct result of being made in the image of God, rather than the essence of it.\textsuperscript{13}

More recently the image has been seen in the plurality of and relationship between man and woman, “male and female he created them.”\textsuperscript{14} Just as there is a plurality within the unity of the triune Godhead, so there is a plurality within humankind. Barth lays great stress on the ability of humankind to have an “I-Thou” relationship with God: “The relationship between the summoning I in God’s being and the summoned divine Thou is reflected both in the relationship of God to the man whom He has created, and also in the relationship between the I and the Thou, between male and female, in human existence itself.”\textsuperscript{15} According to Barth, man’s essence is to be an object of God’s grace. Very few theologians have seen the image and likeness linked to the physical body, at least, not primarily.\textsuperscript{16} Von Rad “would not rule out man’s body as part of the image in man: quite the contrary, he thinks that the idea of the

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\item \textsuperscript{12} Calvin makes the same mistake in his commentary on Col. 1:15. See \textit{The Epistles of Paul The apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians}, tr. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1965), 308. “Imo a Paulo refellitur, cuius verba sunt (1. Corin, 1 l, 7): Vir est imago et gloria Dei.” (CO 52:84).
\item \textsuperscript{13} Aalders, \textit{Genesis}, 1:71. In a similar vein, W.J. Dumbrell, \textit{Covenant & Creation} (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1984), 33 states, “Our most natural starting point will be the question of the divine image in man since in the context of Gen. 1:26-28 it is closely bound up with the dominion over creation he is to exercise, and moreover, it is the point to which Gen. 9:1-7 returns.”
\item \textsuperscript{14} Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics}, III The Doctrine of Creation, tr. J.W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and H. Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 1:183-206.
\item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, 196. Problems arising from Barth’s view are discussed by Berkouwer, \textit{Man: the Image of God}, 72-74.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Gunkel was one who did, as mentioned by Barth. “In sharp contrast to the exposition of the Early Church, Gunkel tried to argue that, although the spiritual element is not excluded, the primary reference of the divine likeness is physical.” \textit{Ibid.}, 193. Berkhouwer discusses and refutes Gunkel’s position in \textit{Man: the Image of God}, 77ff.
\end{itemize}
image sets out from corporeality as something visible. [...] there has been increasing reluctance to exclude man’s body from the image of God – an exclusion generally supported previously, when theologians sought the content of the image in man’s ‘higher’ qualities, in contrast to the ‘lower’ bodily qualities, which should not be considered in connection with the image.”¹⁷ In the context of a study of Calvin’s view of the body, it is worth noting a recent book, The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis ¹ by J. Richard Middleton. He notes that among systematic theologians, the body is almost universally excluded, thereby “entrenching a dualistic reading of the human condition” and notes that “this continues to perpetuate an implicit devaluation of the concrete life of the body in relation to spirituality.”¹⁸

Another theologian who does not want to exclude the physical aspect of being human from our being made in the image of God is Charles Sherlock.⁹ Pope John Paul II also saw the human body as bearing “a sign of the image of God. It also constituted the specific source of the certainty of that image, present in the whole human being.” After the Fall, “man loses the original certainty of the image of God, expressed in his body.” He further describes the Fall as a “rupture of man’s original spiritual and somatic unity. He realizes for the first time that his body has ceased drawing upon the power of the spirit, which raised him to the level of the image of God.”²⁰

For the purpose of analyzing Calvin’s concept of the image of God in man and woman, especially as it relates to the body, his sermons on Job and Genesis will be examined as well as some other sermons and commentaries. Calvin refers to the image of God in man numerous times in his long series of 159 sermons on Job, begun on February 26th, 1554. The sermons on Genesis were begun on September 4th, 1559. The final version of the Institutes will be cited for comparison, where the relevant passages are found especially in Book ¹, chapter 15. In this way it is hoped that Calvin’s mature views are best represented.

**Calvin’s General Observations on the Image of God**

When Calvin discusses how God created man”¹¹ in his image, he relates the image mainly to reason and intelligence, sometimes to reason and sense, or reason and dis-

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¹⁸. J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis ¹* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 24. In his footnote he elaborates as follows: “Despite many theological interpreters asserting in recent times, especially since Barth, that the whole person, and not just the soul or mind, is made in God’s image, this assertion typically plays no further role in the majority of such interpretations.”
²¹. Even though Calvin does not mean to exclude woman, he mainly uses “l’homme” as his subject when describing the image of God in man in his sermons. For ease of discussion, I will follow Calvin in this and use “man” as a gender-neutral noun, in the same way as “de mens” in Dutch, and “der Mensch” in German are gender-neutral. The subject of women as image-bearers will be discussed later in this chapter.
creation.22 Only incidentally does he link it with dominion, as in “God put us on earth to reign there, to have joy of his creatures, to bear his image.”23 He does not agree with those who “locate God’s likeness in the dominion given to man … whereas God’s image is properly to be sought within him, not outside him, indeed, it is an inner good of the soul.”24 In his Genesis Commentary he admits that dominion is “some portion, though very small, of the image of God.”25 In his Genesis Sermon 39, Calvin reminds his listeners that man was created out of the earth, or mud, and we will return to that until the resurrection. We are but mire and filth.26 When we know what we are made of, it should take away all pride and deprive us of all haughtiness.27 And yet, God has put this marvelous image in us, which should make us grateful of the goodness, virtue and wisdom of God. As far as our origins are concerned, we are like the animals. This knowledge was intended to keep us humble. As he put it in the Institutes, “we must realize that when he was taken from earth and clay, his pride was bridled. For nothing is more absurd than those who not only dwell in houses of clay, but who are themselves in part earth and dust, to boast of their own excellence.”28 Yet, because man bears the image of God, and is the abode of an immortal spirit, he is also of great importance. He has reason and intelligence, and dominion over all.29 Calvin explains, “If we look at our body, it is formed of earth, and yet God has chosen

22. “Or voila un homme qui se dira sage, ayant raison et discretion, qu’il a esté creé à l’image de Dieu pour estre illuminé en toute verité…” (CO 35:126). “[Dieu] nous a eslevez par dessus les bestes brutes, nous donnant sens et raison, ce quil n’a pas fait à tous autres animaux. … qu’il nous a donné sens et raison pour estre par dessus les bestes brutes.” (CO 35:237, 238), “Car [les hommes] savent que c’est en quoy ils different des bestes brutes, c’est qu’il y ha sens et raison en eux. Dieu pour nous rendre plus excellens que les beuf, les asnes, les chiens, les porceaux, a imprimé son image en nous: et ceste image ici en quoy consiste elle, sinon que nous ayons discretion du bien et du mal?” (CO 26:120). All translations from the sermons are by A.L. Sewell, except where otherwise noted.
24. ICR 1.15.4. “Neque etiam probabilisorum opinio, qui Dei similitudinem in dominatu ei tradito locant: ac si Deum hac nota sola tum referret, quia constituuit sit omnium rerum herus ac possessor, quam penes ipsum, non extra, proprique quaerenda sit, imo interius sit animae bonum.” (CO 21:39).
26. “Dieu nous a prins de fange et de bouë.” [...] “Il faut aussi que nous retournions encores en cest estat-la, non pas que Dieu nous y laisse (car nous avons l’esperance de la resurrection) mais ie parle maintenant de ce qui est en nostre nature” [...] “nous ne sommes que fange et ordure et dedans et dehors.” (CO 33:485-6).
27. “Et ainsi tousfois et quantes que nous pensons à nous, que ces deux choses nous viennent en memoire: c’est assavoir ceste matiere dont nous sommes prins, pour nous oster tout orgueil, pour nous despouiller de toute hautesse…” (CO 33:486).
28. ICR 1.15.1. “Ac primo tenendum est, quam ex terra et luto sumptus fuit, iniectum fuisset superbiae fraenum; quia nihil magis absurdum est quam sua excellentera gloriari qui non solum habitant tugurium luten, sed qui sunt ipsi ex parte terra et cinis.Quod autem Deus vas testaceum non modo animare dignatus est, sed etiam domicilium esse voluit immortalis spiritus, iure in tanta fuctoris sui liberalitate gloriari potuit Adam.” (CO 2:134-5).
this corruptible vessel, and even where there is neither honor nor dignity, he wanted to make a home for his graces and gifts of his Holy Spirit, in such a way that we would bear his image.” In the next paragraph he links this to humankind being the offspring of God, as in Paul’s address to the Athenians (Acts 17:28-29). Thus, humankind occupies a special and exalted position above all the other creatures. In his original state, as Calvin says,

[T]he 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. And although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.\(^\text{31}\)

The first sentence of this quotation is presented by B.A. Gerrish as a definition of the *imago*.\(^\text{32}\) However, it appears to be more of a description of the results of having the image in man’s original state, rather than a definition of the image itself. One theologian who considers humankind to be the image of God (like Aalders), has stated that “though it is clearly legitimate to *describe* human beings in image terms, attempts to *define* the image of God precisely are fraught with danger. God cannot be defined, and any endeavours on our part to do so constitutes idolatry (cf. Is. 44:9-20). [...] trying to define the image of God is trying to define ourselves, since we are made in his image.”\(^\text{33}\) In the quotation from *ICR* 1.15.3 we see that although Calvin recognizes the uniqueness of the creation of man, he finds it difficult to be precise. Is the image in the mind and heart? Or in the soul and its powers? In this quotation even the body comes under consideration for being able to manifest at least some of the image. It is not without reason that Francis Higman concluded that Calvin’s remarks on the *imago Dei* are: “not entirely coherent.”\(^\text{34}\) Even though Calvin reminds his hearers frequently that they are but mud, he also acknowledges that the body is a marvelous creation. In his commentary on Psalm 139, he states,

One great reason of the carnal security into which we fall, is our not considering how singularly we were fashioned at first by our Divine Maker. [...] David no doubt means

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30. Ibid., 61.
31. *ICR* 1.15.3. “Proinde hac voce notatur integritas qua praeditus fuit Adam quum recta intelligentia polleret, affectus haberet compositos ad rationem, sensus omnes recto ordine temperatos, vereque eximii dotibus opificis sui excellendiam referret Ac quamvis primaria sedes divinae imaginis fuerit in mente et corde, vel in anima euisque potentis, nulla tamen pars fuit etiam usque ad corpus, in qua non scintillae aliena miscent.” (CO 2:138).
figuratively to express the inconceivable skill which appears in the formation of the human body. When we examine it, even to the nails of our fingers, there is nothing which could be altered, without inconveniency, as at something disjointed or put out of place; and what then, if we should make the individual parts the subject of enumeration?35

In his Sermon 39 on Job, discussing chapter 10:10-12, he admits again that there is nothing but infection and dirt in humanity but continues by saying:

Nevertheless, look at the skin, the flesh, the nerves. These are things that can make every one overwhelmed. But when God has gathered so many miracles in one body, and when he shows us there such a beautiful, lively sight of his majesty, shouldn’t we have cause to say: ‘Lord, here are things that exceed all our sense and reason.’ [...] You have made me alive, Lord, that is to say, the principal part of your work that should be magnified is not at all the shape of my body. It is true that already there we see your virtue and admirable wisdom: but the soul is still more, it exceeds it. And for all that, still the soul does not have a shared life, as do the wild animals that have a soul for feeling and moving, for eating and drinking, for coming and going. In man, there are not only these externally focused senses, but there is intelligence and reason – there is truth.36

In short, the human body is both base and wonderful at the same time. The human soul retains its pre-eminence, both over the body and compared with the souls of animals, which only function in order to make them live and move. Although Calvin uses dualistic terminology and may sound like a Platonist, he does not despise the body in principle, since it is a creation of God for which we should be grateful. Calvin specifically states that the tongue was created for singing and speaking, and that “the chief use of the tongue is in public prayers.”37

The image is variously “put on” or “given to” or “imprinted” or “stamped on” man. Another verb that Calvin uses is that God “formed” man in his image.


36. “... cependant voila la peau, voila la chair, voila les nerfs, qui sont choses dont tout le monde peut estre rendu confus. Mais quand Dieu a recueilli tant de miracles en un corps, et qu’il nous monstre là une si belle image et tant vive de sa maïesté, n’avons-nous point occasion de dire: Seigneur, il y a ici des choses qui surmontent tout nostre sens et raison.” [...] “Tu m’as donc vivificé, Seigneur, c’est à, dire, le principal qui doit estre magnifié de ton oeuvre, ce n’est point la figure de mon corps. Il est vrai qu’en cela desia on peut voir ta vertu, et ta sagesse admirable: mais l’ame est encores plus, elle surmonte. Et avec cela encores l’ame n’aura point une vie commune, comme auront les bestes brutes qui auront ame pour sentir et se mouvoir, pour boire et pour manger, pour aller et venir, il n’y a pas seulement ces sens exterieurs en l’homme, mais il y a intelligence et raison, il y a verité.” (CO 33:481).

“Formed” is also used by Scripture and by Calvin of the body that God made when he created Adam, before he breathed the breath of life in him. Thus Calvin seems to suggest a similarity in the creation of the image and the body: both required deliberative action. No man is created without the image. However, some seem to be temporarily deprived of it. In Sermon 3 on Job Calvin preaches on the subject of having many children. He says God bestows on men a great honor when he gives them those whom he has created in his image and likeness to be subject to them. However, this honor entails a great obligation that those who have a family to rule over should always be vigilant. This is a typical sentiment of Calvin, who often lectures on the responsibilities of parents, especially fathers. However, in Sermon 17 he argues that childhood is such that those who are in it are hardly different from the brute beasts. There is neither intelligence nor reason in the little ones. This is a problem, since intelligence and reason are what Calvin associates most often with the image of God. Do children, whom he acknowledges to be image bearers in Sermon 6, have to grow into the image of God? Calvin was probably not aware that he contradicted himself. At that time, children up to the age of seven were generally cared for by

38. “...que Dieu ne crée jamais un homme, qu’il ne lui imprime son image.” (CO 33:512). “… tous hommes sont creez a son image.” SC Vol. I, 42.

39. “Il est vray que Dieu fait grand honneur aux hommes, quand il leur donne ceux qu’il a creez a son image et semblance pour leur estre subjets: mais cependant cest honneur-la emporte obligation grande, que ceux qui ont famille a gouverner, doivent tousiours estre vigilans.” (CO 33:52).

40. Karen E. Spierling and Raymond A. Mentzer have both traced the shift in primary responsibility for the children’s education and catechizing during the time of the Reformation to the father of the family, who was held responsible and called to task by the consistory if he failed to exercise proper discipline. See their chapters “Father, Son and Pious Christian” (95-119) and “Masculinity and the Reformed Tradition in France” (120-139) respectively in Masculinity in the Reformation Era, ed. Scott H. Hendrix and Susan Karant-Nunn (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008). “A pious man, the Reformers believed, would not only earn a living in order to feed, clothe, and house his wife and children, but he would also ensure that his children (and his servants) were educated in the Christian faith at home and attended catechisms regularly. Some of these obligations pertained to women as well, but, generally speaking, Genevan men were held more publicly accountable for the well-being and religious nurture of their children.” (96). See also CO 35:574, in a sermon about Hezekiah, where Calvin presumably addresses a mixed congregation but exhorts fathers to teach God’s ways to their children. Mothers are not mentioned. He does likewise in the commentary on Isaiah 38:19 and in Sermon 10 on 2 Samuel 6 (July 14, 1562) Calvin reminds his congregation of the responsibilities of the father of the family. (SC Vol. I, 162, ll. 29-34). This attitude is reflected in the Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin, ed. and tr. Philip E. Hughes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 47: “…fathers are to send them [children] or see that they are taken [to catechism].” Ditto, 91. Fathers were also required to be present at the baptism of their children, 55. This does not mean that mothers did not participate in the education of the children. Their influence was possibly stronger than that of the fathers.

41. “Car voila l’enfance qui est telle, que ceux qui sont là ne different quasi rien d’avec les bestes brutes, … mais il n’y a n’intelligence ni raison aux petits.” (CO 33:211). See also: “Car si nous mourons en nostre enfance, nous n’avons n’intelligence ne raison: mais avec l’aage nous apprenons ce qui nous estoit incog- nu: c’est que Dieu nous a formez a son image, qu’il nous a donné intelligence pour savoir que nous n’avons pas seulement à passer par icy bas: mais qu’il y a une vie permanente au ciel, que c’est là où Dieu nous appelle.” (CO 33:509).

42. “Car il est vrai que Dieu a bien formé les bestes brutes, les arbres et les autres choses: mail il n’a point formé les hommes comme les bestes, il leur a donné intelligence, imprimant son image en eux.” (CO 34:659).
women. Calvin would not have had many opportunities to observe children, and learn that even babies exhibit signs of intelligence. From about six or seven years of age, children were treated like adults. The need for universal education only began to be promulgated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, allowing for an intermediate stage between young childhood and adulthood.

Childhood was then at an early stage of transition “from early participation of children in contributions to the family economy to compulsory schooling.” When Calvin speaks about children, therefore, he must have in mind those younger than six or seven. The problem remains, however, since severely retarded children and adults do not have reason and intelligence. Are they without the image of God? Calvin does not address the question, but whenever he chastises the sin of drunkenness, he implies that it makes men like the brute beasts, without reason or intelligence. One expression used by Calvin in his sermon on Noah’s drunkenness is that people “brutalize themselves by drinking too much.”

The conclusion would be that inebriated people are temporarily deprived of the image of God. In this same sermon on Noah, Calvin states that wine was given so that the hearts of men would rejoice in God. He then asks,

Where is the image of God? It is imprinted in our souls and in the intelligence we have, and the discernment between good and evil. When all that is effaced, and when those who are drunk in this way cannot judge between black and white, they certainly efface also the image of God, as much as it is in them. That is to pervert the whole order of nature.

Here it is in the soul and in intelligence, not reason and intelligence. If the image is said to be “in our soul and in the intelligence we have” then what is it that is in the soul and in our intelligence? Calvin does not arrive at a definition in his sermons, but he does describe it. In the commentary on Genesis, Calvin describes drunkenness as a “filthy and detestable crime” and mentions drunkards becoming “brutalized by continued intemperance.” In Sermon 95 on Genesis, dealing with Lot’s drunkenness

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45. Ibid., 18.
46. “s’abrutir par trop boire.” Of Noah he says, “Il est là couché et jecté par terre comme une pauvre beste sans sens, sans memoire.” Sermon 45 on Genesis, SC Vol. II part 1, p. 504. See also his Sermon on Daniel 5:1-4, where he says that drunkenness makes a man like a pig: “... l’ivrognerie est une chose plus que detestable, que l’homme efface l’image de Dieu, qu’il se rende semblable à un pourceau, le vous prie cela doit il estre tolleré?” (CO 41:323).
47. He repeats this sentiment in Sermon 95 on Genesis: “pour nous resjouir.” SC Vol. II part 1, p. 1080.
and incest with his daughters, Calvin compares Lot with a tree trunk and states that he had no more feeling, nor reason, than an animal.  He also states that Lot “effaced the image of God in himself.”  Absence of rationality, whether occasioned by drunkenness or other means, is therefore seen by Calvin as damaging or effacing the image of God. When he looks upon a drunkard he no longer sees a man made in the image of God, but an animal. In his lecture on Daniel 4:16 he spoke of Nebuchadnezzar that he “would for a time be despoiled not only of his empire but also of human understanding, so that he would differ in nothing from the beasts.” This would have been a good place for Calvin to mention that Nebuchadnezzar had lost the image temporarily, but he does not.

The Image of God Before the Fall

Whereas Calvin preaches and writes much about the image as being defaced or marred, he also gives his hearers and readers a glimpse of the pristine condition of humankind, when the image was intact. Calvin instructs his congregation what we would be like if man had not fallen into sin:

For if the image of God were to be in us as it was in our father Adam at the beginning, it is certain that all our senses … would be pure and clean, and there would be no pollution at all: and all our looks would be directed to God. As soon as we would contemplate the creatures, God’s glory would be imprinted there; we would be led to him in order to honor him, and to be completely inflamed with his love. There would be no vanity or dissolution.

In Sermon 53 on Job Calvin describes how he sees the image of God in man:

Adam was created in the image of God, endowed with excellent gifts, and he was not even subject to death. For what does this image of God signify? An uprightness, justice and integrity, where God displayed his great treasures, such that in short, man was like a mirror of this excellent glory that shines fully in God.
The picture of a mirror is also employed in the commentary on Ephesians 4:24:

Adam was first created after the image of God, and reflected, as in a mirror, the Divine righteousness; but that image, having been defaced by sin, must now be restored in Christ.\(^{55}\)

In Sermon 6 on Genesis Calvin gives his congregation another picture of what man would have been like, were it not for the Fall into sin, contrasting it with what obtains now. He was created in such purity and with such a natural integrity that his soul possessed an admirable wisdom, which was not at all wrapped in lies, hypocrisy and ignorance, just as now we see nothing but vanity and shadows in us. Also, there was a true desire to obey God and to take pleasure in all good. There was such a steady series of God’s gifts, so that his glory shone everywhere, within and without.\(^{56}\) Thus, God’s glory was exhibited in both body and soul. A similar thought is expressed in the Institutes: “For although God’s glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul.”\(^{57}\) As can be seen from the foregoing, there are various descriptions of the image, or of what the results of the image are, but no definition of what it actually is. Also, it is often about what the image is not, rather than what it is. Throughout his writings, Calvin maintains a strong association between the image of God and reason.

Apart from reason and intelligence as the two most common attributes that Calvin assigns to being made in the image of God, he sometimes mentions the conscience, as in his 39th sermon on Job, where he makes a digression to speak about the true light that gives light to everyone coming into this world (John 1:4):

By this word of light he means that the image of God is imprinted on us, inasmuch as we have intelligence and reason, that we discern between good and evil, that men are born to have some sort of order, some government among them: that each one has his conscience that witnesses that this is bad, and that is good.\(^{58}\)

Berkouwer finds it problematic to define man’s essential nature as lying in his reason:

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\(^{56}\) Paraphrased and summarized from Sermon 6, SC Vol. I part 1, p. 60.

\(^{57}\) ICR 1.15.3. “Quamvis enim in homine externo refugiat Dei gloria, propriam tamen imaginis sedem in anima esse dubium non est.” (CO 2:136).

\(^{58}\) “Par ce mot de clarité il signifie, que l’image de Dieu est imprimée en nous, d’autant que nous avons intelligence et raison, que nous discernons entre le bien et le mal, que les hommes sont nais pour avoir quelque ordre, quelque police entre eux: qu’un chacun a sa conscience qui lui rend témoignage que cela est mauvais, que cela est bon.” (CO 33:489).
Such definitions are actually the contrary to what we call the Biblical view of man, since they make no mention of what Scripture presents as the essential and unique characteristic of man and man’s nature—the relation to God. We never encounter such a man—man-as-reason, or however he is distinguished from the animals—in Scripture. [...] If it is true that the relation to God is essential in the definition of man, than [sic] such “neutral” or “non-religious” definitions of man-in-himself can throw no light at all on the true nature of man.\(^{59}\)

It is true that Calvin does not exactly define the image of God in man in terms of reason, but he comes close to it. He does not exclude the relationship to God, at least, not in the pre-Fall situation, as was seen in the citation above: “all our looks would be directed to God.” Calvin’s descriptions of original humankind are echoed in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

The Image of God After the Fall

After the Fall, according to Calvin, though the Bible does not say so, the image of God is said to have been effaced, disfigured, or corrupted by Adam’s sin.\(^{60}\) Bray has concluded against the pessimistic trend of traditional Protestant theology, that “the New Testament, like the Old Testament before it, says nothing about a loss, corruption or defacing of the creation image of God in man.”\(^{61}\) This notion of effacement, disfigurement, and corruption of the image was not shared by earlier theologians.\(^{62}\) Barth, as reported by Berkouwer, also seems to lean this way: “It is through grace that man remains man, and that the image of God in him is indestructible, since it is in this relation that the image finds expression.”\(^{63}\) However, Calvin says that it was not totally obliterated. Instead of his image shining in us, it seems that we have conspired to despise it.\(^{64}\) For Job to curse the day he was born is inexcusable, according to Calvin, because having imprinted his image in us, God gave us a great honor, that we should be excellent above all other creatures, so that we should always bless his name.\(^{65}\) After the Fall we can only hope to be fully reformed in the image of God after we have “laid aside this mortal body, which is like a dwelling place full of foul smells

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62. James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 36A, Romans 1-8* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 483. “And though there is little or no thought of the divine image having been lost or defaced, as in later Christian theologizing, the implication of Paul’s language here [Romans 8:29] and elsewhere is of an image to be formed in Christians by process of transformation.”
64. “…que au lieu que son image devroit reluire en nous, il semble que nous ayons conspiracy à le despieter.” (CO 33:144).
65. “… que Dieu quand il nous a creez, a imprime son image en nous, qu’il nous a fait cest honneur, que nous fussions excellens par dessus toutes creatures: en cela nous avons tousjours à benir son nom …” (CO 33:145).
and infection, and ... [that] he should reign in us, and that whatever is corrupt in our nature should be totally extinguished.  

After the Fall, God shows humankind his great mercy by leaving some traces of his image in us. Calvin finishes Sermon 6 on Genesis by assuring the congregation once more that God has left some little trace of this blessing in men. In the same sermon Calvin considers wherein the image lies. He briefly allows that “In truth, there is such an artifice in the shape of the human body, that one could well say that it is an image of God.” In Sermon 18 on Genesis he also states that God put the image in both our souls and in our bodies. This is quite different from his earlier assertion in Psychopannychia, where he stated quite categorically that the expressions after his own image and likeness

...cannot possibly be understood of his body, in which, though the wonderful work of God appears more than in all other creatures, his image nowhere shines forth. ... for Moses, to prevent any one from placing this image in the flesh of man, first narrates that the body was formed out of clay, and makes no mention of the image of God ... All I wish to obtain is, that the image itself is separate from the flesh. ... We hold that nothing can bear the image of God but spirit, since God is a Spirit.

This seems to be an instance where Calvin developed his thinking. In the Institutes of 1559 Calvin refutes a particular version of the view that the image dwells in the body: “For Osiander, whose writings prove him to have been perversely ingenious in futile inventions, indiscriminately extending God’s image to both the body and to the soul, mingles heaven and earth.” Andreas Osiander (1498-1552) was “a Lutheran theologian with mystical tendencies.” He wrote a book, De imagine Dei, in which he considered the whole man – soul, spirit, and body – to be the proper seat of the image of God. He reasoned this from Genesis 1:26, arguing that the spirit by itself is not man,

66. “... afin qu’estans despouillez de ce corps mortel, qui est comme une loge pleine de toute puantise et infection, nous soyons pleinement reformez à l’image de Dieu, et qu’il regne en nous, et que ce qui est de corruption de nostre nature, soit du tout aneanti.” (CO 33:170).
67. “... nostre Seigneur a laissé encore des traces en nous, à ce que nous soions enseignez de la misericorde si grande et si inestimable, laquelle Dieu reserve au genre humain.” SC Vol. II, part 1, 56.
68. Ibid., 67. “... il a laissé quelque petite trace de ceste benediction aux hommes.”
69. Ibid., 58. “Et à la verité, il y a un tel artifice en la figure du corps humain, qu’on peut bien dire que c’est une image de Dieu.”
70. Ibid., 211. “pource que nous avons effacé l’image de Dieu qu’il avoit mise et en nos ames et en nos corps.”
71. SW, 3:422-4. “Quae verba de corpore nullo modo accipi possunt. In quo, tametsi mirabile opus Dei, prae caeteris corporibus creatis, apparret, nulla tamen eius imago effulget. ... Nam Moses, ne quis in hominis carne hanc imaginem constitueret, prius e limo terrae corpus formatum narrat, sed nullam imaginem Dei referens. ...sed unum tantum obtinere volo: imaginem ipsam esse extra carnem ... habemus nihil esse quod imaginem Dei ferat, nisi spiritum, ut Deus spiritus est.” (CO 5:180-1).
72. ICR 1.15-3 “Osiander enim (quem scripta eius testantur in futilibus commentis perversae fuisse ingeniosum) imaginem Dei promiscue tam ad corpus quam ad animam extends, caelum terrae miscet.” (CO 2:136-7).
nor the soul, but that ‘man’ includes the body as well as the soul and the spirit. Therefore the body is included in the image of God. He further argues that Adam was created in, and prefigured, the image of incarnate Christ. “Consequently, just as Christ cannot be properly understood without reference to his humanity, including his physical body, so also man, created in the image of Christ, cannot be comprehended correctly without including his body.” What Calvin objects to is the mingling of heaven and earth. He may have had the following quotation from Osiander in mind:

Thus, just as our Lord Jesus Christ by nature is God and man, so also Adam, by nature man, through grace is a partner and partaker of the divine nature. And thus, in the end, man was made in the image of God, in his likeness, because the body of Adam was like the body of Christ, the soul of Adam was like the soul of Christ, and God was in Adam through grace just as He is in Christ through nature. This is where Osiander’s views of the divinization of man coincide with those of the image of God. Calvin is more careful to maintain the distinction between God and man, the Creator and the creature. He teaches that “when Paul discusses the restoration of the image, it is clear that we should infer [...] that man is made to conform to God, not by the inflowing of substance, but by grace and power of the Holy Spirit, [who] surely works in us without rendering us consubstantial with God.” Calvin also disagreed with him about justification. Osiander maintained that “In Christ the whole fulness of God dwells, and consequently also in those in whom Christ dwells,” and that “We are righteous by his essential righteousness.” Calvin maintains that God’s righteousness is imputed to us.

With regard to those who say that man’s uplifted face, in contrast with the animals, indicates the nature of the image of God, Calvin asserts, “I shall not contend too strongly – provided it be regarded as a settled principle that the image of God,.

74. Ibid., 214-5.
75. Ibid., 220, quoting Osiander, Gesamtausgabe, 9:475. Translation from the Latin is by Van Vliet.
77. ICR 1.15.5. “Atque ubi de imaginis instauratione disserit Paulus, ex eius verbis elicere promptum est, non substantiae influxu, sed spiritus gratia et virtute, hominem fuisse Deo conformem. Dicit enim (2 Cor. 3, 18) Christi gloriam speculando, in eandem imaginem nos transformari tanquam a Domini spiritu: qui certe ita in nobis operatur ut Deo consubstantiales nos reddat.” (CO 2:140).
78. CO 1:165-7, “Contra Osiandrum.”
79. Quoted in James Weis, “Calvin Versus Osiander” Springfielder 29 (1965), 32.
80. ICR 3.11.3. “Quum itaque nos Christi intercessione iustificet Deus, non propriae innocentiae approbatione, sed iustitiae imputacione nos absolvit, ut pro iustis in Christo censeamur, qui in nobis non sumus.” (CO 2:535).
81. The Battles edition of the ICR refers to Ovid, Metamorphoses I. 84ff, and Cicero, II. lvi. 140.
which is seen or glows in these outward marks, is spiritual. In 1551, when he published the Commentary on Isaiah, Calvin did not link man’s erect posture to the image at all:

Men see every day the heavens and the stars; but who is there that thinks about their Author? By nature men are formed in such a manner as to make it evident that they were born to contemplate the heavens, and thus to learn their Author; for while God formed other animals to look downwards for pasture, he made man alone erect, and bade him look at what may be regarded as his own habitation.

It is possible that Calvin was remembering Augustine’s less succinct comments on 2 Corinthians 4:16:

If by the outer man one understands that life whereby we sense through the body with the five celebrated senses [...] this man too, and not without cause, is said to share in the likeness of God. [...] Moreover, the human body is unique among the bodies of land animals in not being stretched out prone on its stomach. However, although it could see [in that position], the body stands erect in order to look upon the heavens, the principle [sic] of visible things. And although it is recognized that the body has no life of its own but lives by the presence of the soul. Still the human body can rightly be regarded as created more in the image and likeness of God than the other bodies of animals. [...] it is more adapted for viewing the heavens.

Further in the same section (ICR 1.15.3) Calvin says,

Therefore, although the soul is not man, yet it is not absurd for man, in respect to his soul, to be called God’s image; even though I retain the principle I just now set forward, that the likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man’s nature towers over all the kinds of living creatures.

Here he does seem to define the soul as the image, or the image as the soul. So we see that in the same year that the final version of the Institutes was published Calvin does allow the body to express some of the image of God. In the sermon he does not say

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82. ICR 1.15.3. “Modo fixum illud maneat, imaginem Dei, quae in his externis notis conspicitur vel emicit, spiritualem esse.” (CO 2:136).
85. ICR 1.15.3 “Quamvis ergo anima non sit homo, absurdam tamen non est, eum animae respectu vocari Dei imaginem; eti principium quod nuper posui retineo, patere Dei effigiem ad totam praestantiam, qua eminet hominis natura inter omnes animantium species.” (CO 2:137-8).
that we are wrong to see the image of God in the body also, even if Osiander was wrong to do so in the particular way he reasoned. Still, in Sermon 6 on Genesis, after allowing for the possibility of the image being seen in the body, Calvin continues by asserting that Moses does not have those external attributes in mind. We need to go to “the soul, which is the most worthy and precious part in man.”86 The soul has reason, intelligence, and will. Calvin summarizes by saying that the image of God is “principally in the soul,” even though it has its extension in the body as a kind of accessory.87

Engel discusses a number of seemingly contradictory ideas about the image of God in Calvin’s writings and has resolved these contradictions by employing different perspectives.88 With respect to Calvin’s criticism of Osiander, the key word is “indiscriminately.” Engel argues that Calvin

...does not say to Osiander that there is no sense in which the image of God can be applied to the body, but rather that the way in which Osiander has applied it is incorrect. Osiander spoke of the body as the image of God in such a way that he forgot the distinction made from the perspective of humankind between the soul as the seat of the image of God and the body as a duller reflection.89

Engel claims that in Psychopannychia, “Calvin had not yet developed his complex theological structure of shifting perspectives.”90 It may be debated whether Calvin consciously developed these perspectives, or whether the contradictions were unresolved in his thinking and Engel managed to find a key to resolving them. There is no doubt, however, that she has provided a useful tool for looking at Calvin’s writings by employing the lens of different perspectives which allows her to solve these contradictions. For example, with respect to whether the body is or is not the image of God, Engel states,

After rejecting the definition of the image of God as dominion over nature in the next sentence, Calvin quickly moves on to assert that ‘since the image of God has been destroyed in us by the Fall, we may judge from its restoration what it originally had been.’ His purpose in this passage is to compare the image in fallen Adam with the restored

87. Ibid., “… l’image de Dieu est principalement en l’ame, et bien qu’elle ait son etendue jusques au corps comme accessoire…”
88. See Chapter II, “Imago Dei” in Mary Potter Engel, John Calvin’s Perspectival Anthropology (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 37-72. Engel was not the first to employ different perspectives with regard to Calvin. Jean Boisset, Sagesse et sainteté dans la pensée de Jean Calvin (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959), had already employed such a devise when he wrote: “De ce point de vue, la vision calvienne de l’homme dans le monde s’oriente dans deux perspectives: elle considère l’homme loin de Dieu – et il est perdu, et l’homme appelé par Dieu, élu par Dieu – et il est sauvé.” (p. 3). Further mentions of perspectives occur at p. 7, 35. However, Boisset did not make a systematic study using different perspectives within Calvin. He does use perspectives between Calvin and others, notably Plato as on p. 263.
89. Engel, Perspectival Anthropology, 46.
90. Ibid.
image in Jesus Christ. In other words, he shifts to the perspectives of God as judge and God in Christ here in his discussion of the image of God in the body. From the first perspective we see that there is no image in the body. Sin has marred the beautiful crafting of our human bodies so that only ‘obscure lineaments’ remain to be seen. But from the second, looking through the ‘perfection of our nature’ in the lively image of Christ, we see that before the Fall Adam had ‘no part of him in which some scintillations did not shine forth,’ even though the chief seat was in the mind and heart. [...] Shifting to the perspectives of God as judge and God in Christ he is able to maintain simultaneously that the image of God has been lost in the body in the Fall and that it is restored in Jesus Christ.  

The Beginning of Restoration of the Image of God

For the Christian believer, the question arising is: What is the meaning of the image of God in man after the Fall and before the final transformation of the resurrected body? For Calvin, the answer is that,

The beginning of our recovery of salvation is in that restoration which we obtain through Christ, who also is called the Second Adam for the reason that he restores us to true and complete integrity. For even though Paul, contrasting the life-giving spirit that the believers receive from Christ with the living soul in which Adam was created [1 Cor. 15:45], commends the richer measure of grace in regeneration, yet he does not remove that other principal point, that the end of regeneration is that Christ should reform us to God’s image.

This reformation into God’s image is obtained through sanctification, which is a gradual process. Calvin speaks of it in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:18 (1546):

Observe that the purpose of the Gospel is the restoration in us of the image of God which had been cancelled by sin and that this restoration is progressive and goes on during our whole life, because God makes His glory to shine in us little by little.

In his Genesis commentary (1554) Calvin asserts that “since the image of God has been destroyed in us by the Fall, we may judge from its restoration what it originally

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91. Ibid., 47.
92. ICR 1.15.4. “Ideoque recuperandae salutis nobis initium est in ea instauratione quam consequimur per Christum, qui etiam hac de causa vocatur secundus Adam, quia nos in veram et solidam integritatem restituit Quamvis enim vivificantem spiritum quo donantur a Christo fideles, opponens Paulus (1 Cor. 15, 45) animae viventi in qua creatus fuit Adam, uberiorem gratae mensuram in regeneratione commendet, non tamen alterum illud caput tollit, hunc regenerationis esse finem, ut nos Christus ad imaginem Dei reformet” (CO 2:138).
93. The second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, tr. T.A. Small (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), 50. “Nota hunc esse finem evangelii, ut Dei imago, quae inducta fuerat per peccatum, reparetur in nobis, atque huius instanciaionis progressionem tota vita esse continuam: quia paulatim gloriam in nobis suam illustrat Deus.” (CO 50:47).
had been. Paul says that we are transformed into the image of God by the gospel."94 He describes how our restoration in the image of God can begin to take place in the believer, but it will not be complete in this life. This reasoning was also used against two heretics, Michael Paulus and Guillaume Guegnier, who were perfectionists.95 They had come to Geneva “with the sole intention of spreading their poison.” They promoted the idea that “no one is a Christian unless he is perfect” and that “there is no Church unless it is perfect.” Calvin convinced Paulus of his error, but Guegnier persisted in his perfectionist views and was banished from the city.96

In his commentary on 1 John 3:3 (1551), he likens sanctification to being able more and more to see God:

But inasmuch as the image of God is renewed in us, we have eyes prepared for the sight of God. And now, indeed, God begins to restore His image in us; but in what a small measure! Therefore unless we are stripped of all corruption of the flesh, we shall not be able to behold God face to face.97

Calvin reminds his readers of Paul’s saying that “Now we see through a glass darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Still, even in this life the believers are being transformed into the image of Christ. On verse 6 he comments, “But here we are again taught how lively and efficacious is the knowledge of Christ; for it transforms us into His image.”98 In his Commentary on John 17:3 (1553), Calvin makes this knowledge more specific; it is not mere head-knowledge, but faith:

But where he has shone, we possess him by faith and also enter into the possession of life; and this is why the knowledge of him is truly and justly called saving. Nearly every single word is of consequence; for not any kind of knowledge is meant here, but only that which transforms us to the image of God from faith to faith.99

When Calvin compares the knowledge of God and of Christ that we enjoy compared with the Israelites in Old Testament times, he says,

96. Ibid.
Today God appears to us in a different manner than what he ever did to our fathers, such that he puts before us his living image in our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we would look on him as Father and Savior, and that today, instead of obscurity, we have a great light in the Gospel. Let us confess that we should be all the more inclined to obey it in everything.\textsuperscript{100}

In Sermon 56 on Job he states that since we are men, we are already God’s workmanship and he has reformed us in his image by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{101} The transformation into the repaired image of God is confined to the elect in Christ. Even though Calvin was preaching on Job (Sermon 148), he says that the image was repaired in the elect through Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{102} Calvin teaches that there were elect people in the Old Testament times and considered them as restored to a certain degree by sanctification in anticipation of the salvation that was to come in Christ.\textsuperscript{103} Believers will only be fully reformed in God’s image after they have laid down their mortal flesh, but we should pray that already today God may work this transformation.\textsuperscript{104} In Sermon 10 on Daniel, Calvin explains that the means of transformation is the pure preaching of the Gospel, where we have Christ presented to us. “We know that he is the living image of God his Father. When we contemplate him, it is not only so that God may be known by us, but also that we should be transformed into his glory.”\textsuperscript{105} The preaching of the Gospel is combined with the work of the Holy Spirit in distri-

\textsuperscript{100} “Puis qu’aïnssi est donc qu’auiourd’huy Dieu s’apparoist à nous en une autre façon qu’il n’a point fait aux peres, tellement qu’il nous propose son image vive en nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ, afin que nous le contemptions pour pere et sauveur, que nous avons auiourd’huy au lieu de l’obscurité, une grande lumiere en l’Evangile: cognoissons que tant plus devons-nous estre affectionnez à y obeir du tout.” (CO 26:143).

\textsuperscript{101} “Or il est vrai, entant que nous sommes hommes, que desia nous sommes sa facture: mais il y a plus, c’est qu’il nous a reformez à son image par la grace de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ.” (CO 33:693).

\textsuperscript{102} “D’autant que Dieu nous a creeze à son image et semblance: et combien que ceste image ait esté effacee par le peche d’Adam, si est-ce qu’elle a esté reparee aux eleus, quand nostre Seigneur Iesus a esté envoyé, qui est l’image vive de Dieu, et avons esté exaltez par son Esprit, en telle sorte que nous voila restablis en nostre premier degré: et Iesus Christ nous a fait cest honneur de descendre de la race d’Abraham, c’est à dire de se vestir de nostre nature, afin de nous reconcilier à Dieu son Pere.” (CO 35:371).

\textsuperscript{103} See ICR 2.10.1 and ff. “...they participated in the same inheritance and hoped for a common salvation with us by the grace of the same Mediator.” “...quum patres eiusdem nobiscum haereditatis fuerint consortes, et eiusdem mediatoris gratia communem salutem speraverint, quatenus in societate hac diversa fuerit eorum conditio.” (CO 2:313).

\textsuperscript{104} “Il nous faut tenir en nostre petitesse, prians Dieu qu’il nous despouille de ceste chair mortelle, afin que nous le voyons tel qu’il est, quand nous serons semblables à luy, comme il en est parlé en sainct Jean. Et au reste en attendant ce iour-la, qu’il nous reforme auiourd’huy à son image, afin que nous le puissions mieux contempler.” (CO 35:305).

\textsuperscript{105} “... quand l’Evangile nous est purement presché, nous avons là Jesus Christ qui nous est presenté, et nous scâvons qu’il est l’image vive de Dieu son Pere, voire que quand nous le contemplans, ce n’est pas seulement à fin que Dieu soit connue de nous, mais à fin que nous soions transformés en sa gloire...” (CO 41:426). See also, “Nostre Seigneur Iesus n’est-il pas la vive image de Dieu son Pere?” (CO 26:128).
Buting his gifts to achieve the transformation. At the resurrection, the image of God "will be restored to fullness, in our body as well as our soul." It is in contemplating God through the Gospel that Calvin sees the sanctification and restoration in the image of God to occur. One place where he so describes it is in his Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:18 (1548):

At the same time he points out both the force of the revelation and our daily progress in it. He uses this similitude of the image in the mirror to make three points: first, that we need not fear obscurity when we approach the Gospel for in it God shows us His unveiled face; second, that this should not be a dead and fruitless contemplation, for through it we should be transformed into God's image; third, that neither of these things happens all at once, but by continual progress we increase both in the knowledge of God and in conformity to His image. That is the meaning of 'from glory to glory.'

Calvin referred to the same text in his Institutes: "But in another passage the same apostle shows what a sure and genuine taste of itself even a small drop of faith gives us when he declares that through the gospel, with uncovered face and no veil intervening, we behold God's glory with such effect that we are transformed into his very likeness [II Cor. 3:18]." It will be noted that Battles translated "imaginem" as "likeness" here. The transformation into the renewed image of God is, in Calvin's view, obtained by faith, by contemplating the Gospel, and by the resulting sanctification. It results in knowledge, as well as true righteousness and holiness.

Ethical Implications for God’s Image-Bearers

In his commentary on Genesis 9:6, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man” Calvin links the image of God to the requirement of exercising love and care for our neighbor:

Men are indeed unworthy of God’s care, if respect be had only to themselves; but since they bear the image of God engraven on them, He deems himself violated in their person. [...] This doctrine, however, is to be carefully observed, that no one can be injurious to his

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106. "Cequ’il fait quand il nous distribue les graces de son sainct Esprit, afin que nous soyons reformez à son image." (CO 23:657).
109. ICR 3.2.20. "At quam certo et minime fallaci sui gustu nos afficat vel exigua fidei guttula, idem alibi ostendit, quum affirmat (2 Cor. 3, 18) nos per evangelium revelata facie nulloque obiecto velamine glorian Dei tanta efficacia contemplandi, ut in eandem imaginem transformemur." (CO 2:414).
brother without wounding God himself. Were this doctrine deeply fixed in our minds, we should be much more reluctant than we are to inflict injuries. Should anyone object, that this divine image has been obliterated, the solution is easy; first, there yet exists some remnant of it, so that man is possessed of no small dignity; and, secondly, the Celestial Creator himself, however corrupted man may be, still keeps in view the end of his original creation; and according to his example, we ought to consider for what end he created men, and what excellence he has bestowed upon them above the rest of living beings.\textsuperscript{110}

It should be noted that the biblical text says nothing directly about the image being obliterated. Calvin deduces it from the results of sin. Calvin seems to think that his readers take it for granted that the image was indeed significantly damaged. Another passage that teaches practical consequences is James \textsuperscript{3}:9, where “likeness” is used instead of “image.” Again, there is no suggestion in the biblical text that the image has been damaged or destroyed. Calvin first says“If God is blessed in all His works, this should be true in men above all, on whom His image and His glory cast a particular radiance.” But a few sentences later he again uses similar phraseology as in the Genesis commentary. “If it is objected, that the image of God in human nature was removed by the sin of Adam, we must admit it was sadly deformed, yet in such a way that certain lineaments of it still appear.”\textsuperscript{111} This is a consistent theme in Calvin’s writing and preaching that is nowhere specifically stated in the Bible. Calvin infers it from the consequences of the Fall. Humankind no longer exhibits those qualities that Calvin associated with the image of God before the Fall: absence of pollution, vanity, and dissolution, presence of love, glory, excellent gifts, uprightness, justice and integrity. The original righteousness as the principal characteristic of pre-Fall humanity is especially notable for its absence in the post-Fall situation.

Commenting on 1 John 4:17b, “because as he is, so are we in this world” Calvin writes:

By these words [...] he means that we in our turn are required to resemble the image of God. Therefore, what God is in heaven, He bids us be in this world, that we may be reckoned His children. For when God’s image appears in us, it is, as it were, the seal of His adoption.\textsuperscript{112}


\textsuperscript{111.} “Nam si benedicendus est Deus in universis operibus suis, id praesertim valere in hominibus debet: in quibus peculiariter relucet imago eius et gloria.” [...] “Si quis obiciat, deletem Adae peccato fuisse Dei imaginem in humana natura fatendum quidem est fuisse misere deformatam, sed ita ut lineamenta adhuc quaedam appareant.” (CO 55:411).

Here Calvin sees sanctification, in the form of resembling the image of God, as proof of being children of God. In the context of John’s Epistle, that refers especially to love of God and love of neighbor. In Sermon 64 on Job Calvin exhorts the congregation to love our neighbors as ourselves because God has created all of us in his image and we have the same nature. “Besides that, it shows us that we should live agreeably in true brotherhood with those who are related to us.” This brotherhood is a more positive good than what he advocated in Sermon 44 on Job, where he merely said that recognizing that our neighbors are also made in the image of God “should deter us from extortion and violence towards them.” He reasons similarly for neighborly care in Sermon 71 on Job, alluding specifically to those who are afflicted by God. In Sermon 113 on Job, Calvin comments on Chapter 31:13-15, where Job gives his reasons for treating his servants well. Calvin preaches that the same God made us all and we should recognize our common humanity. “For the one who does not deign to recognize a man as his brother, may as well make himself into a cow, a lion, or a bear, or some other savage beast. He renounces the image of God which is imprinted on us all.” Calvin reasons that, since we all have the same Creator, “we must not oppress our neighbors, so as not to offend God.” Since all people belong to the community of image-bearers, whether they know it or not, we should be motivated to love them, as Calvin taught in his sermon on the second chapter of Deuteronomy (1555). It is in the nature of humankind to bear the image of God and this entails the solidarity of the human race as a distinct and special creation. Calvin spoke about humans as

maginem Dei referamus. Qualis ergo Deus in coelo est, tales nos in hoc mundo esse iubet, ut censeamur eius filii. Nam imago Dei, quum in nobis apparat, veluti adoptionis eius est sigillum...

113. “Sur cela aussi il nous monstre qu’il nous faut accorder en vraye fraternité avec ceux qui sont conointis avec nous.” (CO 55:357).

114. “Car si nos prochains sont formez à l’image de Dieu, et cependant nous pillerons l’un et mangerons l’autre, chacun sera adonné à soi: ie vous prie ne crachons nous point contre Dieu entant qu’il nous est possible, quand nous faisons quelque nuisance à ceux qu’il a formez à son image? Si nos prochains sont membres de Iesus Christ, et que nous leur facions quelque extorsion et violence qu’il ne soit question que de regarder à nostre profit particulier: n’est-ce point deschirer le corps de Iesus Christ par pieces?” (CO 34:9).

115. “Et puis, quand nous verrons un homme qui aura esté affligé de la main de Dieu si fort que rien plus, que nous sachions non seulement qu’il a esté créé à l’image de Dieu, mais aussi qu’il nous est prochain, et comme un avec nous: nous sommes tous d’une nature, nous avons une chair, nous sommes le genre humain, pour dire, que nous sommes sortis d’une mesme source.” (CO 34:118).

116. “Car celuy qui ne daigne reçognoistre un homme pour son frere, il faut donc qu’il se face un boeuf, ou un lion, ou un ours, ou quelque autre beste sauvage, et qu’il renonce à l’image de Dieu qui est imprimee en nous tous.” (CO 34:655).

117. “... il faudra conclure ce qui est vray, que nous ne pouvons pas opprimer nos prochains que Dieu n’y soit offensé.” (CO 34:659).

118. “... mais si est-ce qu’il y a encore quelque communauté en general, que tous hommes doivent penser qu’ils ont une nature commune entre eux.” [...] “... tousfois estans hommes nous devons avoir quelque lien de communauté, nous devons avoir quelque amour fraternelle.” (CO 26:9). See also Sermon on 2 Samuel 11:2, “Or ceux qui nous sont bien estranges, encore nous appartienent, pource que nous sommes tous faictz à l’image de Dieu, nous avons vne nature commune qui nous doit estre vng lien d’un amour et charité fraternelle.” SC Vol. I, ed. Hanns Rückert (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1936-1961), 6.
compared to the “other creatures.”

He called humans “social creatures or beings.” Gloede comes to similar judgments about the essential nature of humankind in the image of God and its ethical implications. Drawing on various Calvin citations, similar to the ones already quoted, he calls our common humanity “the most fundamental natural order.” He provides three attitudes that should exemplify our concerns for our common humanity as image-bearers: mourning for the dead, hospitality, and an attitude towards possessions that is marked by an awareness that riches are given by God and require care of the poor. Because we are created in God’s image, we should love our neighbor so that God will not be injured in his majesty. In this way, although Calvin sees reason and intelligence as characterizing the imprint of God’s image in man, it comes to fruition in the practical sphere of neighborly love. The idea that we should love all fellow human being on account of God’s image in them is not restricted to the sermons. In the Institutes there is a section devoted to our duty to love our neighbor because of the image, whether friend or foe. Apart from brotherly love, Calvin also expects that having the image of God should mean that God’s truth should shine in us, as he preached in his sermon 22 on Deuteronomy 4:11-14.

From the biblical perspective, the image in man is also a reason for God not to forget his people, the other one being that we are his children since he has adopted us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Image of God in Woman

Does Calvin’s theological thinking about the image of God include any special attention for the female sex? During his Sermon 6 on Genesis Calvin teaches that the woman also has the image of God. He follows Scripture in this emphatically. He also


120. Comm. Genesis, 1:28 and 1:213 “. . .for as man is a social animal [creature], . . .” “Man was formed to be a social animal [creature]” “conditum esse hominem ut sit sociale animal.” “. . . nam quum sociale animal sit homo. . .” (CO 23:46 and 96).


122. Ibid., 164. “Diese fundamentalste natürliche Ordnung ist die des gemeinsamen Menschentums.”

123. Ibid., 169-73


125. ICR 3.7.6.

126. “Pourquoi est-ce que Dieu nous a creez à son image, sinon à ce que sa verité reluisse en nous?” [...] “il faut que son image soit cogneue en nous, et que sa verité y reluisse.” (CO 26:140).

127. “... jamais il ne nous mettre en oubli: non point seulement entant que nous sommes ses creatures formees à son image: mais que nous sommes ses enfans, ainsi qu’il nous a adoptez par nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ.” (CO 33:604).
agrees that dominion was given to both male and female. In the same sermon he makes a digression to discuss Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 11:7, which seem to contradict the Genesis passage. Calvin says that Paul is there discussing exterior regulations and that the woman is subject to the man, because he is her head. In his commentary on Genesis 2:18, Calvin states that “the woman also, though in the second degree, was created in the image of God.” Did he mean in the second degree because she came after Adam? Or in a lesser degree? It is to be noted that the Corinthians passage does not speak about submission or authority, except in verse 10 where Paul states that “the woman ought to have authority over her own head.” The argument between experts as to the meaning of kephale whether it is authority/leader or source/origin determines the outcome of the exegesis. The first leads to a hierarchical order, the second to a chronological order. In the hierarchical order Christ is somehow in permanent submission to the Father. However, Christ is truly “very God of very God.” Within the Trinity there is mutual submission in perfect unity. The idea that all men are in authority over all women also follows from this view, although there are very few people who believe this consistently. It is just impractical. In Ephesians 5 Paul talks about the marriage order, where the husband is the head/leader of the wife, but in Corinthians it is “every man” and “every woman.” In the chronological order Christ in his humanity came later, being sent by the Father, and woman came after the man, for he was her source/origin. “She was taken out of man.” (Genesis 2:23). The interdependence that Paul emphasizes (vv. 11-12) should have appealed to Calvin. It is clear to the modern reader of both Scripture passages that Paul’s argument seems to detract from and distort the force of the emphatic Genesis statements about the image of God being in both male and female. Calvin, in commenting on the Corinthian passage (11:1-16), is forced to make the distinction of “exterior regulations,” not only because of how he interprets Paul’s reference to the creation, but also because of his own ideas of male superiority and the necessity of female subjection. Calvin reads the post-Fall subjection of woman back into the creation account and makes it an enduring principle for all time, instead of being one of the results of sin. In the commentary on 1 Corinthians 11 (1546) he claims that female subjection is part of “the eternal law of God, which has made the female sex subject to the authority of men. Therefore all women are born to

129. Ibid., 62 “la police exteriere.”
131. Most translators have added “a sign of” before “authority,” which then means they are obliged to discuss headgear. It is not present in the Greek.
133. The chapters on Marriage and Sexuality and Gender have more to say about Calvin’s views on women.
submit to the pre-eminence of the male sex.” Here we see some inconsistency in exegesis. The subjection of woman is not mentioned until after the Fall. In the second creation story (Genesis 2:4-25), the image is not mentioned until God breathed into Adam the breath of life (v. 7). Calvin sees the imago to result from the infusion of the breath of God. From this, Calvin argues, in his Psychopannychia, that the image did not come into existence before then, and was not found in the body. Yet he argues that subjection was present from the time of creation, even though it was not mentioned until after the Fall. On this question, Calvin differs from Luther, who maintains that there was equality of dignity at the beginning:

… if the woman had not been deceived by the serpent and had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects. For the punishment, that she is now subjected to the man, was imposed on her after sin and because of sin, just as the other hardships and dangers were: travail, pain, and countless other vexations.  

On the text of 1 Corinthians 11:7, Hans Helmut Eßer argues that Calvin has separated the inner-anthropological usage of the imago from that of the original (pre-Fall) and the ultimate (consummation) destiny. In the latter two, there is equality of man and woman, as well as in sanctification. However, the reality of the rule of man over woman is isolated from the reality of the image. The rule of man over woman is a sign of God’s rule. Eßer concludes his discussion of the text with: “This exegesis may have expressed a biblical foundation for the new humanistic ethos, which combined with the reformational spirit and transformed evangelical women into essential spiritual and cultural co-bearers of the Reformation.” It is not clear how this concluding opinion follows from what he stated about Calvin’s view of the image of God.

The authenticity of the passage (1 Corinthians 11:2-16) has been questioned in a detailed and thorough article by William O. Walker, who concludes that the passage


135. “... for Moses, to prevent any one from placing this image in the flesh of man, first narrates that the body was formed out of clay, and makes no mention of the image of God; thereafter, he says, that ‘the breath of life’ was introduced into this clay body, making the image of God not to become effulgent in man till he was complete in all his parts.” SW, 3:423. “Nam Moses, ne quis in hominis carne hanc imaginem constituere, prius e limo terrae corpus formatum narrat, sed nullam imaginem Dei referens. Deinde ait inditum luteo corpore vitae spiraculum: ut tum demum eluceret in homine Dei imago, quum omnibus suis partibus constaret.” (CO 5:181).

136. Luther, Works, 1:115.

is “an interpolation, that it consists of three originally separate and distinct pericopae, each dealing with a somewhat different though related topic, and that none of the three pericopae is authentically Pauline. This means, of course, that the passage cannot be used as a source for determining Paul’s attitude toward the proper status and role of women.”\(^{138}\) While it would be comforting to women if Walker’s thesis could be proven true, Calvin did not have the benefit of Walker’s research, but the fact remains that the passage made it into the canon and Calvin had to take it into account, as do we. More recently, David Hamilton has provided an analysis of this passage that does not involve a hierarchical system of authority, nor does it require excision from the canon of any passage.\(^{139}\) Calvin does seem to find it difficult to justify the line that Paul has taken in this passage. First, he argues that Galatians 3:28 has to do with spiritual standing in Christ, where there is no male and female, whereas in Corinthians Paul is dealing with “external connexions and social proprieties” where “the man takes his lead from Christ, and the woman from the man, so that they do not stand on the same level, but this inequality exists.”\(^{140}\) He expects this inequality to continue till the end of time. In other words, not even the grace of the Gospel can overcome the disparity that arises out of Calvin’s understanding of the creation ordinance, or as Calvin often calls it, the “order of nature.” As will be seen in the following two chapters, Calvin frequently considers cultural phenomena to be part of “the natural order.” It is only in the spiritual realm that Calvin allows women to have equality with men (see chapter 7). In this life, all men are over all women, even single men.

Paul is not speaking here of individual people or of each household, but he divides the human race into two parts, as mentioned in the previous sermon. Thus there is the male and the female. I say this, for although a man may be unmarried, he yet has this privilege of nature, that he is the head. And of whom? Of the women: for we must not only look at a single household, but at the order that God has established in this world.\(^{141}\)

The end result of his deliberations seems to be a diminution of woman’s standing, which he tries to ameliorate by exhorting man to “exercise his authority with moderation, and not ill-treat the woman, who has been given to him as his companion. Let the woman be content in her position of subjection, and not feel indignant be-

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141. Sermon 12 on 1 Corinthians 11:4-10. “Or saint Paul ne parle point ici des personnes, ou d’un chacun mesnage: mais il distingue le genre humain en deux parties, comme il a esté touché au sermon precedent. Il y a donc le masle et la femelle. Je di ceci, pour ce que combien qu’un homme ne soit point marie, si ne laisse-il pas toutesfois d’avoir ce privilege de nature, qu’il est chef. Et de qui? Des femmes: car il ne nous faut point regarder en une maison seulement, mais en l’ordre que Dieu a establi en ce monde.” (CO 49:724).
cause she has to play second fiddle to the superior sex.”

However unattractive playing second fiddle sounds to modern ears, it is a degree better than what Augustine proposed. He taught that woman by herself is not the image of God. The image of God is grounded in “spirit which is sexless.” […] “But when she is referred separately to her quality of help-mate, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one.”

Jane Dempsey Douglass has provided a rather optimistic interpretation of Calvin on these passages, emphasizing the possibilities of future changes in the direction of more equality. Thus, after drawing out Calvin’s more positive comments, she states that,

Calvin seems haunted by 1 Corinthians 11:7 and Paul’s apparent teaching that only men are made in the image of God. Again and again in various contexts Calvin rejects the most obvious interpretation in favor of his own view that Paul intends such restriction of women’s dignity to apply only to the realm of human governance and that women really are made in the image of God in the theological sense. Calvin rightly perceives that this text is a key one for the traditional theological teaching of women’s subordination to men. … Calvin has to his own satisfaction transformed the text from one of the foundation stones of a theological justification of women’s subordination into theological support for women’s greater freedom in the church at some future time.

The “theological support for women’s greater freedom” is not as obvious to the general reader of Calvin’s works as she presents it by her selective sampling of quotations. In order to see this support for greater freedom, she is forced to deal in a somewhat strained fashion with Calvin’s more negative comments. Still, she has to acknowledge that Calvin’s views, as she more positively interpreted them, of women’s position being “subject to change,” had no practical consequences for

142. Ibid., 234. “Vir moderate exerceat suum imperium, nec mulieri insultet, quae ei socia data est. Contenta sit mulier subiectione: nec indigne ferat, praestantiori sexui se postpositam esse.” (CO 49:478). The translator uses an idiom to translate *postpositam* which literally means “in the secondary position.”


145. Ibid., 63.

women’s leadership in the church in Calvin’s day and for many years afterwards. In her *Preface* she admits that Calvin himself can be held perhaps more accountable than other Reformed theologians for Protestant women’s continued subordination to men in the church, because he understood the theological possibility of giving freedom to women but decided not to make any practical attempt to do so. [...] I present Calvin without apology as I believe he presented himself: open to future change on theological grounds, but far too deeply shaped by the prejudices of a patriarchal society to imagine giving up those patriarchal structures in the foreseeable future.

What remains is that from the perspective of theology proper, woman is created equally. From the perspective of anthropology she is the image to a lesser degree. The woman is created equally in the image of God and has dominion with man over the creation, but in practice, according to Calvin, under “exterior regulations,” she is the image to a lesser degree and in a derived sense via her husband. Even as a single woman or as a venerable widow, she is in subjection to men.

The conclusion of this section is that Calvin included the female sex in the image of God, at least in a spiritual sense. By doing so he stimulated a more egalitarian tendency in Reformed thought. This tendency took a long time to come to fruition and even now is not fully realized. For all practical purposes, he did not give a special place to woman as co-created in the image of God.

The Body of Christ in His Humanity

Two instances which can serve as a test for one’s view of the body are the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ. In this section we will focus on Christ’s body in his humanity and in the glorification. The Gospels record Mary giving birth. They record Jesus being tired, thirsty, and hungry. He was also circumcised. All these are indications of having a real body, like ours. These incidental mentions of bodily needs are commented on by Calvin only briefly since they require no great explanations. He does mention the error of Marcion, who taught that Jesus did not have a material body but was only a phantasm or apparition (*ICR* 4.17.17).

At the beginning of the sermon 19 on Matthew 1, Calvin stated that in order to know Christ as our brother, he needed to be clothed in our flesh and nature. If we only recognized his divinity, we would be too far removed from him. In order to be our Mediator, he not only had to partake of our nature, but also our infirmities, so that he would have compassion on us and help us. He continues by reminding his

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148. Ibid., 10.
149. Sermon 19 on the Harmony of the Gospels. “Advisons donc pourquoi le Saint Esprit a yci mis au devant le rolle du parentage du Fils de Dieu: c’est afin que nous cognoissions que vrayement il est nostre frere, d’autant qu’il a vestu nostre chair et nature. Car sans cela quel acces aurions-nous à luy? Si nous n’y cognoissions que la divinite, il est certain que nous en serions par trop eslongnez. Nous aurions donc
hearers that Jesus had to be like us in all things, except for sin. It was necessary that justice was obtained in our flesh and our nature. Without that we would remain in our condition. Acquitting us of our debts needed to be done in our flesh. Calvin tells his congregation that Jesus Christ was made weak in order to strengthen us; he became poor in order to fill us with his riches. Jesus Christ is true man: God manifested in the flesh. We should be persuaded then, that the Son of God was made like unto us, and was clothed in our flesh, in order to repair all offenses we committed in such a way that they would not be held against our account to condemn us. In discussing Christ’s office of Mediator, Calvin writes similarly:

Who could have done this had not the selfsame Son of God become the Son of Man, and had not so taken what was ours as to impart what was his to us, and to make what was his by nature ours by grace? Therefore, relying on this pledge, we trust that we are sons of God, for God’s natural Son fashioned for himself a body from our body, flesh from our flesh, bones from our bones, that he might be one with us. An echo of the creation story (Genesis 2:23) is reflected in the quotation above. Calvin appears to be thinking of Adam’s exclamation over the newly created woman, but instead of the woman being created from man, he inverts the thought and states that Christ was created from our human body, through Mary. The longer version of Ephesians 5:30 adds after “for we are members of his body” the following: “and of his flesh and of his bones.” This is considered to be a later addition. The Mediator needed to be like us as well as being and remaining God’s Son. In his commentary, Calvin states that “Christ is the image of God because He makes God in a manner visible to us. [...] outside Christ, everything that claims to represent God will be an idol.” Our Mediator became God with skin; we could not truly know God if he had not become man. Calvin sees the incarnation as a sign of God’s great love:

Let us contemplate the infinite love of our God since he has given his only Son, and did not spare him at all for us, as is said in John 3:16. God could indeed have redeemed us by
another means, and even without any means, for it only needed a single word from him. But in order to express the incomprehensible love he bears us, and the inestimable care he has for our salvation, he wanted his only Son clothed in our flesh. How? What affinity is there between these two natures? Between this celestial glory that amazes the angels of Paradise, such that they need to hide themselves in order to adore what they do not comprehend at all – and this lodge of our body, this prison, this filth? That God should be joined there so that he who is man should be at the same time God, and the one who is God, man? Not that their natures are confused, for each retains its properties. But however it may be, in one person we contemplate the Majesty the angels adore, and then we see this poor human condition which is there united as if God declared in one word that he wants to be made one with us in the person of his only Son.\textsuperscript{154}

The God-Man lived in a real body and in his real body Jesus suffered a real death, like our death. In his Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:48 (1546), Calvin explains it thus:

For we know that the body of Christ was subject to death, and that it was delivered from corruption, not by some inherent property of its own (essentiale proprietate), to use the accepted term, but by the providence of God and nothing else. Therefore not only, as regards the substance of His body, was He earthy, but for a time He also shared in our earthy condition. For before the power of Christ could show itself by conferring the life of heaven on us, it was necessary for Him to die in weakness of the flesh. But it was in the resurrection that this heavenly life first appeared, that He might give life to us also.\textsuperscript{155}

We would have to allow that in his earthly life Christ was “confined” in his human body. In Christ’s case, it was not sin that made the prison. It was the restriction of Christ as Creator of all and Ruler over all (Col. 1:15-20; 3:1) being confined to a human body. However, when speaking of Christ as the Eternal Word of God in his incarnation, Calvin sees him as not “confined” but as continually filling the world:

\begin{quote}
154. “Contemplons aussi l’amour infinie de nostre Dieu en ce qu’il a donné son Fils unique, et ne l’a point espargné pour nous, comme il est dict au 3. chap. de saint Iean, Dieu nous pouvoit bien racheter par autre moyen, et sans nul moyen du tout (car il ne faloit que sa seule parole), mais afin de nous exprimer l’amour incomprehensible qu’il nous porte, et le soin inestimable qu’il ha de nostre salut, il a voulu que son Fils unique vestist nostre chair. Et comment? Quelle convenance y a-il entre ces deux natures, entre ceste gloire celeste laquelle estonne les Anges de paradis, tellement qu’il faut qu’ils se cachent pour adorer ce qu’ils ne comprenent point, et ceste loge de nostre corps, ceste prison, ceste pourriture? Que Dieu se soit là conioint en sorte que celuy qui est homme, soit quant et quant Dieu, et celuy qui est Dieu, soit homme? Non pas que les natures soient confuses: car chacune retient sa propriete. Mais quoy qu’il en soit, en une personne seule nous contempons la maieste de Dieu que les Anges adorent: et puis nous voyons ceste povre condition humaine qui est là unie comme si Dieu declaroit en un mot qu’il veut estre fait un avec nous en la personne de son Fils unique.” (CO 46:226).

\end{quote}
They thrust upon us as something absurd the fact that if the Word of God became flesh, then he was confined within the narrow prison of an earthly body. This is mere impudence! For even if the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of a man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be born of the virgin’s womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning!  

Christ’s Resurrection Body

In life and in death, Jesus had a real human body. In his resurrection he displayed a glorious, transformed body. Christ’s earthly body was transformed in such a way that he could enter through closed doors, as well as appear and disappear suddenly in various places. Calvin sometimes sees Christ as being “imprisoned” in his incarnate body, as in the Harmony of the Gospels: “He calls Christ’s death a receiving up, not only because he was taken away, but because He left the lowly prison of His body and ascended on high.” Here Calvin sees the prison as Christ’s body on earth and the release from that prison as the ascension into glory. Christ ascended in bodily form. Calvin meant that Christ left his earthly, pre-resurrection body, and ascended in his glorified, post-resurrection body. This is not to say, however, that there were two bodies: the tomb was clearly empty. As Calvin puts it, Christ “suffered the same death that other men naturally die; and received immortality in the same flesh that, in the mortal state, he had taken upon himself.”

From the perspective of Christ in his humanity, he is confined. From the perspective of the Eternal Word, he fills the universe. As he explains in another place in the Institutes:

In this manner, he is said to have descended to that place according to his divinity, not because divinity left heaven to hide itself in the prison house of the body, but because even though it filled all things, still in Christ’s very humanity it dwelt bodily, that is, by nature, and in a certain ineffable way.
Both perspectives are needed. When he discusses the ascension into heaven, Calvin
concedes that Christ’s presence “had been confined in a humble abode of flesh so
long as he sojourned on earth.” Calvin continues by describing the greater presence
of Christ by his Spirit that can only happen after he has returned to the Father. “He
consoles them for his bodily absence, saying that he will not leave them orphans, but
will come to them again in an invisible but more desirable way.” It was part of
Christ’s humiliation that he took on human flesh as in a “humble abode.” There
seems to be no logical reason to suppose that Christ’s body will no longer have the
marks on his side and hands when he comes to judge the living and the dead, but
Calvin thinks “he continued for a time to bear the leftovers of the cross,” and it “has
been foolish, old women’s nonsense to imagine that He is still marked with His scars
when He comes to judge the world” The wounds would remind the blessed ones
that Christ did indeed have a human body and suffered for us. It does not detract
from the glory of the resurrection.

**Christ’s Body and Our Body**

When believers are said to be transformed into the image of Christ, it has nothing to
do with Jesus’ body and only indirectly with their own bodies. They are being trans-
formed by the renewing of their mind. They do this by offering themselves, their
bodies (τὰ σώματα), as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1). In
the new heaven and the new earth, that is, at the resurrection, the final transforma-
tion into Christ’s image will be accomplished. As Murray puts it, “... the conformity
embraces the transformation of the body of our humiliation to the likeness of the
body of Christ’s glory (Phil. 3:21) and must therefore be conceived of as conformity
to the image of the incarnate Son as glorified by his exaltation.” At that point, there
will be nothing to remind believers of the humble and earthy origins of the human
body, the body of our humiliation (τὸ σώμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν). Colossians de-
scribes the transformations as one of knowledge: “Do not lie to one another, since
you have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of
its Creator” (3:10). As Paul puts it, “Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even
as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). The mention of the Creator, in the Colos-
sians verse, rather than of Christ, reminds the reader of the original creation of hu-
mankind in “uprightness, justice and integrity,” to use Calvin’s words once again. In
his commentary on Colossians 3:10, Calvin affirms that

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162. *ICR* 2.16.14 “Corporalis vero absentiae solatium proponit, quod non deseret pupillos, sed iterum
ad eos veniet, invisibili quidem modo, sed magis optabili...” *(CO* 2:381).
   “Haec certe mira fuit indulgentia erga discipulos, quod aliquid sibi deesse maluit ad perfectam resurrec-
tionis gloriam quam tali subsidio fidem illorum fraudari. Caeterum stultum et anile delirium fuit, plagis
adhuc confossum imaginari, quam adveniet mundi iudex.” *(CO* 45:813).
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. And this is what he immediately adds, that we are renewed after the image of God. Now, the image of God resides in the whole of the soul, since it is not only the reason that is upright, but also the will. 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, righteousness and goodness of God.¹⁶⁵

Of course, “confined” does not have the same, negative connotation as “imprisoned.” In Calvin’s view, whereas humankind is inevitably imprisoned because of sin, Christ chose deliberately to be confined in a body in order to carry our sin in human flesh and make the sinless sacrifice for our sin. It is noteworthy that Calvin speaks of Christ choosing Mary’s womb as a temple for Jesus.¹⁶⁶ Balke infers from this that it is incomprehensible to understand and interpret Calvin from a Platonic point of view.¹⁶⁷ But to take this unique instance of Christ’s virginal conception as being representative of Calvin’s view of the body is unwarranted when we consider all the evidence relating to his negative views of the body. In the Last Admonition to Joachim Westphal (1557), Calvin speaks of Christ’s body as sojourning in a tabernacle:

For we do not simply assert that Christ’s body is in one place, because it is natural, but because God was pleased to give a true body to his Son, and one finite in its dimensions, and he himself was pleased to sojourn for a time on earth under the tabernacle of this body, and with the same body to ascend into heaven, from whence he bids us look for him.¹⁶⁸

Here it is possible to see an allusion by Calvin to John 1:14, where the Word is said to have “tabernacled” among us (Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐκήνυσεν ἐν ἡμῖν). In the context of the Lord’s Supper it was stressed that Christ’s body should not be imagined to be in the elements of the Eucharist, as stated in the Consensus Tigurinus:

¹⁶⁶. ICR 2.14.1 “sed quia e virginis utero templum sibi delegit in quo habitatet...” (CO 2355).
¹⁶⁷. W. Balke, Calvijn en de Bijbel (Kampen: Kok, 2003), 241.
It is especially important that any idea of a local presence of Christ should be put away. For while the signs are here in the world, seen by our eyes and touched by our hands, Christ in so far as He is man must be sought nowhere else than in heaven and in no other way than with the mind and the understanding of faith. It is therefore a perverse and impious superstition to enclose Him under the elements of this world.169

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the serpent had tempted them not only with the idea of being “like God,” which they already were, being created in his image, but also with knowledge: “knowing good and evil.” In the final state of redemption, believers will again be fully transformed into the image of God and will have fullness of knowledge. This would seem to imply that knowledge or the mind is a significant aspect of the image of God.

Conclusion

On the subject of the image of God, Calvin is not so different from his predecessors and contemporaries, although in drawing practical consequences with respect to neighborly love he did add valuable insights to what it means to be created in God’s image. Calvin’s thinking about the image of God provides us with descriptions rather than definitions. On the whole, he places a great deal of importance on reason as part of the image. Righteousness also plays a prominent part, especially in the restoration of the image of God. The body is acknowledged to reflect some of the glory of its maker and is therefore seen as having a connection with the image, although only a minor one. The body is not to be despised, however, as in Platonism, because it is a marvellous creation of God. Women only have the image in a spiritual sense and will be equal with men only in the hereafter. It would have been understandable if Calvin had attributed this inequality as a result of the Fall into sin, but he does not. He believes it is God’s eternal decree that women should be in subjection to men. Calvin does not express himself on the bodily implications of the female sex being created in the image of God. Nor does he exclude women from his positive remarks about the body as reflecting the glory of its Creator. Calvin’s full acceptance and appreciation of the body of Christ in his incarnation and glorification counters the low esteem of the body characteristic in Platonic hierarchies.

Chapter Six
Marriage in Theory and Practice

As announced in the Introduction, chapters 6, 7, and 8 are dedicated to marriage, sexuality, and the naked body. These topics together provide a kind of practical test as to how Calvin dealt with the body in daily life. How do his views and attitude relate to the main question of this study? Do they affirm the Platonic elements in his view of the body, or do they run against this suggestion? The first chapter of this block is focused on marriage of man and woman as indicated in the creation accounts of the Bible and the exclusive legal relationship of the two sexes in the sixteenth century. In this context we will discuss Calvin’s view on the relation between man and woman in marriage. How did his own biography of a young man, a bachelor, a married man and a widower colour his ethical thinking? The female perspective of pregnancy and childbirth will also be addressed.

In an overview of ideas on marriage, Gary Quinn, in the very first paragraph, attributes “a rather one-sided view of marriage” to Calvin, whom he considers a “very important and creative thinker.” After quoting him on 1 Corinthians 7, (“Marriage is a remedy ordained by God to help our weakness and is to be used by anyone who does not possess the gift of continence”), he comments, “With this kind of ‘enthusiasm’ about marriage, it is easy to see why many Christians have come to think of it as little more than an institution for cripples.” With this concise dismissal, the reader who is unacquainted with Calvin’s writings may come to think that this was the essential point that Calvin made on the subject of marriage. Quinn makes no mention of Calvin’s more enthusiastic opinions, nor does he deal with his thoughts on marriage as a covenant. He could have appropriately brought that in when he stated, “In the Bible, marriage is not founded on natural law arguments (that marriage is good because procreation is good), but rather upon the idea of the covenant between God and his people.”

Another author who takes a rather negative view of Calvin on this subject is Selderhuis, who states, “That he did not much care for women can almost be seen in his appearance. As far as he was concerned, marriage was unnecessary, although he did oppose required [sic: compulsory] celibacy.” It is unclear how someone’s appearance can reveal such a lack of interest in women. This chapter will outline the more exten-
sive views of Calvin on marriage and show that he in fact considered marriage to be necessary except for those who had the rare gift of continence.

Calvin did make a significant contribution to the development of Protestant ideas of marriage. Together, the reformers offered a new conception of marriage based on mutual love, founded on affection, friendship, and mutual assistance in all of life; a relationship blessed by God but not sacramental; one to be viewed not solely through the couple but rather through the family as a whole and the place of the marriage in the larger society; and thus a relationship to be understood as part of God’s redemptive plan for the government of the fallen world, to be regulated not by the church but by the civil authorities.4

Erasmus had already paved the way for declining to see marriage as a sacrament. In 1518 he commented on Ephesians 5 in his In Novum Testamentum Annotationes: “Mystérion must be translated as ‘mystery’ and not ‘sacrament’; furthermore, the mystery refers to the union of Christ and the Church and not to marriage.” Luther and Calvin echoed this line of reasoning in their writings on marriage.

Calvin had a relatively limited experience of marriage, but he did write about it in his commentaries and speak about it in his sermons. Moreover, as a minister and member of the Consistory, he had to deal with many pastoral problems involving married people. This chapter will not deal in detail with divorce or its regulations. These are dealt with in an excellent way by Robert M. Kingdon in Adultery and Divorce in Calvin’s Geneva.6 The social conventions in Geneva are dealt with by John Witte and Robert Kingdon in their book Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage, Volume 1 of Sex, Marriage, and Family in Calvin’s Geneva.7 My emphasis is more on what Calvin preached to his congregation and what he wrote in his commentaries in considering the bodily and sexual aspects of marriage.

Calvin’s Own Marriage

Although Calvin had been in favor of marriage in the abstract since he joined the Protestant cause, he did not personally endeavor to find a wife until 1539, when he was almost thirty years old. Initially, it seems to have been more the wish of his friends in Strasbourg, and especially Bucer, than any urgent need for himself.8

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to that he either was a student, or had a somewhat unsettled life, having had to flee France in 1535. He does not seem to have been in the company of women very often. His mother had died when Calvin was very young (six years) and he did not see much of his sisters during his years of study. He did, from time to time, send remembrances to the mothers or sisters of his correspondents, so he must have had at least a superficial acquaintance with some women. In his younger days, when he was still on the path towards becoming a priest, he may have avoided their company in the tradition of advice given to celibate clerics:

Who sees too much of women’s charms
His morals and his conscience harms;
He cannot worship God aright
Who finds in women great delight. 9

The advice to avoid women has a long history. A medieval monk, Roger de Caen, expressed it very bluntly: “There is no plague which monks should dread more than woman: the soul’s death.” 10 It was also advised by rabbis such as Jose ben Johanan (1st Cent. B.C.): “Talk not much with womankind.” 11 Calvin was, however, acquainted with some ladies of the nobility, notably Renée de France (the Duchess of Ferrara), Jeanne d’Albret, and Marguerite of Angoulême and did talk and correspond with them. 12 It was only when he was in Strasbourg, after his first tumultuous time in Geneva, that Calvin had opportunity to see Protestant Christian marriage in practice. Bucer, at whose urging he had come to Strasbourg, was happily married himself and keen to see Calvin married also. 13 However, his correspondence with Farel in February 1540 shows that he himself was far from averse to the idea: “Nevertheless, in the midst of such commotions as these, I am so much at ease, as to have the audacity to think of taking a wife.” 14 After the first candidate was rejected and the second was in consideration, he expressed his hope cautiously: “Nevertheless, I make myself look very foolish if it shall so happen that my hope again fall through.” 15

15. Ibid., “Quanquam ridiculum me facio si contigerit me ista spe decidere.” (CO 11:12).
After negotiations with these prospective brides had foundered, Calvin finally married in August 1540. Calvin’s requirements for a wife sound rather prosaic. This is what he had instructed his friend Farel:

“But always keep in mind what I seek to find in her; for I am none of those insane lovers who embrace also the vices of those they are in love with, where they are smitten at first sight with a fine figure. This only is the beauty which allures me, if she is chaste, if not too nice or fastidious, if economical, if patient, if there is hope that she will be interested about my health…”[16]

However, considering how Calvin’s life turned out, these qualities were precisely the ones he needed in a wife. Marriage was mostly a practical matter, as Kingdon put it: “Clearly the sixteenth century did not believe in love matches or in marriage based on infatuation. Love was expected to follow marriage, and to grow and deepen in the succeeding years.”[17] Romantic love as a basis for marriage did not become common until the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. In Calvin’s time, the thinking and practice about marriage was more like it still is in some of today’s Asian societies: “Westerners marry because they love one another, Asians love one another because they are united in marriage. Marital love, for them, is often born after marriage.”[18] But even if romantic love was not seen as a necessary prelude to marriage, romantic love within marriage was regarded as something positive.[19] So it seems to have been for Calvin.

Calvin’s bride was Idelette de Bure, who had been widowed the previous spring. When Farel met Idelette, he considered her to be not only virtuous and honorable, but actually beautiful,[20] so that turned out to be a bonus for Calvin, who was not, after all his protestations to the contrary, immune to female beauty. Commenting on the Ephesians 5:27 phrase “not having spot or wrinkle,” he even admits that “the wife’s beautiful figure is a cause of love.”[21] In the Congrégation he also teaches that, although it is possible for a man to look at a woman with a chaste eye, the devil can use the sight of a beautiful woman to tempt a man to lust and fornication.[22]

Idelette brought two children to the marriage. Apart from greetings from his wife to his correspondents, or mention of her being sick, Calvin did not write much about her or their marriage. In a letter to Farel, Calvin recounts the dying of the First Syndic, Amy Porral, who was visited by Idelette: “... when my wife arrived, he told her to be of good courage whatever might happen, that she ought to consider that she had not been rashly led hither, but brought by the wonderful counsel of God, that she might serve in the Gospel.” Calvin does not specify by which means Idelette served in the Gospel, but it may well have been in the visitation of parishioners. About a month after this deathbed visit, Idelette was prematurely delivered of a son. It is strange that Selderhuis introduces the paragraph describing the difficult, premature birth and subsequent death of their son by saying, “Calvin and his wife experienced pleasant things together as well.” There was nothing pleasant about that experience except the initial joy of the birth. Idelette was never again in good health. Calvin mentions her illness again in a letter to Farel:

I have a mind to set about writing several things, but as my wife is now in ill health, not without danger, my attention is otherwise engaged.

After a few weeks, their baby, Jacques, died, which was a great sorrow to them both. Calvin wrote to Viret:

Greet all the brethren; ... and your wife, to whom mine returns her thanks for so much friendly and pious consolation. She is unable to reply, except by amanuensis, and it would be very difficult for her even to dictate a letter. The Lord has certainly inflicted a severe and bitter wound in the death of our infant son. But he is himself a Father, and knows best what is good for his children.

Calvin mentions his “little daughter” in 1544 laboring under “a continual fever.” It appears she did not survive either. In 1546 mention is made of another child who “died in the birth,” according to Beveridge and Bonnet. Idelette herself died in
March 1549. Calvin was devastated. He writes of “this heavy affliction, which would certainly have overcome me, had not he, who raises up the prostrate, strengthens the weak, and refreshes the weary, stretched forth his hand from heaven to me.”

Considering the illnesses of both Calvin and his wife, it cannot be supposed that they had many occasions to delight in each other. Calvin may have been writing autobiographically when he stated, “For if a wife falls into a long, drawn-out illness, nevertheless, that does not give the husband justification for seeking another wife,” nor for the wife if the husband should become sick. The marriage partners should seek God’s help if things go wrong. Sickness was no excuse for divorce. Beza referred to Idelette as Calvin’s “most excellent wife” when he mentioned her death, and told of the loss Calvin bore “with a firmness which made him in this respect also a shining example to the whole church.”

Gordon has asserted: “One comment in Beza’s biography has not served Calvin well, and that was the suggestion that he and Idelette had a sexless marriage, adhering to chastity.” This is an unfortunate remark in an otherwise excellent biography. “Chastity” has three basic meanings in French and Latin, as well as in English. The first is abstinence from sex, the second is sexual faithfulness, and the third is moral purity in thought and deed, though not necessarily in that order. Beza did not mean to suggest that Calvin and his wife had a sexless marriage, but that they were faithful and pure in their marital relations. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day echoes the various meanings of chastity and what it means to be chaste, whether married or single.

Calvin the Matchmaker

Calvin was quite a keen matchmaker, at least initially. When he proved not to be always successful, he gave up on it. But back in 1546, when Pierre Viret’s wife died, Calvin went to quite some lengths to help him find another wife. He writes to Mr de Falais to seek his help in finding a wife for Viret, saying, “I am well aware that, for your part, knowing of how much consequence the marriage of such a man is for the Church of God, you would not spare yourself any pains therein.” Married clergy are

29. SW, 5:219, 11th April 1549. “...in hac tanta calamitate, quae certe me fregisset, nisi manum e coelo porrexisset is cuius officium est erigere prostratos, debiles confirmare, lassos reficere.” (CO 13:229 gives date as 2nd April).
33. See Witte & Kingdon, Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage, 100-107.
seen as a benefit to the Church of God. At one time Calvin described a certain widow under consideration as follows: “a widow as well endowed as I could have wished for myself if God had so far afflicted me as to have deprived me of my helpmate, and that there was a necessity for my marrying again…” This at least proves that he envisaged re-marriage if he should lose Idelette. Although he encouraged Viret to remarry, Calvin himself never remarried.

Calvin the Widower

The awareness of Calvin’s own feeble state of health made him realize, were he to marry again, he would not be able to give much joy to his wife. He admitted as much in a sermon preached in 1554, “I am aware of my infirmity, perhaps a wife would not find herself well contented with me.” In his Corinthians Commentary he gives equal rights to widows and widowers to remarry, but he himself refrains from doing so. On 1 Timothy 5:9 he comments, “Not that he [Paul] disapproves of second marriages or attaches any kind of stigma to those who have contracted them; he rather encourages the younger widows to marry again, but he wanted to be very careful in avoiding the imposition of an enforced chastity on women who needed husbands.” His interpretation of Paul at this point is the opposite of Tertullian’s, who saw a second marriage as being less in accordance with the will of God, detrimental to faith, and obstructive to holiness.

It is possible that Calvin was just too busy to give the matter of a second marriage much thought. He did continue to take a lively interest in Viret’s family. Viret’s second wife bore him four daughters and a son. In countless letters to Viret he sends best wishes to his wife and little daughters. The reader is inclined to think that Calvin would have liked to have had some children of his own, even though he counted as his spiritual children the “myriads of sons throughout the Christian world.”

To Monsieur de Falais he writes, “I am sorry that I cannot be with you for

35. SW, 5:80, Letter to Monsieur de Falais dated 16th November 1546. “... une vefve daussi bonnes conditions que ie vouldrois souhaitter pour moy, quant Dieu mauroit afflige iusque la que de mavoir destitue de ma compaignie, et qu'il me fauldroit remarier...” (CO 12:420).
36. Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:1-4. “De moy, ie ne veux point qu'on m'attribution à vertu si ie ne suis point marié: plusost c'est un vice en moy, si ie pouvoye mieux servir à Dieu en mariage que de demeurer comme ie suis, ie ne crain point que ie ne puisse protester devant Dieu et les hommes, que ie ne fusse marié. Mais ie cognoy mon ininfirmité, que peut estre une femme ne se trouveroit pas bien avec moy.” (CO 53:255).
39. Two daughters and a son died of the plague in Lausanne and two more daughters as well as his second wife died of the plague in France. Robert D. Linder, “Forgotten Reformer” Christian History 20:3 (2001), 37.
40. “Balduin twits me with my want of offspring. God had given me a son. God hath taken my little boy. This he reckons up among my misdeeds, that I have no children. I have myriads of sons throughout
at least half of a day, to laugh with you while we wait for a smile from the little infant, under the penalty of bearing with his cries and tears.”

Another possible reason for not marrying again may lie in the fact that Calvin did not think there would be anyone worthy of replacing Idelette. When writing Concerning Scandals (1550), he wrote, “It is now eighteen months since the death of my wife, a woman of matchless type, and ever since I have again been practicing celibacy, and not unwillingly.” Living with the memory of the ‘matchless’ Idelette made him immune to the charms of any other woman.

Childbirth

Perhaps the memory of the many anxieties concerning Idelette’s pregnancies and illnesses also made the thought of a second marriage unwelcome. Childbirth was, and was seen as, a dangerous ordeal, part of the burden of being a wife, also by Calvin: “When [Paul] speaks of bearing children, he sums up in one phrase all the annoyances comprised in rearing offspring, and, … under ruling the household he includes all the duties of housewifery.” Calvin had no romanticized view of motherhood! To Monsieur de Falais, whose wife was expecting, Calvin wrote, “And seeing that the time of the trial of Madame draws near, we shall remember her in prayer for her happy delivery.” Calvin is aware of how much damage pregnancy can do to a woman. When he comments on Sarah’s beauty even at the age of 65 he writes that “her sterility availed to preserve her beauty, and to keep her whole habit of body entire, for there is nothing which more debilitates females than frequent parturition.” Unless he discussed these matters with Dr Textor, Calvin could have known them only from personal experience with Idelette or through observation of other women.


41. SW, 5:137 Letter to Monsieur de Falais dated 16th August 1547. “Il me fait mal que ie ne puys la estre avecque vous du moings ung demy iour, pour rire avecque vous, en attendant que lon face rire le petit enfant en payne dendurer ce pendant quil crye et pleure.” (CO 12:578).


When describing the death of Rachel in childbirth, Calvin ascribes her difficulty to the “fatigue of the journey.” He does not link her death directly to Jacob’s pronouncement to Laban: “If you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live” (Genesis 31:32). Calvin thinks God punished Jacob for being too much in love with his beautiful wife:

This fault in the holy man was cured by a bitter medicine, when his wife was taken away from him: and the Lord often deprives the faithful of his own gifts, to correct their perverse abuse of them. [...] Whoever, therefore, desires the continuous use of God’s gifts, let him learn not to abuse them, but to enjoy them with purity and sobriety.

Did Calvin include himself in this generalization? We cannot tell. When he describes Rachel’s trial, he notes that “she was completely oppressed with pain. She died therefore in agonies, thinking of nothing but her sad childbirth and her own sorrows.” It would be unreasonable to expect a woman to think of anything else while being in the throes of both giving birth and dying, but Calvin faults her for not being thankful for having a son and for giving him a sad name. This seems rather peevish, since he knows that a woman can suffer “exquisite pain” in giving birth. In his sermon on Luke 1:52-55 he shows his appreciation for the miracle of birth: “When I came out of my mother’s womb, did he not draw me forth as by a miracle?”

Clinical anatomists read female genitalia through the lens of the normative male body, confirming text-based conclusions from antiquity that women were an inferior, imperfect version of men. Yet female genitalia were still problematic; a confusing, complicated, and imperfect parallel for equivalent male reproductive organs. Early modern gynecological knowledge presented difficulties for physicians because it could not be personally experienced or understood.

On the subject of twins, Calvin seems to have some unusual views. First, he thinks that Cain and Abel were twins on the grounds that Moses does not repeat the words “and she conceived.” However, elsewhere in his exegesis he admits that the writers of Scripture do not always tell us everything that happens. The birth of twins is seen as a good thing in the case of Cain and Abel because the world needed to become inhabited. Calvin writes that “the heart of Adam was divinely confirmed, so that he did not shrink with horror from the production of offspring.” There is no reason why he should have been horrified. He may have deduced from the animal world that mating resulted in offspring, but intercourse in itself was not horrifying. At that point he had only seen animals being born with relative ease, and although God had predicted that Eve would have pains in childbearing, that was only an abstract notion at the time. Cain’s birth was the first human birth he would witness.

The next twins to be mentioned in the Bible are Esau and Jacob. Here again, Calvin’s exegesis exceeds what is warranted in the text. Commenting on Genesis 25:22, he states that the struggle of the twins occasions the mother such grief that she wishes for death. And no wonder; for she thinks that it would be a hundred times better for her to die, than that she have within her the horrible prodigy of twin-brothers, shut up in her womb, carrying on intestine war. They, therefore, are mistaken who attribute this complaint to female impatience, since it was not so much extorted by pain or torture, as by abhorrence of the prodigy. For she doubtless perceived that this conflict did not arise from natural causes, but was a prodigy portending some dreadful and tragic end.

The Bible does not say that Rebekah wished for death, nor that she thought something horrible was about to occur because she was carrying twins. She just asks, “Why is this happening to me?” Calvin associates twins with a portent, or omen of evil. In the case of Tamar’s twins, Perez and Zerah, Calvin sees it as a judgment:

The Lord, in order to humble them, caused a prodigy to take place in the birth. [...] we know that prodigies sometimes portend good, sometimes evil. Here, however, there is no doubt that the twins, in their very birth, bring with them the marks of their parents’ infamy.

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52. For example, the Bible only once mentions that Isaac “prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren.” But Calvin infers, quite reasonably in fact, that these prayers continued for many years until Isaac was sixty years old and finally became a father. *Commentary Genesis*, 2:42.
It is not clear how the two boys could show the infamy of their parents just by being twins. The word translated as “prodigy” (monstrum) is in other places by other authors translated as “monster.” Normal twins were not usually designated as “monsters.” That term was confined to conjoined twins, babies with two heads or with other deformities. Why Calvin should use that term to describe normal twins is a mystery. Calvin attributes miscarriages and birth defects to sin. God has decreased his benediction with respect to fruitfulness, even though it is not altogether extinguished. Calvin knows that birth can come as suddenly as death on the wicked: the mother knows she has to give birth, but she knows neither the hour nor the minute. Calvin wonders how the baby can be nourished during the nine months. He only infrequently uses the word ‘womb’ (matrice) and far more often ‘belly’ or ‘stomach’ (ventre). The way he speaks about pregnancy suggests that he did not know that the womb is a distinct organ separate from the belly:

How were you created? How were you begotten in the belly of your mother where you took form? How were you carried there and nourished for the space of nine months? How did you come out in the end? [...] When we consider the corruption and filth, how may such a little creature be begotten? Nevertheless, it takes form, as we see that our body is styled. And how is it that a child could be nourished there, considering the infection and foulness in the mother’s belly amid all the excrement and still be able to draw nourishment from it? And that he should be able to grow so that he can come into the world?

That any healthy child could result from all this is cause for Calvin to ascribe glory to God for his miraculous provisions: we should confess that God is wonderful in all his works. Calvin may have been less informed about female anatomy than some of his contemporaries. A woodcut dating from 1506 shows a live infant being surgically extracted:

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55. See Katherine Crawford and Susan Broomhall in *A Cultural History*, 62, 72, 85 and the illustration on 86, and 94-5.
56. Sermon 6 on Genesis, “Et au reste, l’inegalité que nous voions, que les hommes n’engendreront pas tous et que tous les enfans sortans du ventre de la mere ne sont pas tous semblables, qu’il y en aura d’aucuns qui seront desja caduques et comme tendans au sepuilchre, qu’il y en aura mesmes de tortus, de borgnes, d’aveugles, de bossus et de boiteux, cognaissons que tout cela procede du peché. Que tout ce qui est comme defiguré et maleficié, Dieu en cela monstre que sa benediction est amoindrie, combien qu’elle ne soit pas esteinte du tout.” CS XI/1, 65.
57. Sermon 52 on Deuteronomy. “Quand ils penseront avoir complotté avec la mort: les voila saisis, comme une femme qui ne doute point qu’elle doyve enfanter, elle ne sait l’heure ne la minute.” (CO 26:530).
58. Sermon 151 on Job 39:1-2. “Comment est-ce que tu as esté créé? Quand tu as esté engendré au ventre de ta mere, que tu as prins forme: comment est-ce que tu as là esté porté et nourri par l’espace de neuf mois? Comment en la fin es-tu sorti? Pourrois-tu determiner de toutes ces choses? [...] Qu’est-ce qu’une petite creature soit engendree, voire de corruption et ordure: et cependant qu’elle prenne forme, comme nous voyons que nostre corps est figure? Et puis qu’est-ce qu’un enfant soit là nourri en infection et puantise au ventre de la mere parmi tous les excremens: et qu’il tire substance toutes fois: et qu’il soit si bien grossi qu’il ait le moyen de venir au monde?” (CO 35:409).
59. Ibid. “Ainso donc apprenons de faire nostre profit de ceste doctrine: sur tout pour confesser que Dieu est admirable en toutes ses oeuvres...” (CO 35:413).
removed from a dead woman. In c. 1510 Leonardo da Vinci produced a drawing showing the fetus in a womb, not in the stomach. This, and other Caesarean sections known to have taken place, would have informed people of the structure of the womb separate from the stomach. This knowledge was not yet widely disseminated.

In contrast with Aristotle, and Aquinas after him, Calvin nowhere implies that the female body is inferior, or a defective male, but he seems to have suffered from the general ignorance of its workings and structure.

Another mystery for Calvin is the question of how the infant in his mother’s womb can breathe. He has a rather simplistic solution:

The life of man consists of air. If someone suffocates us, we’re done for. Well, it’s true that little children in their mother’s belly have some kind of respiration, but by which means? Via the navel.

It is unclear how he envisages this breathing through the navel. As for the actual birth process, he is very much aware of the pain and effort involved. When he preaches on Galatians 4:19, he speaks as follows:

Look how he speaks with both severity and great love. Paul is not content to present himself as a father to them, who in any case has a tender love towards his children, but he says that he is like a mother in labor and anguish. However much pain she feels, she loves the child that must leave her belly more than she does her own womb and her life. When St Paul uses this image, he certainly knew how to declare himself more affectionate, so that he would break the hardness of the hearts he was addressing, or to mollify them. But however that may be, he does not flatter them when he reproaches them for their wickedness of not at all knowing their mother who gives them birth and who has nourished them with her own substance and blood...
He also seems to think that the mother’s blood is converted into milk for the baby. On the subject of milk, Calvin is all in favor of mothers breast-feeding their own children, rather than employing a wet-nurse. Mothers should willingly devote themselves to nurse their children.

It is true that we don’t see that in all mothers: for there are many of these soft and delicate women who will not at all take the trouble for their children, so that a wet-nurse will have greater affection for those children who are not their own, than their own mothers.

Preaching on 1 Timothy 5:10 about the good works that widows should be known for, Calvin takes ‘brought up’ to mean ‘nursed’ or ‘breast-fed,’ which is one of the more narrow meanings of the verb ἐτεκνοτρόφησεν. He therefore argues that women, if they are to be put in the office of widows, should not have been like those “delicate ladies who say, ‘Look, I cannot nurse my child, if I hear it cry, I would die of sorrow, I cannot endure the pain.’ Off to the wet-nurses, to the wet-nurses, as soon as the child has left the belly.” He also asks, “Does a woman know that God obliges her to nurse her children?”

Sarah joins the office of nurse with that of mother; for the Lord does not in vain prepare nutriment for children, in their mother’s bosoms, before they are born. But those on whom he confers the honour of mothers, he, in this way, constitutes nurses; and who they deem it a hardship to nourish their own offspring, break, as far as they are able, the sacred bond of nature. If disease, or anything of that kind, is the hindrance, they have a just excuse; but for mothers voluntarily, and for their own pleasure, to avoid the trouble of nursing, and thus to make themselves only half-mothers, is a shameful corruption.

It is not the case that Calvin despises nurses as such. Obviously, it is better to be nursed by a wet-nurse than to be starved to death. He often compares God’s ways...
with humankind to that of a kindly nurse who accommodates herself to her small charges. He points out that Paul “compares himself (and not without cause) to a nurse who will support a little child, and who will spare nothing in order to show the love that she bears him.” Calvin knows the difference between a bad and a good nurse:

Let’s take the case of a nurse who may be a chatterbox, and a drunkard. Well, she may be able to gossip a lot, she may make a pretense, so that it seems that she is the most careful of her child in the world. But what? If she is an intemperate drunkard and gossip, and if, instead of sleeping at night she gives herself over to debauchery so that she has no milk at all, then the poor child is not nourished at all. By contrast, she who willingly works and who will take nourishment and substance with her ordinary rest, she will be able to nurse her child.

He also knows it is no mean thing to be up and about day and night, to endure cold and heat in order to give the baby the breast. But a believing woman will know that God ordains it and approves of it as a sweet smelling sacrifice.

Calvin was not alone in advocating breast-feeding. Francesco Barbaro, Juan Luis Vives, and Erasmus all advocated for mothers to breast-feed their own children. If the mother herself could not, then she “must select with great care a healthy, virtuous nurse lest her child be corrupted in body and mind by impure nourishment.” It was considered that the milk of the noble and well-born mother was “more delicate than a nurse’s of low rank and more suitable for the breeding of fine gentlemen.”

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70. See, for example, Sermon 17 on Titus 3:8-15. “Mais quand nostre Seigneur condescend à nostre rudesse, et qu’il nous instruit privenement, non seulement comme un pere ses petis enfans, mais comme une mere nourrice qui begaye, afin qu’elle soit entendue par celuy qui n’a point encoren bonne intelligence.” (CO 54:58). See also CO 53:155, et al, and F.L. Battles, “God was Accommodating Himself to Our Capacity,” Interpretation 31 (1977), 19-38. Reprinted in Interpreting John Calvin, pp. 117-137.

71. Sermon 15 on Galatians 3:3-3. “il s’accompare (et non sans cause) à une nourrice qui supportera un petit enfant, et qui n’espagnera rien pour montrer l’amour qu’elle luy porte.” (CO 50:458).

72. Sermon 31 on 1 Timothy 4:6-7. “Comme prenons le cas qu’il y ait une nourrice qui soit une babilarde, et une yvrongnesse: et bien, elle pourra caqueter beaucoup, elle pourra faire des mines, qu’il semblera qu’elle soit la plus songneuse du monde apres son enfant. Mais quoi? si est-ce que c’est une yvrongnesse pleine d’intemperance et de babil, et qu’au lieu de dormir de nuict, elle sera addonnee à paillardes tellement qu’elle n’aura point de laict, et le povre enfant ne sera point nourri. Au contraire, celle qui travaillera volontiers, et cependant prendra nourriture et substance avec son repos ordinaire, elle pourra aussi nourrir son enfant.” (CO 53:376).

73. Sermon 19 on 1 Timothy 2:13-15. “si elle est nourrice, qu’elle soit nuict et iour debout, qu’elle endure froid et chaud pour leur donner la mammelle, que si elle supporte cela patiemment, sachant que c’est que Dieu ordonne, et qu’il approuve, cela luy est un sacrifice de bonne odeur.” (CO 53:228).

74. Hugh Cunningham, Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500 (London: Longman, 1995), 52. “Both humanist and Protestant writings firmly advocated breast-feeding, and in society as a whole it was undoubtedly the norm. If there were exceptions they were to be found mainly amongst the rich, but there are numerous records of mothers in this group who did breast-feed and took pride in it.”

75. Margaret L. King in A Cultural History, 244.


77. Ibid.
Writing and Preaching on Marriage

Since God is the Author of marriage, it is therefore a sacred bond, not to be despised. How did Calvin view the marriage relationship? He saw it as hierarchical: the husband was to rule over the wife, though gently, and the wife was to be submissive to her husband. He closely follows Paul in asserting that the creation order prescribes this hierarchy. He uses the argument of nature, as he understands it, to say that

[W]omen by nature, (that is, by the ordinary law of God) are born to obey, for all wise men have always rejected γυναικοκρατίαν, the government of women, as an unnatural monstrosity. Thus for a woman to usurp the right to teach would be a sort of mingling of earth and heaven. Thus he bids them be silent and abide within the limits of their sex.78

Calvin sees “the order of nature” or “the natural order” as God’s creation order, where his glory shines forth.79 Therefore, what seems unnatural to him has to be contrary to God’s will. Note the all-inclusive tone of “all men” and “always” in the quotation above. Of course, when Elizabeth came to the throne in England (1558) and promoted the Protestant cause rather than the Catholic one as her predecessor had done, he had to modify his opinion and say that in exceptional cases God did allow government by a woman! In 1559 he writes to William Cecil that “her most excellent majesty, the queen, has been raised to the throne in a wonderful manner by the hand of God…”80 In a subsequent letter to Cecil he was forced to defend himself from being associated with John Knox’s book The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, written against Mary Queen of Scots and published in 1558. But in ordinary circumstances and in the domestic sphere of marriage, according to Calvin, a husband is to rule over his wife:

Woman was created later to be a kind of appendage to the man on the express condition that she should be ready to obey him. Thus, since God did not create two ‘heads’ of equal standing, but added to the man a lesser helpmate, the apostle is right to remind us of the order of their creating in which God’s eternal and inviolable appointment is clearly displayed.81

The Genesis text does not apply the adjective “lesser” to the noun “helpmeet” in respect of the woman. Indeed, when the term ezer is applied to God himself it does not have a hint of servitude or subjection.\(^{82}\) The helper is to be ‘corresponding to him’ or ‘suitable for him.’ However, Calvin argues that obedience was Eve’s natural condition from the beginning. The “order of nature implies that the woman should be the helper of man.”\(^{83}\) This does not quite agree with what he later wrote, commenting on Malachi (1560), “the wife is to become as it were the half part of the man”\(^{84}\) and on The Harmony of the Law (1563): “the wife who is as his very life, or at any rate half of himself.”\(^{85}\) Half implies two parts of equal standing. This slight movement towards equality appears to have come late in life. However, in his sermon on Genesis 3:14-16, Calvin says nothing about subjection being a woman’s lot from the beginning. God’s judgment after the Fall is:

He tells her that he will increase her sorrows in conceiving children and that she will be subject to her husband. It is as if he said, ‘You will no longer be at liberty, but it will be necessary that your punishment shows that you are not worthy to govern yourself by your own wisdom. Your husband will have to have the rule over you, inasmuch as you have subjected yourself to Satan and to a brute beast, of which you should have been afraid. Therefore, in that you have subjected yourself in this way, you will lose your freedom, and from now on all your affections relate to your husband, that is to say that you depend on him and that he governs you, and that you should be subject to him.’\(^{86}\)

Here Calvin implies that before the Fall, Eve was not in subjection. But in the very next sermon, Calvin puts these words in God’s mouth: “... when you have even preferred the woman, who was subject to you and who was inferior to you, to your Creator, did you not pervert the whole order of nature?”\(^{87}\) Also in the commentaries Calvin teaches that woman was always meant to be in subjection. After Eve’s sin, obedience became servitude; “the subjection became less voluntary than it had been before.”\(^{88}\) In Juan Luis Vives’ *De institutione foeminae Christianae* (1523) we see the

\(^{82}\) See Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:7; 29; Ps. 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 115:9, 10, 11; 121:1, 2; 124:8; 146:5; et al.
\(^{86}\) *SC* Vol. XI/1, 206. “C’est autant comme s’il disoit: ‘Tu ne seras plus en liberté, mais il faudra que ta punition monstre que tu n’es pas digne de te gouverner par ta propre prudence. Il faudra donc que ton mari ait la conduite sur toy, d’autant que tu t’es assujettie à Satan et à une brute brute, dont tu devois avoir horreur. D’autant donc que tu t’es ainsi assujettie, tu perdras ta liberté, et dès maintenant il faudra que tu rapportes toutes tes affections à ton mari, c’est à dire que tu dependes de lui et qu’il te gouverne, et que tu lui sois sujette.’”
\(^{87}\) *SC* Vol. XI/1, 209. “... et mesmes que tu as préféré la femme à ton créateur, laquelle t’estoit sujette et qui estoit inferieure à toy, n’as-tu pas perverti tout l’ordre de nature?”
\(^{88}\) *Comm. iTimothy*, 218. (1548) “ut iam minus liberalis sit subjectio quam prius fuisset.” (CO 52:277).
model of a Christian wife being chaste, modest, silent, submissive, hard-working, soberly dressed, pious and longsuffering. Maclean comments, “Such works, [i.e. like Vives’] which are impregnated with a distrust of women’s weak nature and her propensity to evil and to sinful passions, appear if anything more repressive than pagan texts on this topic.”

We have no direct evidence how this ideal of subjection worked out in practice in the Calvin marriage. There are references in Calvin’s writings on the need for husbands to be gentle with their wives. Paul “confirms the subjection of wives by the authority of God. He requires from husbands that they be not bitter, because there is a danger lest they should abuse their rule by tyranny.” But even if Calvin was gentle and considerate in his husbandly “rule” there is no doubt that Idellette did not have an easy time being married to a workaholic who was constantly besieged by people needing advice or help. In his Genesis commentary Calvin declares:

The woman is given as a companion and an associate to the man, to assist him to live well. …For if the integrity of man had remained to this day such as it was from the beginning, that divine institution would be clearly discerned, and the sweetest harmony would reign in marriage; because the husband would look up with reverence to God; the woman in this would be a faithful assistant to him; and both, with one consent, would cultivate a holy, as well as friendly and peaceful intercourse.

There was a shift in thinking about marriage during the Renaissance: a greater emphasis was placed on the notion of companionship: “Calvin’s emphasis on companionship and mutuality in marriage represented a significant shift in the Christian understanding of the conjugal bond.” The woman was not just a servant or bedfellow, but a companion. The husband is to be the head and leader of the wife and she is to be the “inseparable associate of his life.” After marriage, a man’s prime loyalty is to be to his wife, no longer to his parents. All the troubles, strife and disharmony that Calvin perceives in marriages arise from the effects of the Fall. Prior to the Fall, the woman had been in subjection to her husband, but that was a liberal and gentle subjection, now, after the Fall, she is cast into servitude. Calvin abhors dis-

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cord in marriage: "When the husband and wife do not live in good accord, they are making war against God, as if they wanted to dissolve that sacred bond."96

In his sermon 39 on Ephesians 5:22-26, Calvin mentions wifely subjection 26 times, whereas he mentions the duty of husbandly love only six times.97 This can be seen as a departure from his usual way of preaching. Normally he would address the men in his congregation and neglect to say anything specific to the women. Were the women of Geneva being particularly disobedient? Or did he take it for granted that the husbands knew that they should love their wives? Paul, by contrast, devotes only two verses to wifely duties and nine to husbandly duties. Calvin does not expand much on what the husband’s duties may entail but mentions that he should know how to guide his wife and his household and should use humaneness and gentleness, recognizing her fragility. He does say that cruelty and tyranny are not part of the duties. Cruelty would be an abuse of his authority. The aim should be to have a peaceful, orderly household in which friendship reigns. Such would have been the case if sin had not entered the world.

In spite of the stated ideal of gentleness that Calvin preached, the consistory had to deal with a number of cases where husbands beat their wives. They were reprimanded and told to live peaceably with each other. Wife abuse was "subject to increasingly firm sanctions in later years."98 Calvin did advise wives to bear with their husbands if they were violent towards them and allowed them only to “desert chronically abusive husbands who posed grave threats to their bodies and souls, provided that these women gave adequate notice of their intentions.”99 This advice was given in the context of a discussion of desertion and assumed that the spouse was an unbeliever. Witte and Kingdom comment on the theology of mixed marriages as follows: “Those who sought to escape such mixed marriages should be strongly dissuaded, though they could not ultimately be prevented from separating from spouses whose abuse imperiled the body and soul of the believing spouse.”100 If both were believers, the spouses were expected to mend their ways and put up with each other. To modern ears, this advice seems rather harsh and disrespectful of the sanctity of life. After all, a woman may not realize she is in mortal danger until a second before the fatal blow is struck.

Calvin is quite adamant that most people have not been given the gift of continence, and they should be prepared to make use of the God-given remedy of marriage. He sees the sin of Adam as having been marked especially in what he calls “the intemperance of the flesh.” Unless someone has been given the special gift, he should make use of the gift of marriage, provided for those who cannot abstain from sexual

96. Sermon 12 on Genesis. “Et quand le mary et la femme ne vivent point en bonne concorde, ilz font la guerre à Dieu, comme s’ilz vouloient dissouldre ce lien sacré.” SC Vol. XI/1, p.140.
97. Calvin began preaching on Ephesians in May 1558. Sermon 39 is found in CO 51:735-46.
98. Witte and Kingdom, Courtship, 77.
99. Ibid., 425.
100. Ibid., 355.
intercourse. In the commentary on 1 Corinthians, Calvin follows Paul closely in advocating the possibility of celibacy for those who have the gift of continence and marriage for those who do not have this gift. Fornication is to be avoided because it defiles the Temple of the Holy Spirit. He considers it a temptation of Satan to think that a life without intercourse is more holy. This opinion is in contrast to that of the Roman Catholics, who praised celibacy and forbade the marriage of priests and monks but hypocritically turned a blind eye to those many priests and monks who lived with a woman outside of marriage, or seduced other men’s wives. One writer considers that it was the “great majority of priests” who were “living with concubines” at the end of the fifteenth century. In the Actes de Ratisbonne (1541) the reader finds arguments against the forbidding of marriage for priests, monks, and nuns in the Roman Catholic Church. It is seen as a fulfillment of St Paul’s prophecy (1 Timothy 4:3) that the Catholics forbade marriage. The Acts argue that ministers of the Gospel should be free to marry, or not to marry. In 1555 Calvin explains it in strong terminology:

If anyone imagines that it is to his advantage to be without a wife and so without further consideration decides to be celibate, he is very much in error. For God, who declared that it was good that the woman should be the help meet for man, will exact punishment for contempt of His ordinance. Men arrogate too much to themselves when they try to exempt themselves from their heavenly calling.

Other Catholic practices to which Calvin was opposed were secret marriages, treating marriage as a sacrament, the large list of impediments to marriage, the prohibition of divorce, and the discouragement of remarriage after being widowed.

101. “l’intemperance de la chair [...] sinon qu’il nous preserve d’un don special, comme il est dit, que ceci n’est pas donne a tous [...] il y a le remede de mariage, pour ceux qui ne se peuvent abstenir.” (CO 26:342).
102. See Concerning Scandals, 102-106, (CO 8:72-75) and ibid., “But what Sodom was ever crammed with so many filthy monstrosities as today swarm the brothels of the monks?” 86. “Quae autem Sodoma tot unquam foeditatum monstris referta fuit, quot hodie scatent monarchorum lustra?” (CO 8:61). See also Kingdon, “The Reformation and the Family,” 14.
104. “... on ne pourra plus differer de laisser le mariage libre à tous ministres ecclesiastiques, à ce que chacun selon la grace qui luy sera faicte, et sa vocation, vive ou en mariage ou sans se marier, et ainsi qu’il puisse servir à son Eglise en bonne conscience et sans Offense.” (CO 5:601).
106. “Secret marriages, however, were presumptively valid. Neither the couple nor their parents could have their marriages annulled just because they had been contracted without parental consent. Calvin came to this position on secret marriages only reluctantly in later life, aware that he was now closer to traditional Catholic teachings than to the teachings of some other Protestants.” Witte and Kingdon,
On the famous Pauline passage on marriage in First Corinthians, chapter 7, Calvin defends himself for dealing with such a delicate matter as intercourse. One wonders if his own modesty was somewhat offended by his having to comment on Paul’s writing about intercourse. Like Paul, he finds himself to be under the necessity of speaking of these things. On verses 3-5, “Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer,” Calvin comments, Paul knew how everyone is inclined to self-love, and eager to gratify his own pleasure. That is the reason why a husband, having satisfied his passion, not only neglects his wife but even despises her. And there are few who are not sometimes waylaid by this feeling of distaste for their wives. It is for those reasons that Paul deals so anxiously with the mutual obligations of the married life.\(^{107}\)

In commenting on this verse, Calvin may have masturbation in mind when writing of self-love (7:5). There is a Latin verb, *masturbari*, which Calvin could have used, but possibly did not on account of his own modesty. This verb is thought to have come from *manu stuprare*, to defile with the hand, which perhaps sounded more explicit than Calvin intended and so he uses the expression ‘self-love.’ On the eve of the Reformation, masturbation was considered an ‘unnatural act’ requiring confession.\(^{108}\) Calvin condemns masturbation because it involves neglect of one’s wife. If by ‘self-love’ he means making love in a selfish way, instead of masturbation, then that could result in the supposed distaste for the wife, which is what appalls Calvin. Either some men confided this feeling to Calvin or he knew from his own experience in marriage. Luther had similar thoughts on sexual passions: “Now, after sin, we all know how great passion is in the flesh, which is not only passionate in its desire but also in its disgust after it has acquired what it wanted.”\(^{109}\) Luther was considerably more open about his private life than Calvin.\(^{110}\)

The mutual obligation of husband and wife in maintaining fidelity is also stressed in Calvin’s commentary on Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22.

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*Courtship, Engagement and Marriage*, 164. Calvin, and other reformers, held that secret marriages violated the commandment to honor one’s father and mother.

\(^{107}\) *Commentary on Corinthians*, 137. “Deinde sciebat quam sit quisque proclivis in amorem sui, at propriae voluptati deditus: hinc fit ut vir expleta libido uxorem non modo negligat, sed etiam fastidiat: ac rari sunt quibus non interdum obrepat hoc uxorem fastidium. Ob has causas tam anxie de mutua coniugii obligatione disserit: quasi diceret, si quando coniugatis veniat in mentem coelibatum expetere, quia sanctior sit, aut vagis libidinibus stimulentur: meminerint se devinctos esse mutuo nexu.” (CO 49:403).


\(^{109}\) *Luther’s Works*, Volume 1 Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St Louis: Concordia, 1958), 62.

\(^{110}\) “Luther gloried in his marriage and gloried in his family and let the world know it. In fact, he gloried in them to a degree that faintly embarrasses some of his modern admirers. In private letters he describes the joys of marital sex in clinical detail.” Kingdon, “The Reformation and the Family,” 19.
Although the disloyalty of husband and wife are not punished alike by human tribunals, still, since they are under mutual obligation to each other, God will take vengeance on them both; and hence the declaration of Paul takes effect before the judgment-seat of God, Let not married persons defraud one another; for the wife hath not power over her own body, nor the husband of his. (1 Cor. vii. 4, 5).

Calvin repeatedly contrasts the “men of old” who allowed or encouraged perpetual celibacy in people, even those already married, and who also held up virginity as the greatest of all virtues, with the views of Paul and himself: “Paul expressly directs that those who are married should only deprive each other temporarily.” Calvin stresses that virginity is a gift, one that is not given to everyone. Those without the gift should marry. After the Fall, marriage is not only for the procreation of children, but also a remedy for incontinence. Interestingly, in the Form for the Celebration of Marriage (1542), children are mentioned only indirectly in the final prayer. Calvin also recognized that people may wish to marry for love, comfort and support. This concept includes idea that the husband and wife may have enjoyment of each other’s company and intimacy. But even within marriage Calvin advises people not to make “wrong and unrestrained use of the benefit” of marriage “in order to satisfy their passions anyhow, indeed without limit or sense of shame.” Here again we see his fear of excess, of going beyond bounds, as well as his tendency to be ashamed of the physical aspect of marriage. For Luther also, it was inevitable that shame accompanied sexual intercourse:

If Adam had persisted in the state of innocence, this intimate relationship of husband and wife would have been most delightful. The work of procreation also would have been most sacred and would have been held in esteem. There would not have been that shame stemming from sin which there is now, when parents are compelled to hide in darkness to do this. No less respectability would have attached to cohabitation than there is to sleeping, eating, or drinking with one’s wife.

Calvin claims that Paul “has not recommended intercourse to those who are married, in order to entice them to find delight … but that he had regard for what was called

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111. Harmony of the Law 3:78. “Caeterum quamvis in foro terreno non aeque puniatur viri ac mulieris perfidia: quia tamen mutuo inter se obstricti sunt, utriusque vindex erit Deus. Ideoque apud coeleste tribunal valet Pauli sententia, Ne se invicem fraudent coniuges: quia sicut uxor propiori corporis ius non habet, ita nec vicissim maritus (1. Cor. 7, 4).” (CO 24:649).
114. “… que ayans saincte lignée, ilz te louent et servent…” (CO 6:207). In sixteenth century society in general, “the purposes of marriage were held to be the preservation of the race, mutual aid and comfort, and avoidance of sin, the first usually receiving the most emphasis.” Kelso, Renaissance Lady, 78.
115. Luther’s Works, 1:317.
for by the weakness of the people.” 116 It seems that, in Calvin’s opinion, delight is not a legitimate motive for having intercourse. In the Institutes also, Calvin warns, “Let not married persons think that all things are permitted to them” and “It is fitting that thus wedlock contracted in the Lord be recalled to measure and modesty so as not to wallow in extreme lewdness.”117 However, in the same Institutes he also states that God created many beautiful things for his image bearers to delight in, even though they have no practical or useful purpose. He lists food, clothing, the beauty of flowers and trees, fragrances, wine that gladdens the heart of man, lovely colors, precious metals and other evidence of God’s kindness. These blessings are given to us to delight in “apart from their necessary use.”118 Music also “may minister to our pleasure, rather than to our necessity.”119 Therefore, sexual intercourse should be allowed to delight us apart from the purpose of procreation. It has to be stated that his contemporaries also warned of excessive use of the marital bed.120

After meeting twice with a possible marriage candidate for Viret, Calvin describes her as follows: “She is very modest, with an exceedingly becoming countenance and person.”121 There would be no point in mentioning that, if delight in beauty were to be irrelevant. In his commentary on Lamentations 2:15 Calvin even states, “For we delight in beautiful things; and wherever God’s gifts appear, we ought to have our hearts filled with joy.”122 Is sexual delight then to be forbidden or restricted? In limiting the purposes of intercourse in marriage almost exclusively to procreation and as a remedy for sin, Calvin did not deviate much from his Catholic predecessors. Where he differed was that he never exalted virginity and celibacy as they did, and he did stress companionship. Calvin sees something negative still even in the marital relations between believers:

...since I acknowledge that all human affections can get very much out of hand, I do not deny that there may also be ... a lack of discipline (ἀταξία), which, I will allow, is sinful. And more than that, this feeling, I grant you, is more violent than others, and almost bestial. But against that I also maintain, that whatever vice or disgrace there is about it, is

116. Comm. 1 Corinthians, 140. “ut scilicet meminerint, coniugium impudicitiae remedium esse : ne eius bono intemperanter abutantur ad explendam quovis modo, imo absque modo et verecundia libidinem [...] ac testatur se non ideo commendasse tori societam coniugibus, ut eos ad voluptatem alliciat, aut quia libenter id praecipiatur: sed respexisse quid postulet infirmitas eorum...” (CO 49: 405).
117. ICR 2.8.44. “Quaere non omnia sibi licere coniuges existimant [...] Sic enim ad modum et modestiam revocari decet coniugium in Domino contractum, non in extremam quamque lasciviam exundare.” (CO 2:297).
120. Kelso, Renaissance Lady, 88.
so covered by the honorableness of marriage, that it ceases to be a vice, or at least ceases to be thought of as such by God... the intercourse of husband and wife is a pure thing, it is proper and holy; for it is the institution of God. The uncontrolled passion with which men are aflame is a vice springing from the corruption of human nature; but for believers marriage is a veil which covers the fault, so that God sees it no longer.  

To ascribe the epithet of ‘bestial’ to the sexual impulse is doubly damning in Calvin as he usually reserves this for drunkenness and other such dissolute sins that he associates with brutishness. In his commentary on Psalm 45 Calvin understands it to be a love-song and states that it speaks of

the mutual love which husband and wife ought to cherish towards each other. But the word loves is sometimes taken in a bad sense, and as even conjugal affection itself, however well regulated, has always some irregularity of the flesh mingled with it; this song is, at the same time, called maskil, to teach us, that the subject here treated of is not some obscene or unchaste amours, but that, under what is here said of Solomon as a type, the holy and divine union of Christ and his Church is described and set forth.

It is interesting that Calvin considers even “well regulated” marital affection to have some irregularity of the flesh mingled with it, since he did not consider people truly married if they could not consummate the marriage. Commenting on the purification of women after childbirth, Calvin says, “For the cohabitation of man and woman in itself, without reference to offspring, is a matter of shame and indecency; but here the procreation of children, which should remove this indecency, is accounted the cause of pollution, because the whole race of Adam is full of contagion.”

If any object that holy matrimony is thus brought into disgrace and disrepute, the reply is easy, that if the marriage couch is free from stain, it is due to the indulgence of God. When therefore the husband and wife procreate children in lawful wedlock, it is not to be considered simply permitted, as if the generation were altogether without impurity, but by special

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123. Comm. 1 Corinthians, 140-1. “... quum in omnibus humanis affectibus inordinatum excessum esse confitear, me non negare quin sit etiam in hac parte áraçia, quam vitiosam esse concedo: imo hunc affectum praee alis impotentem esse concedo, et prope belluinum. Sed contra etiam contendendo, quidquid est vitii aut turpitudinis sic tegi coniugii honestate, ut vitium esse desinat, vel saltem desinat a Deo imputari. [...] coitus viri et mulieris res pura est, honesta et sancta, quoniam est Dei institutio: intemperies, qua fervent homines, vitium est ex naturae corruptela ortum: sed fidelibus coniugium velum esto unam sub Solomonis figura sanctam et divinam Christi cum ecclesia coniunctionem nobis proponi.” (CO 49:405-6).


privilege and indulgence; because the sanctity of marriage covers what otherwise might be imputed to blame, and purifies the very elements of our guilty nature. Whence it is plain that marriage, through which the procreation of children becomes lawful, has nothing disgraceful about it. 126

The picture of marriage as a cover is also used in Calvin’s sermon on Deuteronomy 5:18.

Thus, every intemperance of the flesh is vice, but still, in the way our Lord supports us, he has ordered a means whereby this vice will not at all be imputed to us. This intemperance of the flesh, therefore, being vicious in and of itself, being damnable, will not at all be imputed before God, when the cover of marriage is there. 127

In Sermon 11 on Genesis, Calvin also uses the concept of cover in marriage:

Marriage was established by God to remedy the intemperance which arose from sin. So marriage is given as a remedy, and even though it was shameful for the man and the woman to live together, it is no longer called sin when marriage intervenes. God had pity on our weakness and, when establishing marriage, wanted it to be like an honourable veil to cover that lewdness, by which we could be dismayed. 128

Not only is sexual activity vicious and damnable, it is also polluted, filthy, shameful, and dirty, according to Calvin. If even married people indulge in it too much, they turn their home into a brothel. 129 It seems that for Calvin, shame is inevitable, even in a Christian marriage.

126. Ibid., 499-500. “Si quis obiiciat, sanctum coniugium hoc modo dedecore probroque affici, in promptu est responsio: quod thorus coniugalis macula caret, id debere adscribi Dei indulgentiae. Quod ergo generant maritus et uxor legitime coniuncti, non simpliciter licitum esse censetur, ac si generatio prorsus omni vitio careret, sed per veniam et singulari privilegio: quia coniugii sanctitas tegit quod alio- qui poterat in culpam imputari, et ipsas vitiosae naturae sordes abluit. Unde apparet nulla ignominia notari coniugium, cuius respectu legitima est sobolis procreatio.” (CO 24:312).

127. “Ainsi toute intemperance de la chair est vice: mais encore selon que nostre Seigneur nous sup- porte, il a ordonné un moyen tel, que ce vice ne nous sera point imputé pour vice. Ceste intemperance de la chair donc estant vicieuse en soy, estant damnable, ne nous sera point impute devant Dieu, quand ceste couverture de Mariage y sera.” (CO 26:342).

128. Sermons on Genesis Chapters 1-11, tr. Rob Roy McGregor (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 194. “Le mariage donc est donné pour remede à cela; et combien que ce soit une chose honteuse de l’habitation de l’homme et de la femme, si ce est que cela n’est point imputé à peché, quand le mariage intervient. Car Dieu a eu pitié de nostre infirmité et, en ordonnant le mariage, il a voulu qu’il fust comme un voile honorable pour couvrir ceste turpitude en laquelle nous pourrions estre confuz.” SC XI/1, 137.

129. “Comme si un homme se vouloit donner par trop de licence, et une femme avec son mari: il n’y a point de raison, que d’un mesnage on face un bordeau. Mais quand un homme vivra honnestement avec sa femme, en la crainte de Dieu: combien que la compagnie du lict soit honteuse, si est-ce toutesfois que devant Dieu elle n’a point d’opprobre, ne devant ses Anges. Et pourquoi? La couverture du Mariage est pour sanctifier ce qui est pollu et prophané: elle est pour nettoyer ce qui estoit ord, et sale de soy.” (CO 26:343).
Let’s take note of what the apostle says: that the marriage bed is honorable, when men and women keep themselves in the fear of the Lord and in all modesty. In the place where there would be shame (and rightly so), our Lord changed the whole into honor.¹³⁰

On this point Calvin did not vary much from the church Fathers who thought that the passion accompanying sexual intercourse was sin. Augustine wrote similarly:

The united effort, then, of a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation is the natural good of marriage. But the man makes a bad use of this good who uses it like a beast, intent merely on the gratification of his lust, instead of the simple desire to propagate his species.”¹³¹

Commenting on the provision that a newly-wed man should not go to war for at least a year (Deuteronomy ²⁴:⁵), Calvin wisely perceives that it takes some time to consolidate a marriage, and that “by their association for a whole year ... mutual confidence may be established between them, and they may afterwards continually beware of all incontinency.” He continues:

But that God should permit a bride to enjoy herself with her husband, affords no trifling proof of His indulgence. Assuredly, it cannot be but that the lust of the flesh must affect the connection of husband and wife with some amount of sin; yet God not only pardons it, but covers it with the veil of holy matrimony, lest that which is sinful in itself should be so imputed; nay, He spontaneously allows them to enjoy themselves.¹³²

Sexual intercourse is seen as “sinful in itself,” even in marriage. If the cover of marriage allows God to not see it as a sin or vice, should we not do the same? In any case, before sin entered the world there was no impurity in the act of intercourse. Just because it can be abused, or “get out of hand,” does not mean that married believers have to be ashamed of the act of intercourse. Calvin is even more negative in his commentary on Genesis ⁴:¹, “and Adam knew his wife Eve.” He writes, “the word ‘to know’ modestly insinuates the sexual knowing of the man and his wife, a shameful matter of itself. Though the filthiness of intercourse is to be numbered among the fruits of sin: because it is born of the intemperance of lust.”¹³³ This would seem to

¹³⁰ “...notons bien ce que dit l’Apostre, que le lict de Mariage quand les hommes et les femmes se contiendront en la crainte de Dieu et en toute modestie, que ce lict-la est honorable: au lieu qu’il auroit de la honte (et à bon droict) nostre Seigneur convertit le tout en honneur.” (CO ²⁶:³⁴³).
¹³² Harmony of the Law, ³:⁸⁴. “Porro quod novae uxori permitit Deus se oblectare cum marito, non vulgare indulgentiae suae specimen in eo demonstrat. Fieri certe non potest quin concubitum viri cum uxore aliquo vitio iniiciet carnis impietas: atqui Deus non solum ignoscit, sed velum opposit sancti coniugi, ne imputetur quod per se vitiolum erat: imo ultro concedit, ut maritus et uxor se oblectent.” (CO ²⁴:⁶⁵²).
¹³³ John King, in ¹⁸⁴⁷, chose not to translate this comment, see footnote ¹ on p. ¹⁸⁹ of the Commentary on Genesis. “Cognoscendi verbo congressum viri cum uxore, rem per se pudendam, verucunde insin-
contradict what he said in his Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7, as quoted above. A “shameful matter” cannot be at the same time “a pure thing ... proper and holy.” Calvin remains ambivalent in his appreciation of sexual intercourse.

Regarding non-sexual aspects of marriage, Calvin’s opinions are fairly typical of the time he lived. The Commentary on 1 Peter was written in 1551, after the death of Idelette. He may well have had her in mind when he wrote, “By a meek and a quiet spirit, he marks what especially belongs to women, for nothing more becomes their sex than a placid and a sedate temper.”134 When he comes to the verse that tells husbands how to live with their wives, it is clear that he holds to an authoritarian view of marriage, as was, of course, common in his day. What is more offensive to our modern ears is that he compares women with children:

Peter does not unreasonably order women to be cared for, and to be honoured with a gentle treatment, because they are weak. Further, just as we forgive children more easily, when they offend through inexperience of age, so the weakness of the female sex ought to make us not too rigid and severe towards our wives.135

In this Calvin did not differ from his contemporaries, who, considering women to be weak of body and mind, far less educated, and subservient to men all their lives, felt it would be cruel to blame them for some faults.136 Certainly, in the sixteenth century women were weaker than today. They often died in childbirth, which was the most common cause of death at an early age. In sermon 18 on Genesis Calvin mentions the trouble and pain women have in pregnancy, in childbirth, and in nursing their children.137 That was certainly the case for Idelette.

Both the Commentary and the Sermons on Genesis were written and preached more than ten years after Idelette’s death. Here we may suspect that Calvin thinks back on his own marriage from time to time as he comments on marriage. In the Genesis sermons Calvin portrays the Creator as a caring, generous Father who provided all things needful for his image-bearers. In return, they should recognize that all good gifts come from his Fatherly hand. Calvin states that Eve had been the cause of putting us in such ruin and confusion as we are, and that Adam sinned in obeying the voice of his wife rather than the voice of God. Calvin chides Adam for having

uat, quanquam coitus foeditas inter peccati fructus numeranda est: quia nascitur ex libidinis intemperie.” (CO 23:82).
136. Kelso, Renaissance Lady, 85. See also Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Woman, “It is habitual for commentators to refer to Nicomachean Ethics, VIII, where it is implied that the wife’s subjection to her husband, like the child’s subjection to his father, derives from nature.” 50.
137. SC Vol. XI/1, p. 208.
preferred the woman, who was subject to him and who was inferior to him, above his Creator.\(^\text{138}\) In the Genesis commentary Calvin allows that both man and woman have the image of God, although he refers to Paul’s allusion (in 1 Cor. 11:7) to the image there referring to the conjugal order as opposed to the spiritual order. In the present life, Calvin insists, men have the preeminence over women: “The glory of God is seen in the higher standing which the man has, as it is reflected in every superior authority.”\(^\text{139}\) Calvin naturally reflects what generally the current conditions were. Apart from royalty and abbesses there were no females in positions of superior authority. In the same commentary he states, “… as far as external connections and social propriety are concerned, the man takes his lead from Christ, and the woman from the man, so that they do not stand on the same level, but this inequality exists.”\(^\text{140}\) In this instance Calvin does not envisage that social proprieties may change, yet, when discussing the length of hair he freely admits that propriety changed over time. And with respect to a man covering his head with a skull cap, he sees no great problem with that either. He is rather pragmatic about it.\(^\text{141}\) Indeed, in the Institutes he is less dogmatic regarding both head covering and the speaking of women.\(^\text{142}\) Perhaps he was by then moving towards a less dogmatic view.

As far as obedience to husbands is concerned, Calvin teaches that wives owe them obedience, even if the husbands were to “spitefully use their wives, whom they are commanded to love and to spare as weaker vessels. … They are still subject even to those who are wicked and undutiful.”\(^\text{143}\) There is, of course, a caveat when he mentions Peter’s warning that we must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29), but there could be many things not directly against God’s will that would be a burden for a wife to obey. Calvin’s high respect for the authorities placed by God over people tends to work to the disadvantage of the wife, especially since he clothed the requirement of submission in the language of God’s design. In the ideal situation of a husband loving his wife as Christ loved the Church there would be no hardship, but to enforce obedience in other situations carries the danger of oppression, or, as Calvin would put it, “tyranny.”

\(^{138}\) Ibid., 209. “la femme avoit esté donnée à Adam à fin qu’elle luy fust en aide. … que tu as préféré la femme à ton créateur, laquelle t’estoit sujette et qui estoit inférieure à toy.”

\(^{139}\) Commentary 1 Corinthians, 232. “In hoc superiore dignitatis gradu conspicitur Dei gloria, sicuti relucet in omni principatu.” (CO 49:476).

\(^{140}\) Ibid., p. 230. “Quantum ad externam compositionem et decorum politicum, Christum vir et virum mulier sequitur: ita ut non sit idem gradus, sed locum habeat inaequalitas ista.” (CO 49:474).


\(^{142}\) ICR 4.10.31. “What? Does religion consist in a woman’s shawl, so that it is unlawful for her to go out with a bare head? Is the decree of Paul’s concerning silence so holy that it cannot be broken without great offense? Not at all. For if a woman needs such haste to help a neighbor that she cannot stop to cover her head, she does not offend if she runs to her with her head uncovered. And there is a place where it is no less proper for her to speak than elsewhere to remain silent.”

\(^{143}\) ICR 4.20.29.
In the records of the Consistory mention is made of abusive husbands whose wives were told to submit anyway. They were advised to flee the marriage only if she were in danger of her life! On the other hand, husbands were forbidden to ill treat, beat, or torment their wives on pain of severe criminal sanctions, and one case in 1557 even resulted in excommunication.\textsuperscript{144}

In his letters there are hints of what Calvin thinks is important in marriage. A good understanding between the partners before embarking on marriage is one such thing: “Besides, love requires previous acquaintance, and the household affairs never go on well without a private mutual understanding, and a settlement of the conditions required on both sides.”\textsuperscript{145} Even for more or less arranged marriages, Calvin required the free consent of the parties concerned. Parents could not force their children into a marriage if they did not want to enter it. John Witte Jr. has written on the question of parental consent and has pointed out that, in contrast to other reformers, Calvin did not appeal to the commandment to honor father and mother.\textsuperscript{146} This was because he had early on, in his 1546 Marriage Ordinance, decided that it was the consent of the father that was decisive. If the father was not available, the advice and consent of other male relatives was preferred by Calvin above that of the mother. In his writings on the topic Calvin appeals to “the common laws of nature” and “natural equity,” rather than the commandment. Witte comments:

He might well have been constrained by his insistence in the 1546 Marriage Ordinance that it was the father’s, not the mother’s, consent that was essential. It would have been hard for him to press the father’s superior authority on the strength of a commandment to honor thy father and thy mother.\textsuperscript{147}

Witte is surprised that Calvin was “jealous to ensure that girls were as protected from tyrannical parents as boys in their decision to marry” while at the same time he was “churlish about the role of the mother in consenting to her minor’s engagement and marriage.”\textsuperscript{148} Witte concludes, “On this issue, the Bible and the tradition did chart a more egalitarian way. Calvin did not follow it.”\textsuperscript{149}

**Writing and Preaching on Adultery**

Calvin’s sermon on the seventh commandment as found in the series on Deuteronomy provides us not only with his views on adultery but also with additional insight

\textsuperscript{144} Witte and Kingdon, *Courtship*, 45, 76, 210, 373-5.
\textsuperscript{145} SW, 575 Letter to Monsieur de Falais dated 4th October 1546. “Oultre ce que lamour requiert congnoistre precedente, et iamais les mesnages ne se portent bien, sinon quon se soit declare privent lun a laultr, et quon ait traicte des conditions que chacun requiert en sa partie.” (CO 12:393).
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 591. Italics in original.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 604.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 605.
on marriage. The sermon was preached on July 3rd, 1555, some seven years after his sister-in-law, Anne, married to Antoine Calvin, was accused of adultery, an event which caused him great sorrow and embarrassment. This no doubt accounts for the fervency of his language. In 1557 Anne was again accused of committing adultery, this time with the hunch-backed servant Pierre Daguet. Although she pleaded not guilty, even under torture, she was convicted. Antoine was granted the divorce he requested. Judith, Calvin’s stepdaughter, caused similar shame and embarrassment in 1562.

In his sermon Calvin refers to New Testament passages to augment his exposition and argument. All sexual immorality is detestable, but adultery is breaking the trust in marriage: “It is true that all contracts, and all promises that we make should be faithfully observed, but if we make a comparison, it is not without cause that marriage is called a Covenant of God.” Sacred marriage is contracted not just between the two parties, but also with God, who is the author of marriage. This does not mean that it is a sacrament, as in the Roman Catholic Church, but it does need to be protected.

As was shown above, Calvin sees something “almost bestial” in the sexual urges, even of married people. When it comes to adultery he describes it in similar terms, making it almost similar to married sex or making married sex as bad as adultery.

When we hear this word ‘Adultery,’ it should be abhorrent to our ears, as if men particularly wanted, like furious beasts, to despise God and to break the sacred bond which he established in marriage.

Calvin surely did not intend to put adultery and married sex on the same level, but his words show that he had considerable unease about sexual activity.

Referring to what the Lord said in his sermon on the mount, Calvin states that we need to be pure in heart and mind and body, and not look lustfully at another’s spouse, “For this is said, because not only our souls, but also our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.” Elaborating on Paul’s teaching (1 Corinthians 6:19), Calvin says, in Sermon 38 on Deuteronomy:

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150. CO 26:334-346.
152. See SW, 7:262, letter to Bullinger, 12th March, 1562. “...accidit moeror domesticus ob flagitium privignae, qui me in solitudinem ad paucos dies compulit.” (CO 19:327).
153. “Il est vray que tous contracts, et toutes promesses que nous ferons, doyvent estre observees loyaulement: mais si nous faisons comparaison, ce n’est pas sans cause que le Mariage est nommé Alliance de Dieu.” (CO 26:335).
154. “Quand donc nous oyons ce mot d’Adultere, il nous doit estre execrable, comme si les hommes vouloyent notamment despiter Dieu: s’ils vouloyent rompre, comme bestes furieuses, le lien sacré qu’il a establi en mariage.” (CO 26:336).
155. “Car il est dit, que non seulement nos ames, mais aussi nos corps sont temples du sainct Esprit.” (CO 26:337).
Look how God honors us by choosing these poor bodies, which are nothing but fragile vessels, they are only carrion, nothing but earth and filth, and yet, God has honored them so much that he wants to make them temples of his Holy Spirit to dwell there. And now will you go thus … to make them into pigsties? 156

It is interesting to see how Calvin uses similar words to describe the body as he does elsewhere – earth, filth – but in the context of preaching on the evils of adultery he mentions the body as temple many times, but not once as prison. It is as if he seeks to raise the thoughts of his congregation to a higher level when he has to tell them of the evils of adultery, whereas at other times he just wants them to be humbled about their origins – mud and earth – and situation – in the prison of the body. In his 1546 commentary of 1 Corinthians 6:19 Calvin only uses the word ‘temple’ three times and does not elaborate very much. In Sermon 129 on Deuteronomy, preached on January 15th 1556, Calvin again makes the link between sexual purity and being a temple of the Holy Spirit:

God does not cease to be offended when a man desecrates the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is his body, and when he prostitutes by such a vile deed a member of our Lord Jesus Christ. For we are all members of his body. Then, if he also goes and debauches a girl who is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is part of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, when all that is done, there is an embarrassment that is too big. 157

Calvin not only condemns actual adultery and fornication, but also all words, gestures, and actions that would open the door to Satan to tempt people to such forbidden behavior. He particularly mentions dancing:

People know very well that dances cannot be anything other than preambles to fornication. They are designed to open the door to Satan, and to call out for him to come and enter boldly. Dances always lead to that. 158

Although he admits that to the pure all things are pure, Calvin says that we should not only avoid the act of fornication, but also whatever is connected to it, all that

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156. “Voila donc Dieu qui nous a fait cest honneur, de choisir ces povres corps, qui ne sont pas seule-
ment vaisseaux fragiles, mais ce ne sont que charognes, c’est terre et pourriture, et cependant Dieu les a
honorez iusques là, qu’il en veut faire les temples de son sainct Esprit pour y habiter, et nous […] en
ferons des estables à pourceaux?” (CO 26:338).

157. “Dieu ne laisse point d’estre offensé, quand un homme violé le temple du sainct Esprit, qui est son
corps, et quand il prostitue en telle villenie le membre de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ. Car nous sommes
tous membres de son corps. Et puis, quand il va aussi bien desbaucher une fille qui est le temple de Dieu,
qui est du corps de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ: quand tout cela se fait, c’est une confusion trop grande.”

158. Sermon 8 on Deuteronomy 5 (2nd July, 1555). “Or on sait bien que les danses ne peuvent estre
 sinon des premambles à paillardise, qu’elles sont pour ouvrir la porte notamment à Satan, et pour crier
qu’il vienne, et qu’il entre hardiment. Voila qu’emporteront tousiours les danses.” (CO 26:341).
approaches it, and all that may induce us to it.\footnote{159} He decisively puts dancing in that category. Initially, dancing was allowed at wedding parties, but after 1549 it was banned altogether.\footnote{160}

### Problem Marriages

There are some cases of marriages that Calvin disapproved of that involved a too great disparity of age. One of them was dissolved:

At about this time [1557], by resolution of the Consistory and decree of Messieurs, the marriage contracted between the widow of Jean Archard, aged more than 70, and a servant of hers, aged about 27 or 28, was dissolved because of too great inequality of age. The Consistory resolved further that Messieurs should be requested to make a ruling on this matter for the future.\footnote{161}

The pastors probably suspected that the young man hoped to be a widower soon and would be able to enrich himself by marriage.

Another marriage involving disparity of age was outside the jurisdiction of Calvin and Geneva. The case of Farel had the opposite problem: Calvin thought Farel was too old, at age 69, to marry a seventeen-year-old girl. She was Marie Thorel, the daughter of a widowed refugee woman who kept house for him. The widow would probably have met with Calvin’s approval, but Farel fell in love with the daughter.\footnote{162} Calvin could not dissuade Farel from his wedding plans. Calvin tried to ameliorate the scandal by suggesting that either Farel or the girl ought to leave the Farel house until the wedding. Farel had invited him to the wedding but he steadfastly refused. The first wedding banns had already been published on 14 September. Calvin wrote to the ministers of Neuchatel on 26 September 1558 in an effort to appease them and not to force a break of the engagement, as that would only increase the scandal. He admitted that Farel had committed a folly, as he saw it. He tried to excuse Farel by saying that the latter had a “\textit{malladie incurable},” suggesting he was not of sound mind. He reminded them that Farel had served God for thirty six years and encour-

\footnote{159. \textit{Ibid.}, “Il est vray que toutes choses sont nettes à ceux qui ont la conscience pure [...] Voila pourquoi ce precepte doit estre consideré, en sorte que nous ne regardions point seulement l’acte de la paillardise, mais que nous regardions à ce qui y est conioint, à tous les accessoires, à ce qui en approche, à ce qui nous y peut induire.” (CO 26:341).}

\footnote{160. Witte & Kingdon, \textit{Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage}, 461.}


\footnote{162. In contrast with the findings in \textit{Guillaume Farel 1489-1565}, ed. Comité Farel (Neuchatel: Éditions Delachaux & Niestlé S.A., 1930), Witte and Kingdon maintain that Farel married the widow “some four decades younger than Farel.” That would make her about twenty nine years old. Bernard Cottret, \textit{Calvin. A Biography}, tr. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 253, describes Marie as “originally from Rouen, whose father, Alexandre Turol, was a refugee in Neuchâtel.” A widow would more likely have been described in terms of her late husband. Heiko A. Oberman, “Calvin and Farel: The Dynamics of Legitimation in Early Calvinism” \textit{Journal of Modern History} 2:1 (1998), 43, suggests Marie was “sixteen or seventeen years old.”}
aged them to deal gently with him. The wedding finally proceeded in December 1558, without Calvin’s blessing. Farel was still of sound body, for the marriage was blessed with a son, who was baptized on June 22, 1564, when Farel was about 75 years old. Farel named him Jean, after Calvin, who had died the previous month. This was a gracious gesture, considering how strongly Calvin had opposed his marriage. Their friendship suffered severe damage over this matter. This is shown by the almost complete lack of correspondence between them after the wedding. Oberman lists only three letters from Calvin to Farel and eight from Farel to Calvin. Before the wedding, they had corresponded on average once a month, and more often at critical times.

In 1563 Calvin’s Harmony of the Law commentary appeared with an opinion that may well reflect his feelings about Farel’s marriage:

> If a decrepit old man falls in love with a young girl, it is a base and shameful lust; besides he will defraud her if he marries her. Hence, too, will jealousy and wretched anxiety arise; or, by foolishly and dotingly seeking to preserve his wife’s love, he will cast away all gravity. When God forbade the high priest to marry any but a virgin, He did not wish to violate this rule, which is dictated by nature and reason; but, regard being had to age, He desired that modesty and propriety should be maintained in the marriage, so that, if the priest were of advanced years, he should marry a virgin not too far from his own age: but if he were failing and now but little fitted for marriage on account of his old age, the law that he should marry a virgin was rather an exhortation to celibacy, than that he should expose himself to many troubles and to general ridicule.

This is one more case of Calvin inserting his own ideas and reservations into the text. He seems to assume that the High Priest would only get married after he became High Priest. The text could just mean that any priest eligible for the office of High Priest could ensure his continued eligibility by marrying a virgin. Thus, a young priest could marry a young virgin, which would obviate all the problems Calvin foresees in a marriage where there is disparity of age.

Other marriages and engagements were annulled on the grounds of disparity of age, as well as impotence or communicable diseases. Impotence prevented the mar-
riage from being consummated and was a cause for the dissolution of marriage.\textsuperscript{167} If impotence occurred later, the marriage partners would have to bear their distress. Communicable diseases endangered the health and life of the spouse and their potential children.\textsuperscript{168}

**Marriage as Covenant**

John Witte has shown that Calvin came to view marriage as more than a mere contract and that he regarded it as a covenant:

The emerging scholarly consensus is that Calvin … was the first to develop a detailed covenant model of marriage in place of the prevailing Catholic sacramental theology and canon law of marriage. … Calvin went beyond the tradition … in using the doctrine of the covenant to describe not only the vertical relationship between God and humanity, but also the horizontal relationships between husband and wife.\textsuperscript{169}

In his *Treatise Against the Libertines* (1545), Calvin already describes marriage in terms of a covenant:

For marriage, I say, as God instituted it (Gen. 2:24) and blessed it, transcends all natural unions, and should even be preferred to the union between a father and his son. Marriage, as Jesus Christ has promised, is indissoluble (Matt. 19:6). Marriage is consecrated in the name of God and is hence founded on His authority. Marriage is called a “divine covenant” by Solomon (Prov. 2:17) and is compared by Saint Paul to the spiritual union which we have with our Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:32).\textsuperscript{170}

In sermon 11 on Genesis Calvin called the marriage covenant “sacred” because it was ordained by God.\textsuperscript{171} The lectures on Malachi were published in 1560. On chapter 2:14 Calvin lectures on what it means to have God as a witness of a marriage:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{167} RCPG, 77.
  \item \textsuperscript{168} For an overview of these, see chapter 8, “Fitness for Marriage” of Witte and Kingdon, *Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage.*
  \item \textsuperscript{170} Benjamin W. Farley, tr. and ed. *John Calvin Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 280. “Le mariage, dis-ie, que Dieu a institué (Gen. 2, 24), et auquel il a mis telle vertu. Qu’il surmonte toute conionction naturelle, iusque à estre préferé à la conionction qu’a le filz envers son pere. Le mariage que Iesus Christ a prononcé estre indissoluble (Matth. 19, 6). Le mariage qui est consacré au nom de Dieu, ainsi qu’il est fondé sur son auctorité. Le mariage qui est appelé par Salomon alliance divine (Prov. 2, 17): qui est comparé par sainct Paul à l’union spirituelle que nous avons avec nostre Seigneur Iesus (Eph. 5, 32),” (CO 7:213).
  \item \textsuperscript{171} “une alliance sacrée.” CS XI/1, 130.
\end{itemize}
He intimates in these words, that when a marriage takes place between a man and a woman, God presides and requires a mutual pledge from both. Hence Solomon, in Prov. ii. 17, calls marriage the covenant of God, for it is superior to all human contracts. So also Malachi declares, that God is as it were the stipulator, who by his authority joins the man to the woman, and sanctions the alliance [...] He calls her the wife of his youth, because the more filthy is the lust when husbands cast away conjugal love as to those wives whom they have married in their youth. [...] It is not then without reason that this circumstance is mentioned, for the lust of the priests was the more filthy and as it were the more monstrous, because they forsook wives whom they ought to have regarded with the tenderest love, as they had married them when they were young. [...] He calls her a consort, or companion, or associate, because marriage, we know, is contracted on this condition – that the wife is to become as it were the half part of the man.  

According to Lawler, “It cannot be disputed that Calvin taught that marriage is presented in the Bible as a covenant. Calvin is the first post-biblical Western theologian to do so.”

The mutual obligations implied in a covenant leaves open the possibility of a more equal partnership in marriage. But Calvin did not reach that understanding. For him, mutuality in marriage meant that the husband ruled his wife and the wife submitted to her husband.

Conclusion

In consideration of the discussion in this chapter, the conclusion can be that Calvin showed a basic acceptance of marital life. His ongoing warnings against the ‘lust of the flesh’ reflect his theological view on the human condition. Male and female, men and women are created in the image of God, but practically this earthly life is covered and imbued by sin. This makes him cautious and suspicious when it comes to sexuality, even in marriage. It has, however, also been shown that the concept of covenant has tempered and even moulded his view of marriage. It can be defended that the concept of God’s covenant functioned as correction of Calvin’s tendency to a derogatory approach to the body.

Calvin should be credited with introducing in a certain level of mutuality and equality but on the whole he did not advance the cause of equality and the concern

172. Commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets, 555-6. “Significat his verbis ita contrahi inter virum et mulierem coniugium, ut Deus praesideat et stipuletur ab utroque fidem mutuam. Ideo Solomon Proverb. capite (v. 17) vocat coniugium foedus Dei, quia excellit supra omnes humanos contractus. Sic etiam Malachias statuit Deum quasi stipulatorem, qui coniungat sua autoritate virum uxori et sanctat illam societam. [...] Adolescentiae uxorem vocat, quoniam eo foedior est libido, ubi mariti abiciunt coniugalem amorem erga uxores, qua ab ipsa adolescentia duxerunt. [...] Haec igitur circumstantia non abs re poni tur, quoniam libidum sacerdotum eo foedior erat et quasi prodigiosa, quum ita ab uxoribus discederent, quas tamen amplecti debuerant tenero amore: quum duixissent adhuc puellas. [...] Vocat consortem, vel sociam, quia scimus contrahati matrimonium hac lege, ut uxor sit quasi dimidia pars viri.” (CO 44:452).

for the vulnerable position of women very much. Because of his personal experiences in marriage, he did show more empathy and sympathy than others had up till that time. When societal customs and expectations are considered, Calvin was not a revolutionary, as can be seen from Wiesner’s assessment of the state of marriage at the time:

With very few exceptions, Catholics, Protestants (both magisterial and radical) and Jews, English, French, Italians and Germans, highly educated humanists and illiterate street singers, all agreed that women should be subservient and that husbands should rule over their wives. Indeed, there is no issue that early modern men – and apparently most women – agreed upon so completely. The notion was not only an intellectual construct, but shaped legal codes throughout Europe, with married women always under the legal control of their husbands, usually unable to transfer property or make contracts without his consent, and adult single women and widows often required to have a male guardian oversee their legal and financial affairs. Husbands were generally given the right – either explicitly or implicitly – to coerce or punish their wives physically, and courts rarely supported a wife’s leaving her husband even for serious physical abuse.174

Although Calvin did not support physical violence against wives and urged husbands to be gentle in their rule, in the other matters mentioned here he does not deviate much from the societal norm of his age. By giving husbandly rule a strong religious sanction, Calvin may even be said to have increased the power of men over women. However, because of his exegesis of the marital relationship as a love relationship based on the union between Christ and his church, and his growing awareness of a covenantal concept of marriage, he also paved the way for a more equal marriage partnership. His insistence on parental, and especially, paternal consent to the marriage did involve a significant change in policy and practice. His attitude towards sexual relations within the bonds of marriage are unfortunately negative and seem to reflect what could be a Platonic dislike about bodiliness. In spite of his insistence on wifely subjection, which could be harsh if the husband were not loving, his attitude towards women was largely positive.

Chapter Seven
Sexuality and Gender

After Calvin’s view of marriage, the aspects of sexuality and gender invite investigation. Did he regard sexuality as an aspect of male and female personality or merely as a corporeal instrument? Sexuality and gender were not yet as important an item of discussion and study in the sixteenth century as they are today.¹ The word gender related only to the grammatical categorization of nouns into masculine, feminine and neuter. Although gender as a sociological concept was only developed as late as the 1970’s, it is useful to look back on Calvin’s works and see how his views might fit within its construct. For the purpose of this discussion we will take gender to refer to the socio-cultural aspects of being a man or woman – that is, how society sets rules for masculinity and femininity – while sex refers to the base of biological sex differences (“male” and “female”) on which they were erected.² In today’s usage, gender is used to distinguish cultural categories from biological ones within the area of sexuality. This distinction “prevents us from confusing cultural responses to male-female relations from the creational givenness of our sexual humanity.”³ As will be seen in what follows, Calvin often confuses the cultural responses with what he understands to be the law of nature or the creation order. In this he is not unique among Christian thinkers. In the twentieth century Herman Dooyeweerd also appealed to the “order of Nature” in Volume III of the New Critique of Theoretical Thought. Elaine Storkey criticizes him for not responding to the various theories current during his life and for providing “no focus on the male-female dimension in his own account of human anthropology.”⁴ If it was difficult for Dooyeweerd in the twentieth century to think in other than patriarchal and male-oriented terms, it would have been very difficult for Calvin to do so in the sixteenth century. On the positive side, Storkey sees in Dooyeweerd’s modal analysis a useful starting point for further theorizing:

¹. For a useful overview of the literature, see Merry Wiesner-Hanks, “Gender and the Reformation” in Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 100 (2009), 350-365.
⁴. Ibid., 86. Storkey regrets that he did not respond to “Tertullian’s notion of sin as wrapped up in the very ontology of women, the ascetic dualism of the Church Fathers and the disastrous result it has on understanding female sexuality; Engel’s repudiation of marriage as legalised ownership of the woman; Freud’s development of female neuroses as arising from penis envy.”
In his writing men and women share their humanness in all aspects of reality. Number, space, energy, life, emotions, thought, history, social relationships, economics, law, aesthetics and our lives of faith are all in the context of the outworking of our common image of a God who is neither male nor female, but who breathes sexuality into the Creation. And in all of these areas of life our humanity can be enriched and fulfilled by each other, when we do not fall prey to absolutisation of any aspect as the root of our identity, but living creatively together.\(^5\)

Thus, Dooyeweerd’s modal analysis could be a counter measure to the male theoretical framework of “much traditional theologising.”

**Sexuality**

Calvin’s commentary and sermons on Genesis show that he acknowledges sexuality to be part of God’s good creation. He praises God for having provided all things needful for them before he created the human pair. The way God created woman from man is also seen as a special way of caring:

> Although the place was filled in with flesh and Adam’s strength was not diminished by the procedure, the fact is that a part of him was given to the woman so that, as we have said, there would be a union not only for pleasure and delight, but that we might know that the order of nature would be otherwise violated. That is also why Paul says no one has ever rejected his own flesh (cf. Eph. 5:29). As a result, marriage must demand both love and honour inasmuch as the man and the woman have thus been brought together.\(^6\)

Here we see Calvin allowing for pleasure and delight as one of God’s purposes in creating humankind as male and female. In the rest of the sermon Calvin extends the blessings of the sexual nature of humankind to the wider society. It is not just good for individual people who have a spouse, but it is also good for people in general to appreciate the fact that God created the human race in two parts, not just married people:

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We must realize that this blessing is for everyone and even for those who are not married. Consequently, if a man does not get married, he is nonetheless obligated to associate with his neighbors, and the same is true of a woman.\(^7\)

The blessings of being created male and female flow beyond the couple to the whole human race. If Calvin had preached or commented on the Song of Songs, we would no doubt have more insight into his thinking on sexuality. The fact that Calvin did not write or preach much on sexuality should not surprise us. After all, sexuality was “natural,” even though he still saw something shameful in the act of intercourse and insisted on moderation in sexual activity (as discussed in the previous chapter). He had more to say about homosexuality because that was “against nature.”

Homosexuality

Homosexuality, referred to as “the crime of sodomy” in the Genevan legal documents, was considered “one of the most atrocious and abominable that there is.” It was considered worse than fornication, promiscuity, adultery, and prostitution. Naphy observes that this was so because homosexuality was a crime “against nature,” whereas the other offences were “the incorrect application” of “natural sex.”\(^8\) Whenever Calvin invokes the “order of nature” he means “the ordinary law of God” or the creation order as he understands it, but it usually turns out to be a cultural concept. Luther also considered homosexual acts to be “contrary to nature and more than bestial.”\(^9\) Calvin considered incest to be against nature as well. Sexual assault, child molestation, bestiality and same-sex acts were capital crimes and were dealt with in the courts. The other sexual crimes were usually dealt with by the consistory. Naphy lists twelve sodomy trials during Calvin’s ministry. Those found guilty were sentenced to beatings, banishment, or executions. As can be seen from the legal advice quoted, Calvin was involved as both a lawyer and a minister.

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7. *Ibid.*, 191. “... il faut que nous cognoissions que ceste benediction est pour tous et mesmes pour ceux qui ne sont point mariez. Ainsi donc, quand un homme ne sera point marié, si est ce qu’il est obligé encore à s’entretenir avec ses prochains, et une femme aussi bien.” SC Vol. XI/1, 134.

8. See Appendix 1, a statement of legal advice to the Senate signed by Germain Colladon [lawyer], Jehan Calvin [lawyer and minister], François Chevallier [lawyer], and Abel Poupin [minister], attached to chapter 6: “Sodomy in early modern Geneva: various definitions, diverse verdicts,” by William Naphy in *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Tom Betteridge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 107. The trial related to this advice took place in December 1554.


11. See Sermon on Lot’s daughters, preached on May 13th, 1560. “Voilà un incest qui est contre nature. [...] une paillardise vilaine et enorme.” SC Vol. XI/2, 1075. Also, sermons on 2 Samuel 13, where Calvin faults Tamar for suggesting marriage to her half-brother Amnon, which he considers incest (he was not at all severe on Abraham for marrying his half-sister!): “In this way, she reversed the whole order of nature. She wanted to pervert the sanctity of marriage; she wanted to persist in this evil to the very end.” He blames the rape victim more than the rapist. See Michael Parsons, “Luther and Calvin on Rape: Is the Crime Lost in the Agenda?” in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 74:2 (2002), 123-142.
In Europe in general, sexual crimes were regulated or penalized by religious and political authorities.

Before the Reformation, prostitution was widely tolerated, and most cities had official brothels that were taxed and licensed. After the Reformation, brothels in Protestant cities were generally closed and those in Catholic cities regulated more strictly; women who were arrested for prostitution were harshly punished. [...] Homosexual activity was also harshly suppressed, and became a crime punishable by death in some parts of Europe. The number of actual executions for homosexuality was small, but the methods of death, such as burning alive, could be grisly. Despite these measures, however, male homosexual subcultures with special behavior, styles of dress, and meeting places began to develop in Europe’s largest cities.12

Preaching on Genesis 19,13 Calvin first mentions the other sins committed by the Sodomites, those of cruelty towards the poor, referring to Ezekiel 16:49: “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me.”14 Calvin implies that once people stop honoring God and are blind towards their obligations towards their neighbors, they fall into even more serious sins, such as “brutal affections.” They “forget themselves” and “subject their bodies to evil things.”15 Calvin admonishes those in authority to act quickly so that the evil will not spread unhindered. He makes a comparison with navigation: if the ship is not made secure before a storm rises up, it will be too late to do anything once the storm is raging and the ship will end up on the bottom of the sea. Up until the time of that particular sermon seven sodomy trials had taken place in Geneva during Calvin’s ministry, resulting in four executions, two beatings, one perpetual banishment and one listed as unknown. It would seem that the government was indeed serious about punishing this crime. Towards the end of this sermon he praises Lot for going outside to speak with the Sodomites and thereby endangering his life, but he states, “Amidst this virtue there is vice, for [...] he is ready to abandon his daughters.”16 The next day he continues to preach on this subject and says that Lot is both praiseworthy in wanting to protect his guests at the possible cost of his own life, as well as reprehensible for offering to prostitute his daughters. He interprets Lot’s thinking as follows: “He sees there something against nature that is so enormously brutal that it would be

14. This lack of care for the poor does not receive as much attention in the United States today as do Sodom’s other “detestable things.”
16. SC Vol. XI/2, 1015. “Or parmy ceste vertu il y a du vice [...] il est prest d’abandonner ses filles.”
better to abandon his own daughters, no matter how shameful it would be.”
He repeats that Lot is at a loss what to do, but implies that Lot also thinks that rape is
less evil than sodomy, because the latter is “against nature.” Calvin says that we must
join zeal with reason when we try to do the right thing; we need God’s Spirit to be our
guide so that we do not avoid one evil by choosing another. Lot “committed a detest-
able vice before God and men.” Calvin spends more time defending Lot for wanting
to protect his guests than he does condemning the homosexual intentions of the
Sodomites. Perhaps he did not want to pay too much attention to these crimes in
church, so as not to offend or confuse innocent children. His commentary on this
event is similar to the sermons, except for brevity.
In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:9 (1546), Calvin takes “effeminate” (μάλα-
cοι) to be people who, “although they do not openly abandon themselves to impurity,
discover, nevertheless, their unchastity by blandishments of speech, by lightness of
gesture and apparel, and other allurements.”

For “abusers of themselves with man-
kind” (ἄρσενοκοίται) Calvin does not repeat the phrase, perhaps out of disgust, but
states: “The fourth description of crime is the most abominable of all – that mons-
trous pollution which was all too prevalent in Greece.” That speech, gestures, and
apparel should warrant the same exclusion from the Kingdom of God as homosexu-
ality does not seem to disturb Calvin, but does explain his strong words about effemi-
nacy and cross-dressing. A recent, detailed study of the two Greek terms by Linda
Belleville has produced a different interpretation. Her findings show that the
mentor-student relationship in Greek society was not as dissolute and excessive as is
sometimes assumed. She concludes that μαλακοί should be translated as “male prosti-
tutes” and ἀρσενοκοίται as “men who copulate with men.” In her opinion, “male
prostitutes” fits first-century cultural mores: “Men of social standing regarded male
prostitution as the ultimate act of human degradation.” She therefore favors the
NRSV’s “Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, so-
domites...” and the NCV’s “Do not be fooled. Those who sin sexually, worship idols,
take part in adultery, those who are male prostitutes, or men who have sexual rela-
tions with men...” as the two modern translations that have most accurately captured
the Koine and culture of Paul’s day. In Calvin’s commentary on Romans 1:26, Calvin
also expresses his opinion that the sin of homosexuality was “at that time universally

17. Ibid., 1017.
18. Ibid., 1019.
molles intelligo, qui, tametsi non prostituant se vulgo ad libidinem, verborum tamen lenocinis, effemi-
nato gestu et vestitu alisque delitiis impudicitiam suam produnt.” (CO 49:393). In his later commentary
on 1 Tim 1:10 (1556), Calvin does not repeat or amend his understanding of what these words mean. He
passes over them briefly as “shameful lust,” or “foedae libidines” (CO 52:256).
20. Ibid., 209. “Quartum genus omnium est gravissimum, prodigiosa scilicet illa foeditas, quae in
Graecia nimis usitata fuit.” (CO 49:393).
21. Linda L. Belleville, “The Challenge of Translating ΆΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ and ΜΑΛΑΚΟΙ in 1 Cor-
inthians 6:9: A Reassessment in Light of Koine Greek and First-Century Cultural Mores,” in The Bible
22. Ibid., 28.
prevalent. It is astonishing how frequently this abominable act, which even brute beasts abhor, was then indulged in.”

It was thought at the time that animals never engaged in homosexual behavior and therefore homosexuals were worse than the “brute beasts.”

**Gender**

As has been shown in the chapter on marriage, Calvin interpreted the early chapters of Genesis to teach male superiority and female submission, both before and after the Fall into sin. The Biblical texts relating to subordination “are in almost complete harmony with pagan tracts on the same topic, of which the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economics* and Plutarch’s *Conjugalia praecepta* are the most quoted by Renaissance theologians.”

Hence, it was not difficult for people like Calvin to continue this line of thought when interpreting the Bible. Today, more egalitarian interpretations are available to students of the Bible, ones that do not require any excision of passages from the canon or doubt of Pauline authorship.

However, Calvin and his contemporaries were still heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, which “assumed that women were inferior to men and defined them as merely childbearers and housekeepers. This view was authoritatively expressed in the works of the philosopher Aristotle.” In his *Republic*, Plato suggested a different possibility for women, but that remained an ideal that was never translated into reality. However, Renaissance humanism “opened the door to a reevaluation of the nature and capacity of women. By calling authors, texts, and ideas into question, it made possible the fundamental rereading of the whole intellectual tradition that was required in order to free women from cultural prejudice and social subordination.”

This opening of the door proceeded very slowly. Fundamental changes are always resisted. Calvin often saw cultural conditions as being part of the “natural law” and he was not in a hurry to change what he saw as the “natural order.” He called on women not to “battle against nature” by wanting to be a teacher or to resist being in subjection to men.

It is interesting to note that “in the later Middle Ages, the spirituality of the church was shaped by women as well as men.” This female spirituality, exemplified by people


such as Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and Mechtild of Magdeburg did not
despise sensuality or bodiliness, nor did it affect social conditions of male supremacy.
With the coming of the Reformation, there was a shift to the masculine in religious
language.

The emphasis on predestination and the preference for Word over sacrament as means of
God’s presence accented a wholly other God who made inescrutable judgments apart from
human initiative. Theological language regained a highly masculine flavor, and imagery of
the divine, with its transcendence, otherness, and arbitrary judgments, was modeled on the
father in the patriarchal family.\(^3^0\)

The emphasis on God as Father is evident and the masculine point of view prevails in
Calvin’s writings and sermons. Other women have attempted to infuse a more feminine
atmosphere into the Reformation. Marie Dentière wrote and preached in the early time of Genevan reform.\(^3^1\) Katharina Schütz Zell (1498-1562) married the priest
Matthias Zell, which caused him to be excommunicated. She became an outspoken campaigner for the right of clergy to marry. In addition to sheltering religious refugees, she also did pastoral work and wrote prolifically, including letters of consolation, a sermon, catechetical instructions, and other writings. In contrast with Idelette de Bure, she was a more public figure and did not shrink back from criticizing other, male theologians. Her writings give evidence of extensive Biblical knowledge.\(^3^2\)

As might be expected, Calvin was quite clear in his own mind about what were the
proper gender roles, activities, and attributes for men and women. These were not
very different from the surrounding culture. The prevailing views fitted the existing
social conditions where men were in charge and women were subservient. Women
had considerably less access to education than men, in a situation where only about
five percent of the population of Europe was effectively literate.\(^3^3\) The apparent incapacity of women for other than domestic duties rested on their lack of education. However, there were sufficient examples of widows capably taking over and running their late husband’s business or trade to undermine that generalization of incapacity. Moreover, the daughters of Sir Thomas More, Queen Elizabeth, and other privileged ladies who had received an excellent education proved that it was not an innate lack of ability that restricted women’s activities. More’s daughter Margaret translated Erasmus’ *A Devout Treatise upon the Paternoster*, and spoke Latin fluently. She surpassed her father in the study of astronomy. She was renowned for being a devoted daughter, wife, and mother, as well as a scholar. Queen Elizabeth was fluent in Greek and Latin and spoke six modern languages in addition to English. She translated

\(^{30}\) Ibid.
Marguerite of Navarre’s *Mirror of the Sinful Soul* into English, as well as Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and Plutarch’s *De Curiositate*. The regent of the Netherlands, Margaret of Austria, was skilled in governing and diplomacy.\(^3\) By their example and success, these women may be seen as early advocates of, or role models for, equal opportunity for women. Calvin, by contrast, saw these gifted and highly ranked women as examples of God’s exceptional graces. He notably expressed this in the case of Queen Elizabeth. In the case of Deborah it was to shame the lack of courage of the men. In his letter to Bullinger he calls government by women utterly at variance with the legitimate order of nature, it ought to be counted among the judgments with which God visits us; and even in this matter his extraordinary grace is sometimes very conspicuous, because to reproach men for their sluggishness, he raises up women endowed not only with a manly but a heroic spirit, as in the case of Deborah we have an illustrious example. But though government of this kind seems to me nothing else than a mere abuse, yet I gave it as my solemn opinion, that private persons can have no right to do anything but to deplore it. For female rule badly organized is like a tyranny, and is to be tolerated till God sees fit to overthrow it.\(^3\)

It seems that female rule “well organized” was not even considered a possibility. Only God was allowed to make exceptions to the “natural order” of male superiority and female subjection. Calvin would be surprised to learn that God allowed four generations of women to rule over the Netherlands for more than a century without overthrowing such rule, nor ending it by giving male offspring.

In the congregation also, Calvin takes it for granted that the men are in charge. When he preaches on duties, he preaches to the men: what they should do for their wives, children, and servants:

> How do I account for what God has given me? I have good gifts in my hands. I have a family. I should be busy instructing my wife, my children, and my servants in the fear of God. I should always have a watchful eye so that nothing happens at home that would offend God.\(^3\)

\(^3\) For more on these and other gifted ladies, see *Women Writers of the Renaissance*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (University of Georgia Press, 1987) in their relevant chapters.


\(^3\) Sermon 3 on Deuteronomy 1:9-15 (March 27th, 1555). “comment est-ce que ie m’acquitte de ce que Dieu m’a donné? l’ay du bien entre mains, l’ay famille, ie me devroye occuper à instruire ma femme, mes enfans, mes serviteurs en la crainte de Dieu, ie devroye avoir tousjours l’oeil pour veiller à ce qu’il ne se fist rien en la maison, où Dieu soit offensé.” (CO 25:632).
Occasionally, he speaks more directly to the women in the congregation, but on the whole, he addresses the men as the responsible parties. He expresses strong feelings about what is appropriate for each sex. He does not like effeminate men, nor women dressed as men. Calvin is against anything that would blur the distinctions between the sexes, such as cross-dressing or effeminate behavior. Men should look like men and not like their wives. If they were to do that, it would seem that they are annoyed that God created them men. It would be as if they wanted to renounce their sex, which is a shameful thing.37 It was considered ill-advised for a woman to dress in man’s apparel “lest she think she has his courage.”38 Sometimes Calvin uses the word “effeminate” to mean the opposite of courageous. A true man will be courageous.39 The people are to choose rulers who are not effeminate.40 A woman’s pre-eminent virtue was chastity, not courage. A saying attributed to Ludovic Dolce states that, “without chastity a woman lacks every other virtue.”41 However, Calvin did praise manliness, or manly courage in at least one woman. In his dedication of the Genesis commentary to Henry, Duke of Vendome, he praises his mother, the Queen of Navarre, as follows:

She by no means dissembles her own utter estrangement from the superstitions and corruptions with which Religion has been disfigured and polluted. And in the midst of turbulent agitations, it has been rendered evident by convincing proofs, that she carried a more than masculine mind in woman’s breast. And I wish that at length even men may be put to shame, and that useful emulation may stimulate them to imitate her example. For she conducted herself with such peculiar modesty, that scarcely any one would have supposed her capable of thus enduring the most violent attacks, and, at the same time, of courageously repelling them.42

In the Queen of Navarre, Calvin saw the virtue of modesty combined with the – for him – typically masculine quality of courage. During his long association with the Duchess of Ferrara, he repeatedly admonished her to have courage to continue in the true faith, despite the opposition of her husband and kinsmen. He encouraged the women imprisoned for their faith in Paris to be constant and courageous, just like the women who did not flee from the crucifixion scene and who were made announc

37. “... qu’ils ne soient point effeminez: ainsi qu’on le voit quelque fois, qu’il y en a qui s’attifent comme des espouses. Quand donc ils auront cela, il semble qu’ils soient marris que Dieu ne les ait fait femmes, et que quasi ils voudroient renoncer leur sexe. Et cela est une chose honteuse.” (CO 28:19).
39. “... il ne faut point (di-ie) que nous soyons effeminez, mais que nous ayons un courage invincible, pour batailler contre Satan, et contre toutes tentations, nous monstros vrais hommes.” (CO 28:66).
41. Kelso, Renaissance Lady, 71.
cers of the resurrection. For ordinary women, Calvin seemed to see no necessity for being courageous. They only needed to be chaste, obedient, and quiet. It is not the case that modesty and humility were seen as exclusively feminine characteristics. Calvin also praised these qualities in one of his preachers. But generally speaking he assigned certain characteristics as masculine, and others as feminine, even while recognizing that a person may have a quality that is usually associated with a person of the opposite sex. Today’s society is more accepting of a mode of thinking about people that is more “human” rather than “male or female,” and less surprised to see characteristics in people that used to be predominantly assigned to one sex. In the Bible we see examples of women taking the initiative even in a powerfully patriarchal society. For example, Moses would not have lived, were it not for the integrity of the Hebrew midwives who resisted the command of the Pharaoh, Moses’ mother and sister who took the initiative of putting baby Moses in a basket in the Nile, and the Egyptian princess with her serving girls who rebelled against the edict of Pharaoh to have all baby boys killed. The women at the cross showed more courage than the male disciples, who all fled. Lydia started a church in her home. Priscilla taught Apollos a more accurate version of the gospel. These women all went against the injunction of quiet obedience and subjection to men.

Certain behaviors, such as those Calvin praised in his commentary of 1 Peter 3 (“a meek and quiet spirit”) were seen to be appropriate for women. He contrasts that with “an imperious and self-willed woman.” Of course, a woman can be outspoken and humble without being imperious. Sarah, whom Peter quotes as being obedient, may have regretted obediently going along with the deception of Pharaoh regarding her status as wife. But when she suggests obtaining children through her servant, Abraham obediently follows her plan. In both cases they would have gained by further discussion or even argumentation. Calvin does not excuse these sins when he preaches on these passages. By contrast, he praises the assertiveness and persistence of the Canaanite (Syrian Phoenician) woman, even in the face of Christ’s apparent disinterest and silence (Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30). If she had stayed meek and quiet, her daughter would not have been healed.

Sometimes Calvin comes across as condescending, as in his commentary on Isaiah 38:15, “I will call to remembrance” in the Vulgate, which the Papists used in favor of

43. SW, 6:363-6, letter dated September 1557. CO 16:632-4.
46. For a discussion on Calvin’s censure in the commentary and in the sermons, see Scott M. Manetsch, “Problems With the Patriarchs: John Calvin’s Interpretation of Difficult Passages in Genesis,” Westminster Theological Journal, 67 (2005), 1-21. See also John L. Thompson’s contributions as listed in my Bibliography.
auricular confession. He writes of the argument, “even old women can laugh at it.”

In other words, it is so spurious, that Calvin expects even uneducated women to pour scorn on it. In advocating that the Scriptures be available to all people in their own language, in the Latin Preface to Olivétan’s Bible, he reasons as follows:

When, therefore, we see that there are people from all classes who are making progress in God’s school, we acknowledge His truth which promised a pouring forth of His spirit on all flesh [Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17]. They [the above Rabbis] rage against this and are indignant. What is this but to reproach God for his bounty. Oh, if they had lived in that age when Philip had four prophesying daughters [Acts 21:9], how shamefully would they have carried them off? Unless perhaps they had accepted them in a like shameful manner. But when indeed they strongly despise the word of God as often as they please, why do they not at least imitate the example of the Fathers to whom they pretend to be so deferential? Jerome did not disdain mere women as partners in his studies. Chrysostom and Augustine – when do they not urge the common people to this study – how frequently [don’t] they insist that what they hear in church they should apply in [their] homes? Why is it that Chrysostom contends that the reading of holy scripture is more necessary for common people than for monks? That tossed about by various waves of care and business, they are immediately dashed into the shipwreck of this age unless they hold on to this anchor?

Here the need for everyone to study and be taught the Word clashes with Calvin’s views on women’s ministry in the church: in his commentary on Acts 21:9 he reduces the prophecy of the four daughters to a private affair. He surmises that “they did prophesy at home, or in some private place, without the common assembly.” Yet, he defines a prophet as “a messenger between God and man.” Moreover, Paul states, “the one who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Corinthians 14:4). Was Phillip the only one to profit from the prophecy? In the fourth sermon on Pentecost, Calvin

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49. This ET by F.L. Battles is found in Appendix IV of the 1536 ICR, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986 repr. 1989), 374-5, emphasis added. “Quum ergo videmus ex omnibus ordinibus esse qui in Dei schola proficiant, agnoscimus eius veritatem, qui promisit effusurum se de spiritu suo super omnem carnem. Isti contra fremunt et indignantur. Quid hoc est nisi Deo suam largitatem exprobrare? O si eo saeculo vixissent, quo Philippo erant quatuor filiae prophetantes, quam indigne eas tulissent? nisi forte et indignis modis accipissent. Quando vero Dei verbum, quoties libitum est, fortiter contemnunt, cur non patrum saltem exempla imitantur, quibus tantum se deferre simulat? Hieronymus non est desidnatus mulierculas studii consortes. Chrysostomus, et Augustinus quando non plebem hortantur adhaec studia? Quam frequenter inculcant, ut domi relegant, quae in ecclesia audierunt? Quid quod Chrysostomus plebeiis magis quam monachis necessariam esse scripturae sanctae lectionem contendit: quod variis curarum et negotiorum fluctibus iactati in naufragium statim abriperentur saeculi huius, nisi ad hanc ancoram haererent?” (CO 9:788).


teaches that people who have received gifts of prophecy are obliged to teach their neighbors and other believers, great or small. The Holy Spirit, through Joel and Peter, emphatically included the women. Calvin excludes them. His attitude towards “mere women” and their gifts is as sexist as the rest of his contemporaries generally. He did not heed the clarion call of Peter in Acts 2.

Similarly, he comments on 1 Corinthians 1:21 (1546) that philosophers, with regard to knowledge of God, betray “a silliness worse than that of old wives.” As if old men are never silly! On Titus 2:3 he comments,

Talkativeness is a disease among women and old age usually makes it worse. In addition to this, women are never satisfied with their talking until they have become prattlers and slanderous-mongers attacking everybody’s reputation. The result is that old women by their slanderous garrulity, as by a lighted torch, often set many homes on fire. Many are also given to drinking and with all modesty and gravity forgotten they display a quite indecent wantonness.

The judgment that women were more talkative than men and could not keep secrets was a common one during the Renaissance. Calvin only needed to remember Samson to know that keeping secrets is difficult for men also. Men can be just as garrulous as women, and just as addicted to alcohol, and often are more so, with all the attendant consequences. However, men had more power to designate women as silly, than women had the power to characterize men for their faults. Gender relations are relations of power. As one modern writer states: “Those in the seats of power usually take their perceptions of the world for granted, accepting their own experiences as normative.” Calvin wrote and preached out of a Renaissance, Humanist, Christian, mostly male culture, which was the normative one for him. It was not only in Geneva that men were supposed to rule over their wives, and wives were expected to be quiet and submissive. It was generally held that, next to being chaste, women should be obedient and quiet. Calvin thinks that women “by nature, (that is,
by the ordinary law of God) are born to obey.” 58 What Calvin considers to be “nature,” is in fact the cultural milieu in which he lives. He also sees the perceived weakness of women to be part of the laws of nature:

If men are fragile and easily troubled, the weakness of your sex is even greater, according to the laws of nature. 59

It probably did not occur to Calvin that women’s supposed weakness arose from lack of education, being kept “in their place,” and frequent childbearing. In modern, more equal societies women generally live longer, even if they may not be as physically strong as men.

Kelso observed that “men are no more permitted evil than women, though they approve in themselves what they find evil in women, and subject women to laws they would never observe themselves.” 60 To his credit, Calvin tried to be even-handed in dealing with sin, no matter which sex committed it, but in his thinking he tended towards judging women more harshly than men. He held them to higher standards.

In the context of his commentary on Sarah’s plan of surrogacy, Calvin makes another generalization on women, “For we know the vehemence of female jealousy.” 61 Vehemence of affections was seen as typical of females:

The effect of the uterus on the mind weakens rationality and increases the incidence and violence of passions in women: hate, vengeance, fear, anger are all thought commonly to hold greater sway over the female sex; but also compassion, pity, and love. [. . .] For all this, woman is considered to be inferior to man in that the psychological effects of her cold and moist humours throw doubt on her control of her emotions and her rationality. 62

Perhaps Calvin had experience of an extremely jealous female. Perhaps he never met a jealous man. However, as far as sexual purity was concerned he did not apply a double standard, as was so common during his time. In his study “Women in Geneva” Monter has shown that during and shortly after Calvin’s time in Geneva, the rulings of the consistory were remarkably egalitarian with regard to sexual morals:

From 1550 until 1585, Geneva, swollen with religious refugees, was indeed a theocracy, dominated by the ideals of a clergy who decreed an even-handed, symmetrical treatment of men and women in matters of sexuality but was blatantly asymmetrical in matters of

58. Commentary i Timothy, 217. “sed in muliere id non valet, quae natura (hoc est, ordinaria Dei lege) ad parendum nata est.” (CO 52: 276).
59. “Si les hommes sont fragiles et aisement troublez, la fragilité de vostre sexe est encores plus grande, voire selon le cours de nature.” (CO 16:632).
60. Kelso, Renaissance Lady, 26.
education. After 1590, the picture darkens: as civil officials reclaimed control of morals enforcement from the clergy, the double standard returned with full force, and the sex-linked [i.e. gendered] crimes of infanticide and witchcraft were prosecuted vigorously.\(^53\)

This equal treatment of men and women is in stark contrast to the application of the double standard applied generally in Europe, and in earlier times in Geneva, when it came to sexual crimes. For Calvin, sexual and other sins, whether committed by man or woman should incur the same punishment. Commenting on the Seventh Commandment he states, “... if it was unlawful for the daughters of Israel to be harlots, (Deut. 23:17), the same reasoning applies necessarily to males.”\(^64\) It is true, however, that Calvin sometimes characterizes women in a way that is not flattering. Even when he praises women, he manages to characterize them with some perceived fault. Commenting on the giving of their gold and silver for the work of the tabernacle, Calvin states:

Express mention is made of the women, not only whose bounty, but whose labours, as soon afterwards appears, God designed to make use of in the work of the sanctuary. Moses magnifies the fervour of their pious desires, because they did not spare their ornaments; of which people, and especially women, are generally so fond, that they would rather suffer cold, hunger, or thirst, than touch them. It was, therefore, a sign of no ordinary zeal to deprive themselves of their rings and bracelets, which many are so slow to part with, even when they are dying of hunger.\(^65\)

Vanity and love of ornamentation were seen as typical female vices in Calvin’s day.\(^66\) In his exegesis of 1 Timothy 2 Calvin seeks to correct “a fault to which women are almost always prone.” It is the “excessive concern and eagerness about dress.”\(^67\) This also basically reflects the thinking of his milieu. When preaching on 1 Timothy 2:9, Calvin thinks women are naturally inclined to the fault of immodest dress. Women

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\(^{66}\) Kelso, Renaissance Lady, 47.

\(^{67}\) Comm. 1 Timothy, tr. T.A. Smail (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), 215, 216. “Porro sumpta occasione vitium quo fere laborare solent mulieres, corrigere voluit. [...] Est autem nimia ornatus cura et cupiditas.” (CO 52:275). See also his sermon: “Paul a voulu ici toucher un vice auquel les femmes sont enclines de nature, et par trop addormentes, c’est aseavor ce fol appetit de se monstrer, et d’estre pompeuses, afin qu’on les regarde de loin : pource que les femmes sont entaches de ce vice-là, S. Paul notamment en parle ici.” (CO 53:197).
are overly given to this vice. It results from vanity and pride in his opinion. They need to exercise moderation. He excuses them somewhat on account of their weakness, and calls them "poor frail creatures." He sermonizes as follows:

If a woman dresses herself like a harlot, and shows herself to be unchaste in her countenance and in her garments and other trimmings of herself, is that not repugnant? Will people say that such behavior is suitable for a woman who makes such a profession [of faith]? No, not at all.

Uncovered bosoms and fancy hairstyles were particularly mentioned as being offensive to Christian modesty. Calvin preached against these, as well as other manifestations of excesses such as luxurious clothing and jewelry. However, here again, this was not restricted to Reformed communities. Catholic and state authorities also sought to control excesses in clothing and food by sumptuary laws.

On one occasion Calvin deals out a different judgment for the same sin. For example, he infers that Miriam instigated the opposition to Moses (Numbers 12), perhaps from the fact that Miriam’s name was mentioned first, even though the text says that “they asked.” Calvin gives a plausible explanation as to why God should not punish Aaron in the same way as Miriam, but he calls her a “foolish woman” and does not call Aaron anything similar.

On the injunction against cross-dressing (Dt. 22:5), Calvin reveals his abhorrence of effeminacy.

This decree also commends modesty in general, and in it God anticipates the danger, lest women should harden themselves into forgetfulness of modesty, or men should degenerate into effeminacy unworthy of their nature. Garments are not in themselves of so much importance; but as it is disgraceful for men to become effeminate, and also for women to affect manliness in their dress and gestures, propriety and modesty are prescribed, not only for decency’s sake, but lest one kind of liberty should at length lead to something worse.

68. “Car s’il y ait excuse, il est bien certain qu’elle appartient plustost aux femmes qu’aux hommes, à cause de leur infirmité. Et bien, il faut supporter ces povres creatures fragiles.” (CO 53:198).
The “slippery slope” he envisages is somewhat like the immorality he anticipates if people dance together. Just like the rabbis put an extra fence of ordinances around God’s commandments, so Calvin forbids activities that may lead to sin.

William Monter has accused Calvin of “some slight tendencies toward misogyny.” On the basis of what he offered as evidence, perhaps the emphasis should be on the “slight.” In this context he declares that on Idelette’s death “he could muster no warmer tribute to her than to say that she had never interfered with his work.” But this is not the only thing Calvin said about her. In the same letter he wrote,

And truly mine is no common source of grief. I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life, of one who, had it been so ordered, would not only have been the willing sharer of my indigence, but even of my death. During her life she was the faithful helper of my ministry.

Since Calvin considered his work for God to be the most important thing in his life, one could even regard his statement as a compliment. He clearly appreciated what Idelette had brought to his life, as was shown by his intense grief when she died. It is possible that the Genevan women in his pastoral care were more prone to exhibit those traits of which he disapproved than did Idelette. Calvin cannot be considered misogynistic towards the noble ladies with whom he corresponded, perhaps somewhat paternalistic, but not misogynistic. He is very deferential towards people of high standing, such as the Duchess of Ferrara, Jeanne d’Albret, and the Queen of Navarre, and even to the lesser nobility, such as Mr and Mme de Falais. It is true that “Calvin spoke and wrote to noblewomen less from the point of view of their being women than from the point of view of their being noble. [. . . ] Calvin’s interest in aristocratic women tended to be more political than spiritual.” Calvin writes in the hope that their influence would aid the cause of the Reformation. He believes that God puts these people in their elevated position in society for his special purposes. Concluding a letter to the Duchess of Ferrara, he writes:

May the Lord care for you in this your infirmity; may God manifest in you the efficacy of the Spirit in such a way that you may be as much honored in his household as God has elevated you in station and dignity among people.
It is clear that Calvin, in writing to women of the nobility, “addressed his attention to the noble position and political influence of these women rather than the concerns of their sex.” In his brief exposition of Galatians 3:28 Calvin does not elaborate on what it might mean that the divisions of class, race, and gender are no barrier to becoming children of God (v. 26). For him, at least, class and gender continued to be matters of significance, in spite of what he asserts in the commentary:

The meaning is that there is no distinction of persons, and therefore it does not matter to what nation or class anyone may belong. Nor is circumcision any more regarded than sex or civil rank. Why? Because Christ makes all one. Whatever other differences there may be, the one Christ suffices to unite them all. Therefore he says, Ye are one, and means by this that the distinction is now removed. His object is to show that the grace of adoption and the hope of salvation do not depend on the law but are contained in Christ alone. The one Christ therefore is all.

He sees no more distinctions in Christ, but seems unable to conceive of any practical results of the doctrine. It took society and the Christian community a long time to see that the text should have practical consequences for slaves and women. As for class differences, today they are not so much between the nobility and the common men and women, but more between the moneyed and the poor. Calvin did address that disparity by strongly urging the rich to relieve the needs of the poor. On the subject of slavery, Calvin does not interpret Paul’s letter to Philemon to mean that he expects him to free Onesimus, even though verse 16 does imply that, especially when tied to v. 17 “receive him as myself.” Philemon would not have received Paul as a slave. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Calvin also refers to the Galatians text and states,

When he says that there is no difference between man and woman, he is speaking about the spiritual kingdom of Christ, where the outward characteristics (personae), count for nothing, and are not taken into consideration, for it has nothing to do with the body, nothing to do with men's physical relationships with each other (ad externam hominum societatem), but it is concerned wholly with the spirit. That is why Paul declares that there is even no difference between ‘a slave’ and ‘a free man.’

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77. Blaisdell, “Calvin’s Letters to Women,” 84.
79. Comm. 1 Corinthians, 239. “Quum mulierem a viro differre negat, tractat de spirituali Christi regno, ubi personae non aestimantur, nec in rationem veniunt: nihil enim ad corpus, nihil ad externum hominum societatem, sed totum in spiritu situm est. Qua ratione etiam servi et liberi nullam esse differentiam testatur.” (CO 49:474).
As this kingdom of Christ is spiritual, and not of this world (John 18:36), Calvin does not contemplate an outcome that brings about an end to the prevailing relational distinctions between men and women. Likewise, Calvin does not understand Galatians 3:28 as directing us towards change in the social relationships between males and females. The headship of male over female continues for him to be a creational given, and any inequality that this entails is not set aside by the redemptive implications of our being in Christ.

In a lucid article, Mary Potter has used the devise of different perspectives to understand Calvin’s views on gender. She observes two strands, an egalitarian and a hierarchical one. She concludes:

Calvin’s affirmation of radical equality from the perspective of cognitio dei does not signal a departure from the patriarchal ideology of Christianity but only an alteration in its structure and functioning for, in addition to providing a theological affirmation of radical spiritual equality, Calvin supplies theological justification for and confirmation of the natural hierarchy of men over women with his cognitio hominis. His insistence of the inviolability of the natural order of the subordination of women to men, supported by his elevated theology of marriage and his doctrine of extraordinary and ordinary providence, secures the bolts to the door of the patriarchal prison for women.

Conclusions

Calvin’s regards sexuality essentially as belonging to God’s creation. In most cases, Calvin’s thinking about sexuality and gender questions reflect those of the society at large in the sixteenth century. Where he differs is on the equal punishment for both sexes guilty of sexual sins. He observes many instances of behavior typically associated with the male or female sex, confirming the generally accepted characteristics and proclivities. When attributing feminine traits to men, Calvin always expresses himself in a pejorative way. Any deviation from the sexual relationship of man and woman in marriage, as read from the biblical account of the good creation, is regarded as being against nature. Any renewal of nature by grace aims at restoring the original relation between the two sexes, not transcending the possibilities of creation.

On balance, the verdict of this chapter is neither a depreciation of the male or female body as such, nor an identification of sexuality as a particular form of bodily captivity. When weakness of our bodies is expressed through the prison metaphor, Calvin never specifies any particular negative experiences as belonging to gender or sexuality.

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81. Ibid., 738.
Chapter Eight

Nakedness and Shame

Our aim in this chapter is to explore the link between nakedness and shame in Calvin’s view of the body. If he held an essentially Platonic view of the body, it should be recognizable in the language used to describe our naked existence. Is the link between nakedness and shame a result of Calvin’s personal prudery or is it the cultural conditioning of his times? Is this feeling of shame with respect to nakedness a reflection of Platonic disdain of the body? The fact that the naked body is first mentioned in the biblical account of creation could lead him to an appreciation of the naked body. Calvin, however, does not go deeply into the Genesis narrative where it says that Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed (Genesis 2:25).

Calvin’s commentaries and sermons on the stories of Adam and Eve, and Noah, and a few others will be analyzed to gain an understanding of Calvin’s thinking. The commentary on Genesis and the sermons on Genesis both date from Calvin’s later years – 1554 and 1559 onwards respectively – and presumably express his mature thoughts.

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so is shame, it seems. Where some people or cultures see nakedness plain and simple, others only see a shameful nakedness. For Calvin, bodily nakedness is strongly associated with shame and disgrace. He also lists nakedness among dire situations such as poverty, famine, diseases, and reproaches. Never as something positive, except that before the Fall “there was nothing but what was honorable … our parents had nothing in themselves which was unbecoming until they were defiled with sin.” Nudity in and of itself had not been wicked, except that the image of God has been disfigured by our corruption. The Fall, of course, caused the defilement of sin. Calvin wonders why deformity should appear in only one part of the body (and by that he means the genitals), since our whole human nature is infected by squalid sins. He concludes that it was enough for God that a certain shameful sign was conspicuous in the human body which would remind us


of our sins. This is how he links the genitals especially with shame. Augustine said something similar when he discussed shame and lust.

In the very first chapter of his *Institutes* of 1559, Calvin also links nakedness and shame. “For, as a veritable world of miseries is to be found in mankind and we are thereby despoiled of divine raiment, our shameful nakedness exposes a teeming horde of infamies.” It is true that in this particular context Calvin is probably thinking of spiritual nakedness, in which case he thinks that our fallen nature has need of divine clothing, “the garments of salvation … and the robe of righteousness” of which Isaiah speaks (61:10). But for Calvin, spiritual nakedness and bodily nakedness are both characterized by shame.

In his commentary on Genesis as well as in the *Institutes*, Calvin goes out of his way to ascribe honor to God for the way he created everything, but especially mankind. In the *Institutes* he writes:

Likewise, in regard to the structure of the human body one must have the greatest keenness in order to weigh, with Galen’s skill, its articulation, symmetry, beauty, and use. But yet, as all acknowledge, the human body shows itself to be a composition so ingenious that its Artificer is rightly judged a wonder-worker.

Also, in the twelfth Sermon on Genesis Calvin states, “Thus we should not be surprised if Adam and Eve were not ashamed of being naked, inasmuch as there was nothing in their body, nor in their soul which was not like a testimony to the goodness and wisdom of God. It was without shame; everything was honorable.” But in the sixth Sermon on Genesis he had already stated that it is the soul that has reason, intelligence and will, “which is much more than all that is found in the exterior of the body.”

References:


4. City of God, tr. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1871), 2:36. Book 14, Chapter 20, “Human nature, then, is without doubt ashamed of this lust; and justly so, for the subordination of these members, and their defiance of the will, are the clear testimony of the punishment of man’s first sin. And it was fitting that this should appear specially in those parts by which is generated that nature which has been altered for the worse by that first and great sin.”


8. SC XI/1, 58. Sermon 6 Genesis du samedi de jour de septembre 1559, “l’ame, comme j’ay dit, a la raison, intelligence et volonté, qui est beaucoup plus que tout ce qu’on trouvera en ce corps exterieur.”
against us in order to lead us to perdition.9 Whenever Calvin compares body and soul, he always values the soul above the body10 and puts soul and body over against each other as two distinct entities. This is where Calvin appears to be very platoic. He wants to give honor to the Creator of the body, “this corruptible vessel,” but Calvin himself values it only insofar as it is the home of the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit and thus may bear God’s image.”

In spite of the praise he gives to the Creator of the human body, every mention of nakedness, even metaphorical, is connected to a word of negative connotation, such as deformity, turpitude, disgrace, or ignominy. According to Calvin, the fact that man was created in the image of God gives him “the highest nobility,” but his being made of the dust of the earth should cause him to learn humility.12 In his ninth Sermon on Genesis Calvin says, “This is what is expected of us, that we should always look at our origins, where we have come from, in order to lower our eyes and walk in all humility, confessing that we are but earth and dust.”13 The need for humility in the face of God’s majesty is a strong theme in Calvin’s writings.

Commenting on the verse, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed,” Calvin writes, “That the nakedness of men should be deemed indecorous and unsightly, while that of cattle has nothing disgraceful, seems little to agree with the dignity of human nature.” He then continues by making a sweeping generalization: “We cannot behold a naked man without a sense of shame; yet at the sight of an ass, a dog, or an ox, no such feeling will be produced. Moreover, everyone is ashamed of his own nakedness, even though witnesses may not be present.”14 In his twelfth Sermon on Genesis, he expresses similar sentiments and goes even further, saying that it is a shameful thing for men and women to disrobe. Even if a man were to be by himself, he would barely look at himself for shame. He continues by saying that we should be ashamed to look at our own bodies and should also be in a state of blame and shame when others see us. Calvin attributes all this to the Fall into sin. God did not put this sense of shame in the animals after the Fall. But God wanted to increase the opprobium that he put in our persons. Speaking of the animals, Calvin says, “He did not put such an infamy in their bodies.” Calvin goes on to say that if

9. SC XI/1, 60. Sermon 6 on Genesis, “nostre corps, qui doit estre instrument pour servir à l’ame, … toutesfois il est comme pour equiper le diable, pour nous faire la guerre … à fin de nous mener à perdition.”
10. As discussed in chapter 3.
11. SC XI/1, 61. Sermon 6 on Genesis, “Si nous regardons à nostre corps, il est formé de terre, et cependant Dieu a eleu ce vaisseau corruptible, et mesmes où il n’y a nul honneur ni dignité, il l’a voulu faire domicille de ses graces et des dons de son saint Esprit, tellement que nous portions son image.”
13. SC XI/1, 97. Sermon 9 on Genesis. “Voilà donc ce qui nous est icy proposé: d’une part, c’est que nous regardions toujours à l’origine dont nous sommes sortiz, pour baissier les yeux et chemynier en toute humilité, confessant que nous sommes que terre et poudre…”
there were no prohibition or punishment for it, there would be many people who would “brutalize” themselves by going nude and being a spectacle. Calvin might have been thinking about the Anabaptists of Münster, who took it upon themselves to proclaim the naked truth by walking around naked. The Münsterites also practiced polygamy and adultery, excesses that horrified Calvin, as did the anarchy of their lifestyle. He probably linked these sins with the practice of nakedness. The interesting thing here is that when Calvin speaks about the original condition of humankind, he says that “they were without shame, because God created them in this condition, so that his image would shine in their bodies, inasmuch as their bodies were to be the homes [domiciles] of their souls, which were formed and created in the image of God.” The “which” refers to the souls. This is one of three places where Calvin speaks of the body as a home for the soul, and here he does so in the context of discussing Adam and Eve’s original condition. This makes for a welcome change from the body as “the prison of the soul.”

This negativity and shame of one’s own body, as expressed by Calvin, even in solitary privacy, seems extreme. Considering the way poor people lived, there must have been some at least in Calvin’s day who were somewhat accustomed to nakedness and not ashamed or embarrassed at their own or others’ nakedness. They probably bathed in streams and lakes. There were public baths in his time, but, as Luther records,

... the more modest and more serious people ... avoid the public baths, although the private parts are carefully covered both by women and by men.

Therefore, we may surmise that Calvin’s sense of shame about the body must have arisen out of his personal prudery and prejudices. Certainly the poor families of his day often slept all together in one room, or even in one bed. The naked body held no mystery or shame for them. Only if the naked body was used for immoral purposes was shame produced in connection with nudity. Calvin nowhere considers the possibility that the innocence about our naked body, which we lost in the fall, may be regained in Christ, even though he states, “Scripture everywhere admonishes us of our nakedness and poverty, and declares that we may recover in Christ what we have lost in Adam.” In the sermons also, Calvin states, “It is said that the Spirit of Christ is life, although he lives in our mortal bodies. For there is only corruption; there is nothing but a mass of filth and villainy in man. It is a vessel full of foul smells, until the time that it may be renewed.” He goes on to say that, “Be that as it may, when a

15. SC XI/1, 147. Sermon 12 on Genesis, “il signifie qu’ilz estoient sans honte, pource que Dieu les avoit creez à ceste condition, que son image reluit en leur corps, d’autant que leurs corps estoient les domiciles de leurs ames qui estoient formées et créée[s] à l’image de Dieu.” I have summarized Calvin’s argument preceding this quotation.
16. The other places are in Sermon 75 on Job, and ICR 1.15.6, as discussed in chapter 3.
17. Luther’s Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St Louis: Concordia, 1958), 1:139.
little portion of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ lives in us, it is life, says St Paul; it is enough to wash all the rest and to take away all that is corrupt in us, and to restore us, so that we are participants of the glory of Our God and of the heavenly life.” Calvin restricts that cleansing and life to the soul, not to the body. When discussing baptism he does not dwell on the significance of the body being washed as such, but is quick to quote 1 Peter 3:21 (“not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God”). Calvin sees the body only as unworthy, something to be ashamed of, with no restoration in sight until the resurrection. The question arises, “Why does Calvin emphasize the negative so much, when he also seems to appreciate the renewing power of the Holy Spirit in man?” He even states that God’s grace “is more abundantly poured forth, through Christ, upon the world, than it was imparted to Adam in the beginning.” If he really believed that, should he not have had a more positive view of God’s grace on the human body? While Calvin may have applied the recovery to spiritual nakedness and poverty, he did not extend it to his feelings about the body. Nor did he apply the more abundant grace to his appreciation of the body. For Calvin, “we have nothing with which to glorify ourselves, […] for we are nothing but earth and mud, when all is said and done.” As discussed in chapter 5, Calvin sometimes asserts that the image of God only applies to the soul, and consists of reason, intelligence, and will. Spiritual life is only present in reason, intelligence, and will, not in the body. This is Hellenistic rather than Biblical thinking. At other times he seems to suggest that the body was also made in God’s image, as in Sermon 12 on Genesis, where he says, “But, as we said, sin is as well shown in the body as in the soul, for all that the soul was pure and clean, that it tended towards God’s justice, as one could see, there it was that God engraved his image in man, and that was also the case in the body, which had none of the dissolute character it has today.” Further in the same sermon he states that there is “nothing but turpitude and villainy in our bodies.”

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19. SC XI/1, 98-99. Sermon 9 on Genesis, “Mais il est dit que l’esprit de Jesus Christ est vie, combien qu’il habite en noz corps mortelz. Car il n’y a corruption; ce n’est qu’une masse d’ordure et de villeiney que l’homme; c’est un vaisseau plein de puantise, jusques à ce qu’il soit renouvelé. Or, quoi qu’il en soit, quand il y habite quelque petit portion de l’esprit de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ en nous, c’est vie, dit saint Paul; cela suffit pour laver tout le reste et pour oster tout ce qui est de corruption en nous, et nous restaurer, en sorte que nous sommes participants de la gloire de nostre Dieu et de la vie celeste.”

20. ICR 4.15.2. “Et subdit continuo Petrus, baptisma illud non esse depositionem sordium carnis, sed conscientiam bonam apud Deum, quae ex fide est.” (CO 2:963).


22. SC XI/1, 96. Sermon 9 on Genesis, “nous n’avons point de quoy nous glorifier, … car nous ne sommes que terre et fange, quand tout sera conté.”

23. As, for example, in SC XI/1, 99, Sermon 9: “il n’y a que l’ame en laquelle nostre Seigneur nous a formee a son image.” And in SC XI/1, 116, Sermon 10: “Il faut comprendre la vie spirituelle qui est en la raison, intelligence et volonte.”

24. SC XI/1, 147. Sermon 12 on Genesis, “Mais, comme nous avons dit, le peché s’est aussi bien montré au corps comme à l’ame, car tout ainsi que l’ame estoit pure et nette, qu’elle tendoit à la justice de Dieu, qu’on pouvoit voir, voilà Dieu qui a engravé son image en l’homme, cela estoit aussi bien au corps, qu’il n’y ait point d’intemperance comme aujourduy.”

25. Ibid., 148. “Que en nos corps il n’y a que turpitude et villennye.”
It would be interesting to know how Calvin would have reacted to statues of naked or near-naked people such as the David by Michelangelo and the Venus de Milo, but he did not see them. The city of Florence was not on his way to Ferrara and the Venus was not discovered until the nineteenth century. One imagines that he would have averted his eyes and imputed salaciousness to their creators. Michelangelo and artists like him celebrated the beauty of the naked human body, something Calvin was unable to do.

The account of Noah’s drunkenness as interpreted by Calvin is very revealing as to his attitudes. Calvin faults Noah mainly for his drunkenness, which he calls “a filthy and detestable crime,” which made him lose all “self-possession” so that he did “in a base and shameful manner, prostrate himself naked on the ground, so as to become a laughing-stock to all.” Calvin expresses his usual fears about excesses and going beyond bounds but he is exaggerating here: Noah was naked in the privacy of his own tent. There was no public spectacle. There were, perhaps, some grandchildren in addition to Canaan by that time but no-one outside the family. The Bible does not specifically say that Noah was “mocked by his own son.” It just says that Ham told his two brothers, thereby increasing the shame of his father. This is a case where Calvin, by introducing the idea of “mocking,” goes against one of his own exegetical principles, not to go beyond the text (ultra verbi progredi). Calvin may have had the restrictions on uncovering the nakedness of family members in mind (Leviticus 18), but they were not proclaimed till after the Exodus. Ham did not know of them. In any case, “uncovering the nakedness” is generally thought to be a euphemism for having sexual relations, as reflected in the more modern translations of the Bible.

Most commentators agree that the failure of Ham to cover his father, and with it the sin of drunkenness, spoke to a character fault in Ham that was exacerbated in his son Canaan. That fault was a lack of filial respect. Calvin writes at length about the respect and reverence that was due to Noah as father. “This Ham, therefore, must have been of a wicked, perverse, and crooked disposition; since he not only took pleasure in his father’s shame, but wished to expose him to his brethren.” Shem and Japheth are praised for their filial respect and modesty in covering their father without looking on his nakedness.

As critical as Calvin is of Ham, so he is approving of Shem and Japheth.

And thus they gave proof of the regard they paid to their father’s honour, in supposing that their own eyes would be polluted, if they voluntarily looked upon the nakedness by which he was disgraced. At the same time they consulted their own modesty. For (as was said in the third chapter) there is something so unaccountably shameful in the nakedness of man, that scarcely any one dares to look upon himself, even when no witness is present.  

26. See Willem Balke, Calvijn en de Bijbel (Kampen: Kok, 2003), chapter 3 “De sleutel van de kennis,” especially pp. 57-8.
27. Comm. Genesis, 1:303. “Hic duorum fratrum tam pietas quam modestia laudatur, ne apud eos vilescat maestas patris, sed quam illi debent reverentiam, semper foveant, et, integram conservent, a probri eius conspectu avertunt oculos. Atque ita testantur sibi vere curae esse honorem patris, dum oculos suos violari putant, si sponte nuditatem eius adspexerint quae probrosa erat: simul etiam vere-
This is a very revealing statement. He brings in his unsubstantiated opinion about nakedness from his commentary on chapter three and reads it into the character and views of the two more honorable brothers. Note that Calvin states that there is something “unaccountably shameful” in the nakedness of man. If he could not account for it he should have reconsidered why nakedness should be shameful, especially for someone who believes that God himself designed and created the human body in a wonderful way. In commenting on the curse, Calvin faces great difficulties trying to justify the curse on Canaan, while it was Ham’s behavior, in Calvin’s eyes, that deserved the condemnation. He advises the reader not to indulge in conjecture or excessive curiosity. Various exegetes have suggested that the curse was a prophetic one on a tribe headed by Canaan that would later be known for ungodly, idolatrous, and sexually perverse behavior, and the enemy of Israel. Calvin himself believes that Noah was “speaking in the spirit of prophecy.” He asserts, “What would certainly be the condition of the Canaanites, Noah could not know by human means. Wherefore in things obscure and hidden, the Spirit directed his tongue.” So the viewing of the nakedness (if that was all that occurred) was the occasion of the prophetic curse, but not the direct cause. Other exegetes have pointed out that since God had blessed the three sons (Genesis 9:1), Noah could not now curse Ham, so he cursed his offspring.

Circumcision

Calvin’s discussion of circumcision also yields some interesting comments. In his 1536 *Institution of the Christian Religion* Calvin discusses circumcision quite dispassionately, without making any judgment about it:

For the Jews, circumcision was a symbol to admonish them that whatever comes forth from man’s seed, that is, has been corrupted and needs pruning. Moreover, circumcision was a token and reminder to confirm them in the promise given to Abraham of the blessed seed in which all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, from which they were also to await their own blessing. Now that saving seed (as we are taught by Paul) was Christ, in whom alone they trusted they were to recover what they had lost in Adam.

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cundiae suae consultum. Nam (ut capite tertio dictum fuit) adeo pudendum nescio quid habet hominis nuditas, ut vix quisque adspicere se audeat sine teste.” (CO 23:151-152).
30. Some scholars have suggested castration or incest was the thing that “was done to him” (Genesis 9:24). If his son had merely seen Noah naked, how would he know that as soon as he woke? Looking at somebody is not usually described as being *done to somebody.* See Frederick W. Basset, “Noah’s Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan, a Case of Incest?” *Vetus Testamentum* 2# 2 (April 1971), 232-37, and Stephen Gero, “The Legend of the Fourth Son of Noah,” *Harvard Theological Review* 73: 1/2 (Jan.-Ap. 1980), 321-330.
31. *ICR of 1636,* tr. F.L. Battles (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 126. “Circumcisio Iudaeeis symbolum erat, quo admonerentur, quidquid ex hominis semine prodit, hoc est, nomen naturam corruptam esse,
This statement is virtually unchanged in the 1559 version (ICR 4.14.21). His unease about circumcision is expressed in his comments on Genesis 17:11, where the rite of circumcision was first commanded to Abraham and his offspring. Calvin calls the command to circumcise “very strange and unaccountable… at first sight.” 32 He finds it hard to credit the idea that the sign of so great a mystery should be situated in the shameful parts. 33 He even thinks that “God seems to us foolishly to have commanded” circumcision. It was “necessary for Abraham to become a fool, in order to prove himself obedient to God.” 34 Calvin concludes that circumcision was a sign of repentance, and that God’s aim was to “completely abase the pride of the flesh.” 35 In his sermon on the same passage Calvin follows the same reasoning:

For if we are ashamed that this spiritual sacrament was instituted in that part of the body, we should at the same time be ashamed of having been saved by Abraham’s lineage. For if we do not want to accept the salvation which is given to us in the seed of Abraham, we are all lost, because there is no other means at all. 36

Calvin further comments on circumcision in his commentary on Isaiah 20:2. God commands Isaiah to go round naked for three years. Here too, Calvin reveals much about his views on nakedness. First of all, he states that if anyone went around naked of his own accord he would be “justly ridiculed,” but not if God commands it. This is a strange manner of reasoning, as if God acts totally apart from the very morality that he requires of his people. Does Calvin think there are two levels of propriety for God, as he contends there are different “levels of justice within God”? 37 In Calvin’s mind, God is often seen as the incomprehensible One, the totally Other “for He has squared out His law to be our measure, and not to be subject to it Himself.” 38 But then, according to Calvin, God would have a lower or lesser level of propriety than him. In response to those who said that nakedness would be unbecoming in a prophet,
Calvin argues that this “nakedness was not more unbecoming than circumcision, which irreligious men might consider to be the most absurd of all sights, because it made an exposure of the uncomely parts. Yet it must not be thought that the Prophet went entirely naked or without covering those parts which would present a revolting aspect.” Here we see Calvin’s personal ambivalence about the body influence his exegesis. Note these negative words (unbecoming, absurd, uncomely, and revolting) in regard to what God had created. He concludes on this matter, “I am therefore of the opinion that Isaiah walked naked whenever he discharged the office of a prophet, and that he uncovered those parts which could be beheld without shame.” In other words, Isaiah was not really naked. Except for the early church fathers who assumed that naked did mean totally naked, the scholarly consensus seems to be that a loincloth was all that Isaiah wore. In the Bible passage it is clear that Isaiah’s nakedness was to exemplify the forced nakedness of the captives who had their buttocks uncovered, so it is possible that the loincloth covered only the genitals in front of the body. Prisoners of war were usually stripped naked to humiliate them. In the sermons on Micah, Calvin notes nakedness being a result of involuntary removal to a foreign land, the result of their sin, their “malice and rebellion” (Micah 1:11). So Calvin is aware of this manner of humiliating prisoners of war. But he is uncomfortable with the picture of a prophet of God literally acting out this condition. So he assumes it to mean partially clothed. Of the early church fathers, none took “naked” to mean partially clothed. Delitzsch states that in oriental culture anyone is considered naked who appears without an outer garment. Isaiah is left with only the tunica. It is the clothing of one who has been robbed or cursed, of a beggar or prisoner of war. Ridderbos also interprets naked as “without an outer garment.” S.H. Widyapranawa writes that “he was now wearing only the loincloth permitted to a prisoner or a slave.” R.E. Clements states, “Whether the prophet went about entirely naked, or whether he retained a brief loincloth . . . makes no difference to the prophetic character of the action.” John Oswalt maintains that the Hebrew word for “stripped” can “connote either full or partial nudity, such as only wearing a loincloth, which would leave the ‘buttocks bared’ (20:4).” Another commentator to leave the precise degree of nakedness unspecified is Gene M. Tucker, who does not even comment on the possibility of a loincloth.

45. John N. Oswalt, Isaiah, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 244.
It would seem, from the foregoing, that Calvin’s interpretation of Isaiah’s nakedness is not unique among commentators. Calvin’s interpretation reveals how he associates shame with the human body; complete nakedness would mean showing “a revolting aspect.” In this way he expresses his negative feelings about the body in general, and genitals in particular.

Calvin seems to have been unaware that circumcision was common among the peoples of the Ancient Near East, as he calls the rite something “whereby the seed of Abraham is distinguished from other nations.” It should be noted that if no-one went about naked, people would never see the distinguishing sign of circumcision and so it would be pointless as far as being a witness to others of God’s special relationship with the Jews. And if other tribes around them also circumcised their males, there would be no peculiar aspect to it. Those tribes were descended from Abraham (CO 42:106). The Philistines were not descended from Abraham. That is why David can call Goliath “this uncircumcised Philistine.” However, the Egyptians also practiced it, although in a different manner: “Whereas the Hebrews amputated the prepuce and thus exposed the corona of the penis, the Egyptian practice consisted of a dorsal incision upon the foreskin which liberated the glans penis.”

Less than a year before he died Calvin discusses circumcision again, this time in the Congregation. The topic under discussion was the resumption of the practice of circumcision as related in Joshua chapter 5. He says, “And we even see that when the foreskin is mentioned, it is a detestable thing. It can only mean that Moses had omitted circumcision as if the people were excommunicated and rejected by God for some time.” He continues by describing the purpose of the rite: “Circumcision was given before the Law and as a witness to the adoption of God by which the lineage of Abraham was separated from all the rest of the world.” In this way, Calvin presents the lack of circumcision as a punishment from God. Daniel Hawk sees the lack of circumcision as disobedience on the part of the people, not as punishment from God:

The wilderness generation’s failure to circumcise those ‘born during the journey’ demonstrates their disobedient nature, for YHWH explicitly commanded the circumcision of all males in the household, including children (Gen 17:11-14). The narrator explicitly draws attention to their disobedient character by commenting that the entire generation came to its end in the wilderness because they ‘did not listen to the voice of the Lord’ (v. 6).

In his lectures on 1 Samuel Calvin has to deal with the nakedness of Saul. In this context he again takes it to mean “not completely naked.” He applies a spiritual

48. Congregation du vendredi 23e Juillet 1563. “Et mesmes nous voyons quand il est parlé du prepuce, que c’est une chose detestable. On ne peut donc autrement juger sinon que Moyse ait laissé la circoncision comme si le peuple estoit excommunié et rejetté de Dieu pour ung temps.” (Manuscrit français, Folio 96a, Bibliothèque Publique Universitaire Genève).
49. Ibid., “Mais la circoncision a esté donnée devant la loy et a esté donnée comme ung tesmoignage de l’adoption de Dieu par laquelle la lignée d’Abraham estoit esparée d’avec tout le reste du monde.”
lesson: “having been stripped of all faults and corruption, we ought to be clothed with the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Calvin’s feelings about nakedness were shared by the Council in Geneva, possibly under his influence. It repeatedly forbade mixed bathing in the public bathhouses. It is not clear whether any kind of bathing costume was required by the bathhouse (as was assumed by Luther’s comments). An even more serious infraction was committed by two ministers who went nude bathing with a certain Huguenne and her sister. They were reprimanded and later deposed. Today they would also most likely be reprimanded by their colleagues and perhaps also deposed, depending on their particular cultural context.

Calvin’s discomfort and feelings of shame about the body are probably at least partially related to his own ill health throughout most of his life. Still, in commenting on the various Bible passages we discussed, he ought not to have read more shame and disgust into them than is present. What he read into them was informed more by his prejudices and prudery than by the actual words of Scripture. By sometimes reading more into the text, as in the Noah account, or by sometimes coloring the plain meaning of the text to express more shame, as in Isaiah, Calvin betrayed his own exegetical principles in order to accommodate his prudery. Hans-Joachim Kraus has identified eight principles of exegesis in Calvin’s writings. The first of these is clarity and brevity. In the case of Noah, Calvin has seen more in the account than is present in the words of Scripture: brevity was abandoned for his imaginative interpretation, adding laughter, mockery, and insult to the story. The second principle is the intention of the author. In the case of Isaiah, Calvin presumes to know that the author intended to convey the feeling of disgust and shame even if the Scriptures meant to express that Isaiah was not completely naked.

In the resurrection, the godless are “stripped of the body, but because they bring into God’s sight nothing but a disgraceful nakedness, they are not clothed with a glorious body.” This is in contrast with the believers “who are clothed with Christ and adorned with His righteousness receive the glorious robe of immortality.”


52. For example, on the 2nd and 5th March, 1543 “— Sur ce que les predicans se lamente des estuves pour ce que les femmes ce mesle avecque les hommes ordonne que cest affere soyt remys avecque lungdi prochaïen (ibid. fol. 25c.). Lundi 5. Ordonne que les hommes nayent a ce estuver avecque les femmes ny les femmes averse le hommes et aussy que ung chascun hommes et femmes soient separe sinon quil soient conioinct en mariage et allors peulve coucher ensemble non pas estuver, et de ce fere commande ment aux estuviers. (Reg. du Conseil, fol. 26 v.).” (CO 21:308).


55. Commentary on The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, tr. T.A. Small (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd,1964), 67. “Exuuntur enim corpore etiam impii: sed quia nihil in Dei conspectum afferunt praeter ignominiosam nuditatem, ideo non superves-
Calvin continues by explaining that “God clothes us twice, first with the righteousness of Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit in this life and then after death with immortality and glory.” Calvin is clearly speaking of spiritual nakedness and spiritual righteousness, although the godless appear to be stripped of their physical body. However, if in this life already we are clothed with Christ’s righteousness, what cause do we have to be ashamed of the body redeemed by Christ? If a disgraceful nakedness belongs to the godless, should believers, sanctified by the Spirit, also be ashamed of their nakedness? Calvin does not seem to adequately consider the flesh and blood reality of our bodies as redeemed by Christ. If, with the Psalmist, we are to consider the creative works of God, and to praise him for them, should we not also praise him for our physical bodies, especially those redeemed by Christ?

One would wish that Calvin had more consistently applied his teaching that in Christ we are restored to our innocence. Just because bodies are often troublesome and pained, and are not perfect, does not mean they are full of turpitude or something to be ashamed of. It is unfortunate, but understandable in view of his other comments, that Calvin did not write a commentary on the Song of Songs. Calvin often, with approval, quotes Bernard of Clairvaux, who gave numerous, completely allegorical sermons on the Song of Songs, but when Calvin quotes him from these, he never reproves him for being allegorical. He uses Bernard to support his own views.

It would have been difficult for him to give an allegorical interpretation, given his aversion to allegories, but even more difficult to write a non-allegorical commentary. In “The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality” Moore mentions Castellio as offering a literal interpretation. Engammare states that Castellio maintained his literal interpretation, contra Liebing, who asserts that Castellio later reverted to an allegorical interpretation. Castellio saw it as an indecent love-song that Solomon wrote, but not under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The dispute between Castellio and Calvin was discussed in the Council, with Calvin maintaining that the Song was holy. He could not fault Castellio for being literal rather than allegorical, since Calvin despises allegories.

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60. “M. Calvin et Me Bastian Chastilion. Sur ce que entre eulx sont en dubie sus l’approbation du livre de Salomon lequel M. Calvin approve saict et ledit B a s t i a n le repudie disant que quant il fist le capistre septieme il estoyt en folie et conduyct par mondaienetes et non pas du saict Esperit. Et sur ce hont demande ledit Sr Calvin estre aoys en dispute et daventage ledit Sr Bastian a diest quil laysse tel livre pour tel quil est.” (CO 21:329).
61. See chapter 3, f.n. 142.
nical status of the Song of Songs, Calvin took it as an offence against the majesty of the Bible. However, Castellio never actually excluded the Song from the Bibles he translated.\(^62\) Max Engammare, surveying the very few references of the Song of Songs in Calvin’s writings, thinks that he also had a literal interpretation.\(^63\) However, Calvin does quote from Bernard’s Sermons on the Song of Songs, about twenty times in twelve sections of the Institutes.\(^64\) Calvin’s quotations are such that he must have read Bernard closely and even quoted him from the actual books. The Song must have presented something of an enigma to Calvin.

One document describes the Song of Songs as follows:

> Love poetry is carnal knowledge, a hymn to the beauty of the body and the goodness of creation, to the sheer joy of bodily existence and its pleasures. In love, the body is a means of grace, and the graceful forms of the body are a means of love.\(^65\)

The lovers in the Song of Songs embrace their sexuality and nakedness before one another without any shame, even though they live in a fallen world. They joyfully describe their naked bodies as a source of delight, not shame. It is almost impossible to imagine Calvin giving such a positive view of the sensuousness of bodily life. However, he moved a tiny bit in that direction when he stated that “the wife’s beautiful figure is a cause of love.”\(^66\) That must have been his clothed wife’s figure, since he did not approve of men and women disrobing in front of each other. When speaking about life in the Garden of Eden, Calvin may well have agreed with Smallman:

> The man and the woman were naked before each other and before God without shame, because nakedness represented the most beautiful thing about the Garden – openness and freedom. This is life as God meant it to be lived.\(^67\)

Modern Catholic teaching is also positive about humankind’s original condition. Pope John Paul II stated, “In the state of original innocence nakedness did not express a lack. Rather, it represented full acceptance of the body in all its human and therefore personal truth.”\(^68\) Openness, freedom, and acceptance turned into shame after the Fall. Calvin reiterates that in Sermon Seventeen on 1 Timothy 2: “had it not been for the sin of man we should not have been ashamed to be naked.”\(^69\) In Platon-

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\(^{62}\) Engammare, *Qu’il me baise*, 16.

\(^{63}\) *Ibid.*, 11, f.n.47.

\(^{64}\) *ICR* 2.1.4; 2.3.5; 2.5.1; 2.3.12; 2.16.1; 3.3.15; 3.11.22; 3.12.3; 3.12.8; 3.15.2; 3.21.1; 3.24.4.


\(^{69}\) “Sans le péché de l’homme nous n’aurions point honte d’estre nuds.” (CO 53:205).
ism the body, though inferior to, and ruled by the soul, had to be trained to be fit, so that a balanced life could result: “I have observed, he said, that the devotees of unmitigated gymnastics turn out more brutal than they should be and those of music softer than is good for them.”\textsuperscript{70} The best blend of music and gymnastics was to ensure a balanced person. In ancient Greece gymnastic training took place unclothed (γυμνός). There was no shame associated with such nakedness, even though the body was considered inferior to the soul. Calvin associates nakedness and shame by linking them to our fallen nature. He does not foresee a radical restoration, or even a partial one as far as shame about the naked body is concerned, until after the resurrection.

**Christ’s Naked Body**

There was no shame in Christ’s nakedness, even as he hung on the cross like a condemned criminal, because of his sinlessness and perfect righteousness. Calvin comments on this as follows:

> The Evangelists portray the Son of God as stripped of his clothes that we may know the wealth gained for us by this nakedness, for it shall dress us in God’s sight. God willed His Son to be stripped that we should appear freely, with the angels, in the garments of his righteousness and fulness of all good things, whereas formerly, foul disgrace, in torn clothes, kept us away from the approach to the heavens.\textsuperscript{71}

In this way, Calvin once more emphasizes the contrast between sinners and the Savior. In the sinner, nakedness is foul and unbecoming. In the Savior it proves his great love for us in that he was willing to be stripped of everything in order to save us, and “to make us rich with the riches of his victory.”\textsuperscript{72}

**Conclusions**

Now and then it is possible to catch Calvin in making a positive statement on the naked body. This happens when he comments on the creation, when both in their body and soul everything was a testimony to the goodness and wisdom of God. Then he can say: “It was without shame; everything was honorable.”\textsuperscript{73} Our fall into sin, however, covered our bodily existence in shame, to which clothing is the God-given


\textsuperscript{72} *Ibid.*, “ut nos victoriae suae opibus ditaret.”

\textsuperscript{73} SC XI/1, 148. Sermon 12 on Genesis, “Ainsi ne nous esbahissons pas si Adam et Eve n’ont point eu honte d’estre nudi, d’autant qu’il n’y avoit rien en leur corps non plus en leur ame qui ne fust comme tesoignage de la bonté et sagesse de Dieu. Or cela estoit sans vergogne; tout y estoit honorable.”
answer. Nakedness is in biblical language a metaphor for standing guilty before God. For Calvin, bodily nakedness after the Fall is always connected to sin and therefore even a disgrace to human dignity. The (male and female) sexual organs especially seem to be expressions of this disgrace to Calvin. While soteriologically speaking sin and guilt can be washed away in the blood of Christ, the effects of original sin seem to be so tied to the naked body that only the eschatological deliverance can set the human race free. However, Calvin does not especially resort to the use of the prison metaphor when connecting nakedness and shame.
Chapter Nine

The Body at Creation, After the Fall, and in the Resurrection

Introduction

The challenge of this chapter is to give a systematic-theological account of Calvin’s view of the human body from the perspective of the main loci of Christian dogmatics. This means that we once again will address the question how Calvin’s view of the body surfaces in the doctrine of creation, the doctrine of the fall and consequent (hereditary) sinfulness, the doctrines of Christology and soteriology, pneumatology and sanctification, and finally in the locus regarding the last things, eschatology. What can be said concerning the thesis that he was a Platonist with respect to the body? It will be clear that some of the observations and evaluations of the foregoing chapters will surface here again, but now under a more strict systematic-theological perspective.

The Body at Creation

Although the pristine state of the human body as God’s handiwork did not last very long, Calvin does have a few words to say about it. He emphasizes that God, in his fatherly care, provided everything needful for humankind to be blessed with an abundance of good things, which only our sins have caused to be diminished. Only when the earth was fully arranged with all the necessities of life and adorned with beauty did God create humankind. God could have created humankind first, but he chose to have everything provided before creating humans, like a good father would provide clothes and everything else when his wife is close to giving birth.¹ Calvin says that man was created superior to all other visible creatures: there was nothing approaching man in his dignity. It was there that God especially wanted to make his glory reflected.² The rest of Sermon 6 is devoted to the meaning of the image of God, as

¹ Sermon 6 on Genesis (9th September, 1559). “Comme un père n’attendra pas que son enfant soit venu au monde, quand le terme approche, que sa femme doit enfant, il provoira de ce qui est requis à l’enfant. Quand un père aura faculté, il achètera pour l’emmaillouter et tout le reste.” Supplementa Calviniana, Vol. XI/1, Sermons sur la Genèse Chapitres 1,1 – 11,4, ed. Max Engammar (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000), 54. Hereafter: SC. He repeats these sentiments towards the end of the sermon, mentioning in particular the crib that is to receive the baby, and the wood to warm the home (66).

² Ibid., 55. “... l’homme est une creature noble par dessus toutes les autres ... je di visibles ... il n’y a rien qui approche de l’homme. ... c’est là où Dieu a voulu faire reluire sa gloire.”
discussed in chapter 5. When it comes to preaching on the creation of woman, Calvin explains why it is important that she was created from Adam’s flesh, rather than from the earth, as was Adam. God wanted to ensure that people felt and knew themselves to be of one substance, so that they would be united in mutual love, and would know themselves to be connected to their neighbors, because all were derived from one person. Calvin also relates this point specifically to the marriage relationship: “there is a mutual obligation here. The husband should support his wife and know: 'She is a part of me.’”

In the Institutes, Calvin is more concerned to describe the soul, and to distinguish it from the body, rather than comment on the body itself (ICR 1.15.2). He does commend the use of the tongue in singing and praying, “for it was particularly created to tell and proclaim the praise of God” provided “they are associated with the heart’s affection.”

In his later years Calvin was more expressive and positive about God’s handiwork in creating the human body. For example, in Sermon 39 on Job, he waxes eloquent about a “work so perfect and excellent as is the human body.” In particular he mentions the nails on our hands, which appear like something superfluous, but nevertheless perform important functions. “It is certain, therefore, that the nail of a man, which is but a superfluity, will be for us a mirror of God’s providence.” Even though he expresses this detailed appreciation of a man’s nails, he insists that the most important part of us is still the soul. In saying that God has clothed him with skin and flesh (Job 10:10-12), Job maintains (according to Calvin) that the principal part of man does not consist of what is apparent to the eye, but in what lives within the body. There should be a guest lodging in our body, i.e. the soul. So the main part of man is the spirit which God has placed therein. The body is such a work of art and so excellent, that we should be ashamed: what then should we think of the soul which surpasses it by so much more and is more worthy?

The Body After the Fall

In Sermon 6, describing the creation of humankind, Calvin previews the effects of the Fall, saying that even in our miserable state, God still shows himself to be a father to...
Calvin cannot keep to his text about creation without going to the results of the fall. The earth still produces food for our needs so that our bodies may be fed and cared for. As described in the previous chapter, Calvin sees shame about the naked body to be the immediate result of the Fall, as does Genesis. In both the commentary and the sermons, Calvin mentions that we are not ashamed to see animals naked, but we are embarrassed of our own and others’ nakedness. The Fall rendered both our bodies and souls corrupt. There is “no purity in either our body or our soul, for our senses are perverted and our experience proves it.” He goes as far as to say that “our nature is so infected by sin, that, in a manner of speaking, up to the end of our fingers the fruits and effects of sin are obvious.” He does not say how the fingers of a fallen person look different from those of Adam and Eve before the Fall. Calvin’s response to all the resulting conditions since the Fall is to admonish his congregation to resolve to repent and seek the grace of his Holy Spirit to wage war against our iniquities and gain the victory. In the sinful, fallen state, Calvin sees humankind as “nothing but earthworms, nothing but filth.” The human body is directly affected by the Fall, since the earth is cursed because of Adam. However, the woman is more directly affected in her own body when she brings forth children in pain, or with hard labor. Adam also has to engage in hard labor in order to obtain food from the earth. Instead of joy, peace, and delights, which would have been ours if Adam had continued in his integrity, there are storms, hail, famines, and other disasters that constitute the means by which God punishes the sins of humankind. Illnesses are also seen as resulting from the Fall. In short, says Calvin, “we see the curse of God on our whole body.”

In the commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:15, he is also concerned to include the body in the benefits and obligations of salvation:

Observe, that the spiritual connection which we have with Christ belongs not merely to the soul, but also to the body, so that we are flesh of his flesh, &c (Eph. 5:30). Otherwise, the hope of a resurrection were weak, if our connection were not of that nature — full and complete.
And a little further, on 1 Corinthians 6:20, “... he shows that the body is subject to God no less than the soul, and that accordingly it is reasonable that both be devoted to his glory.”

He repeats this sentiment in connection with 2 Corinthians 7:1 “in order that you may sanctify yourself to God aright, you must dedicate both body and soul entirely to him.”

On Romans 12:1 Calvin comments: “He says first, that our body ought to be offered a sacrifice to God; by which he implies that we are not our own, but have entirely passed over so as to become the property of God; which cannot except we renounce ourselves and deny ourselves.”

The thought that our bodies are not our own but belong to God, has been reflected in Reformed confessions, such as the Heidelberg Catechism (Q & A). It is also reflected in more recent statements made against people who argue that a woman’s body is her own and therefore she may do with it what she likes, including aborting her own child. Unfortunately, those who would abort a child probably have no concept of belonging to God, body and soul. Thus the argument would not hold for them.

The Body in the Resurrection

Calvin’s most explicit teaching on the nature of the human body in the resurrection is located in the Institutes (3.25.7 and 8). He is concerned to refute the thinking of some people who say that we will “be furnished with new and different” bodies. He adduces many Scriptures to prove that our bodies will be changed, not replaced by different bodies. He makes the same argument in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:53 “If he had said, ‘This corruptible ought to be renewed,’ he would not have so clearly and effectively disposed of the error of those fanatics who invent the notion that men are to be given new bodies. But when he says here that this corruptible is to be clothed with glory, there is no more room left for argument.”

In his commentary on Philippians 3:21 Calvin admits how humanly difficult it is to believe in the resurrection:

As nothing is more incredible, or more contrary to carnal perception than the resurrection, Paul places before our eyes the boundless power of God, that it may swallow up all doubt.

For distrust arises from our measuring the thing itself by the narrowness of our own understanding.  

Calvin also admits that

Nothing is more repugnant to human reason than this tenet of faith. For nobody else, except God, can convince us that after our bodies, which are already subject to corruption, have rotted away, or been consumed by fire, or been torn in pieces by wild animals, they will be restored in their wholeness, but in a far better nature.

This must have been a comforting thought when Calvin considered his own, disease-ridden body. When the commentary was published in 1546 he was already suffering from a number of illnesses, especially migraines. Calvin goes back to creation. The greatly better condition is an advance on the “original state” mentioned in Calvin’s sermons on Job 19:25 about the nature of the resurrection body: God will restore our bodies to their original state. Calvin says that after his death, his body will be as though annihilated in the grave, but God will guard and keep his soul. After the resurrection he will be better able to contemplate the life obtained by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even if his bones as well as his flesh have decayed, he will, with Job, see God in his own flesh. It will be as it was before, because God is mighty to do so.

In the commentaries Calvin also expands on the meaning of the resurrection. He sees the resurrection of Lazarus as a special case, not only because it happened shortly...
before Jesus’ crucifixion, but also because “he now displays his power on a rotting corpse.”27 This miracle also confirms the faith of Job that God can raise even the dead who have already decayed. In the resurrection, believers will be “free from all pain and corruption.”28 They “shall no longer remember their miseries.”29

As mentioned in chapter three, Calvin thought that people should not be engaged in unprofitable speculations, for example, whether people would stand or sit or walk in the resurrection. They should, rather, be more concerned about getting to the heavenly kingdom.30 By contrast, Luther was quite specific in his beliefs about the heavenly afterlife. He contended that, although people would have their five senses, they would not have what belongs to the earthly life: bread, clothing, money, children, cattle and whatever is needed for this life. We would not eat, drink, digest, defecate, perspire, or make love. A wife would not need a husband, and vice versa. There will be no differentiated status among people: a serving girl would no longer have a mistress, and the one who was a preacher here will not be a farmer, but all are holy. The whole body will be more beautiful than it was on earth.31 Luther seems to expect us to have superman powers in the resurrection: "With this your finger you’ll be able to carry this church; you’ll be so strong, you’ll be able to jump to the sun and more than four miles. The weak body will have such power. Nothing will be impossible for it."32 He compares it to a mighty tree, which is far stronger than the seed from which it grew.

Calvin does not specifically state what believers will or will not do in the heavenly kingdom. In Harmony of the Gospels, he states that the resurrected Jesus “has no more need of meat and drink than angels have, still he voluntarily condescends to join in the common usages of mortals. During the whole course of his life, he had subjected himself to the necessity of eating and drinking; and now, though relieved from that necessity, he eats for the purpose of convincing his disciples of the certainty of his resurrection.”33 Calvin does not say anything similar about the raised bodies of

30. Sermon on Matthew 5:8-10. “Il y en a beaucoup auiourd’huy qui voudroyent scavoir par une curiosité non moins impertinente que sotte, quelle sera en Paradis la gloire des fideles, s’ils seront assis ou debout, s’ils se proumeneront, s’ils iouiront des creatures d’yci bas, quel en sera l’usage, et à quoy tout cela servira. Brief, ils voudront s’amuser à telles speculations qui sont de nul profit, et voudront aller par toutes les chambres de paradis, pour scavoir quel il y falt: et cependant ils ne se soucient point d’en approcher.” (CO 46:800).
believers but it is possible that he thinks the same as Luther about not needing food or drink. He is less willing to speculate about matters not revealed in Scripture. Commenting on Matthew 22:30, he says of the believers:

They shall be free from every infirmity of the present life; thus affirming that they will no longer be exposed to the wants of a frail and perishing life. Luke expresses more clearly the nature of the resemblance, that they can no longer die, and therefore there will be no propagation of the species, as on earth.34

As is often the case, Calvin shows himself to be more reserved and constrained than Luther. He is not willing to be precise where the Bible is vague or silent. For example, on Matthew 27:52, relating how the graves were opened when Jesus died, he states,

Another and more difficult question is, What became of those saints afterwards? For it would appear to be absurd to suppose that, after having been once admitted by Christ to the participation of a new life, they again turned to dust. But as this question cannot be easily or quickly answered, so it is not necessary to give ourselves much uneasiness about a matter which is not necessary to be known.35

The most important aspects of the resurrection of believers to life, for Calvin, are its certainty and its glory:

If it is the case that I shall see my God, what excuse will there be today when God declares to us so clearly and expressly the Resurrection and gives us so many beautiful promises? And considered even that we see of it the mirror and substance in our Lord Jesus Christ, that he is raised in order to show that we must not doubt at all being one day participants in this immortal glory.36

Our own resurrection is guaranteed by Jesus’ resurrection. It affirms the original goodness of the created world, especially the goodness and integrity of the human body as it was created. It should not surprise us that our final redemption also in-
cludes our body, in a glorified state. Our humble, weak, and sinful body will be changed into a glorious body.

The care of dead bodies is of concern to Calvin for decency’s sake in the case of unbelievers and because of the resurrection in the case of believers. He sees Joshua act in obedience to the law (Deuteronomy 21:23) by taking down the king of Ai (Joshua 8:29) and the other captive kings (Joshua 10:27) and burying them rather than leaving them to be eaten by birds of prey or other animals.\(^{38}\) He praises the men of Jabesh Gilead for giving Saul and his sons a decent burial when they found out that their bodies were hanging from the wall of Beth Shan. They burned the rotting flesh and buried the bones under a tamarisk tree (1 Samuel 31:11-13).\(^{39}\) He admits that God sometimes allows the righteous to be left in an ignominious state but that does not mean that they are cursed of God. The sight of a dead body should be abhorrent to us:

For it is a sad and disgraceful thing, nay, a horrid spectacle, when we see men unburied; and the duty of burying the dead has from the beginning been acknowledged, and burial is an evidence of a future resurrection, as it has been before stated. When, therefore, the body of a man lies unburied, all men shun and dread the sight; and then when the body gets rigid through cold, and becomes putrid through the heat of the day, the indignity becomes still greater.\(^{40}\)

Respect for the body is required therefore, even for executed criminals.

**Conclusion**

Although Calvin is generally more concerned about the soul, he does show a distinct awareness of the human body as being God’s handiwork and therefore perfect and excellent. The effects of the Fall are disastrous and disgracing, which particularly becomes visible in the corporeal life of human beings. Calvin associates the Platonic prison metaphor easily with the wording of St. Paul in Romans 7 and 8 and fills it, in fact, with Pauline eschatological hope. This leads to a sharp division between this life and the life to come. The body in this present age is immersed in a world of sin, and subject to many sinful impulses. In the resurrection the body will be liberated from the chains of sin and curse, and completely brought under dominion of the glory of


\(^{39}\) *CO* 30:728-30, Lecture 107 on 1 Samuel.

God. In both the state of our humiliation and of glorification the body has its place, but under completely different conditions.
Chapter Ten
Conclusions

In this final chapter we have to answer the main research question. Was Calvin a Platonist with respect to the body? The answer is both “Yes” and “No.” Calvin reflects Platonism in his language but not consistently in his thinking and exegesis. He leans towards Platonism when he speaks or writes disparagingly about the body and when he uses the prison metaphor, but he is a biblical theologian when he acknowledges the creative goodness of his heavenly Father in designing the human body and shares the hope of a bodily resurrection. The eschatology of Paul, with its sharp distinction between this earthly life and the life to come as exemplified in his commentary on Romans 7-8, together with the Platonic impulse of Renaissance culture form the two tendencies in his thought, which sometimes converge, sometimes conflict, and often remain in tension.

Theologically, Calvin cannot be called a Platonist, for he acknowledges the goodness of the creation and that includes the body. Although he initially excluded the image of God from the body when writing in the Psychopannychia that the body had nothing to do with the image, he later conceded that in man’s original state, God’s “glory shone everywhere, within and without.” Thus, anthropologically, the body was included in the image. In the fallen state, God’s wonderful creative skill and loving care is still visible in the body, but the image is defaced. Thus, Calvin would agree that our problem is not that we are bodily creatures; our problem is that we are sinners.

The unique event of the incarnation is confirmation, also for Calvin, that Christ fully identified with us in his humanity, and thus in his bodiliness: “he is our flesh.” To be a true Mediator, Christ “fashioned for himself a body from our body, flesh from our flesh, bones from our bones, that he might be one with us.” It was in his own body he suffered and died for us: “He offered as a sacrifice the flesh he received from us. That he might wipe out our guilt by his act of expiation and appease the Father’s righteous wrath.” The incarnation is the foundation of Christology. There would be no salvation if the Son of God had not taken on a human body, whereas a Platonist could not imagine a god wanting to take on a body. In Platonism the aim is to escape the body. Here, in the core elements of Christian thought on human exis-

tence, the deep influence of the biblical tradition is felt. When it comes to creation, salvation, and consummation, the body is theologically affirmed.

Soteriologically, Calvin is not consistent when it comes to the meaning of the body. While it is true that he exhorts believers to live holy lives and to exercise self-control over the body, he also states that being one in Christ “has nothing to do with the body, and has nothing to do with the outward relationships of mankind, but has solely to do with the mind.” This one regrettable statement detracts from Calvin’s teaching on salvation. The life that is saved by being in Christ is lived in the body. This awareness should have consequences for the body, its behavior, and its health.

The body is relevant to pneumatology in two ways. The first is that it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Paul states this in the context of warning against sexual immorality and other gross sins. Calvin applies the meaning not to the being, but to the actions of the body, “so that we may be under no delusion about acquitting ourselves towards Him, for we can only do that when we yield ourselves to His service, wholly and completely, so that He may also direct the outward actions of our lives by His Word.” The second aspect of the Spirit’s work in the body is the resurrection: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:11). This is usually taken to refer to the resurrection of the bodies of believers, as the analogy with Jesus in the first part of the verse would suggest, but Calvin applies it to the process of sanctification by the Spirit “by which he gradually mortifies the remains of the flesh and renews us in the heavenly life.” Here also, what we do with our body should be directed by the Holy Spirit.

In his eschatology Calvin’s main point about the body is that it will be renewed and glorified. The dead in Christ will be raised and Christians alive at the coming of the Lord will also be changed and glorified. It will not be the case that they will get a different, brand new body, but their bodies will be renewed. The body is not annihilated as something evil, it is renewed and glorified. Christ came to restore our creaturely bodiliness through the resurrection of the body, his own and eventually ours. Thus the perceived tension between body and soul is attenuated by the resurrection.

In more earthly, practical matters, such as sexuality, and in particular intercourse between married people, Calvin comes across as unnecessarily negative. It is not absolutely clear why Calvin should have singled out this aspect of life to deny the delight that God obviously intended in creating humankind as male and female. He is positive about all the other delights that God provided in his fatherly care. Flowers,
fragrances, music, precious stones and metals are all given for our delight, even in this fallen world. Granted that the human body is part of God’s creation it would have been theologcally fitting if he had considered the delight of sexual intimacy with equal gratitude. Obviously this is not the case. Calvin’s view on the frailty of the human being and the conviction that all of creation is deeply embedded in sin prevent him from coming to such an appreciation. As we concluded in chapter 8, only eschatological deliverance can set the bodies of the human race free. Calvin’s eschatological perspective and his preference for things of the mind may have led him to under-appreciate the body. In this respect his deep awareness of the vulnerability of the human body and his doctrine of sin and the cultural impact of Platonism are convergent strains in his thought. Battenhouse even writes about Calvin’s “fundamental Platonism.” He states, “The otherworldliness of Calvin, it seems quite clear, is more Greek than Hebrew.” However, Louis Jacobs has asserted:

It is hoped that [...] the lie will be given to the caricature of Judaism as a religion with its stress above all on the physical body in its relationship to the divine. Any neat distinction, say, between Christianity, supposedly concerned primarily with the soul, and Judaism, supposedly concerned primarily with the body, must be rejected if only because of the complexity of the issue. There is no single, official view in Judaism (and, I imagine, the same is true of Christianity) on this and on similar extremely involved topics.

Still, as far as Calvin is concerned, his primary concerns were the soul, mind, and reason. Cooper found that Calvin simply found “confirmation for his own self-consciously Platonistic categories.” In my study of Calvin I have indeed encountered a strong Platonic influence, both in terminology and ideas. However, when it comes to a comparison of those Bible verses that Cooper uses to demonstrate his view of “holistic dualism” with an afterlife between physical death and the resurrection, there is nothing in Calvin’s commentaries that contradicts Cooper’s view. Therefore, it would seem that there is nothing that would hinder Calvin adopting a more holistic view, if he were not so much influenced by Plato. His sharp distinctions between body and soul have the effect of separating what God has joined together.

One of the results of our study is that when using the prison metaphor, Calvin, fills it, in fact, with the eschatology that the apostle Paul brings forward in Romans 7 and 8. On several occasional it was argued that one can speak of a correction of the Platonic tendency in Calvin’s thought. This result comes close to the opinion of A. Baars. In his article “Meditatio Futurae Vitae bij Calvijn,” Baars contends that re-

search has shown that there are important, intrinsic differences between the manner in which this saying is used in Plato and the manner in which Calvin uses the term. This essentially Platonic formula was given a biblical meaning and was corrected as to its contents by the reformer. However, the reader of only Calvin’s Institutes, and not much else, is likely to be given the impression that Calvin was mostly Platonic in his thinking.

It is, of course, hardly surprising that there should be some inconsistencies in the vast number of works by Calvin from a systematic-theological point of view. Jane Dempsey Douglass writes,

Calvin himself did not see all the logical consequences of his own position, nor did he act consistently on the insights he had. The same judgment can be made of our own generation. But as theologians of the twelfth century liked to say, we can see a little further because we sit on the shoulders of giants. Calvin is such a giant in the theological tradition.

Many of Calvin’s opinions and pronouncements are consonant with those of the sixteenth century culture in general. Occasionally he advances beyond his milieu, for example, in disavowing a double standard for sexual sins, and in prohibiting parents to marry off their children against their wills. His emphasis on equality in the marriage bed, following Paul, is also significant. His linking of the teaching on God’s image in humankind to the need for care for the neighbor is also an element in his thought that triggers modern sensibilities, particularly in the situations where there is a widening disparity between the rich and the poor. But still, ambivalence remains when it comes to the body. In his Commentary on Romans 6:12-13, he states that “body” is

not to be taken in the sense of flesh, and skin, and bones, but, so to speak for the whole body of man’s existence. We may quite certainly infer this from the present passage, for the other clause, which he will shortly add concerning the parts of the body, extends also the soul. Paul thus refers disparagingly to earthly man, for the corruption of our nature prevents our aspiring to anything worthy of our original. …

The objection that there is a difference in the case of the soul is easily answered by the assertion that in our present degenerate state our souls are fixed to the earth, and so enslaved to our bodies, that they have fallen from their proper excellence.


Why would “the parts of the body” extend to the soul? Is this an intimation of a more unified view of body and soul? If so, he did not proceed along this path. Or is this again a statement caused by his doctrine of the encompassing effects of sin? Calvin does not seem to discuss the body as being used as an instrument of righteousness (v. 13), except in one generalized sentence: “Our members, too, are to be dedicated and consecrated to His will, so that all our powers of soul and body may aspire to His glory alone.” However, he does not spell out how we can be God’s hands and feet in the world with our bodies. What would we be without our bodies? We would not be human. What could we do without our bodies? We could not work for the coming of the Kingdom, we could not love our neighbours, and we could not glorify God by praising him. After all, the tongue is specifically made for the praise of God, according to Calvin. Calvin equates ‘body’ here with “the whole of man’s existence,” which “extends to the soul,” even though the text speaks of “mortal body” whereas Calvin has said that the soul is immortal. He conflates the mortal body with the immortal soul in this part of his commentary.

To conclude, for Calvin the soul is imprisoned in the body, but the soul is also enslaved to the body. There seems to be a reluctance to speak about the body except in contrast or in conjunction with the soul in matters that pertain to this life. Calvin believes that in eternity the soul will not be without the body and the body will not be without the soul. He sees an integrated reality in the hereafter but a split on earth; the body is keeping the soul in bonds, fettered. As to the question that instigated my research, “Was Calvin a Platonist with respect to the body?” the answer has, therefore, to be a qualified “No.”

Calvin’s negativity towards the body and especially sexual delights for a long time permeated the cultures of those societies that adopted the reformed faith. Early Calvinists considered this life to be “nothing but a vale of tears” but later Calvinists (Neo-Calvinists and Kuyperians) have taken Calvin’s doctrine of creation to imply the necessity of full involvement of Christians in every aspect of life. This world-affirming view is exemplified in the Contemporary Testimony, “Our World Belongs to God.” As far as bodiliness in general is concerned, society has moved away from Calvin’s concepts: we are now much more concerned with the body than he would ever have approved or anticipated. This is not to say that this contemporary appreciation of the body is without risks. One thing that can be learned from Calvin is that, when appropriating the biblical message in our own time it is essential to be open to the critical and corrective elements of this message. At the same time Calvin exemplifies how difficult it is to be open to such fundamental corrections, given the pervasive sensitivities and convictions of one’s own life and times.

esse animae rationem, in promptu est solutio: ut nunc sumus degeneres, animas nostras terrae affixas esse, et sic corporibus addictas, ut a sua praestantia desciverint. (CO 49:11).
16. This testimony was first approved by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of North America in 1986. It is “subordinate to our creeds and confessions.” An updated version was adopted in 2008.
Appendix

This is a list of occurrences of the prison metaphor, as well as expressions indicating the need or desire to be liberated from the body, as discussed in this work.

1. “Atque ut hanc poenitentiam assidue (sic enim oportet) illi, quamdiu in carcere sui corporis degunt, prosequuntur, ita subinde atque assidue illam remissionem obtinent.” Institution 1536 (CO 1:78). “And, as they persistently pursue this repentance (for so they must) as long as they dwell in the prison of their body, thus repeatedly and persistently they obtain that remission.”

2. “Nam quamdiu in hoc carcere corporis nostri claudi degimus, habitabunt in nobis reliquiae peccati; sed si promissionem in baptismo nobis a Deo datam fide tenemos, non dominabuntur nec regnabunt.” Institution 1536 (CO 1:113). “For so long as we live cooped up in this prison of our body, traces of sin will dwell in us; but if we faithfully hold fast to the promise given us by God, they shall not dominate or rule.”

3. “. . . sed tantum dico, omnes Dei electos per fidem ingredi in vitam aeternam, quacunque aetatis parte ex hoc corruptionis carcere tollantur.” Institution 1536 (CO 1:118). “But I am only saying that all God’s elect enter into eternal life through faith, at whatever point in age they are released from this prison house of corruption.”

4. “Qua ratione, eo ipso loco, descendisse dicitur secundum divinitatem; non quod divinitas coelum reliquerit, ut in ergastulum corporis se abderet, sed quia, tametsi omnia impleret, in ipsa tamen Christi humanitate corporaliter, id est, naturaliter habitabat et ineffabili quodam modo (Col. 2).” Institution 1536 (CO 1:122). “In this manner, he is said to have descended to that place according to his divinity, not because divinity left heaven to hide itself in the prison house of the body, but because even though it filled all things, still in Christ’s very humanity it dwelt bodily.”

5. “disseremus hoc loco de animarum quiete, ... a corporibus solvuntur.” Psychopannychia 1534/42 (CO 5:188). “we will here say something respecting the rest of the soul when ... it is freed from the body.” SW, 3:432.

they shall be divested of flesh and the desires of the flesh ... then at length will they rest and recline with God.” SW, 3:433.

7. “hoc ipso declarans, meliorem sui partem corporis vinculis captivam teneri, ac per mortem liberatum iri.” Psychopannychia 1534/42 (CO 5:194). “Declaring, that his better part was held captive by bodily chains and would be freed by death.” SW, 3:440.

8. “vi sua non exerceri post dissolutam compagem corporis?” Psychopannychia 1534/42 (CO 5:195). “[The soul’s] vigour is not exercised after the fetters of the body are dissolved.” SW, 3:441.

9. “Si corpus animae est carcer, si terrena habitatio, compedes sunt: quid anima soluta hoc carcer, exuta his vinculis?” Psychopannychia 1534/42 (CO 5:196). “If the body is the prison of the soul, if the earthly habitation is a kind of fetters, what is the state of the soul when set free from this prison, when loosed from these fetters?” SW, 3:443.

10. “nos quidem cupere egredi ex hoc corporis ergastulo, sed non ut vagemur incerti sine hospitio.” Psychopannychia 1534/42 (CO 5:195). “We desire indeed to depart from this prison of the body, but not to wander uncertain without a home.” SW, 3:442.

11. “Quamdiu in corpore est, virtutes suas exserere: quum ex illo ergastulo egreditur, ad Deum migrare...” Psychopannychia 1534/42 (CO 5:201). “As long as it [our spirit] is in the body it exerts its own powers; but when it quits this prison-house it returns to God...” SW, 3:449.


13. “Exin transit ad desribendam spiritus et carnis luctam, quam in se filii Dei sentient quamdiu carcer mortalis corporis circumdantur.” (CO 49:4 Argumentum). “From this he passes to describe the struggle between the Spirit and the flesh experienced by the children of God as long as they are surrounded by the prison of our mortal body.” Comm. Romans, Theme of the Epistle, 1540.

14. “Car c’est une maladie tant enracinee en nostre nature, que jamais nous n’en sommes pleinement gueris, que nous ne soyons delivrez de ceste prison de nostre corps.” Recueil des opuscules (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003), 183. Petit Traité de la sainte Cène, 1541 (CO 5:444). “All Men Imperfect and Blameworthy,” Calvin writes, “For it is a malady so rooted in our nature, that we are never completely cured until we are delivered from the prison of the body.” Short Trea- tise on the Supper of Our Lord, at part 26.
15. “Contentions aussi l’amour infinie de nostre Dieu en ce qu’il a donné son Fils unique, et ne l’a point espargné pour nous, comme il est dict au 3. chap. de sainct Jean, Dieu nous pouvroyt bien racheter par autre moyen, et sans nul moyen du tout (car il ne faloit que sa seule parole), mais afin de nous exprimer l’amour incomprehensible qu’il nous porte, et le soin inestimable qu’il ha de nostre salut, il a voulu que son Fils unique vestist nostre chair. Et comment? Quelle convenance y a-il entre ces deux natures, entre ceste gloire celeste laquelle estonné les Anges de paradis, tellement qu’il faut qu’ils se cachent pour adorer ce qu’ils ne comprenent point, et ceste loge de nostre corps, ceste prison, ceste pourriture?” (CO 46:226). “Let us also be content with the infinite love of our God in that he has given his only Son, and did not spare him for our sake, as is said in the third chapter of St John. God could well redeem us by another means, and even without any means at all (for it only needed a single word), but in order to express the incomprehensible love that he bears us, and the inestimable care that he has for our salvation, he wanted his only Son to be dressed in our flesh. And how? What affinity is there between these two natures, between this celestial glory which astonished the angels of paradise, such as it is necessary that they hide themselves in order to worship what they do not comprehend at all, and this dwelling of our body, this prison, this rottenness?” Sermon on Matthew 1 (19th Sermon on the Harmony of the Gospels), 1542.

16. “Voyla donc comme nous avons bien à regretter nostre vie: non point par un desespoir, mais d’autant que nous devons hayr le peché et l’avoir en detestation. Il faut aussi que nous desirions que Dieu nous retire de ceste captivité si miserable en laquelle nous sommes: comme sainct Paul nous en montre l’exemple. Il se confesse estre malheureux, d’autant qu’il habite en son corps comme en une prison: il demande comment il en sera delivré.” (CO 35:529). “This is how we should be sorry for our life: not at all with despair, but inasmuch as we should hate sin and detest it. We should also desire God to withdraw us from this so miserable captivity in which we live, as Saint Paul shows us by example. He confesses himself to be unhappy, since he lives in his body as in a prison. He asks how he will be delivered from it.” First Sermon on Song of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38, 1542.

17. “Et l’estre des hommes où est-il, sinon qu’ils soyent conioints à leur Dieu? Or nous sommes maintenant comme en prison: car au lieu que ce monde nous devoiroit estre comme un paradis terrestre, si nous eussions perseveré en l’obeissance de Dieu, nous sommes comme en un pays estrange, auquel nous sommes comme reclus et bannis.” (CO 35:532). “What is it to be human, if not to be joined to God? For we are now as if in prison: for instead of this world which should be for us like an earthly paradise, if we had persevered in obedience to God, we are in a foreign country, as it were, in which we live as recluses and to which we have been banished.” First Sermon on Song of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38, 1542.
18. “Vray est que nous pourrons bien gemir et soupirer d’estre captifs en ceste prison de peché.” (CO 35:536). “It is true that we will indeed be able to groan and sigh for being captive in this prison of sin.” Second Sermon on Song of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38, 1542.

19. “Car cependant que nous sommes yci appesantis en ceste prison de nostre corps, nous ne pouvons pas ouvrir la bouche à demi (par maniere de dire) pour louer Dieu: nous n’y allons pas d’un si franc courage ne d’une ardeur si vehemente comme il seroit requis.” (CO 35:567). “For while we are here weighed down in this prison of our body, we cannot half open our mouth to praise God (so to speak). We do not go there with such a pure courage, nor with such a vehement fervor as would be required.” Fourth Sermon on Song of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38, 1542.

20. “Premierement il use d’une belle proprieté, en disant, que l’homme fidele par la mort est delivré des liens de son corps: comme il l’exprime plus clairement en un autre passage.” Recueil des opuscules Brève instruction contre les anabaptistes, 1544 (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003), 629. “First of all he uses an apt expression in saying that the faithful man is delivered by death from the bonds of his body, as he explains more clearly in another passage (Rom. 7:23; 8:22).”

21. “Il est certain que ce corps mortel nous est comme une prison, pour abaisser nostre ame si bas, comme captive aux choses terriennes.” Recueil des opuscules (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003), 630. “Certainly this mortal body is for us like a prison in order to humble our soul so low as to make it captive to earthly things.” Brève instruction contre les anabaptistes, 1544.

22. “Enquoy il signifie qu’il n’y a autre moyen de le mettre en estat de perfection, et le retirer de la servitude de peché, qu’en sortant de son corps, où il estoit detenu captif comme en une prison.” Recueil des opuscules (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003), 683. “In so doing he indicates that there is no other means of being put into a state of perfection and of being rescued from the bondage of sin except in departing from his body, wherein he was held captive as in a prison.” Contre les Libertines, 1545. B.W. Farley translation (267-8).

23. “Parquoy nous desirons de sortir de ceste prison, pour estre avec le Seigneur: nous savons qu’estans en sa compagnie nous aurons vray contentement de tous biens.” Recueil des opuscules (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003), 697. “Why do we desire to leave this prison? It is in order to be with the Lord. We know that in his presence we will have true contentment and enjoyment of all good things.” Contre les Libertines, 1545.

24. “Gemitus autem fidelium inde nascitur, quod se exsulare hic sciunt extra patriam: quod sciunt se corpore inclusos tener tanquam ergastulo. (CO 50:62). “But the groaning of believers arises from their knowledge that here they are exiles
from their native land and are shut up in the body as in a work-house (ergastulo), and so they count this life a burden because they cannot escape the slavery of sin except by death and so they wish to be elsewhere.” Comm. 2 Corinthians 5:4, 1546.

25. “Hac ratione corpus nostrum vocatur carcer, qui nos premit.” (CO 50:62). That is why our body is called a prison (carcer) in which we are held captive.” Comm. 2 Corinthians 5:4, 1546.


27. “...desirant le semblable: à savoir, quand il a esté retiré de ce corps mortel, qui est comme une prison, qui nous tient en servitude de peché.” Recueil des opuscules (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2003), 723. “Desiring the same, i.e. when he had been drawn out of this mortal body, which is like a prison that holds us in slavery to sin.” Lettre aux fidèles de Rouen, 1547.

28. “...quia haec caduca vita, et centum assidue mortibus subiecta, longe dissimilis est aeternae gloriae, quae Dei filios decet: quia carnis ergastulo servilem in modum inclusi, longe a libero coeli terraque dominio distamus.” (CO 55:330). “For this transient life, constantly exposed to a thousand deaths, is far different from that eternal life which belongs to the children of God. We are shut up in the slaves’ penitentiary (ergastulum) of our flesh and are far distant from the freedman’s domain of heaven and earth.” Comm. 1 John 3:2, 1551.

29. “Refulget quidem in evangelio sol iustitiae Christus: sed ita ut mentes nostras semper ex parte occupent mortis tenebrae, donec e carnis ergastulo educti, in coelum transferamur.” (CO 55:456). “Christ, the Sun of righteousness, does indeed shine forth in the Gospel, but in such a way that the darkness of death always possesses our minds until we are released from the work-house of the flesh and carried off into heaven.” Comm. 2 Peter 1:19, 1551.

30. “Nam utcunque per se expetenda mors non sit, fideles tamen, quia carnis ergastulo inclusi peccato mancipati sunt, assidue gemere decet.” (CO 36:654). “For while death is not desirable on its own account, yet believers ought to ‘groan continually,’ (Rom. viii.23,) because sin holds them bound in the prison of the flesh.” Comm. Isaiah 38:10, 1551/59.

31. “…ubi autem exuerint carnis impedimenta, proprius venturos in Dei conspectum.” (CO 36:655). “When the entanglements of the flesh shall have been laid aside, we shall more closely ‘see God.’” Comm. Isaiah 38:11, 1551/59.
32. “Quorum, inquirunt, attinebat, Tabithae animam, si in beatam quietem recepta erat, in corporis ergastulum revocari, ubi tot miseris conflictando aegre laboraret?” (CO 48:221). “Certain fanatics ... say, ‘What benefit was there for the soul of Tabitha, if it had been received into blessed rest, in being called back into the prison-house of the body, where it would labour with difficulty, contending with so many misfortunes?’” Comm. Acts 9:41, 1552.

33. “In summa, puerperis similes sunt fideles, quatenus in Christo renati iam in coeleste Dei regnum et beatam vitam ingressi sunt: similes autem gravidis et parturientibus feminis, quatenus adhuc captivi in carnis ergastulo ad felicem illum statum suspirant, qui sub spe latet absconditus.” (CO 47:367). “To sum up: believers are like women in travail, in that, born again in Christ, they have already entered into the heavenly kingdom of God and the blessed life. And they are like pregnant and travailing women, in that, being still held captive in the penitentiary of the flesh, they long for that happy state which lies hidden under hope.” Comm. John 16:21, 1553.

34. “… atqui videmus, quam pretiosa anima in foedo et putrido corpore latuerit, quae ab angelis in beatam vitam defertur. Quare nihil illi nocuit, desertum ac contemptum omni humano solatio destitui, cui ex carnis ergastulo migranti praesto ad obsequium adesse dignantur spiritus coelestes.” (CO 45:408-9). “But if the angels carried him [Lazarus] away to the blessed life, we can see how precious was the soul which was concealed within the filth and rottenness of the body. Death was no harm to him; deserted, despised, without any help of man, when he left the prison house of the body heavenly spirits deigned to be beside him, at his [God’s] command.” Comm. Luke 16:22, 1555.


36. “Etsi autem anima, postquam migravit ex ergastulo corporis, superstes manet: in se tamen nihil habet firmitudinis.” (CO 32:81). “And although the soul, after it has departed from the prison of the body, remains alive, yet its doing so does not arise from any inherent power of its own.” Comm. Psalm 103:15, 1557.

37. “Sed hic exoritur quaestio: quia videtur privare sensu omnes mortuos. Atqui si animae ex corporum ergastulis egressae sunt superstites, alacrius tunc eas vigere certum est, unde sequitur, Deum a mortuis quoque laudari.” (CO 32:191). “From his appearing to deprive the dead of all sensibility, a question occurs: If souls, after they have departed from their corporeal prison, still survive? It is certain
that they are then more vigorous and active, and, therefore, it must inevitably
follow that God is also praised by the dead.” Comm. Psalm 115:17, 1557.

38. “Quanquam enim Deus electos suos hic sanctificat, tamen quamdiu habitant in
ergastulo carnis suae, nunquam ad sanxitatem angelicam perveniunt.” (CO
40:659-660). “For although God sanctifies his elect here and now, yet so long as
they live in the prison of their flesh, they never attain angelic holiness.” Lectures
on Daniel 4:13-16, 1561.

39. “Nos autem inclusi hoc ergastulo adhunc detinemur sub servitute peccati, atque
ita inquinati sumus multis sordibus.” (CO 41:105). “But we, alas! are detained in
this prison-house, we are bound down in slavery to sin, and are polluted by much
corruption.” Lectures on Daniel 8:13-14, 1561.

40. “Voila sainct Paul qui se complaint en telle sorte, et en la fin il conclut, Helas, ie
suis miserable : qui me delivrera de ceste prison où ie suis?” (CO 32:683).”Saint
Paul bemoans himself in this way, Alas! I am miserable: ‘Who will deliver me
from this prison where I am?’” Sermon on Psalm 119:129-36, 1553.

41. “Nous avons une prison mortelle qui nous environne … nous sommes pleins de
tant de corruptions qui ne cessent de nous inciter à mal.” (CO 33:144). ”We have a
mortal prison that surrounds us . . . we are full of so many corruptions which do
not cease to incite us to evil.” Sermon on Job, 1554.

42. “Nous sommes enserrez en une prison, estant en ceste vie.” (CO 33:166).”We are
locked up in a prison while in this life.” Sermon 13 on Job, 1554.

43. “Car apres avoir faict sa complainte, apres avoir souhaité d’estre retire de ceste
prison de mort, il adiouste, Je ren graces à mon Dieu.” (CO 33:169). ”For after
having made his complaint, after having wished to be pulled out of this prison of
death, he adds, ‘I give thanks to my God.” Sermon 13 on Job, 1554.

44. “les fideles peuvent bien souspirer, estans comme faschez de languir en ceste
prison de leur chair.” (CO 33:170). ”I say that the faithful may well sigh, being
vexed to languish in this prison of their flesh.” Sermon 13 on Job, 1554.

45. “Vray est … que les enfans de Dieu peuvent bien souhaitter la mort: mais c’est à
une autre fin et condition: comme nous devons tous avoir ce souhait de Sainct
Paul (Rom. 7, 24), de sortir de ceste servitude de pecché en laquelle nous sommes
denus. Sainct Paul n’est point là esmeu de quelques tentations de sa chair: mais
plustost le desir qu’il a de s’employer au service de Dieu sans empeschement le
pousse à souhaiter de sortir de ceste prison de son corps.” (CO 33:295). ”It is true
that the children of God may well wish for death, but it tends to another goal and
condition: that we should all have this wish of Saint Paul (Rom. 7: 24), to leave
this servitude of sin in which we are kept. Saint Paul is not there being tempted
by the temptations of the flesh, but rather the desire to employ himself in the
service of God without hindrance compels him to wish to leave this prison of his
body.” Sermon 24 on Job, 1554.

46. “Or maintenant ie voy comme tu me traites: car ie suis malheureux, tu m’enclos
ici en prison, ie ne pourray iamais sortir.” (CO 33:484). “Now I see how you are
treating me. For I am unhappy, you are enclosing me here in prison, I will never
be able to leave it.” Sermon 39 on Job, 1554.

47. “Il faut donc qu’en hayssant le mal et le peché nous soyons faschez de nostre vie.
Et pourquoi? D’autant qu’elle nous tient en captivité, et en ceste prison de tant
d’infirmitéz, qui sont contraires à la volonté de Dieu.” (CO 33:510). “It is neces-
sary then, in hating evil and sin, to be vexed with our life. Why? Inasmuch as it
holds us in captivity and in this prison of so many infirmities, which are contrary
to the will of God.” Sermon 41 on Job, 1554.

48. “Or donc en premier lieu ce qu’il sera licite aux hommes de souhaiter, quand leur
vie sera ici assiégée de tant de povretez et miseres, que Dieu les delivre bien tost
de ce corps mortel : ce n’est pas pour les fascheries qu’il nous faut ici endurer:
mais c’est à cause que nous sommes tousiours subiets à beaucoup de vices.” (CO
33:296). “So, it is lawful for people, when their lives are besieged by poverty and
miseries, to wish that God would deliver them from this mortal body. It is not
because of the annoyances that we must endure here but it’s because we are
always subject to so many vices.” Sermon 24 on Job, 1554.

49. “Or sainct Paul au passage que i’ay allegué, nous amene bien tout au rebours. Car
combien qu’il s’appelle Malheureux, qu’il demande d’estre delivré de la prison de
son corps mortel : si est-ce qu’il revient là, qu’il se contente de la grace qui lui est faite.”
(CO 33:511). “Saint Paul, in the passage to which I alluded, takes us quite a con-
trary way. For although he calls himself unhappy, so that he asks to be delivered
from the prison of his body, when he returns to that point, he is happy with the
grace given to him.” Sermon 41 on Job, 1554.

50. “Mais notons, qu’au milieu de toutes nos tristesses nous aurons deqoy benir
Dieu, comme S. Paul en fait (Rom. 7, 24). Il s’appelle bien miserable, O malheure-
eux que ie suis (dit-il) qui est-ce qui me delivrera de ceste prison de mon corps?
Mais quant et quant il rend graces à Dieu par nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ.” (CO
33:704). “But let’s take note that in the midst of all our sadness we will have
reasons to bless God, like St. Paul does (Rom. 7:24). He does call himself miser-
able, O unhappy man that I am (he says), who will deliver me from this prison of
my body? But at the same time he gives thanks to God through our Lord Jesus
Christ.” Sermon 56 on Job, 1554.

51. “Or d’autrepart nous voyons que nous sommes ici tenus comme en une prison,
cependant que ce corps nous environne nous sommes en servitude de peché:
pourtant nous sommes contraints de gemir, et en ce faisant aspirer à ceste eter-
nité qui nous est promise quand Dieu nous aura retirez de ce monde (car quand
nous approchons de la mort, nous y venons: comme c’est aussi l’entrée de la vie)
aschant que puis que Jésus Christ a passé par là, il ne faut plus craindre que la
mort ait nulle vertu sur nous. . .” (CO 33:627-8). “On the other hand, we see that
we are kept here as in a prison, while this body surrounds us we are in servitude
to sin. We are forced to groan, and in doing so, to aspire to that eternity which is
promised to us when God will have drawn us out of this world (for when we
approach death we get there: it’s like the entrance to life), knowing that since
Jesus Christ passed that way, we should no longer fear that death has any power
over us...” Sermon 50 on Job, 1554.

52. CO 45:606. “Sed quaeritur, cur dicat tunc fore Dei filios, quia filii resurrectionis
erunt, quam Dominus fideles suos, licet fragili ergastulo inclusos, hoc honore
dignetur.” “The question arises, why He should say that being children of the
resurrection they will then be children of God; for the Lord already bestows this
honour upon faithful men still locked in the perishable workhouse of the flesh.”

53. “Car nous ne voyons qu’en partie (dit sainct Paul) et en obscurité. Et si nous
cognoissions cela, c’est assavoir, que nous sommes ici comme en une prison ob-
scure, estans environnez de nostre chair mortelle: et puis, que nous sommes ter-
restres, et qu’il faut bien que nous soyons renouvellez pour comprendre en per-
fection les secrets de Dieu.” (CO 26:46). “For we only see in part (says Saint Paul)
and in obscurity. And if we were to know this, that is to know that we are here as
if in a dark prison, being surrounded by our mortal flesh: and also, that we are
earthly, and that indeed we should be renewed in order to understand perfectly
the secrets of God.” Sermon on Deuteronomy 2:26-37, 6th May, 1555.

54. “Ainsi donc à l’exemple de Moyse, que nous soyons tellement disposez à mourir,
que toutes fois et quantes que nostre Seigneur nous voudra retirer d’ici bas, que
nous soyons prests d’aller et de sortir de ceste prison de nostre corps.” (CO
28:629). “In this way therefore, just like Moses, that we would be so disposed to
die, that any time that our Lord wants to withdraw us from here below, we would
be ready to go and leave this prison of our body.” Sermon on Deuteronomy
31:14-17, 4th May 1556.

55. “… aspirans à la perfection à laquelle maintenant il nous convie par sa parole et à
laquelle il nous faut tendre tout le long de nostre vie, sachant bien que nous n’y
pouvons pas parvenir, iusques à ce que nous soyons despouillez de nostre chair et
retirez de ceste prison en laquelle nous sommes maintenant retenus sous la servi-
tude de peché.” (CO 50:364). “Let us aspire to that perfection to which he now
calls us by his Word, and towards which we aim throughout our lives, knowing
that we cannot reach it until we are rid of our flesh, and released from that prison
in which we are now held in bondage to sin.” Sermon 7 on Galatians, late 1557 or early 1558.

56. “Et qu’il nous supporte tellement en nous infirmitiez, que cependant nous soyons touchez d’une vraye repentance pour gemir et souspirer devant luy, iusques à ce qu’il nous ait retirez de ce corps mortel, duquel nous sommes detenus comme en prison sous la servitude de peché.” (CO 50:670). “May he support us in our infirmity, when we are touched with our need for true repentance. May we tremble and groan before him, until the day that he delivers us from this mortal body, which, like a prison, confines us in bondage to sin.” Sermon 31 on Galatians, 1558.

57. “Le priant toutesfois qu’il face valoir le fruict et la vertu de la mort et passion de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ, non seulement pour cacher les fautes que nous avons desia commises, et pour enselevir la memoire: mais aussi pour nous en purger iournellement par son sainct Esprit, nous supportant touiours par sa bonté infinite, iusques à ce que nous soyons parvenus à la perfection où il nous appelle, estans delivrez de ceste prison de peché de laquelle nous sommes encore environnez.” (CO 51:84). “Let us continue to pray that he would make us recognize our need of the fruit and power of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only to cover the sins that we have already committed, and to erase their memory, but also to cleanse us daily by his Holy Spirit. May he continue to uphold us in his infinite goodness until the day when we reach the perfect standard to which we are called, being delivered from the prison of sin, which still surrounds us.” Sermon 39 on Galatians, 1558.

58. “Ceux donc qui disent que nous pouvons advenir à quelque perfection cependant que nous habitons en ce corps mortel, monstrent assez ou qu’il y a un orgueil diabolique qui les aveugle du tout, ou bien qu’ils sont gens profanes, sans aucune religion ne pieté. De nostre part, notons (comme i’ay desia touché) que Dieu nous a eleus, à fin que nous soyons irreprehensibles : non pas que nous le puis-sions estre iusques à ce que nous soyons despouillez de toutes nos infirmitez, et que nous serons sortis de ceste prison de peché, en laquelle maintenant nous sommes detenus.” (CO 51:273). “Those who say we can attain at some kind of perfection while we live in this mortal body demonstrate sufficiently that there is a devilish pride that blinds them to everything, or rather that they are profane people without any religion or piety. For our part, let us note (as I have already mentioned) that God has chosen us so that we should be irreproachable: but we would not be able to be so until we be stripped of all our infirmities and we will have left this prison of sin, in which we are now detained.” Sermon 3 on Ephesians, 1558.

59. “Il nous faut donc resoudre de tousiours gemir et souspirer, et cependant nous esiouir: car ce ne sont pas choses incompatibles que nous crions avec saint Paul, Helas, malheureuse creature que ie suis, qui est-ce qui me delivra de ceste prison
de mon corps?” (CO 51:307). “We should therefore resolve to groan and sigh always and yet to rejoice: for these things are not incompatible when we cry with Saint Paul, Alas, what a wretched creature I am. Who will deliver me from this prison of my body?” Sermon 5 on Ephesians, 1558.

60. “... mais que nous cheminions paisiblement iusques à ce que nous soyons delivrez de ceste prison en laquelle nous sommes, et que nous soyons pleinement affranchis, quand nous serons recueillis en nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ.” (CO 51:308-9). “Let us walk peaceably until we are delivered from this prison in which we are, and that we may be fully liberated when we will be gathered up in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Sermon 5 on Ephesians, 1558.

61. “Or il nous semble alors que ce soit assez: mais si un homme fidele regarde à soy, il trouvera assez pour se desplaire et pour gemir: comme nous avons dit par ci devant, que sainct Paul mesmes se confesse estre mal-heureux, et qu’il s’escrie, Qui me delivrera de ceste prison mortelle? Les fideles donc trouveront tousiours en eux assez pour se lamenter devant Dieu.” (CO 51:358). “And it may seem that that were enough. But if a man of faith look into himself, he shall find enough to hate and sigh and groan for. I have told you before, that even St. Paul confesses himself to have been unhappy. He cries out, ‘Who shall set me free from this prison of death?’ The faithful then, shall always find enough in themselves to mourn before God.” Sermon 9 on Ephesians, 1558.

62. “car nostre Seigneur Jesus nous a là voulu monstrer que la vraye nature et office de l’Evangile, c’est de nous retirer de la captivité et prison en laquelle nous sommes detenus iusques à ce qu’il nous ait affranchis: car c’est aussi son office, ainsi qu’il en parle au huitieme chap. de sainct Iean.” (CO 51:421). “For our Lord Jesus wanted to show us that it is the true nature of the Gospel to pluck us out of bondage and prison in which we were detained, until he set us free; for it is his own office also, as he says in the eighth chapter of St. John.” Sermon 14 on Ephesians, 1558.

63. “Voilà comme les povres ames sont desliees, voilà comme les povres captifs sont retirez de prison, et ceux qui auparavant estoyent plongez en tenebres de mort, sont amenez en la clairté de vie.” (CO 51:421). “Look how these poor souls are unbound, look how these poor captives are taken out of prison, and those who were before plunged into the shadows of death are led to the brightness of life.” Sermon 14 on Ephesians, 1558.

64. “Or quand S. Paul dit, A fin que l’Eglise fust sans ride et macule mais irreprehensible en saicteté: ce n’est pas que ceci soit desia accompli et parfaict en nous, ne qu’il le puisse estre cependant que nous serons environnez de nostre corps: car c’est comme une prison et captivité: et nous trainons tousiours nos liens cependant que nous habitons ici bas: et encore que nous ayons bien profité en la crainte de Dieu, si est-ce qu’il nous faut tousiours dire avec S. Paul, que nous
now when St. Paul says ‘to the end that the church should be without spot or wrinkle, but unrebukable in holiness,’ he does not mean that this is accomplished and perfected in us already, nor that it can come about as long as we are encompassed about with our body, for it is like a prison and bondage, and we drag our shackles after us continually while we are here below. And although we may have profited well in the fear of God, yet we are bound to say always with St. Paul that we are kept in miserable servitude and cannot serve God, except by half, so to speak.” *Sermon 40 on Ephesians, 1558.*

65. *ICR* 1.15.2 “…quam ubi soluta est a carnis ergastulo anima, Deum esse perpetuum eius custodem.” *(CO* 2:135). “When the soul is freed from the prison house of the body, God is its perpetual guardian.” *1559.*


68. *ICR* 3.2.19 “Quequadmodum enim si quis carcere inclusus … terrei corporis compedibus vincti...” *(CO* 2:413-4). “It is like a man who, shut up in a prison . . . Thus, bound with the fetters of an earthly body . . .” *1559.*

69. *ICR* 3.3.14, “…quamdiu inclusi sumus mole corporis nostri.” *(CO* 2:444). “…as long as we are encumbered with our body.” *1559.*

70. *ICR* 3.3.20 “Proinde, donec in carcere corporis nostri habitabimus, assidue nobis cum naturae nostrae corruptae vitis luctandum est, adeoque cum naturali nostra anima.” *(CO* 2:450). “Accordingly, so long as we dwell in the prison house of our body we must continually contend with the defects of our corrupt nature, indeed with our own natural soul.” *1559.*


72. *ICR* 3.9.4 “Si liberari a corpere, est asseri in solidam libertatem, quid aliud est corpus quam carcer?” *(CO* 2:526). “If to be freed from the body is to be released into perfect freedom, what else is the body but a prison?” *1559.*

73. *ICR* 3.25.1 “Quamdiu carnis ergastulo sumus inclusi, peregrinamur a Domino.” *(CO* 2:729). “So long as we are confined in the prison house of the flesh, we are away from the Lord.” *1559.*
74. *ICR* 4.1.1, “Nam quia ergastulo carnis nostrae inclusi ad gradum angelicum nondum pervenimus.” *(CO 2:745).* “Shut up as we are in the prison house of the flesh, we have not yet attained angelic rank.” 1559.

75. *ICR* 4.15.11, “Nam quamdiu in hoc carcere corporis nostri clausi degemus, habitabunt in nobis reliquiae peccati; sed si promissionem in baptismo nobis a Deo datam fide tenemus, non dominabuntur nec regnabunt.” *(CO 2:968).* “For so long as we live cooped up in this prison of our body, traces of sin will dwell in us; but if we faithfully hold fast to the promise given us by God in baptism, they should not dominate or rule.” 1559.

76. *ICR* 4.15.12 “Quod si filii Dei captivi in carcere detinentur quamdiu vivunt . . .” *(CO 2:969).* “But if God’s children are held captive in prison as long as they live . . .” 1559.

77. *ICR* 4.16.19 “. . . praesertim, si non ante exuit ipsos ignorantia, quam eripit ex carnis ergastulo?” *(CO 2:990).* “. . . especially if he has not removed their ignorance before taking them from the prison of the flesh?” 1559.

78. *ICR* 4.17.30 “Qua ratione eo ipso loco descendisse dicitur secundum divinitatem: non quod divinitas coelum reliquerit, ut in ergastulum corporis se adberet; sed quia, tametsi omnia implet, in ipsa tamen Christi humanitate corporaliter, id est naturaliter habitabat, et ineffabili quodam modo.” *(CO 2:1032; the French version has “comme en une loge” CO 4:1027).* “In this manner, he is said to have descended to that place according to his divinity, not because divinity left heaven to hide itself in the prison house of the body, but because even though it filled all things, still in Christ’s very humanity it dwelt bodily, that is, by nature, and in a certain ineffable way.” 1559.

79. *IRC* 1.14.2 “. . . quand Salomon parlant de la mort dit, que lors l’esprit retourne à Dieu, lequel l’a donné: et Iesus Christ recommandant son esprit à Dieu, et sainct Estienne à Iesus Christ (Eccles. 12, 7; Luc 23, 46; Act. 7, 59), n’entendent autre chose sinon que quand l’ame sera sortie de la prison du corps, Dieu en soit le gardien perpetuel.” *(CO 3:216).* “When Solomon speaking about death says that when the spirit returns to God who gave it, and when Jesus Christ commended his spirit to God, and Stephen did the same to Jesus Christ they understood nothing except that when the spirit leaves the prison of the body, God will be its perpetual guardian.” 1559.

80. *IRC* 2.7.5 “Quand nous regarderons depuis le commencement du monde, ie dy qu’il n’y a eu nul de tous les saintz, lequel estant en ceste prison de corps mortel ait eu une dilection si parfaite, iusques à aimer Dieu de tout son coeur, de toute son ame et de toute sa vertu.” *(CO 3:401).* “If we look from the beginning of the world, I say that none of the saints, being in this prison of the body, attained such
a perfect delight of loving God with all his heart, his soul, and with all his might.” 1560.

81. IRC 2.7.13 “Et ne faut point que cela nous estonné, qu’elle requiert une plus parfaite saincteté que nous ne pouvons avoir cependant que nous sommes en la prison de nostre corps…” (CO 3:410-411). “And we ought not to be astonished that it requires a more perfect holiness than we can have while we are in the prison of our bodies…” 1560.

82. IRC 2.13.4 “Car combien qu’il ait uny son essence infinie avec nostre nature, toutesfois ç’a esté sans closture ne prison; car il est descendu miraculeusement du ciel, en telle sorte qu’il y est demeuré: et aussi il a esté miraculeusement porté au ventre de la vierge, et a conversé au monde, et a esté crucifié, tellement que ce pendant selon sa divinité il a tousiours rempli le monde comme auparavant.” (CO 3:544). “For even if he [Christ] in his immeasurable essence united with our nature, it was in any case without a wall or prison, for he descended miraculously from heaven, in such a way that he both stayed there and was also miraculously carried to the womb of the virgin, and walked about on earth, and was crucified, so that according to his divinity he always filled the world as before.” 1560.

83. IRC 3.2.19 “… si quelcun estant enclos en basse prison n’avoit la clairté du soleil qu’obliquément et à demy par une fenestre haute et estroite, il n’auroit pas la veue du soleil pleine n’a delivre, toutesfois ne laisseroit pas d’avoir la clairté certaine, et en recevoir l’usage. En ceste maniere, combien que nous, estans enfermez en la prison de ce corps terrien, ayons de toutes pars beaucoup d’obscurité, si nous avons la moindre estincelle du monde de la lumiere de Dieu qui nous descouvre sa misericorde, nous en sommes suffisamment illuminez pour avoir ferme assurance.” (CO 4:35). “If someone, being shut up in a low prison had sunlight only obliquely through a high and narrow window, he would not have sight of the full sun delivered, nevertheless he would still have the steadfast brightness and receive its usefulness. In this manner, although we are locked up in the prison of this earthly body, having much darkness on all sides, if we have the smallest spark in the world of the light of God who demonstrates his mercy to us, we are sufficiently illuminated to have a firm assurance.” 1560.

84. IRC 3.3.20 “Parquoy cependant que nous habiterons en ceste prison de nostre corps mortel, il nous faudra tousiours et sans cesse combatre avec la corruption de nostre nature, et tout ce qui est de naturel en nous.” (CO 4:95). “While we live in this prison of our body, we must always and without ceasing fight against the corruption of our nature, and against all that is natural within us.” 1560.

85. IRC 3.9.4 “Si le departement de ce monde est une entrée à vie, qu’est-ce autre chose de ce monde qu’un sepulchre? et demeurer en iceluy, qu’est-ce autre chose que d’estre plongez en la mort? Si c’est liberté que d’estre delivré de ce corps, qu’estce autre chose du corps qu’une prison?” (CO 4:215). “If the departure from
this world is an entrance to life, what is this world but a tomb? And to dwell in it, what is it except to be plunged in death? And if it is freedom to be delivered from this body, what is this body if not a prison?”

86. IRC 3.9.4 “Saint Paul deplore bien sa condition, de ce qu’il est detenu comme lié en la prison de son corps plus long temps qu’il ne voudroit, et souspire d’un desir ardent qu’il a d’estre delivré (Rom. 7,24).” (CO 4:215). “Saint Paul does indeed deplore his condition, in which he is kept as if tied to the prison of his body longer than he wanted, and he sighs with an ardent desire to be delivered from it.”

87. IRC 3.25.1 “Car puis que nous esperons ce qui n’apparoit point (Rom. 8, 25): et comme il est dit en un autre passage, la foy est une demonstrance des choses invisibles (Hebr. 1.1): cependant que nous sommes enserrez en la prison de nostre corps nous sommes d’autant esloignez de Dieu (2 Cor. 5, 6).” (CO 4:532). “For, since we hope for what does not appear (Rom. 8:25) and it is said in another passage, faith is a demonstration of invisible things (Heb. 11:1), while we are locked up in the prison of our body we are away from God (2 Cor. 5:6).”

88. IRC 4.15.11 “Car tant que nous vivrons enfermez en ceste prison de nostre corps, les restes et reliques de peché habiteront en nous: mais si nous retenons par foy la promesse qui nous a esté donnée de Dieu au Baptesme, elles ne domineront et ne regneront point.” (CO 4:920). “For as long as we live closed up in this prison of our body, the remains and rests of sin will live in us, but if we keep by faith the promise give to us by God at our baptism, they will not reign over us at all.”

89. IRC 4.15.12 “Il dit donc qu’il a à luiter continuellement contre les reliques de sa chair, et qu’il est tenu comme prisonnier, pour ne pouvoir du tout obeir à la Loy de Dieu, tellement qu’il est contraint de s’escrire qu’il est malheureux, et demander qui le delivera (Rom. 7, 24). Si les enfans de Dieu sont en prison et captivité durant ceste vie mortelle, il ne se peut faire qu’ils ne soient en grande angoisse, pensans au danger où ils sont.” (CO 4:921). “He says, therefore, that he has to struggle continually against the vestiges of his flesh, and that he is kept like a prisoner, so that he cannot fully obey the law of God, so that he is compelled to cry out that he is unhappy, and to ask to be delivered (Rom. 7:24). If the children of God are in prison and in captivity during this mortal life, they must be very anxious over the thought of their own peril.”

90. IRC 4.16.19 “Puis donc qu’ils l’ont parfaitement en la vie future, pourquoi n’en pourront ils avoir icy quelque petit goust, ou en appercevoir quelque estincelle: sur tout veu que nous ne disons pas que Dieu les despouille d’ignorance, iusqu’à ce qu’il les retire de la prison de leur corps?” (CO 4:954). “Since then they have it [grace] perfectly in the future life, why is it that they cannot have a little taste of it here, or to receive a little spark of it? Especially as we do not say that God re-
moves their ignorance from them, until he takes them from the prison of their bodies?” 1560.

91. “Mais quand nous aurons cognu que la gloire de Dieu est plus preceuse beaucoup que nostre vie: et d'autre costé que si ceste loge est abattue, . . . que nous avons un edifice au ciel qui est beaucoup meilleur: voila qui nous fera prendre la mort en gre, et mesmes que nous venions devaut Dieu la teste levee, cognissant que nous sortons comme d'une prison: car ceste maudivte captivité laquelle chacun doit sentir en soy, jamais ne cesser aiusques à tant que Dieu nous ait despouillez de ceste chair corruptible.” (CO 23:771-2). “But when we know that the glory of God is much more precious than our life, and on the other hand, that this lodge is weak, . . . that we have a building in heaven which is much better: that will make us deal with death willingly, and we would even come before God with our heads lifted up, knowing that we are departing as from a prison. For this cursed captivity which everyone must feel in himself, will never cease to be until God has taken away this corruptible flesh.” Sermon 3 on Abraham’s sacrifice, 1561.
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