

Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

Matthew Joel Tuininga

September 18, 2014
Date

Christ's Two Kingdoms: Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church

By

Matthew Joel Tuininga
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
Ethics and Society

Timothy P. Jackson
Advisor

John Witte, Jr.
Advisor

Elsie Anne McKee
Committee Member

Steven M. Tipton
Committee Member

Accepted:

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

Date

Christ's Two Kingdoms: Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church

By
Matthew Joel Tuininga
M.Div., Westminster Seminary California, 2009

Advisor: Timothy P. Jackson, Ph.D., John Witte, Jr., J.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion
Ethics and Society
2014

Abstract

Christ's Two Kingdoms: Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church

By Matthew Joel Tuininga

The premise of this dissertation is that John Calvin's political theology should inform Christian political participation in pluralistic and liberal democratic societies. In contrast to the common portrayal of Calvin as a socio-political transformationalist, it argues that Calvin's conception of politics was shaped by his two kingdoms doctrine, by which the reformer distinguished the eternal kingdom of Christ from Christ's lordship over temporal (or secular) affairs. He viewed politics not as a means of implementing the kingdom of Christ according to the dictates of scripture, but as an endeavor to secure temporal order and civil righteousness in accord with reason, divine law, and the virtues of charity and prudence. While both kingdoms are subject to Christ, the two should never be confused. The penultimate character of secular politics calls for forms of virtue and justice appropriate for sinful human beings in a fallen world.

This dissertation begins by describing the late medieval and early Reformation political theologies and circumstances that formed the context for Calvin's work, and the impact of his work on the Protestant churches of Geneva and France (Chapters 1-2). Chapter 3 then explores Calvin's concept of the kingdom of Christ against the backdrop of his doctrines of creation, sin, and redemption, while Chapter 4 excavates the multiple layers of Calvin's two kingdoms eschatology, including its implications for Christian liberty in contexts such as gender and slavery. Chapter 5 describes how Calvin's theology of the kingdom shapes his concept of the nature and authority of the church, while Chapter 6 outlines his early understanding of civil government. Chapter 7 highlights key elements of Calvin's theology of covenant and law that shape his interpretation and use of the Old Testament. This sets the stage for Chapter 8's argument that Calvin's defense of the magisterial care of religion stems more from his interpretation of natural law than from his exegesis of scripture. Chapter 9 shows that the reformer approached political life through the lens of reason, experience, and prudence, rather than from a theocratic standpoint. The dissertation concludes with suggestions for a contemporary appropriation of Calvin's two kingdoms theology.

Christ's Two Kingdoms: Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church

By
Matthew Joel Tuininga
M.Div., Westminster Seminary California, 2009

Advisor: Timothy P. Jackson, Ph.D., John Witte, Jr., J.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion
Ethics and Society
2014

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the culmination of five years of doctoral work and many more years of research and conversation with teachers, colleagues, students, family members, and friends. I have accumulated more debts than I can possibly acknowledge here: library staff at the Robert W. Woodruff and Pitts Theology libraries at Emory University; colleagues and friends who attended presentations of the work and offered their critical feedback; conversation partners in seminars, classes, online forums, and other informal settings; teachers who challenged and encouraged early attempts to work out my thoughts in various assignments or papers. I am particularly appreciative for opportunities to present summaries of the work at the Third Refo500 Conference in Berlin, in May 2013, and at the Second Annual Convivium Calvinisticum, sponsored by the Davenant Trust, in South Carolina in June, 2014.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Michael S. Horton and David VanDrunen, of Westminster Seminary California, who first guided me into the field of political theology and drew my attention to the Reformed two kingdoms tradition. Both Mike and Dave helped me begin to explore the field through directed studies, while Dave gave me the opportunity to serve as his research assistant and work with him on multiple projects on Reformed political theology and ethics. Alongside these efforts I am appreciative of professors who offered vital guidance over the years at both the undergraduate and graduate levels: Jay Green, Richard Follett, and Paul Morton of Covenant College; Ellen Marshall, Elizabeth Bounds, Stefan Losel, and Diane Stewart at Emory University.

Above and beyond all of these are those who graciously agreed to serve as my doctoral committee: Timothy P. Jackson, John Witte, Jr., Elsie Anne McKee, and Steven M. Tipton. Steve gave me the opportunity to teach with him and allowed me to rope him in to give the dissertation a sociological perspective. Elsie, who teaches at Princeton Seminary, offered her excellent historical theological expertise to the project, despite having never met me in advance. Tim guided me through my doctoral program as a teacher, advisor, and friend, beginning with the day he went above and beyond the call of duty by allowing me, my wife, and our one month old infant to stay indefinitely at his home in Atlanta until we could find our own place to live. He has always challenged me to wrestle with the implications of Christian *agape* in social, political, and ecclesiastical contexts, and even where we have our disagreements, he has cheered me on as a friend and colleague.

To John I owe an enormous debt as the one who first believed in me as a graduate student and made me excited about the prospect of coming to study at Emory. John and I hit it off as soon as we realized that we both grew up in the same Dutch Reformed immigrant community in southern Ontario and attended the same school (at different times of course!). He made me his research assistant and introduced me to the immense field of Calvin studies, driving me to the commentaries, sermons, and letters to scour everything Calvin said relating to law, an effort that proved to be an invaluable foundation for my later dissertation research. He likewise introduced me to the nexus between religion and contemporary law by graciously including me in Emory Law School's Religion and Law group, affiliated with the Center for the Study of Law and Religion. John has the gift of encouragement, and where I faltered, even when his own plate was piled high with challenges, he always helped me see the big picture of what I was doing, and how it was thoroughly worth pursuing. Needless to say, without John this project never would have happened.

I alone am responsible for the mistakes and weaknesses in this dissertation, of course, but the contributions and criticisms of these and many other conversation partners over the years, including many friends and family members, have helped me

along the way: Jimmy McCarty, Justin Latterell, Iwan Baumann, David Alenskis, John Gregor MacDougall, Brian Hecker, Ellis Chaplin, Cal Marshall, Herman Selderhuis, Brad Littlejohn, Darryl Hart, Jeremy and Janine Huntington, Mark and Carla Van Essendelft, Eric Tuininga, Calvin and Ellen Tuininga, and many others.

I owe a special debt to my children, Joel, Katherine, and Sarah, who can now begin to experience what it is like to have a father who is not working on his dissertation. They have been faithful in prayer and encouraging in spirit, always making sure I keep the bigger picture in perspective. Not infrequently, they were the inspiration that kept me going.

My greatest debt, without question, is to my wife Elizabeth, who has been my primary conversation partner and best friend from the beginning to the end of this project. For her part, she can now begin to learn what it is like to have a husband who is not seeking his Ph.D. She has been gracious, patient, and encouraging when I had to work far too hard. As my first and most supportive critic, she faithfully read every sentence of this dissertation before anyone else. She has kept our family running smoothly with too little help from me. She has always encouraged and inspired me, and my gratitude for her love is beyond what words can express.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations	1
Note on Citations	2
Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Two Swords: Two Powers, or Two Kingdoms: Spiritual and Political Power in Early Modern Europe	51
Chapter 2: Calvin, Geneva, and the French Reformed Churches	122
Chapter 3: The Kingdom of Christ	184
Chapter 4: Two Kingdoms	254
Chapter 5: Christ's Spiritual Government	318
Chapter 6: Christ's Political Government: Early Formulations	392
Chapter 7: Covenant and Law	436
Chapter 8: The Magistrate's Care of Religion	479
Chapter 9: Law, Democracy, and Resistance to Tyranny	547
Conclusion: Calvin's Two Kingdoms and Liberal Democracy	605
Bibliography	641

Abbreviations

- CO *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia, Corpus Reformationum* (volumes 29-87; ed. Johann Wilhelm Baum, August Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss; 1863-1900).
- LW *Luther's Works* (55 Volumes; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, et. al.; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-).
- SC *Supplementa Calviniana: Sermons inédits* (ed. Hanns Rückert et. al.; Neukirchen: 1936-2006).

Note on Citations of Calvin's Works

Calvin wrote his scholarly works in Latin, but he ordinarily published a French translation as well. He gave his academic lectures in Latin, while he preached his sermons in French. The majority of these primary sources can be found in the *Ioannis Calvinii opera quae supersunt omnia, Corpus Reformationum* (volumes 29-87; ed. Johann Wilhelm Baum, August Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss; 1863-1900), hereafter *Calvini Opera* or CO, while the rest of the sources I used can be found in the *Supplementa Calviniana: Sermons inédits* (ed. Hanns Rückert et. al.; Neukirchen: 1936-2006), hereafter SC, or at the Post-Reformation Digital Library (<http://www.prdl.org/>). Nearly all of Calvin's works, including most of his sermons, have been translated and published in English. In such cases I have used the English translations, while checking key terminology and wording against the original Latin or French. Occasionally I have altered the translation or wording, either for stylistic or substantive clarity. Thus when referring to Calvin's writings I have used the following method:

- When citing Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I usually cite parenthetically according to Book, Chapter, and paragraph from the 1559 edition, a form of citation that works for both English translations and the original Latin. When I cite the 1536 edition, however, I cite according to Chapter, subchapter, and paragraph. Both these forms of citation work for both the English translations and the original Latin. The English translations I have used are:
 - *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 1559 Edition. Edited by John T. McNeill et. al. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960.
 - *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 1536 Edition. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.
- When citing Calvin's occasional writings I directly cite the English translation, along with the Latin or French original.
- When citing Calvin's letters I provide the receiver and date of the letter, along with the original source. The English translations I have used come from:
 - *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*. 7 Volumes. Edited by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983.
- When citing Calvin's commentaries and sermons I provide the passage on which Calvin is commenting, along with the date and the original source. With the commentaries this is always a citation from the *Calvini Opera*, except in the case of the 1540 commentary on Romans, in which case I have used T. H. L. Parker's *Iohannis Calvinii Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (Leiden: Brill: 1981), which shows the variants between the 1540 and 1557 editions. The English translations I have used are as follows:
 - *Calvin's Commentaries*. 22 volumes. Translated by John King et. al. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

- *John Calvin's Sermons on 2 Samuel: Chapter 1-13*. Translated by Douglas Kelly. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1992.
- *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians*. Revision of the translation by Arthur Golding. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973.
- *John Calvin's Sermons on Galatians*. Translated by Arthur Golding. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1997.
- *John Calvin's Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1:1-11:4*. Translated by Rob Roy McGregor. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009.
- *John Calvin's Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles: Chapters 1-7*. Translated by Rob Roy McGregor. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2008.
- *John Calvin's Sermons on the Beatitudes*. Taken from the *Gospel Harmony*. Delivered in Geneva in 1560. Translated by Robert White. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2006.
- *John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments*. Translated by Benjamin W. Farley. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980.
- *Men, Women, and Order in the Church: Three Sermons* (Sermons on 1 Corinthians). Translated by Seth Skolnitsky. Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications.
- *Sermons from Job*. Translated by Leroy Nixon. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952.
- *Sermons on Deuteronomy*. Translated by Arthur Golding. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987.
- *Sermons on Jeremiah*. Translated by Blair Reynolds. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.
- *Sermons on the Book of Micah*. Translated by Benjamin Wirt Farley. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2003.
- *Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy and Titus*. Translated by Arthur Golding. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983.
- *Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ*. Translated by Leroy Nixon. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950.
- *Songs of the Nativity: Selected Sermons on Luke 1 and 2*. Translated by Robert White. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2008.
- *The Gospel According to Isaiah: Seven Sermons on Isaiah 53 Concerning the Passion and Death of Christ*. Translated by Leroy Nixon. Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 1953.

An excellent and thorough guide to Calvin's works is Wulfert De Greef's *The Writings of John Calvin, Expanded Edition: An Introductory Guide* (trans. Lyle D. Bierma; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

INTRODUCTION

The premise of this dissertation is that John Calvin's political theology should be an important source of guidance for Christian political participation in societies committed to pluralism and liberal democracy. In contrast to the common portrayal of Calvin as a revolutionary or socio-political transformationalist (a portrayal which helps explain the popular caricature of Calvin as a theocratic tyrant), my thesis is that, much more than is typically appreciated by scholars, Calvin's conception of Christian political engagement was an expression of his two kingdoms doctrine, by which the reformer distinguished the eternal kingdom of Christ from Christ's lordship over the temporal, or secular, affairs of this life. This in turn led the Genevan reformer to articulate a much sharper distinction between church and political society than did the papacy or the other magisterial reformers, even as he avoided the Anabaptist rejection of politics. It led him to conceive of political participation not as a means of establishing or implementing the kingdom of Christ according to the dictates of Christian scripture, but as an endeavor to secure temporal order and civil righteousness in accord with reason, law, and the virtues of charity and prudence. While Calvin argued that both kingdoms are Christ's, he insisted that the two should never be confused. The ultimate nature of the eternal kingdom brooks no compromise, but the penultimate character of secular politics calls for forms of virtue and justice appropriate for sinful human beings in a fallen world.

Interpreted on its own terms, this political theological perspective is as relevant to Christians in twenty-first century liberal democracies as it was to those who lived in sixteenth century Protestant city-states. It offers us the theological resources to reject the ideal of Christendom, in which all persons are expected to worship and live as Christians, on the one hand, and to affirm the value of political liberalism and principled Christian participation in pluralistic democratic societies, on the other.

Calvin argued that the kingdom of Christ is a fundamentally spiritual, or

eschatological, reality, one that involves the restoration of the entire creation through the regeneration of human beings by Christ's word and Spirit. The location where this restoration has already begun is the church, and Calvin sharply distinguished the church, as such, from the temporal and political affairs of life. To be sure, these are not two hermetically sealed realms corresponding to the modern distinction between religion and politics. On the contrary, for Calvin the justice of Christ's kingdom places its demands on every area of life. But in contrast to that kingdom and its righteousness, Calvin argued, the political affairs of this age will pass away. Temporal civil institutions cannot establish true piety, justice, charity, or peace, let alone save human beings from sin. Calvin thus sharply differentiated a "twofold government in man," one government that has the power to restore humans to spiritual righteousness, true virtue, and eternal life, the other which can only establish outward, civil, and temporal versions of the same. He placed substantive restrictions on the spiritual authority and prerogatives of the church's ministers, limiting them to the ministry of Christ's word, while correspondingly binding the powers and intentions of political rulers in accord with their temporal limits.

Calvin thus condemned the persecution of non-Christians, such as Turks and Jews, and he maintained that it is unjust to punish heretics or apostates in societies with religious diversity.¹ He denied the assumption (of Aristotle and Christian theologians alike) that it should be the goal of magistrates to make people pious or just, hazarding his career on a decisive distinction between civil punishment and spiritual discipline. He rejected the claim that Christian societies must conform to the Old Testament's civil law, favoring the rigorous use of reason, experience, and the laws of nations, in addition to scripture, for political wisdom. He endorsed some combination of aristocracy and

1 Calvin did not use the word 'pluralism,' of course, nor did he endorse the concept in the modern Rawlsian sense of a commitment to the moral legitimacy of multiple reasonable comprehensive doctrines. He did, however, endorse something like principled pluralism to the extent that he believed adherents of non-Christian religions should be persuaded to convert to Christianity, rather than forced.

democracy, something like civil republicanism,² and he insisted that the power of government is limited by God's law, supporting legal and constitutional structures designed to hold magistrates accountable for their actions. He constantly invoked the language of rights (i.e., *ius*), especially with respect to the poor and the vulnerable, and he encouraged the Protestant tendency to locate the responsibilities of the Christian life in secular vocations such as trade, government, and family.

To be sure, Calvin was no liberal. He did not ground political authority in a social contract; he placed God's law above subjective human rights; and he denied that rights to freedom of speech, association, or religion are absolute. Nor did he draw the lines between church and civil government in ways that can be simply transferred to contemporary democracies. Calvin lived, thought, and wrote five centuries ago, when the differentiated complexities of modern society were only beginning to emerge. Like the pagan philosopher Plato and the Christian theologian Augustine, he assumed that government is obligated to make the truth, the honor of God, and the care of religion its chief concern. In (very) rare cases, he supported the death penalty for individuals judged by all Christendom to be heretical teachers.³ Indeed, his political views explicitly presupposed the existence of Christendom, with all of its practical similarities to Old Testament Israel. John McNeill, who does not hesitate to find in Calvin resources for a commitment to democracy, warns, "Calvin was no modern man, and he was not writing

2 That is, he argued that in the best type of government rule is granted to multiple individuals who are popularly elected and who are obligated to preserve the liberties of the people.

3 Defenders of Calvin sometimes try to minimize the damage of Calvin's defense of the execution of Servetus by reminding us that Calvin was a product of his time, that his views were identical to those of the vast majority of educated persons in the early sixteenth century, and that of the thousands of persons sentenced to death and killed for religious reasons by Protestants and Catholics alike during those years Calvin and Geneva were only involved in this one single case. For instance, Larson dismisses Calvin as simply being the product of a "medieval mindset." Mark J. Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory, The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 88. But while true, these reminders ignore two important points. First, Calvin vigorously, consistently, and *theologically* defended the punishment of heretics. Anyone seeking to appropriate Calvin's political theology for a contemporary democratic context needs to show *why, theologically*, the Geneva reformer was wrong to do so. Second, wrestling with Calvin's political theology in this way forces us to come to grips with the theological assumptions behind our own political commitments.

in the interests of secular conceptions of democracy. Government was for him concerned with what we call the 'rights of man' only in relation to scriptural concepts of God, the moral law, and the 'perpetual rule of love.'"⁴

Thus it may seem ironic to find in Calvin the resources for the *abandonment* of Christendom in favor of a commitment to secular political liberalism. But in my view it is precisely the *theological* orientation to which McNeill refers that should make Calvin's work of interest to contemporary Christian ethicists. Calvin had no dog in the fight over liberal democracy, so to speak; he wrote neither as the critic nor the apologist of any particular form of government. Yet his political theology accurately captures commitments central to the Christian faith and thoroughly conducive toward a Christian embrace of political liberalism in the twenty-first century.

In this dissertation, therefore, I presuppose a conceptual distinction between Calvin's practical politics and his political theology. By the term *practical politics* I refer to Calvin's political actions and commitments, such as his support for the capital punishment of Servetus. By *political theology* I mean Calvin's theological and ethical account of human life and society in the context of sin and the gospel, with its consequent implications for the nature of the church, civil government, and other social institutions. My premise is that the value of Calvin's thought does not lie in his practical politics, which reflected his own time and place, but in the degree to which it offers Christians a faithful and coherent model for thinking about what scripture teaches concerning Christian political engagement. Context is crucial to any clear understanding of political theology, of course, but the contours of Calvin's practical politics are of

4 John T. McNeill, "Calvin and Civil Government," *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (ed. Donald McKim; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 274. "In his warm admiration for political government, he does not for a moment regard it as a realm of mere secularity" (265). Susan Schreiner likewise stresses that although Calvin believed natural law is essential for social life, this does "not mean that Calvin had a 'secular' morality or a naturalistic context for society." Susan Schreiner, "Calvin's Use of Natural Law," *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics and Natural Law* (ed. Michael Cromartie; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 61.

limited interest to constructive political theology. As the French scholar Marc Chenevière put it so well, “the politico-religious thought of Calvin does not concern us, Protestants of the twentieth century, except in so far as it rests on a Biblical foundation... It is Calvin's fidelity to Scripture that gives so much value to his teaching; it is this that *a priori* inspires our confidence in him.”⁵

In fact, I argue that Calvin's illiberal practical politics was *accidental* to his fundamentally biblical political theology because it (appropriately, given his political theological method) arose from his best efforts at interpreting reason, the laws of nations, and the insights of pagan philosophy, rather than from his biblical exegesis.⁶ Yet Calvin's *political theological account* of the kingdom of Christ and the way in which it breaks into this world must be sharply distinguished from these efforts. This account is rigorously scriptural, as are Calvin's associated distinctions between church and politics, between Israel and contemporary political societies, between natural law and the Torah, between the spiritual use of the law and its civil use, and between true righteousness and civil righteousness. Calvin's political theological method distinguished between the authority of arguments drawn from natural reason (which could be challenged and rejected) and that of the teachings of scripture (which, if interpreted correctly, could not be rejected). To embrace his political theology and method, therefore, is not to accept his illiberal practical arguments and conclusions. On the contrary, informed by different interpretations of reason, the laws of nations, and philosophy (again, appropriately, according to Calvin's method), we might readily find in Calvin's political theology substantial reasons for Christians to embrace the institutions, procedures, and practical commitments of liberal democracy.

5 Marc Chenevière, “Did Calvin Advocate Theocracy?” *Evangelical Quarterly* 9 (1937): 161.

6 It was primarily from pagan philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, after all, from whom Calvin drew his arguments regarding the magisterial care of religion. Here we must admit that Calvin was following those who were regarded as the best lights of his day, however much we might disagree with them.

By the term *liberal democracy* I denote constitutional systems of democratic or representative government; basic human and civil rights that encompass life, speech, association, property, and religion; the limitation of government by the rule of law under a system of checks and balances; and the separation of church and state.⁷ I suggest that Calvin's theology offers helpful guidance in how Christians might participate in liberal institutions both *in good faith* to their nonChristian neighbors, and in *faithfulness* to their Lord.

Such a perspective, I believe, is much needed in a time when prominent Christian pastors and theologians, not to mention liberal philosophers, are questioning the compatibility of orthodox Christianity with political liberalism. *That* so many Christians are questioning this compatibility in increasingly pluralistic societies, where traditional Christian moral commitments are often cast aside, is unsurprising. Yet it is ironic, given the traditional tendency of Protestants to claim credit for the emergence of modern democracy. As Timothy P. Jackson maintains, while Christianity may not have invented political liberalism, political liberalism is certainly Christianity's stepchild. If the child has gone prodigal in certain respects, Christians should be about the business of reforming rather than abandoning it.⁸ Seeking refuge in the often agonistic and sometimes authoritarian politics of the Religious Right is no better solution than withdrawing into the worshipping peaceable communities so easily romanticized by neo-Anabaptist theologians, or than naively hoping that civil and political society might

7 By liberal democracy I therefore do *not* mean a comprehensive philosophical worldview such as that articulated by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) or traced by Robert P. Kraynak to Immanuel Kant in *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). I refer to a constitutional and practical liberalism that might be rooted in various comprehensive doctrines, such as that described by John Rawls in his later work, especially "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," a 1997 essay printed in John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 440-490, and such as that defended more thoroughly and consistently by Jeffrey Stout in his *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

8 Timothy P. Jackson, "The Return of the Prodigal? Liberal Theory and Religious Pluralism," in *Religion in Contemporary Liberalism* (ed. Paul J. Weitman; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 182-217.

somehow be transformed into such a community. Calvin, I believe, can help us avoid these temptations.

Take, for instance, the widespread dismay among some conservative Christians at the state's retreat from the regulation of sexual morality and marriage over the past half century. This is a phenomenon that bears fascinating similarities to the way in which many Christians experienced the state's abandonment of the care of religion in preceding centuries. Yet as bitterly as disestablishment was resisted by some Christians in the eighteenth century, it is enthusiastically embraced by most Christians today. Of course, Calvin believed that in principle government should punish false teaching and sexual immorality alike, so it might seem that he has little to say to modern Christians other than to further their disillusionment with modern liberal politics. But such is not the case, for Calvin understood that in reality magistrates may, and often must, tolerate both false teaching and sexual immorality. The civil law, he insisted, cannot establish spiritual righteousness. It must tolerate sin due to the hardness of human hearts, and it must even regulate inherently sinful practices so as to mitigate their destructive consequences. Thus while liberal societies might appropriately fall under criticism for a host of moral failings with respect to fostering community, promoting virtue, protecting life, defending the rights of the poor, caring for the environment, and more, these failings should not come as a surprise, let alone discourage Christians from involvement in flawed political institutions. Civil government is not the kingdom of Christ, Calvin would remind us, nor should we try to make it so. It does not lose its legitimacy when it inevitably fails to meet the highest moral standards of the law of God.

The implications for the political involvement of the church are significant. The church is called prophetically to preach the whole will of God, but that does not mean the church has the authority to dictate the way in which the laws of the state conform to that will. Unlike Judaism or Islam, as Robert Kraynak points out, Christianity recognizes no

political or legal system as demanded by divine law; it offers no blueprint for a Christian state.⁹ Theologians have tried to bridge the gap between the divine word and its political implications through what John Bennett called “middle axioms.”¹⁰ But Calvin's two kingdoms theology warns against any abuse of the church's authority in the cause of politics, clearly differentiating the law of God from the human law of the state, and the restorative ministry of the church from the limited and merely preservative powers of civil government. To be sure, divine and civil law may never be entirely separated, let alone opposed to one another. Calvin agreed that a civil law that violates God's law is no law at all. But this doesn't make it an easy task, a simple process of translation, to determine how the laws of the state should best accomplish the purposes of piety and justice in any given context. Christians are called to fulfill this task in service to their neighbors, Christian and non-Christian alike, according to the virtues of love and prudence (that is, wisdom applied to the purposes of love, not to be mistaken for self-serving pragmatism). If Calvin called Christians thoughtfully to navigate between the scylla and charybdis of political dogmatism and moral relativism in sixteenth century Christendom, such a task remains all the more daunting in a twenty-first century characterized by multiple forms of pluralism. In addition to the religious pluralism that Calvin could have imagined, contemporary Christians experience the moral pluralism that arises from the ever-increasing differentiation of society and its institutions into multiple spheres of life, each with its own purpose, logic, and moral sense.¹¹ While Christians might be tempted to dismiss the compromises demanded by such pluralism as unprincipled pragmatism, Calvin's two kingdoms theology grounds the need for political compromise in a recognition of human sin and a rich account of the multifaceted nature of God's law (natural and biblical; moral, ceremonial, and civil; theological, civil, and

9 Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy*.

10 John Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 76-85.

11 Steven M. Tipton, “Social Differentiation and Moral Pluralism,” *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self* (ed. Richard Madsen, et. al.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15-40.

spiritual, etc.), including the enormous complexities associated with legislating that law politically. As Paul Ramsey recognized, the difference between the two kingdoms calls Christians to exercise a healthy skepticism in response to the claims of politicians, pastors, or denominations to speak the will of God for particular matters of policy or legislation.¹²

If large numbers of Christians on the ground continue to seek a Christian America, a growing number of Christian ethicists and theologians are tapping into disillusionment with the modern liberal (read: post-Christian) state by taking up something of a neo-Anabaptist stance.¹³ If America is increasingly pagan, so the argument runs, we would do well to return to the example of the early church, which also inhabited a pagan world. After all, in hindsight it appears that the church took a seriously wrong turn with Constantine and Christendom, allying the church with the state, and it is a turn that mainstream Christian ethics has never adequately corrected. The true expression of the kingdom of God and its socio-political ethic is the church. The only faithful way to involve ourselves with politics, then, is to recenter politics in the true community of virtue that is the church, to make our political objectives explicitly Christian, and to abandon any sort of political logic that presupposes pluralism, with its necessary compromises in the way of state neutrality or public reason.

There is much that is true in the neo-Anabaptist critique, I believe, but it hardly seems wise to abandon over a thousand years of Christian political theology, let alone to interpret the political theology of the early church through the lens of idealized sixteenth

12 Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 148-157.

13 Here I have in mind especially the prominent works of John Howard Yoder, including *The Politics of Jesus* (2nd ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), and *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (ed. Glen Stassen et. al.; Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009); and Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), and *The Hauerwas Reader* (ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright; Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); and Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentring the Tradition in the Church Rather than the State* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009).

century Anabaptism. I worry that one of the dominant – and dangerous – themes that informs this sort of political theology is the rejection of coercive civil government as a vocation appropriate for Christian service. If such a view is attractive to Christians disoriented by the religious, cultural, political, and legal changes of the past few decades, there is a desperate need to reground Christian political theology in the church's rich theological tradition, while reevaluating the implications of that tradition (as well as its missteps) in light of the passing of Christendom. We will not be in good shape if our theology apes that of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, or Calvin, of course, but neither will we be better off if we entirely disregard them.

There are prominent criticisms of liberalism that are more firmly embedded in church tradition than that of the Neo-Anabaptists, including those associated with communitarians like Alasdair MacIntyre, advocates of “radical orthodoxy” like John Milbank, and liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez.¹⁴ These theologians, while avoiding the turn to pacifism, offer just as vigorous a critique of the modern liberal state in favor of what they regard as a more faithful (or orthodox) Christian political ethos. In comparison to the comprehensive Christian political vision that provides a foundation for true community or virtue, such writers argue, the institutions of liberalism – including the constitutional state, free market capitalism, the separation of church and state, and the language of human and civil rights – are impoverished and corrupting. But while the constructive criticism of liberalism is insightful and necessary, all of these perspectives assume in some way the hegemonic normativity of Christianity for modern society, and hence the abandonment of pluralistic liberalism.

All too many of these Christian critics of political liberalism, like their neo-

¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (3rd ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (2nd Ed.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 150. A more nuanced view, but one that is nevertheless sharply critical of liberalism, can be found in William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

Anabaptist counterparts, write as if the kingdom of God can take substantive socio-political expression in this age. Such over-realized eschatology seems to force us to choose between withdrawing from worldly politics altogether, or seeking the establishment of an illiberal theocracy (albeit one that purports to be gentle and gracious in its use of force).

A major reason why it is worthwhile to return to Calvin's two kingdoms theology, then, is to recover an important strand of the tradition which holds that civil government is ordained by God as a temporal institution charged with restraining evil (punishing those who commit injustice and protecting the innocent), yet which provides a theological standpoint from which to abandon the ideal of Christendom in favor of liberal democracy. To put it another way, there is a need for a 'realist' response to the over-realized eschatology of so much contemporary Christian ethics, one that teaches us how to participate faithfully in the politics of a pluralistic society rather than to withdraw from it or require that it be Christian. As a critic of the social gospel and pacifism Reinhold Niebuhr has long been the face of Christian realism,¹⁵ but Niebuhr's theology is too often only tenuously rooted in Christian scripture, his critics unable to escape the sense that in the end Christian theology doesn't actually do much work for him, that a virtuous pragmatism or utilitarianism plays a greater role in his ethics than does a commitment to the love and justice of Christ.¹⁶ There is a need for a form of Christian realism that serves the demands of Christian theology rather than the other way around, one in which the virtue of prudence serves the purposes and norms of love, rather than permitting us to set them aside. Recognizing this problem with Niebuhr's work, recent

15 See especially Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932); *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941-1943).

16 Calvin is neither a realist nor a pragmatist in this Niebuhrian sense. For instance, while Niebuhr would argue that in an emergency Christians must sometimes act unjustly, getting their hands dirty, so to speak, Calvin insists that Christians must act justly regardless of the consequences. Likewise, while Niebuhr argues that love is a personal virtue inappropriate for the complexities of life in "immoral society," Calvin declares the law of charity to be the rule for all political laws.

ethicists, such as Paul Ramsey and Timothy P. Jackson, have worked to ground a realist approach in the theological virtue of love. Others, including Nicholas Wolterstorff and Eric Gregory, have sought resources for a theologically grounded affirmation of political liberalism in the theological tradition of the church.¹⁷

This dissertation is not constructive in the sense that these works are. I focus almost entirely on describing Calvin's theology in its own context and on its own terms, postponing my own critical and constructive proposals until the conclusion. My goal, however, is to recover Calvin as a relevant voice for contemporary Christian political theology. Calvin's two kingdoms theology offers contemporary Christians a rigorously orthodox and scriptural foundation for Christian realism even as it embraces some of the central concerns of Anabaptism regarding the importance of the church as the truly restorative community of virtue. Indeed, one of the chief characteristics that distinguished Calvin from the other magisterial reformers was his embrace of Anabaptist concerns about the church as a community of true believers dedicated to following Christ and practicing reconciliation. Here Ernst Troeltsch has insightfully identified Calvin's genius as his synthesis of the Anabaptist 'sect-type' of Christian social engagement, in which the church is a distinct community of the faithful, with the medieval 'church-type,' in which the church rejects the attempt to distinguish the elect from the reprobate, and

17 Jackson prefers the term “prophetic liberalism” because it stresses the positive function of Christian love. See Jackson, *Political Agape*, forthcoming. I maintain the term “realism” both because it is relevant to societies liberal and illiberal alike, and because it properly accentuates the limits of temporal politics. See Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); Timothy P. Jackson, *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Jackson, *Political Agape*, forthcoming; Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Wounds of God: Calvin's Theology of Social Injustice,” *Reformed Journal* 37.6 (June 1987): 14-22; *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Oliver O'Donovan takes a somewhat more critical, yet ultimately constructive approach, seeking to ground Christian political participation in liberal democracies in classic Christian understandings of justice, authority, and judgment. O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

in which it remains committed to the social good of all persons.¹⁸ It offers the theological basis for the model of what Martin Marty, Robert Bellah, and Steven M. Tipton call a “public church,” a church that conceives of its purpose in relation to the restoration of all things, not simply the deliverance of the elect who are ‘only passing through’.¹⁹ As Susan Schreiner puts it, Calvin believed Christians must “take responsibility for that world” of which they are a part, while holding “an unrelenting realism” about the effects of sin. Such realism seeks to “distinguish carefully between the spiritual and civil realms and to take seriously the fallen nature of the latter.”²⁰ Thus Calvin's political theology provides the theological foundation for a form of Christian realism in which the motive and guide for Christian participation is always the gospel of Christ, but in which neither the gospel nor the moral law are conflated with what politics can accomplish.²¹

18 Troeltsch writes, “the peculiar essence of Calvinism consists in the combination of the main ideas of Church and Sect in the sense of a fellowship, based upon religion, which, in spite of all that, is still new and original. It is this also which determines the form of its sociological fundamental theory.” Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. Olive Wyon; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992 [1912]), 2:623. “The general significance of this phenomenon consists precisely in this: we have here the union of a national Church and a voluntary Church, of the Church as the organ of salvation and the sect-ideal” (627; Cf. 602). Troeltsch writes of Calvinism, “In its second phase, under the influence of Bucer, it assimilated the element of truth contained in the Anabaptist movement, i.e., the practical social development of the congregation” (579). The key elements of connection here are church discipline (especially excommunication) and its close tie to the Lord's Supper viewed as “the fellowship of genuine and believing Christians, from whom unbelievers are to be kept separate” (593). On the other hand, Calvin was also committed to the concept of a “Christian national and State Church, which admits the necessity for various stages of human experience,” and with the concomitant embrace of civil government that went with it (597). Because it was impossible to know who were elect and who were not, “Both groups are to be included in an ecclesiastical civil commonwealth, and are to be kept in the fear of God by the State and by the Church” (598).

19 Robert N. Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), especially 243-248; Robert N. Bellah, et. al., *The Good Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), especially 179-219; Martin Marty, *The Public Church: Mainline-Evangelical-Catholic* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981); and Steven M. Tipton, *Public Pulpits: Methodists and Mainline Churches in the Moral Argument of Public Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 399-442.

20 Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 84-85.

21 “Calvin always insisted on a Christian realism about societal life.” “This realism required both a respect for the real threat of chaos and an appreciation for the continuing order in the cosmos and in society.” Schreiner, “Calvin's Use of Natural Law,” 74. On Calvin as a realist in the tradition of Augustine see Derek S. Jeffreys, “It's a Miracle of God That There Is Any Common Weal Among Us': Unfaithfulness and Disorder in John Calvin's Political Thought,” *The Review of Politics* (2000): 125-126.

The Literature.

The scholarship on Calvin is, of course, immense, and it is well beyond the scope of a dissertation focusing on Calvin's already massive corpus of writings and sermons to survey this scholarship in detail. Here I highlight the significance of some of the most influential interpretations of Calvin, identifying as selective examples the work of scholars whose contributions are particularly noteworthy or useful, and which are available in English. I present these as five types:

- Calvin as a key to the emergence of secularity and modernity
- Calvin as a socio-political transformationalist
- Calvin as a dialectical theologian
- Calvin as a political actor
- Calvin as a teacher of scripture

I present these as types, but in reality they overlap to one degree or another, and the work of many scholars could readily be assigned to multiple types. Furthermore, to varying degrees they all represent genuine elements of Calvin's thought and legacy, though I argue that only the fifth type provides a reliable foundation for penetrating to the essence of Calvin's political theology.

1. Calvin as a key to the emergence of secularity and modernity

For the past two centuries there has been no shortage of attempts to find in Calvin or Calvinism some key to understanding the modern world. Scholars like Herbert Darling Foster, inspired by the Whig interpretation of history, have seen in Calvin's Geneva the cradle of the Puritan state, in which in turn lay the seeds of modern democracy.²² Calvinist apologists like Abraham Kuyper have sought to rally the faithful

²² Herbert Darling Foster, "Calvin's Programme for a Puritan State in Geneva, 1536-1541," *Harvard Theological Review* 1 (1908): 391-434. Foster defended the thesis that "The earliest programme for a Puritan state is to be found in the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*" (392). Calvin

by claiming that Calvinism is the source of liberty itself.²³ More careful historians such as John McNeill, Robert M. Kingdon, and John Witte, Jr., have identified in Calvin key elements that shaped modern theories of law, government, democracy, marriage, poor relief, and human rights.²⁴ Max Weber launched a world of scholarship, one that has not yet run its course, when he claimed that the roots of the spirit of capitalism lay in Calvin's doctrine of predestination.²⁵ David Little has modified Weber's thesis, arguing that it was in Calvin's concept of order, specifically his differentiation between spiritual (voluntary) and political (coercive) institutions, within which the seeds of modern differentiation can be found.²⁶ Michael Walzer argues that Calvinism spawned the type of individual, the activist revolutionary determined to remake society, that has so left its mark on the modern world.²⁷ Historians, theologians, and sociologists continue to rework and repackage such theses in volume after volume, essay after essay, to this day.

never brought about its full realization, "Yet the beginning of the struggle reveals the tendencies which ultimately worked out those by-products of the Puritan state which the modern world regards among its dearest possessions, civil and religious liberty, economic efficiency, and sound learning" (434).

23 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931).

24 John T. McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," *Church History* 18 (September 1949): 153-171. Elsewhere McNeill claims that from Calvin's "[theological] presuppositions he reached certain viewpoints that have leavened political theory in modern liberal states." McNeill, "Calvin and Civil Government," 274. , *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a critical take on the early legacy for democracy of Calvin, Beza, and the French Reformed tradition, see Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvinism and Democracy: Some Political Implications of Debates on French Reformed Church Government, 1562-1572," *American Historical Review* 69 (1964): 393-401. Robert M. Kingdon argues that Calvin's legacy should be understood in revolutionary terms because it overthrew the old power and authority of the papacy, magisterial bishops, canon law, ecclesiastical courts, and monasteries, the ripple effects dramatically transforming poor relief, hospitals, education, and marriage, and other functions once monopolized by the church. Robert M. Kingdon, "Was the Protestant Reformation a Revolution? The Case of Geneva," *Transition and Revolution: Problems and Issues of European Renaissance and Reformation History* (ed. Robert M. Kingdon; Minneapolis: University of Wisconsin, 1974), 53-76.

25 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (trans. Talcott Parsons; New York: Scribner's 1958). Cf. R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York: Mentor Books, 1926); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Volume 2: *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); On Troeltsch's incorporation of Weber's thesis see *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:604-611. For criticism of Weber's thesis on Calvin and Calvinism see Mark Valeri, "Religion, Discipline, and the Economy in Calvin's Geneva," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 123-142; W. Stanford Reid, "John Calvin, Early Critic of Capitalism: An Alternative Interpretation," *Reformed Theological Review* 43-44 (1984-1985): 74-81, 9-12.

26 David Little, *Religion, Order, and Law* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

27 Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

The most plausible of these works, I believe, see in the Reformation and in Calvin the intensification of a process of secularization that has its roots in Christianity itself. Weber rightly identified the tendency of Christianity to differentiate the salvation of the kingdom of God from life in this world, and numerous scholars have identified in Augustine's concept of the two cities, in the medieval distinction between the secular and the spiritual, and in Luther's and Calvin's concepts of the two kingdoms, the priesthood of all believers, and the sanctity of secular vocations further intensifications of a general process by which the natural and temporal world was disenchanting and demystified. This has in turn contributed to the ever-increasing differentiation of human life into a multiplicity of institutions and spheres, each of which functions according to its own purpose, rationale, and ethic. The secular and differentiated world, as such, can be interpreted through either a thoroughgoing secularist lens or a theistic lens, as Charles Taylor has so brilliantly demonstrated.²⁸ The meaning of the "spheres" might be conceived as the autonomous invention of human beings as individuals or communities, as for Weber and Walzer, or as creation ordinances of God revealed in scripture and in history, as for Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd.²⁹ Either way, Steven M. Tipton argues, the result is a "moral pluralism" that is not the result of religious pluralism but of "social differentiation," with multiple forms of moral meaning appropriate to each sphere of life residing in each individual person. Here there is no possibility of simply imposing the law of God in authoritarian fashion as it was revealed to an ancient and undifferentiated society, but only of working together to determine the way in which the virtues of Christ and the precepts of his will might be fostered honored, and applied in widely

28 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

29 See the various essays on vocation by Max Weber in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (ed. C. Mills and Charles Wright; New York: Oxford University Press, 1946); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (ed. James D. Bratt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461-490; Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought: The Necessary Presuppositions of Philosophy* (4 volumes; trans. David H. Freeman and William S. Young; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953-1958).

differentiated spheres and institutions.³⁰

One of the most provocative accounts of Calvin's role in this narrative is that offered by Ralph C. Hancock. Building on Weber's work, Hancock argues that Calvin's theology made God and his sovereign purpose so transcendent as to be unknowable to human beings. By emphasizing the importance of actively living for the glory of a God whose *ultimate* will could not be known, Calvin redirected religious energies into *secular* life and its *temporal* purposes. The result was a radical secularization of politics.³¹ According to Hancock, Calvin thus separates the two kingdoms by declaring that civil government's purpose, even with respect to religion, is purely outward and secular; it does not advance "spiritual or supernatural ends." Its natural end "seems to be not the perfection of the human soul but simply the maintenance of peace." After all, for Calvin, "We can be spiritually free while politically bound only if we do not understand politics as serving any spiritual purpose – only if human choice cannot affect the salvation of the soul."³²

There is certainly truth to the argument that the Reformation's emphasis on vocation in the secular world as the appropriate context for Christian service played a significant role in modern secularization. But the problem with such interpretations of

30 Tipton, "Social Differentiation and Moral Pluralism," 15-40.

31 As he states his thesis, "in Calvin's thought, the radicalization of transcendence tends to collapse its vertical dimension and thus to redirect the whole energy of non-instrumental longings to the horizontal plane." Ralph C. Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), vii. "Calvin explodes the simple dichotomy between secular and religious concerns; he distinguishes radically between them, to be sure, but precisely in order to join them fast together" (xii). "In every fundamental question that he addresses, Calvin rigorously distinguishes between the secular and the spiritual in order to join them fast together" (25).

32 Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*, 31. Calvin thus makes no effort to present the political order within "a comprehensive hierarchy unifying the natural and the divine" (32). "The notion of order as consciousness of absolute power is the unifying ground of Calvin's treatment of the order of creation (book I) and his treatment of the fall and the restoration of order (books 2-4)." The only path for human beings is fervent devotion to the will and power of God as it is revealed in "the discrete practical activities to which God, through history, has called man" (98). Here reason and natural law do have a place, guiding human beings as they seek their temporal preservation and prosperity, but without any reference to ultimate purposes. "Perhaps only by joining the glory of God to the rational self-preservation of humanity could rationalism overpower the idea that the end of politics is the natural perfection of the human soul" (118).

Calvin is that they tend to abstract certain doctrines from their broader place in the reformer's thought, then proceeding to carry those doctrines to their supposedly logical implications. Hancock's argument is significantly marred by his understanding (or *use*) of Calvin's theology as a philosophical system of deduction from central premises about the sovereignty of God, his limited focus on the *Institutes* at the expense of Calvin's exegetical works, and his self-admitted "violent" reading of the reformer's thought. The arbitrary focus on Calvin's doctrine of God's sovereignty underlies Hancock's absurd claim that for Calvin God's purposes for creation are unnatural and unknowable.³³ Hancock entirely misses the eschatological and Christological thrust of Calvin's theology, with its roots in Calvin's exegesis of scripture.

My project is informed by analyses of Calvin's legacy for secularization, democracy, and modernity, but this *historical* legacy is not its focus. Rather, I explore Calvin's theology understood on its own terms and in its own context. My objective is not to demonstrate how Calvin actually influenced later generations, but to explore his political theology with an eye to how his intellectual descendents *could have* appropriated it in ways supportive of democracy, and to how Christians might profitably appropriate it today.

2. Calvin as a socio-political transformationalist

Perhaps the most prominent popular interpretation of Calvin's political theology is that which makes the reformer a socio-political transformationalist. H. Richard

Niebuhr played no small role in popularizing this view in his 1951 classic *Christ and*

³³ Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*, 35-43, 68, 85-99, 102-115). "The political order, like the order of nature, consists in nothing but sheer obedience to unintelligible power" (113). Natural law has an entirely negative function when it comes to spiritual matters, and even the gospel of Christ is simply a mask for the ultimate power of the transcendent God (123). The restoration of order, of course, is central to Calvin's ethics. "This right order is of course authoritatively and comprehensively represented for Calvin in the person of Christ himself. I will argue, however, that it is possible to look beyond the simple revelation of the person of Jesus in Calvin's theology to the 'secret energy of the Spirit.' Finally, I claim that the meaning of the Holy Spirit is in turn grounded in Calvin's understanding of right order as the pure consciousness of absolute power" (123. Cf. 157-159).

Culture, describing Calvin as a representative of his fifth and best type of Christian cultural engagement, “Christ the Transformer of Culture.” This was in stark contrast to Niebuhr's interpretation of Martin Luther, whose two kingdoms doctrine Niebuhr placed in the category “Christ and Culture in Paradox.” Calvin let his doctrine of God's sovereignty drive his work, Niebuhr argued, arriving at the conclusion that “what the gospel promises and makes possible, as divine (not human) possibility, is the transformation of mankind in all its nature and culture into a kingdom of God in which the laws of the kingdom have been written upon the inward parts.”³⁴ German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann laid claim to the dramatic significance of this interpretation when he characterized European Protestant political theology in terms of two chief streams, “Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms” and the “Reformed doctrine of the lordship of Christ.” The two doctrines, he claimed, led to sharply contrasting forms of engagement with the Nazi German state during 1933-1945.

On the basis of the two kingdoms doctrine, the Lutheran-established churches (the Landeskirche) maintained a 'neutral' position as documented in the 'Ansbach Decree' of 1935. On the basis of the doctrine of the lordship of Christ, which determines the whole of life, the Confessing Church took up the position of resistance, as shown by the 'Barmen Theological Declaration' of 1934.³⁵

On this analysis the implications of Reformed political theology seem obvious. Because Jesus Christ is lord of all, there can be no neutrality with respect to the state or to politics. The church must take an activist approach to politics, demanding that the state defend the righteousness of the kingdom of God. Christians should devote themselves to zealous political activism because, in the popular words of the Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper, “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our

34 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001 [1951]), 217-218. Niebuhr admits that this picture is heavily qualified by Calvin's eschatological distinction between the temporal and the eternal. Cf. Thomas G. Sanders, *Protestant Concepts of Church and State* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 223-229.

35 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Politics of Discipleship and Discipleship in Politics: Jürgen Moltmann Lectures in Dialogue with Mennonite Scholars* (ed. Willard M. Swartley. Eugene: Cascade Books: 2006), 3.

human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry, Mine!”³⁶

The classic scholarly analysis of Calvin and Calvinism along these lines is Ernst Troeltsch's *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, now more than one hundred years old. Troeltsch claims that Calvin incorporated the language of Luther's two kingdoms into his theology, but that, spurred by the doctrines of predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God, Calvin's social theory turned in a radically different direction. “In his teaching on the independence and secular character of the State Calvin used exactly the same language as Luther; since, however, at the same time he created a strong independent Church ... through which he desired to effect a Christian and ethical transformation of the whole of Society and civilization, in practice he made the State subordinate to the Church.”³⁷ Troeltsch, like so many early twentieth century scholars, viewed Calvinism as a system of thought “logically constructed” on “the idea of predestination, the famous central doctrine of Calvinism.”³⁸ In this system the gospel was no longer viewed primarily as a means to the salvation of sinners, but as a means to the greater end of the glory of God. The purpose of the doctrine of justification was not the joy of the forgiveness of sins that results in loving service to one's neighbors, but the sovereign calling of the individual to serve as an instrument of the divine will. The gospel thus became “a spur to action” and the “spirit of active energy” in the heroic elect, who in turn became “Christ's warriors and champions.”³⁹ Certain of their salvation, Christians were free to look outward and to devote themselves to the transformation of society into the holy community of Christ.

36 Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (ed. James D. Bratt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

37 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:627. Thus Lutheranism became marked for its passivity, while Calvinism became known for its “active character” (577).

38 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:579, 581. Calvin was concerned with “the character of God as absolute sovereign will.” “In entire and arbitrary freedom He lays down the law for Himself; and this law is the law of His own glory.” No longer is love at the center of the idea of God, but majesty (582). Luther focused on the revealed God, while Calvin held on to the hidden God, and “in so doing he transformed the whole idea of God.” This idea is not drawn from scripture; “It is the unique product of Calvin's own mind.” (583)

39 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:584.

The doctrine of predestination thus gave rise to Calvinism's second distinctive characteristic, according to Troeltsch, its heroic religious individualism. Whereas the Lutheran Christian satisfies himself with quiet loving service amid the providentially arranged circumstances of life, for the Calvinist

the whole meaning of life consists precisely in entering into these circumstances, and, while inwardly rising above them, in shaping them into an expression of the Divine Will. In conflict and in labour the individual takes up the task of the sanctification of the world ... The Calvinist knows that his calling and election are sure, and that therefore he is free to give all his attention to the effort to mold the world and society according to the Will of God.⁴⁰

The commitment to the lordship of Christ thus endowed Calvinists with a “high sense of a Divine mission to the world,” an “immeasurable responsibility.”⁴¹ “Predestination means that the minority, consisting of the best and the holiest souls, is called to bear rule over the majority of mankind, who are sinners.”⁴²

The third distinctive characteristic of Calvinism, for Troeltsch, is “the central significance of the idea of a society, and the task of the restoration of a holy community, of a Christocracy in which God is glorified in all its activity, both sacred and secular.”⁴³ Here the church is not merely the organ of justification but “the means of sanctification: it ought to prove itself effective in the Christianizing of the community, by placing the whole range of life under the control of Christian regulations and Christian purposes.” This is to take place “in every aspect of life: in Church and State, in family and in society, in economic life, and in all personal relationships, both public and private.”⁴⁴ Calvinism “sought to make the whole of Society, down to the smallest detail, a real expression of the

40 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:588, 589. Protestantism is inherently individualistic, Troeltsch admitted, but Calvin directed that spirit toward the purpose of “the glorification of God in action, [which] is the real test of individual personal reality in religion” (588).

41 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:617

42 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:618. He calls it a “spiritual aristocracy” (2:590).

43 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:590-591.

44 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:591. Calvin thus made “an ethic of sanctification the underlying basis of Church discipline and of the development of the State” (2:601).

royal dominion of Christ.”⁴⁵ His blueprint was scripture, especially the Old Testament.⁴⁶

The result was the sort of inner-worldly asceticism of which Weber wrote, Calvinists acting as enormously confident and disciplined activists whose devotion is to exerting social power as a means of asserting the sovereignty of God:

This peculiar combination of ideas produces a keen interest in politics, but not for the sake of the State; it produces active industry within the economic sphere, but not for the sake of wealth; it produces an eager social organization, but its aim is not material happiness; it produces unceasing labour, even disciplining the senses, but none of this effort is for the sake of the object of all this industry. The one main controlling idea and purpose of this ethic is to glorify God, to produce the Holy Community, to attain that salvation which in election is held up as the aim; to this one idea all the other formal peculiarities of Calvinism are subordinate.⁴⁷

Following Troeltsch's general line of interpretation is a myriad of scholars who claim that for Calvin Christians and the church are God's instruments in the renewal or transformation of society into the kingdom of God. For example, even though he abandons the reduction of Calvin's thought to his view of the sovereignty of God, John Tonkin writes that for Calvin

The new order of God must be made visible not only in the ecclesiastical community but also in society as a whole. That is to say, the Church must extend its sway over the whole social order. Calvin's organization of the city of Geneva is an outgrowth of this drive, and there is no doubt that he saw his purpose there in the same terms as he once used to describe the growth of the reform movement in Poland – namely, to 'establish the heavenly reign of God upon earth.' As the Gospel moves out to claim all nations, the kingdom of Christ comes into full splendor. The structures of the world which oppose his rule are destroyed, as the structures of grace become manifest, and the whole creation is transfigured into conformity with Christ. The fact that this goal will always remain ahead for the Church in no way lessens the urgency of its present task of being the agent of the restoration of order throughout the world.⁴⁸

45 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:622.

46 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:586. To be sure, Calvin recognized that parts of the law were no longer binding on Christians, and in that sense he did not seek to revive “Jewish legalism” (601). But in contrast to the Lutherans, Calvinism “extended the authority of the Bible over a wider field, and in the process it transformed the whole conception of the Bible into an infallible authority for all the problems and needs of the Church” (587). Based on the premise that the Bible could speak to all of life, Calvinists seeking the political and legal transformation of society inevitably found lessons in the example of Israel, its kings and its prophets. Calvin dismissed the immediate significance of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Troeltsch claims, in favor of the more relevant Old Testament (599-600).

47 Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2:607.

48 Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in the Theology of the Reformers*, 128-129. Milner writes,

One of the most influential such interpretations is that of André Biéler, who describes Calvin as the founder of a new socio-economic order characterized by continual transformation on the part of Christians acting according to divine standards of social justice.⁴⁹ In contrast to Luther and other first generation reformers, Biéler argues, Calvin's reformation was social in character, concerned with both ecclesiastical and political institutions.⁵⁰ Thus

the struggle against all kinds of oppression – whether political, economic or social, is one of the Reformation's strict requirements, directly following from its theology and its conception of humanity. For, according to the gospel, each and every individual is raised to spiritual freedom by redemption through Jesus Christ. And that freedom has also to be expressed in the political and social condition of the human person.⁵¹

To be sure, Biéler maintains that Calvin insisted on a sharp distinction between church and state. He likewise acknowledges that for Calvin the kingdom will not be fully established until Christ's return, and that in the meantime Christians must submit to a variety of hierarchical structures whose nature is in sharp contrast to the equality of the kingdom. Yet these important qualifications seem to get lost in Biéler's broader characterization of Calvin as a thoroughgoing progressive as devoted to social reform as he was to the reformation of the church.

“Finally, ... the church cannot be thought of apart from the world, or as a secure corner of redemption in it. That is so, because the order which is being restored in the church is nothing else than the restoration of the *imago Dei* in man ... The restoration of man will thus entail the restoration of order in the world. Calvin's political activism, then, may be traced directly to his conception of the church as that movement which stands at the frontier of history, beckoning the world toward its appointed destiny.” The violence done to Calvin by this interpretation appears in Milner's final conclusion that sanctification and ethics end up being the most important mark of the church! Benjamin Milner, Jr., *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 195. Schreiner claims that Calvin makes Christians the instruments of the renewal of creation. She appeals to Calvin's statements “about the unity of the Testaments, the gradual restoration of the world to order, and the contribution of believers to the restoration of society.” Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 108.

49 “The social order is to be constantly transformed, for it must always be attuned afresh to the requirements of God's will. In this unending, continuous transformation, Christians have a leading part to play.” André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought* (ed. Edward Dommen; trans. James Greig; Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2005 [1961]), 265.

50 For Calvin “Christ's work of redemption is ... carried out equally and indivisibly on nature and society.” Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, 218.

51 Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, 267-268. The church therefore becomes both the means of “the regeneration of society” and “the means of preserving society” (267).

Some scholars go so far as to characterize Calvin as nothing less than a revolutionary in his attitude toward politics and economics. Building on Biéler's work, W. Fred Graham presents Calvin as “the leader of a revolution which disturbed Western society not only in the religious sector, but along the total spectrum of human thought and action.”⁵² In fact, “Calvin was an almost thoroughgoing secularist in the sense that he understood the gospel to be irrevocably concerned with the world.”⁵³ The message Genevans constantly heard from their pulpits was

a message of revolution – the end of the old order of antichrist and his priestly myrmidons, the new worth of the individual in the sight of God, the dawning possibilities of justice, the simplification of the court system, the end of the monasteries and the piggish greed of indolent monks. These sermons ... do not speak very much of another world and happiness there. They speak of this world – of the necessity of serving God here. They cry scorn against all injustice.⁵⁴

Driven by the third use of the law, Graham argues, Calvinists were much more driven than were Lutherans to “change society.”⁵⁵ Unfortunately, Calvin was “perhaps not sufficiently aware of the atrocities which may be committed by the saints of the new order.”⁵⁶

There is an element of truth to the argument that some Calvinists have taken a far more radical approach to the transformation of society into a godly commonwealth than

52 W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1971), 11.

53 Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 160. Cf. 12.

54 Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 19.

55 Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 21. Graham acknowledges his debt to Kingdon and Walzer.

56 Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 20. Graham summarizes Calvin's approach to wealth and poverty with the Marxist phrase, which he draws from André Biéler, “from each according to his ability to each according to his need” (70). He describes Calvin's preaching in revolutionary terms: “bitterness,” “attack,” “thundered,” “acid,” “lashes out,” “anger boils over” (66-73). Yet in a concession that somewhat undermines his own thesis, Graham admits that Calvin's social outlook had a conservative twist, and that most of what he thought civil government should do reflects the typical assumptions of his age, and even the “Christian teaching of all times” (75). Peter Iver Kaufman does not hesitate to charge Calvin with seeking to establish a clerocracy – the rule of the clergy. Calvin was concerned with “redeeming politics” as the “arena in which the community's salvation was measured.” Peter Iver Kaufman, *Redeeming Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 105. Public affairs, for an anxious Calvin, was the arena in which Christians were to demonstrate not only that they were among the elect but that “their election had not been a mistake” (111). The methods for assuring such a demonstration were sharply political sermons and ecclesiastical discipline that would not only oversee the conduct of Christians but the performance of magistrates. By these means not only was Christ's reign established in Geneva, but “one might even say the city became a church” (124).

have other Christians, and it is certainly the case that some Calvinists have perceived their social mission in this light. Far too often Calvinism's revolutionary transformationalism has inspired what Max Stackhouse calls "imperial Calvinism,"⁵⁷ what John De Gruchy identifies as Calvinism's "self-righteous triumphalism,"⁵⁸ and what Wolterstorff describes as "that most insufferable of all human beings, the triumphalist Calvinist."⁵⁹ There have been no shortage of Calvinist theologians who have claimed that the reformer's theology spawns a systematic worldview rooted in the sovereignty of Christ, which must be brought to bear on culture and politics through the systematic application of scripture.⁶⁰ Such attempts span the social and political spectrum. In the hands of W. Fred Graham Calvin turns out looking an awful lot like a 1970s liberal democrat,⁶¹ whereas read through the lens of C. Gregg Singer, the very same Calvin comes to resemble a 1950s conservative.⁶² For Paul Chung Calvin turns out to be a proto-liberation theologian.⁶³

Yet such perspectives tends to exaggerate the social and political passivity of other Christian traditions, especially Lutheranism, which also had a revolutionary

57 Max L. Stackhouse, *Creeds, Society, and Human Rights: A Study in Three Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 56.

58 John W. De Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 21. Cf. William R. Stevenson, Jr., *Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 79.

59 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 21.

60 See Gordon J. Spykman, "Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition," *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin* (ed. David E. Holwerda; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 163-208.

61 Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*. For a similar perspective from a European see Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*. Biéler claims that the Reformed faith "involves continual social forward movement for all ranks of society; it is precisely the opposite of any stagnation or social conservatism in principle" (232). Consistent with this vision, the church has a "prime responsibility" to reconstruct a holistic ethic, or as Biéler quotes Tawney, "to reconstruct church and state, and to renew society" (458).

62 C. Gregg Singer, "Calvin and the Social Order; or, Calvin as a Social and Economic Statesman," *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet* (ed. Jacob T. Hoogstra; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 227-241.

63 Paul (Sueng Hoon) Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics in John Calvin: A Pneumatological Perspective* (New York: University Press of America, 2000), 121-122, 157-158. Chung summarizes Calvin's ethic: "What stands behind spirituality and social ethics in the pneumatological perspective is in fact Christian solidarity and commitment to the option for the emancipation of the poor and the oppressed. This radical democratic concern, which is socially oriented, is what Calvin strove to seek concerning politico-economic problems" (158).

impact on law and society.⁶⁴ They tend to overemphasize certain strands of Calvinism, such as English Puritanism, at the expense of others, such as the Reformed churches of Hungary or France. While it is true that Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine differs from that of Luther, especially to the extent that Calvin worked it out in institutional terms, two kingdoms theology remains absolutely central to Calvin's thought and that of the Reformed tradition, serving as an important restraint on any sort of triumphalist eschatology.⁶⁵ Though Christ's kingdom will one day restore all things, according to Calvin, this side of Christ's return the kingdom is only manifest in the church's pilgrimage under the cross.⁶⁶

64 See John Witte, Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

65 Oliver O'Donovan and Joan O'Donovan succinctly summarize the general consensus when they write in their classic *Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought*, "John Calvin may largely take the credit for conceiving and implementing a reintegration of political order and spiritual community that transformed the historical complexion of Reformation Christianity. By the time of his 1536 *Institutes*, the 'two kingdoms' dialectic had issued in, on the one hand, the jettisoning of political order from spiritual community by the Anabaptist separatists, and on the other, the cozy assimilation of spiritual community to political order by Lutheran rulers." Calvin, however, "renovated an essentially Gelasian model of church-commonwealth relations with reformed evangelical content ... stressing harmonization of the spiritual and the temporal realms as of two communal realizations of God's will for fallen mankind, one direct and the other indirect." Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 662. Still, the two kingdoms distinction remained "perennial to his thought and vital to his defense of civil government against its Anabaptist detractors" (664). Cf. John T. McNeill, "John Calvin on Civil Government," *Calvinism and the Political Order* (ed. George L. Hunt; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 41. McNeill recognizes that "Calvin separated in thought the two entities, church and state, but assumed and provided for their mutual interaction." But McNeill mistakenly associates this view with that of Richard Hooker, whose political theology more resembled that of Zwingli, Bullinger, and later Erastus.

66 In a thought-provoking critique of twentieth century Reformed theology, John Bolt argues that twentieth century theologians have been too quick to dismiss Calvin's emphasis on the spirituality of the kingdom of Christ and the suffering of believers as "regrettable lapses that need to be balanced by strong affirmations of the history-changing power of 'kingdom action' by believers." On the contrary, Bolt insists, "*Calvin's world- and history-affirming eschatology must be clearly distinguished from and seen as a critique of all attempts to immanentize (and historicize) the kingdom of God on earth, including many twentieth-century appropriations of Calvin's own eschatology.*" John Bolt, "A Pearl and a Leaven: John Calvin's Critical Two-Kingdoms Eschatology," *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology: Legacy and Prospect* (ed. Sung Wook Chung; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 252. Emphasis Original. Bolt contrasts Jürgen Moltmann's "theology of hope" to the tradition of Augustinian eschatology in which he places Calvin. "Instead of seeing the kingdom of God as a spiritual reality manifested primarily in the church, as Augustine did, Moltmann joins a long line of theologians of messianic eschatology or historicizing eschatology that was present in the early church, repudiated by Augustine, but revived by the twelfth-century Calabrian Abbot, Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202)" (257). Bolt identifies Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine as the restraining factor on the Geneva reformer's

Finally, the perspective of Calvin as a transformationalist all too often confuses Calvin's orthodox and conservative teaching on the doctrine of predestination with the novel and radical conception of the faithful as a spiritual elite determined to transform the world for God. The claims of Troeltsch and others notwithstanding, predestination was not Calvin's "central doctrine." What is more, the reformer emphasized that because one cannot know who are the reprobate or the elect during the present life, such cannot be the objective of church discipline, let alone the basis or motive for political engagement. Calvin treated the doctrine as a source of pastoral comfort for believers while warning them against speculating or drawing dangerous conclusions from the "terrible decree." He emphasized that Christian love for *all* human beings, united by their common identity as bearers of the image of God, is the sole basis for Christian ethics (including with respect to politics).

My dissertation recognizes the significance of Calvin's emphasis on the lordship of Christ over every area of life, including politics, but I argue that for Calvin this emphasis was heavily qualified by the sharp distinction between the nature and purpose of political society and that of the kingdom of Christ. Calvin believed politics and society should be conformed to God's will, but his two kingdoms realism preserved him from the sort of zealous socio-political transformationalism that characterized some of his followers.

3. Calvin as a dialectical theologian

The interpretation of Calvin as a dialectical theologian is less prominent than those of Calvin as a precursor of modernity or as a transformationalist, but it has been

eschatology, a plausible move given that Moltmann has sought to identify two kingdoms theology exclusively with the Lutheran tradition, in contrast to the Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God. In a footnote he writes that historicizing or immanentizing takes place when "the Christian understanding of history's fulfillment *beyond* history is exchanged for a progressivist fulfillment *within* history." Cf. P.F. Theron, "The Kingdom of God and the Theology of Calvin: Response to the Paper by Prof. J. H. Van Wyk," *In die Skriflig* 35.2 (2001): 207-213.

carefully articulated by one of the most stimulating and sophisticated analyses of Calvin's political theology to date, that of William R. Stevenson, Jr.'s *Sovereign Grace*.

Stevenson's interpretation is of particular interest to this dissertation because it carefully compares Calvin's concept of liberty to that of modern liberalism, often emphasizing the conceptual superiority of the former. Stevenson presents Calvin's theology as a dialectic arising out of the doctrines of Christian liberty and the sovereignty of God. On the one hand, he claims, Calvin's doctrine of Christian freedom was "a 'goad' to social action" and "social activism," freeing believers to "concentrate their energies on social renewal" through "positive service in God's developing kingdom."⁶⁷ Equipped with the confidence of their predestination by God, Calvinists could yield themselves to God as servants "for the massive, indeed global, reclamation project which Christ and his Spirit are working to accomplish."⁶⁸ Commenting on Calvin's letters exhorting foreign leaders to reform the church Stevenson writes, "It is difficult not to conclude from such language that Calvin sees as a real possibility the complete transformation of earthly political structures, and other social institutions, by energized Christian believers."⁶⁹

On the other hand, Stevenson recognizes that for Calvin humility regarding the judgments of God's providence "ought to breed [in Christians] a tolerance for human opinions regarding specific aspects of that judgment and therefore a plea for peace as a primary duty of governments."⁷⁰ He likewise concedes that Calvin conceived of government's role as one of judgment in obedience to God's law, not as one of transformative action.⁷¹ "Hence, we ought never to assume that civil government can remake the world but only that it might 'provide that a public manifestation of religion

67 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 60.

68 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 64.

69 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 77 (Cf. 74-75). Indeed, "one can hardly deny the revolutionary implications that *can* flow from [Calvin's] doctrine of providential restoration" (128; Cf. 129). One can begin to see here, Stevenson admits, how Calvin "could indeed have contributed to the 'Calvinist' social revolutions undertaken in his name" (71). Stevenson thinks Calvin opened the door for a conception of the progressive realization of the kingdom in this world (124-126).

70 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 84.

71 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 89.

may exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men.”⁷² Indeed, “To the extent that government should *try* to remake human beings, spiritually or any other way, it is, as we have already seen, doomed to fail.”⁷³ Calvin thus cautions Christians “to beware both the presumption to power and the fatuous infatuation with worldly institutions and political change.”⁷⁴ His “accent falls on 'service' more than 'action.’”⁷⁵ It is clear that he thinks Christians “are neither to resign themselves to a 'fate' of some sort nor to presume to redesign for themselves a new and perfect order. Rather, they are to attend to God's word and to await God's providential unfolding, as they faithfully discharge their godly duties.”⁷⁶

Stevenson's interpretation of Calvin's political theology in dialectical terms is a clear improvement on those interpretations that abstract one element of Calvin's thought at the expense of others, but it also approaches Calvin's thought as a logical system constructed around the doctrine of divine sovereignty, rather than as an exegetical attempt to articulate the often dialectical teaching of scripture.⁷⁷ To be sure, Calvin's biblical theology gives rise to a system of doctrine; the two are not mutually exclusive. But the system is primarily a reflection of Calvin's exegesis and biblical theology rather than the result of reasoning from *a priori* premises. Calvin's concepts of Christian service and of the kingdom of God were less informed by his understanding of predestination and divine sovereignty than they were by Calvin's exegesis of biblical eschatology, and it is in the context of the latter that his account of the church and of politics should be

72 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 93.

73 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 94.

74 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 102.

75 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 103.

76 Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 145. Calvin sees the Christian witness “as largely one of patience and of perseverance in the faith of God's providential promises” (146).

77 Stevenson, though to a lesser extent than Hancock, views Calvin's political theology as a dialectic that holds together only in the sovereignty of God. As he puts it in his conclusion, “The two ends of providence Calvin recounts here could readily serve to show-case the overall dimensions of Christian freedom I have sought to elaborate in this book” (149). Cf. Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 64-69, 151-152. This overriding emphasis on the sovereignty and purpose of God leads to a minimization of the reformer's eschatological distinctions between the temporal and the spiritual, between coercive politics and the kingdom of Christ. See Chapter 8.

understood. My argument strengthens Stevenson's interpretation of Calvin as a dialectical theologian, at least with respect to his two kingdoms doctrine, but it seeks to do so by interpreting Calvin in the context of his exegesis and eschatology rather than the dialectic of human liberty and divine sovereignty.

4. Calvin as a political actor

There have been no shortage of writers who have dismissed Calvin as a theocratic politician and a tyrant without ever engaging the reformer's theology on its own terms and in its own context. Calvin scholars tend not to take such a cynical approach, but some do argue that Calvin's political theology was shaped by his political experience rather than the other way around. For instance, in his excellent study on the consolidation of the Reformation in Geneva William Naphy maintains that Calvin's conflict with the Geneva government over church discipline was a political conflict rather than a theological controversy.⁷⁸ Robert Kingdon, whose work on the practical functioning of Geneva's pastors, elders and deacons is unsurpassed, claims that Calvin's ecclesiology, especially his conception of the offices of elder and deacon, was a product of his experience in Geneva and Strasbourg rather than of his exegesis of scripture.⁷⁹ Coming from historians of Geneva and its institutions, these interpretations remind us to place Calvin's theology in its historical context, but they sell the significance of the reformer's exegesis and theology somewhat short. Much more problematic is Harro Hopfl's interpretation of Calvin, which purports to be an analysis of Calvin's political *theology*.

Hopfl claims that in his early years Calvin's two kingdoms concept was "verbatim Luther's 'two-fold regiment' conception of politics," but that as such the concept failed to

78 William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

79 Robert M. Kingdon, "Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva," *The American Historical Review* 76.1 (February, 1971): 50-69. Kingdon's numerous other essays are cited in Chapter 2.

meet the reformer's needs.⁸⁰ Calvin therefore increasingly thought in the institutional terms of ecclesiastical and civil government. Already in the 1530s Hopfl sees “a marked shift away from the outward-inward, spiritual-civil, two-fold regiment distinctions of the *Institutes*, and a movement towards the idea that civil society comprises not only a civil but also an ecclesiastical *police*.”⁸¹ To be sure, Calvin always maintained his two kingdoms formulations. Likewise the “two-fold regime of magistrates and ministers” always remained the “apex” of Calvin's political theology,⁸² and it even became the bedrock of the Calvinist political theological tradition.⁸³ But Calvin increasingly saw the secular regime not only as playing the fundamental role of providing coercive power and support where the church needed it, but as promoting through that coercion the same edification and sanctification sought by the spiritual regime.⁸⁴

Calvin envisaged a division of labour between magistrates and ministers ... But it was not one between secular and spiritual matters, between *humanitas* and *pietas*, between teaching and coercion, between moral instruction and legal enforcement, or between outward and true righteousness. Instead, both agencies were to use the distinctive resources committed to them by God for the disciplining of the same congregation of body of inhabitants ... to obedience to the same body of laws which covered both piety and righteousness.⁸⁵

Significantly, Hopfl never analyzes Calvin's political theology through the lens of

80 Harro Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 44.

81 Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 66-67, 172.

82 Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 152. Calvin thus maintained a sharp distinction between the “spiritual regime” and the “secular regime,” identifying the former with the visible church “organized in every detail for authoritativeness and autonomy” (122).

83 Harro Hopfl, “The Ideal of *Aristocratia Politiae Vicina* in the Calvinist Political Tradition,” *Calvin and His Influence, 1509-2009*; ed. Irena Backus and Philip Benedict; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 46-66.

84 Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 75, 122-123, 190, 211. For the mature Calvin “the ministers are seen as ideally cooperating with the magistrates in a common enterprise of *aedificatio*,” that is, “an instilling of habits of piety and discipline in the citizenry – congregation” (75). “Calvin had worked out in very great detail, and with much care and acumen, the character of a Christian polity designed precisely to serve as an aid to sanctification: a polity devoted to the honour and glory of God, to *pietas*, to *aequitas* and to *aedificatio*. Discipline is the means to these ends, and it must be, at least ideally, a two-fold discipline of magistrates and ministers” (211). Cf. Harro Hopfl, editor and translator, *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxiii.

85 Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 193. Elsewhere he claims that in the 1543 *Institutes* Calvin “virtually abandoned the attempt to distinguish an area of secular matters, over which secular rulers were to have jurisdiction, replacing it with a much more defensible distinction between the *means* employed by secular and spiritual governors respectively.” Hopfl, *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, xxi.

the reformer's eschatology or his exegesis of scripture. On the contrary, Hopfl's stated concern is "to uncover the relationship between Calvin's practical experience as a political actor and his political theology." In other words, he is interested "to explain how Calvin came to put forward the views he did." While maintaining that Calvin's practice was not simply the application of his theological principles, Hopfl likewise maintains that Calvin's "political theology did not adequately assimilate his practice."⁸⁶ This would not be so problematic, but Hopfl leverages Calvin's practice in order to question the consistency and relevance of his theology. Rather than questioning whether Calvin's practice adequately reflected his eschatological two kingdoms theology, he instead prioritizes Calvin's practice in order to conclude that the "distinctions between celestial and terrestrial, civil and religious, external and internal," are "insecurely based in Calvin's theology."⁸⁷

Some scholars fall into a related mistake insofar as they evaluate Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine first and foremost as a *political* or *sociological* theory of institutions rather than as *theology*. For instance, Nicholas Wolterstorff contrasts Calvin's 'two rules' theology with Luther's two kingdoms, identifying the Genevan reformer with the tradition of political theology going back to Pope Gelasius. The logic of this tradition, he argues, stems from the fact that in societies where church and commonwealth are co-terminous there must be a theory to distinguish spiritual and civil governments, institutions that share a common scope, but operate with different means.⁸⁸ Wolterstorff then criticizes Calvin for identifying the church as a governance-authority structure rather than a community, and for reducing the rest of society to the realm of the state. But this criticism miss the point that for Calvin the two kingdoms are primarily

86 Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 1.

87 Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 187.

88 Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty*, 134-147, 150-151. Wolterstorff acknowledges, however, that the two rules idea can be maintained without this assumption, and even suggests that it underlies the separation clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution (144).

eschatological categories, corresponding primarily to the concepts of the temporal and the eternal, and only secondarily to institutions such as church and state. Calvin conceives of the church in terms of the inbreaking of Christ's spiritual kingdom into this age, while his notion of the political kingdom encompasses *all* temporal authorities and institutions, not just the state.⁸⁹ Gordon Spykman likewise reduces Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine to a failed attempt to distinguish church and state, one marred by the lingering influence of Lutheran and medieval dualisms of body and soul. He proposes Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of sphere sovereignty as a superior route to the same end, failing to appreciate that whereas sphere sovereignty is a sociological concept that reflects on the phenomena of social differentiation, Calvin's two kingdoms arise out of a theological doctrine of biblical eschatology.⁹⁰

This dissertation places Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine in its political and ecclesiological context, and it likewise traces the doctrine to its concrete ecclesiological and political implications, but it prioritizes Calvin's exegesis and eschatological theology as the core of the two kingdoms doctrine. It therefore evaluates Calvin's practical politics

⁸⁹ Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty*, 135-136, 141. He writes, “the failure to establish ... the multiplicity and variety of governance-authority structures is not innocuous; it invites us either to ignore those other structures or, if we do take note of them, to think of them all as somehow deriving their authority from either church or state” (141). For other works focusing on the distinction in institutional terms see I.W.C. Van Wyk, “The Political Responsibility of the Church: On the Necessity and Boundaries of the Theory of the Two Kingdoms,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 61.3 (September, 2005): 647-664; McNeill, “John Calvin on Civil Government,” 41; François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, (trans. Philip Mairet; London: Collins, 1963 [1950]), 308-310; Jeong Koo Jeon, “Calvin and the Two Kingdoms: Calvin's Political Philosophy in Light of Contemporary Discussion,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 72.2 (Fall, 2010): 299-305.

⁹⁰ “This twofold treatment of church and state tends to obscure his general emphasis on the religious unity of life and to bifurcate God's sovereign claim on society.” Spykman, “Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition,” 191. “Structurally, ... the wedges which he drives between church and state are ambiguous and inept, leaving them as rather loosely defined areas of life rather than clearly defined social institutions” (192). Rather than understanding it as a version of Luther's two kingdoms doctrine, Spykman proposes, “it would be truer to Calvin's intent to interpret his strong emphasis on the distinctive roles of these 'two jurisdictions' as an initial attempt to introduce the idea which later came to be known as the 'separation' of church and state.” That is, Calvin “sowed the seeds” and “implicitly opens the door to the development of the principle of sphere-sovereignty” (193). “What was left to later Calvinists was to take the germinal principle of sphere-sovereignty in Calvin, delineate it more clearly with respect to church and state, and then extend it to other spheres in society as one by one they came to the fore in more clearly differentiated ways: commerce, for example, arising from modern capitalism; labor unions, emerging from the Industrial Revolution; modern universities, resulting largely from the scientific explosion” (194).

from the perspective of his political theology, rather than the other way around. It avoids the temptation to identify the two kingdoms simply with the institutions of church and state, even while it shows how Calvin's theology gave rise to that institutional distinction.

5. Calvin as a teacher of scripture

The interpretation of Calvin pursued in this dissertation is that of Calvin as a teacher of scripture. This perspective interprets Calvin's *Institutes*, sermons, and commentaries primarily as attempts to articulate the teaching of scripture, as Calvin himself saw them, rather than prioritizing the *Institutes* as the authoritative expression of a deductive theological system. It likewise evaluates Calvin's political and ecclesiastical involvement in Geneva in the context of the reformer's vocation as a pastor and teacher of the church.

This approach is a healthy reaction to earlier theologies that interpreted Calvin's work, in the mold of many modern systematic theologies, as a system of philosophical and theological deduction from a central doctrine or premise, in Calvin's case the absolute sovereignty of God.⁹¹ Twentieth century Calvin scholars such as François Wendel and Richard Muller have decisively rejected such anachronistic interpretations of the reformer because they ignore what was indisputably the driving impulse of Calvin's life and vocation: the exegesis and teaching of scripture.⁹² Anthony Hoekema

91 A prime example of the distorted view of Calvin to which this can lead is Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*, though Hancock himself admits to offering “a 'violent' reading of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*” (vii). Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2.581-587; Foster, “Calvin's Programme for a Puritan State in Geneva,” 395-396; Gregg, “Calvin and the Social Order,” 228; McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought,” 155; Spykman, “Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition,” 186-189; Margaret R. Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 305; Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 52, 71 (though see 227-229).

92 See, for instance, Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Wendel, *Calvin*, 263-284; Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Methuen, 1956), 159-181; John Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 103-104. Holwerda concedes Calvin's doctrine of the sovereignty of God as giving significant impetus to Calvin's view of history, the “push-view” perspective, but urges that

summarizes the issue well:

The very idea that Calvin took one doctrine as the fundamental principle of his theological system is misleading, because it suggests that Calvin's primary concern was to construct a logically consistent system – one built up by deduction from some original first premise comparable to Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum*. This was not at all his intent. Calvin was concerned to be a theologian of the Word of God – to reproduce as faithfully as he could the teachings of Scripture... For Calvin, fidelity to Scripture was more important than mere intellectual consistency.⁹³

Of course, Calvin sought to be intellectually consistent, but where he saw paradox or dialectic in scripture, without a ready means of synthesis, he urged the necessity of caution. He argued that Christians were not to subject the doctrines of the Trinity or of predestination to rational speculation or formally logical syntheses, let alone to establish them as the foundations for rigorously systematic philosophical systems. The being and acts of God are inherently mysterious, known only through the analogies communicated by God in his revelation. The call of Christians is to follow God's word, embracing its doctrines in light of their original purpose. Only with respect to the temporal affairs of this world can Christians be confident in the powers of reason.

In fact, it is probably the case that the primary reason why Calvin's works continue to be widely published, read, utilized, and taught 450 years after the reformer's death is because they demonstrate an unmatched desire simply and faithfully to expound Christian scripture. Calvin sought, however successfully, accurately to channel what scripture teaches about the knowledge of God revealed in Jesus Christ, with all of its radical implications for human beings, the church, and the world, and with all of its anthropological tensions, covenantal paradoxes, and eschatological complexities. He was not interested in inspiring Calvinists or building a Calvinist movement, but in

Calvin's eschatology provides another, less appreciated root of his dynamism, a "pull-view": his eschatology. In this view the ascended Christ "draws believers upward and forward toward the culmination of human history and the consummation of the kingdom of God." David E. Holwerda, "Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 313.

⁹³ Anthony Hoekema, "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching," *Calvin Theological Journal* 2 (1967), 134.

establishing churches whose fundamental mark was the faithful proclamation of the word of God.

A second tendency of scholars who interpret Calvin as a teacher of scripture has been to question the portrayal of Calvin and his political theology as seeking the transformation of society into the kingdom of God. Various writers point out that, although like all mainstream Christian theologians of the period Calvin believed civil government should enforce the law of God, he carefully distinguished between the kingdom of Christ and political affairs. In fact, Wendel leaves politics almost entirely out of his discussion of Calvin's theology, observing that Calvin's true legacy lay in his conception of the church. "It was because he was the founder of a powerfully organized Church, and at the same time the author of a body of doctrine which was able to rally around it an intellectual elite as well as the mass of the faithful, that Calvin made such a mark upon his age and, even beyond it."⁹⁴ T. F. Torrance highlights the way in which

94 Wendel, *Calvin*, 360. John McNeill likewise cautions that it was Calvin's concern for the establishment of the church that dominates his political comments in letters to foreign leaders, not a concern for political reform in general. For Calvin religious concerns, specifically the welfare of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, were always "paramount." McNeill, "John Calvin on Civil Government," 24-25. Chenevière takes a similar position in Marc-Edouard Chenevière, *La pensée politique de Calvin* (Geneva and Paris: Labor and Fides, 1937), 181-190. Emil Brunner challenged the claim of Karl Barth that Calvin understood politics in exclusively redemptive terms. Emil Brunner, "Nature and Grace," in Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (trans. Peter Fraenkel; London: Geoffrey Bles: Centenary, 1946), 35-45. Balke writes, "Calvin felt that the social order could be changed only through the renewal of the church, which is the *foyer actif* for the restoration of humanity. The renewal of the church, according to Calvin, would become a salting salt that would penetrate the entire social order. The fellowship of the saints came into expression as a love towards all." Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (trans. Willem Heyner. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 267. At one point Balke claims that Calvin's goal was the "sanctification of the world" (277), but he states it more accurately when he declares that for Calvin Christians "are called to sanctification of life *in the world*" (278). In his recent survey of the Reformed tradition, Philip Benedict argues that Calvin's real legacy lies not in politics, economics, or the transformation of society, but in his doctrine of the church. Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 533-546. Cf. Heiko Oberman, *John Calvin and the Reformation of the Refugees* (Geneva: Droz, 2009). Although historians have brought significant attention to Calvin's efforts to reform society, I. John Hesselink observes, "one is hard pressed to find references to the kingdom of Christ in the standard works on this subject." I. John Hesselink, "Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ," *Religion Without Ulterior Motive* (ed. E. A. J. G. Van Der Borght. Leiden: Brill, 2006), 157. John Bolt warns that while Calvin believed the gospel has relevance for every area of life, he also stressed that the kingdom of Christ always exists under the cross. Bolt, "A Pearl and a Leaven." Holwerda thinks that for Calvin "Believers are soldiers waging active warfare against Christ's enemies in order to establish the reign of God on earth, and the organization of the church is essentially organization for battle." Holwerda, "Eschatology and History," 335. But he also recognizes that "Christian existence between the times will always be in the shape of a

Calvin's eschatology led him to focus on the church, with its ministry, sacraments, and discipline, as the expression of the kingdom of Christ in the present age.⁹⁵ Susan Schreiner likewise describes Calvin's theology of creation and redemption in eschatological terms, showing that for Calvin the order of the world threatened by humanity's fall into sin is preserved through providence, natural law and temporal institutions such as civil government, and it is restored through the gospel and the church.⁹⁶ I. John Hesselink identifies Calvin's eschatology and covenant theology as the keys to understanding his theology of law.⁹⁷

No one has reengaged the scriptural roots of Calvin's ecclesiology more clearly than Elsie Anne McKee. Her two excellent studies – of Calvin's concept of elders and the plural ministry, and of the diaconate – evaluate the significance of Calvin's interpretation of key texts in the context of the history of Christian interpretation.⁹⁸ She also situates Calvin's perspective as an interpreter in the context of his struggle, amid the erastian tendencies of Reformation politics, to maintain the spiritual autonomy of the church from the state.⁹⁹

A slightly different approach, but one that also prioritizes Calvin's role as a biblical theologian and pastor, is that of John Witte, Jr., and Robert Kingdon on Calvin's legacy with respect to marriage, sex, and family.¹⁰⁰ Witte and Kingdon show how Calvin's

cross" (336).

95 Thomas F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956).

96 Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*; Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*. Cf. Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought*.

97 Hesselink, "Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ," 139-158; I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992).

98 Elsie Anne McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin's Theology* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988); Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin On the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984).

99 As McKee puts it, "For sixteenth-century Protestants, the question of ecclesiastical autonomy is bound up with the theory of the plurality of permanent ecclesiastical ministries because the customary second office, the diaconate responsible for poor relief, and the most critical additional office, the ministry of discipline, were both functions disputed between civil and ecclesiastical authorities." McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 190.

100 See especially John Witte, Jr., and Robert M. Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

teaching and application of scripture came to concrete expression in the context of a host of moral and institutional dilemmas that arose in the context of the Reformation's abandonment of canon law, in which marriage was as a sacrament under the authority of the church. Based on his two kingdoms doctrine and associated distinctions between the civil and spiritual uses of the law, Calvin crafted an approach to marriage that assigned complementary yet distinct roles to the institutions of church and state. The result was neither simple secularization nor spiritualization but a little of both. Insofar as marriage was a civil institution essential to the welfare of the community, Calvin assigned its regulation and enforcement to the state. Insofar as it was a covenant that channeled the spiritual aspirations of the saints, he assigned its care and discipline to the church. Witte's work here fits closely within the broader trajectory of his writing, which reexplores the theological, social, and political significance of the Lutheran and Reformed two kingdoms doctrines.¹⁰¹ Witte identifies Calvin's two kingdoms theology, like Luther's, with a complex eschatology, anthropology, ontology, and political theology, all of which expressed Calvin's vigorous commitment to the exegesis and application of scripture.¹⁰²

The most direct recent analysis of Calvin's two kingdoms theology has come from David VanDrunen, who considers Calvin as the founder of a tradition of Reformed political theology that has long given preeminent place to the concepts of natural law and the two kingdoms.¹⁰³ VanDrunen emphasizes Calvin's role as a teacher of scripture and

101 Witte, *Law and Protestantism*; Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*.

102 Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 44.

103 David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010). Like Witte, VanDrunen argues that Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine had a lot more in common with that of Luther than is commonly acknowledged. For examples of scholars who simplistically contrast Calvin with the Lutheran two kingdoms doctrine see Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," (trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen; *Calvin Theological Journal* 24:1 (1989): 50; Willem Van't Spijker, "The Kingdom of Christ According to Bucer and Calvin," *Calvin and the State* (ed. Peter De Klerk; Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1993), 121; Willem Van't Spijker, *Calvin: A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought* (trans. Lyle D. Bierma; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 143; J. H. Van Wyk, "John Calvin on the Kingdom of God and Eschatology," 192; Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty*, 145-147. T. F. Torrance identifies Calvin as having a stronger emphasis on the overarching kingship of God over all

pastor, arguing that the two kingdoms doctrine led Calvin sharply to distinguish between creation and redemption, the temporal and the spiritual, the outward and the inward, body and soul. When it came to the spiritual realities of the kingdom of Christ, VanDrunen argues, Calvin emphasized the authority of scripture alone. When it came to the temporal realities of the earthly kingdom, on the other hand, he prioritized the authority of natural law. He conceived of the church and kingdom of Christ in redemptive terms, while he conceived of the significance of politics and the state in preservative terms.

My work follows the interpretation of Calvin primarily as a teacher of scripture and a pastor of the church, though I seek to incorporate the key insights of the other perspectives. But while I draw on this broader strand of scholarship to inform my *approach* to Calvin, I dig far deeper into the two kingdoms theme than do any of these scholars. Indeed, none of the writers who prioritize Calvin's role as a teacher of scripture have devoted more than a chapter of attention to the two kingdoms doctrine itself. My objective is systematically to explore Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine in all of its dimensions, from its foundation in the reformer's eschatology to its practical expression in the reformer's politics.

The Plan of This Dissertation

Despite the danger of repetition, I want to emphasize the point that neither Calvin nor his theology were politically liberal. There is an obvious, insurmountable gap between Calvin, whose political assumptions were informed by his commitment to Christendom, and contemporary Christians, who inhabit societies characterized by pluralism and democracy. The danger for any study that seeks the contemporary

things, enabling civil government to coordinate with the church and bring about the conditions for its success. He also argues that Calvin's view emphasizes more the visible church as a manifestation of the kingdom and its progress in the present age. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 155-160. Cf. O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius*.

relevance of a theologian such as Calvin is that we find in the reformer those things we want to find, reading his work anachronistically to find the answers to questions he could not have asked. Yet this danger is one that we must face, for the only alternative is to dismiss Calvin as a matter of mere historical interest. The solution is not to limit our analysis to that of historical theology, but to ensure that we have first understood Calvin's work in its historical context and on its own terms, only then subjecting it to our critical-constructive engagement. I have attempted to do this by devoting substantial attention both to Calvin's historical context (Chapters 1-2) and to the foundations of his theology (Chapters 3-4, 7). Only then do I turn to Calvin's theology of church and civil government (Chapters 5-6), which in turn sets the stage for my evaluation of the more practical political implications of his work (Chapters 8-9), and for reflection on its potential implications today (Conclusion). Thus most of this dissertation is descriptive rather than evaluative or constructive, but such thick description is essential if we are to understand Calvin's political theology in anything other than a superficial way.

It is also important to stress that my focus in this dissertation is on Calvin, not Calvinism, and it is on Calvin's theology, not his legacy. Regardless of how Calvinists have claimed the heritage of their hero, and regardless of how that heritage has played itself out in history, I engage Calvin's work independent from such concerns. I pay significant attention to what came before Calvin and the circumstances and ideas that shaped his outlook; I pay little attention to what came later. Still, this dissertation is not a work of historical theology in the narrow sense. Though I place Calvin in his historical context, I do not trace out the history of exegesis of key texts as could be done with much profit. My goal is to describe Calvin's political theology in clearer and more comprehensive terms than has heretofore been done.

In conducting the research for this dissertation I read just about everything substantive Calvin wrote on political theology. But incorporating a net that broad in one

dissertation proved overly ambitious, as Calvin's corpus of writings encompasses dozens and dozens of large volumes. I therefore narrowed my focus to Calvin's *Institutes* and commentaries, as well as key letters and tracts that touched on political theology. I read most of Calvin's published sermons that touch on political theology, and I draw on them from time to time, but not in any systematic way.

The first two chapters of this dissertation place Calvin in his historical and political theological context and describe the immediate impact of his work. As such, they force us to consider the difference that Calvin's political theology made in his own sixteenth century context, before considering its potential relevance for today. In Chapter 1 I outline the late medieval and early Reformation context for Calvin's two kingdoms theology, focusing in particular on the various versions of the hotly contested medieval two swords doctrine, on the political theologies of the leading magisterial reformers Luther, Zwingli, Bullinger, and Bucer, and on the magisterial reformers' Anabaptist critics. This chapter gives plausibility to my suggested contemporary appropriation of Calvin's two kingdoms theology because it shows that it already served as a serious alternative to the predominant political theologies in the sixteenth century. In contrast to papal theologies that placed church over state, to magisterial Protestant theologies that placed state over church, and to Anabaptist theologies that undermined Christian political participation altogether, Calvin's theology distinguished – and to a degree even separated – church and state, without driving them entirely apart.

In Chapter 2 I turn to Calvin himself, describing the early development of his ecclesiology, his struggle for the spiritual autonomy of the church in Geneva, and his influence on the Reformed churches struggling under the cross in France. This chapter highlights the clear institutional implications that Calvin associated with his two kingdoms theology. It demonstrates that Calvin's approach made a substantial practical difference. It also shows that the two kingdoms concept could be applied either to a city-

state in which church and state were virtually co-terminous, as was the case in Geneva, or to a religiously divided country in which the church faces the hostility of the state, as was the case in France. This flexibility of application likewise renders plausible my claim that Calvin's two kingdoms theology is relevant to contexts far removed from that of Geneva, including contexts characterized by religious pluralism.

Chapters 3-4 turn to Calvin's eschatology, specifically his theology of the kingdom of Christ, and shows how that eschatology grounds the two kingdoms doctrine. Far too many analyses of Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine treat it primarily as a theory of institutions. These chapters thoroughly penetrate the theological commitments that give rise to the two kingdoms doctrine in the first place, relating it to Calvin's understanding of the gospel, and they unwrap the two kingdoms doctrine's various layers. This enables us to engage the doctrine as a theological concept distinct from its political implications, either for Calvin's time or our own. Chapter 3 describes Calvin's doctrine of the kingdom of Christ in relation to his concepts of creation, nature, the fall into sin, and the kingdom's restoration of the world. I show that when Calvin maintained that the kingdom of Christ is spiritual he essentially meant that it is eschatological. The kingdom of Christ will restore the whole creation, but it breaks into the present age through the regeneration of believers by Christ's word and Spirit.

In Chapter 4 I build on this claim by describing the eschatological contours of the two kingdoms doctrine. First and foremost, I argue, Calvin used the doctrine to distinguish the spiritual kingdom of Christ that is eternal, and that breaks into the present age through the regeneration of believers, from the temporal (and political) affairs of this world, which are destined to pass away. This distinction underlies Calvin's understanding of the nature of Christian liberty. Christians are destined for the full liberty, equality, and justice of the kingdom of God, but in the meantime they must serve in temporal vocational contexts marred by sin, including those of gender, slavery, and

politics. Calvin thus sharply distinguished the spiritual power of Christ's kingdom, which creates true justice, from the coercive power of civil government, which only creates outward or civil justice.

Chapters 5-6 finally turn to Calvin's theologies of church and civil government. Yet in turning to the institutional implications of the two kingdoms doctrine, I still postpone its implications for practical political issues. The purpose of these chapters is to identify the theological character of the church and state in its most basic form. Here again it becomes possible to see how Calvin's thought might be incorporated to a contemporary context without direct consideration of the reformer's own practical politics. Chapter 5 shows how closely Calvin identified the church with the kingdom of Christ. Calvin identified kingdom and church alike by the spiritual marks of the ministry of the word and sacraments, to which he closely related faithful church discipline. The implications for the church's authority are clear and practical. Against Rome, Calvin insisted that the church's spiritual authority is purely ministerial. Neither its teaching nor its discipline can extend beyond that of Christ's word. Yet with the Anabaptists Calvin insisted that the church is a body of the faithful who gather around the Eucharist, subject to discipline and called to spiritual-material service under the guidance of elders and deacons. Where the church must necessarily involve itself in political matters, on the other hand, such involvement does not bind Christian consciences. While the church has political dimensions, those dimensions do not correspond to its status as Christ's spiritual kingdom.

Chapter 6 then turns to Calvin's early political formulations in the 1536 *Institutes*, the 1540 commentary on Romans, the 1544 tract against the Anabaptists, and various letters that Calvin wrote to foreign magistrates. I show how decisively the two kingdoms doctrine shaped Calvin's understanding of civil government and its role, and I also show how Calvin increasingly understood that role to include vigorous attention to the care of

religion. Although Calvin's political thought developed somewhat over the years, its basic contours are already clear in these early writings. Calvin viewed the state as a secular institution called to preserve civil peace, justice, and piety subject to the principles of the natural moral law as it is revealed both in scripture and in nature. This basic outline of his thought needs to be understood in distinction from his concrete arguments on matters of practical politics.

Chapters 8-9 turn to Calvin's practical political arguments on the magisterial care of religion, civil law, forms of government, and resistance to tyranny, but Chapter 7 first offers a brief excursus on key elements of Calvin's covenant theology. The purpose of this excursus is to clarify the way in which Calvin interpreted and used the Old Testament in his practical political arguments. It follows Calvin's early political formulations because it represents the maturing of Calvin's theology. But it continues to build on the two kingdoms concepts outlined in early chapters, showing how the same web of ideas shaped Calvin's conception of covenant and law. Calvin's covenant theology emphasized continuity in the eternal and spiritual covenant of grace, but it dictated a sharp distinction between the temporal political kingdom of Israel and the spiritual kingdom of Christ, between the law as a form of judgment and the law as a means of grace. This set of distinctions in turn underlies Calvin's differentiation between the natural moral law, which is authoritative in politics, and the revealed Old Testament law (including its civil expressions in the Torah), which is not. This chapter provides an additional critical standpoint based in Calvin's own theology from which his practical political arguments can be evaluated.

I commence that evaluation in Chapter 8, where I describe Calvin's developing arguments in defense of the magisterial care of religion, including the obligation of the magistrate to punish idolatry and heresy. Walking through his New Testament commentaries, his tract defending the punishment of heretics, his 1559 *Institutes*, and

his Old Testament commentaries, I show that Calvin's argument relies more on his interpretation of reason, experience, the laws of nations, and classic philosophy than it does on his exegesis of scripture. This is significant with Calvin's political theological method, but it also confirms that Calvin's arguments are subject to critique on the reformer's own terms. Calvin argued that Israel is relevant for the politics of Christendom based on the premise that Israel's politics exemplifies appropriate governance in accord with the natural moral law. Where contemporary Christians challenge this premise they legitimately reject the reformer's practical political conclusions on the grounds of his own underlying political theology. In addition, I show that Calvin himself admitted that his arguments presupposed a context of substantial religious uniformity. In non-Christian contexts, or even in contexts of religious diversity, the magistrate's care of religion will look quite different, necessarily tolerating idolatry and false teaching under the rule of law.

Finally, in Chapter 9 I turn to more positive dimensions of Calvin's practical political theory, including the implications of his two kingdoms theology with respect to government's enforcement of biblical law, the best forms of government, and resistance to tyranny. I show that Calvin seriously qualified his claim that government should enforce the natural moral law by his insistence that government must take into account what is possible given the hardness of human hearts. The result is a civil law much more flexible toward moral intransigence than would at first be assumed. It is left to the dictates of prudence and charity to determine just what civil law should enforce and what it should not. I show that Calvin appealed to the same principles of charity and prudence as the criteria for evaluating the best form of government. Finally, I demonstrate how the reformer's two kingdoms theology shaped his account of just when Christians should resist tyranny, whether as individuals or as those who hold political office. In each of these three dimensions – the nature of law, forms of government, and resistance to

tyranny – Calvin's arguments are conducive of Christian participation in political systems characterized by pluralism and democracy.

In the conclusion I tie these various threads together in the form of a constructive proposal regarding the way in which Calvin's two kingdoms theology might be appropriated as a guide for contemporary Christian engagement in societies committed to pluralism and liberal democracy. My proposal is necessarily critical, rooted in Calvin's underlying political theology rather than in his practical politics. It is also brief, given the constraints of space. No doubt readers will find some of my suggestions lacking in some way or another. Yet development of my constructive argument must be the task for another book. Here I beg the reader's indulgence toward comments that are intended as suggestions rather than arguments.

CHAPTER 1

TWO SWORDS, TWO POWERS, OR TWO KINGDOMS

Spiritual and Political Authority in Early Modern Europe

Calvin viewed his two kingdoms theology as an expression of the classic Christian commitment to a distinction between spiritual and temporal jurisdictions. Of course, the distinction between the kingdom of God and earthly political power already appears in the New Testament, as well as in early Christian writings such as the Epistle of Diognetus. Augustine likewise argued that although the city of God and the city of man are to be categorically distinguished from one another, the citizens of the two cities are mixed together in the present earthly life, sharing a common society and politics. However, when Calvin referred to the common distinction between the spiritual and temporal jurisdictions he was primarily referring to the long-held medieval distinction between spiritual and temporal power that was articulated by the decretists and decretalists of the 12th and 13th centuries, following the Gregorian Reformation. In this chapter I outline the historical context for Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine. Beginning with the late medieval era, I describe how the papacy asserted full power over both the spiritual and temporal swords, while noting the effective opposition such claims received from advocates of secular power. On the eve of the Reformation, I suggest, the civil magistracy was the only accepted authority to which the reformers could appeal to counter that of the papacy. I then describe Luther's development of his two kingdoms doctrine in its context, noting that despite its radical early statement of sharp separation between the power of the word and that of the sword, Luther and Melancthon eventually adapted the doctrine to justify substantive magisterial control over religious matters. The next part focuses on the origins of the Reformed tradition, comparing Zwingli's model of the *corpus christianum*, in which church and commonwealth are coterminous, to Luther's two kingdoms, with a similar practical result of magisterial

control over the church. The fourth part focuses on the Anabaptist movement that offered the magisterial Reformation its most formidable political theological challenge. While it wasn't hard for the reformers to argue that the Anabaptists were a threat to the social order, it was more difficult to deal with the Anabaptists' formidable arguments regarding the difference between civil government and the church, and between the Old and New Testaments. In the fifth part of the chapter I turn briefly to Bullinger, the preeminent theologian of the Zurich Reformed tradition, who strengthened Zwingli's model by interpreting the godly commonwealth through the lens of God's eternal covenant and the continuity of Old and New Testaments. I conclude by introducing Bucer's early attempts to establish discipline in the church independent from that of the civil government, an effort that anticipated Calvin's more successful institutional outworking of the Reformed two kingdoms doctrine in Geneva.

The Two Swords

The canon lawyers of the 12th and 13th centuries presented the distinction between spiritual and temporal power in relation to the classic 5th Century formula of Pope Gelasius I. In 494 Gelasius wrote to Emperor Anastasius, "Two there are, august emperor, by which this world is chiefly ruled, the sacred authority of the priesthood and the royal power. Of these the responsibility of the priests is more weighty in so far as they will answer for the kings of men themselves at the divine judgment."¹⁰⁴ Gelasius's statement was brief and, at least in its legacy, formulaic. Widely accepted as authoritative, its significance, like that of Augustine's *City of God*, would nevertheless be contested and disputed throughout the medieval period. Whatever Gelasius's intentions, and despite the collapse of the Roman Empire and the disintegration of political power in western Europe, the kings and emperors that emerged in the early medieval period

¹⁰⁴Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State 1050-1300* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 13.

considered themselves to be the vicars of Christ. Sacral rulers were believed to administer Christ's kingship even as the pope, the vicar of St. Peter, represented his priesthood. Christian rulers protected and governed the church within their territories, maintaining substantial control over appointments to clerical offices and bishoprics. Yet clergy exerted relatively modest effort in transforming governance, law, or tribal culture according to Christian principles.¹⁰⁵ Pious reformers within the church complained that popes and bishops were manipulated by political powers who fostered a culture of clerical immorality, worldliness, and simony. As Brian Tierney puts it, "To the reformers ... it seemed that the control of ecclesiastical offices by lay rulers was the root of all the evil in the church."¹⁰⁶

The challenge from the church began to intensify as Pope Leo IX gathered an ambitious group of reformers from around Europe as cardinals in Rome. These men, especially Peter Damian and Humbert, began vigorously to debate the legitimacy of lay investiture, the practice in which lay authorities invested bishops with the pastoral staff and ring that symbolized their spiritual office and the temporal feudal estates and jurisdictions attached to that office. Humbert and his followers strongly condemned lay investiture based on Humbert's claim that "Just as the soul excels the body and commands it, so the priestly dignity excels the royal,"¹⁰⁷ Yet eliminating the practice in the face of lay opposition was another matter, and growing papal assertion exacerbated an already bitter contest between emperors and popes, part of what Tierney calls the medieval crisis of church and state.

Reform kicked into full gear when Hildebrand, one of the youngest reformist cardinals, became Pope Gregory VII in 1073. Under the rally cry of the freedom of the church, Gregory and his followers launched what has become known variously as the

¹⁰⁵Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 49-84.

¹⁰⁶Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*, 27.

¹⁰⁷Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*, 35, 41-42.

Gregorian Reformation or the Papal Revolution, securing the independence and autonomy of the papacy from lay rulers and centralizing control over clergy and ecclesiastical institutions. Not only did they modernize and bureaucratize the administration of papal government by means of a central court with officials and bureaucrats (the Curia). They also gradually built up a legal system that regulated church property, the life and morals of the clergy, education, care for the poor, and a sacramental system that shaped the lives of all in Christendom from the cradle to the grave, incorporating even the social institution of marriage. Canon law became the most reliable, systematic, and comprehensive body of law in western Europe, and ecclesiastical courts became arbiters of choice in all sorts of disputes pertaining to property, crime, and morality.¹⁰⁸

Gregory and his followers certainly succeeded in establishing the independence, autonomy, and spiritual authority of the church, but in their more ambitious goal of asserting the supremacy of the spiritual power over temporal power they were less successful. Of course, even aside from theological claims about papal supremacy, the vast properties of the church and the extensive temporal lordships of bishops, including that of the papacy in Italy, inevitably created controversies with emperors, kings, and other secular powers. Overlapping territorial jurisdictions and legal systems spawned an endless tug-of-war between princes and priests, with both sides offering extensive, conflicting theological and legal arguments to bolster their particular and often mundane claims. What emerged was a spectrum of positions ranging from the hierocratic papal claim that all power – spiritual and temporal – belongs to the pope, on one extreme, to the caesaropapist secular argument that supreme power – even over spiritual matters –

¹⁰⁸Both the papacy and its system of canon law became models of governance and law for parallel secular institutions in Europe, helping to spawn vigorous traditions of legal philosophy, education, scholarly commentary, and debate. See Berman, *Law and Revolution*; Cf. John Witte, Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33-50.

belongs to the emperor or to the king, on the other. Alongside of this was the complex reality of a constantly shifting balance of power, unique to each place and time, marked by usurpations, violent conflicts, and formal agreements that could be substantial but that were often subsequently ignored.¹⁰⁹

The complex reality of medieval politics is far beyond the scope of this book, but the theoretical debates and their relevance for Calvin can be broadly understood as a controversy about the meaning and authority of the official papal teaching about spiritual and temporal power. While there were always those seeking to maintain a balance, the extremes defined the debate. Watt argues that by the end of the 14th Century:

the theorists of the relations of the powers had produced two different models: hierocracy and caesaropapism. Each was a logic which rejected any theory predicating a dualism of two autonomous authorities existing co-ordinately in human society. Each was a theory wherein a unity was founded upon the supremacy of one or other of the powers. Each ... postulated one authority to control both swords. Dualism ... was not that logic which was most characteristic of the later middle ages.¹¹⁰

The hierocratic theory made use of arguments drawn from both tradition and scripture. The most famous instance of the former was the Donation of Constantine, in which the emperor allegedly gave the pope temporal authority over lands in Italy and the west.¹¹¹ But the papacy's scriptural argument famously characterized in terms of the “two swords” the disciples offered Jesus in Luke 22:38. The two swords were interpreted allegorically as representing spiritual and temporal power, or jurisdiction. Christ's decisive answer to the disciples, “It is enough,” seemed to confirm not simply the basic distinction between the two swords, but the fact that he himself rightly possessed both. Ironically, the initial appeal to the two swords analogy came from an imperial apologist

109J.A. Watt, “Spiritual and Temporal Powers,” in *Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought: c. 350-c.1450* (Ed. J. H. Burns; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 367-423. Cf. Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*; Berman, *Law and Revolution*.

110Watt, “Spiritual and Temporal Powers,” 422-423. Watt's essay is largely a defense of this claim.

111Steven E. Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 140.

who insisted that the papacy was guilty of usurping the temporal sword in a policy of self-aggrandizement. But gradually the advocates of papal monarchy responded with the subtle new interpretation that maximized papal claims in an astonishing way. They argued that God had given both the spiritual and temporal swords to the popes, who were not only the vicars of St. Peter – Christ's priestly representative on earth – but the vicars of Christ himself, relative to both of his offices of king and priest. True, they consistently admitted, the pope was not to *use* the temporal sword but to *delegate* its use to temporal powers. But the pope nevertheless maintained absolute power and authority, and he could exercise his authority over the temporal power if necessary for the good of the church. Needless to say, these claims were not universally embraced.

Neither Gratian's authoritative and systematic book of canon law, the *Decretum* (c. 1140), nor the debates of its later commentators, the decretists, resolved the debate, though they did feature the dueling claims of hierocrats like Alanus and dualists like Huguccio. Yet in the two crucial papacies of Innocent III (1198-1216) and the former canonist Innocent IV (1243-1254) the proponents of papal supremacy gradually claimed the victory. Innocent III argued that the priesthood was to kingship as the soul to the body, distinct but obviously superior. Christ made the pope his vicar as the successor of St. Peter, to whom had been given “not only the universal church but the whole world to govern,” and therefore “the Roman church has full power in both temporal and spiritual affairs.”¹¹²

To [the pope] is said in the person of the prophet: 'I have set you over nations and over kingdoms, to root up and to pull down and to waste and to destroy and to build and to plant.' [Jer. 1:10] To me also is said in the person of the apostle: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven....' Thus, others were called to a part of the care, but Peter alone assumed the plenitude of power. You see then who is this servant set over the household, truly the vicar of Jesus Christ, successor of Peter, anointed of the Lord, a God of Pharaoh, set between God and man, *lower than God but higher than man*, who judges all and is judged by no one.¹¹³

112Cited in Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*, 132.

113Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 143.

Innocent's authoritative decretals were less assertive, but they pointed in the same direction. In 1234 the updated body of canon law that included Innocent III's decretals was promulgated as the *Decretales*, and by this time the canon lawyers had established the general consensus that the pope held both swords, a development that became all the more important when a leading decretalist became Pope Innocent IV.¹¹⁴

At the same time, driven especially by the papacy of Innocent III, the “high-water mark of papal power and influence,”¹¹⁵ the canon lawyers were also working out a theory of the plenitude of papal power, or jurisdiction, *within* the church. This theory also made use of arguments from custom and tradition, but its primary defense was Jesus' granting of the “keys of the kingdom” to his apostles in Matthew 16:18-19: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This text was closely associated with a similar text in Matthew 18:18, and with John 20:23, where Jesus authorized his apostles, “If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.” The evolving interpretations of these texts, and the claims that were drawn from them, are exceedingly complex, but central to the consensus of the Decretists were the conclusions that 1) Christ had granted the sacerdotal power to administer the sacraments to all the apostles (and so immediately to all priests), whereas 2) he had granted supreme “jurisdiction” and “administration,” the power to govern, to legislate, and to decide specific cases, solely to Peter, and hence to the pope.¹¹⁶

114This consensus is reflected, for example, in Thomas Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, 2.44 and 4.37. See Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, second edition (trans. Richard J. Regan; ed. William P. Baumgarth and Richard J. Regan; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), 196. Tierney claims that Aquinas's rhetoric should be interpreted narrowly to refer to papal temporal rule in Italy, but Morrall and Aveling argue for a broader interpretation. See Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 148.

115Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 143.

116Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility*,

One canonist summarized the consensus when he wrote,

[The pope is] the vicar of God, Jesus Christ, because he has the fullness of power on earth.... He changes the substance, the quantity, or the nature of things.... He makes a secular canon from a monk ... and just like the emperor, he changes the nature of an action ... and like the emperor he makes two things one, as 'legatum' and 'fideicommissum.' ... The pope makes two churches one.... By binding and loosing, he holds the office of God on earth.... The pope is above the law ... dispenses from the rules of the Apostle ... he is above any council.¹¹⁷

Of course, the pope's power of jurisdiction was not absolute. His decisions could not contradict the doctrines of faith, nor could they violate reason or morality. But the pope did have discretionary power over ecclesiastical law, even sometimes when that law came from scripture. He could offer dispensations from vows or oaths, he could depose bishops, and he had supreme authority, the *plenitudo potestatis*, to adjudicate doctrinal and ecclesiastical disputes.¹¹⁸ All of this authority he could enforce with the powers of excommunication and interdiction. Even here, of course, practice did not conform simply to theory. Popes had to choose wisely when to issue mandates and they had to work hard to ensure that those mandates were obeyed. In practice, as Pennington observes, papal power was often only exerted with “delicate negotiations and compromise.”¹¹⁹ But what was crucial was that the pope's jurisdiction was seen to be grounded in the direct authorization of Christ, who had made the pope his vicar in a unique sense, rather than in tradition or the positive law of a pope or council.¹²⁰

Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Ages (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 33 (Cf. 14-57); “The power of binding and loosing attributed to the Pope was a public authority, the power to bind all the faithful by his judicial decisions; it was a power to be exercised in the *forum externum* as distinct from the *forum internum* of the sacrament of penance.” Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 31 (Cf. 25-33); Cf. Kenneth Pennington, *Pope and Bishops: The Papal Monarchy in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 15-72.

117Cited in Pennington, *Pope and Bishops*, 28-29.

118The pope had the authority to “create and innovate in the sphere of positive canon law.” Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility*, 27. The canonists applied the fullness of power to the papacy “only by carefully delimiting the sphere within which juridical sovereignty could be exercised” (30).

119Pennington, *Pope and Bishops*, 33. “As judge and administrator, the pope could take cognizance of any problem in any diocese. The pope is pastor of the entire church. His 'plenitudo potestatis' sets him apart from all other bishops. He is placed above all patriarchs, archbishops, and bishops” (63).

120“By the end of the century, the canonists distinguished between those occasions in which the pope acted through his 'plenitudo potestatis' and those in which he acted through his ordinary power.” Pennington,

The hierocratic theory of papal power received its most impressive and authoritative statement in the papal bull *Unam Sanctum*, promulgated by Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) during a conflict with King Philip IV of France. Appealing to the two swords of Luke 22:38, Boniface declared,

Both then are in the power of the church, the material sword and the spiritual. But the one is exercised for the church, the other by the church, the one by the hand of the priest, the other by the hand of kings and soldiers, though at the will and sufferance of the priest. One sword ought to be under the other and the temporal authority subject to the spiritual power. For, while the apostle says, 'There is no power but from God and those that are ordained of God' (Romans 13:1), they would not be ordained unless one sword was under the other and, being inferior, was led by the other to the highest things.

Boniface's final claim made the matter of jurisdiction and appeals clear. "Therefore if the earthly power errs, it shall be judged by the spiritual power, if a lesser spiritual power errs it shall be judged by its superior, but if the supreme spiritual power errs it can be judged only by God not by man... Therefore we declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff."¹²¹

Of course, Boniface VIII was defeated in his struggle with Philip IV of France, and the claims of *Unam Sanctum*, more of a "last-ditch stand against state control of national churches" than a high-water mark of papal power.¹²² The rediscovery of Aristotle's works (the *Politics* finally appeared in 1260) rendered possible a more positive view of secular society and civil government than were permitted by hierocratic views of nature and grace. Thus as Ozment writes, "The rising nation-states of Europe, in quest of full secular independence and autonomy, acted decisively to curtail the traditional pre-eminence of Peter and, so far as possible, to transform the medieval church into a docile department

Pope and Bishops, 45. It was Innocent III who was largely responsible for the shift of emphasis toward the former (54). Tierney shows that the canon lawyers always viewed scripture as the supreme authority, and they did not raise tradition or the popes to the same level. The theory of papal authority took into account the distinction between divine law, revealed by God, and human law. Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility*, 17-25.

¹²¹Tierney, *Crisis of Church and State*, 189.

¹²²Ozment, *The Age of Reform*,

of the inchoate sovereign state.”¹²³ Accordingly, the 14th and 15th centuries witnessed some of the most impressive intellectual arguments against the supremacy of the papacy, arguments that increasingly went well beyond earlier critics of papal monarchy by challenging the very notion of a Christendom unified under one head on earth.

The University of Paris became especially noted for its defense of royal prerogatives in ecclesiastical matters and its resistance to hierocratic claims. Most famously, the Aristotelian Dominican John of Paris defended a two swords dualism in which the two swords were mutually corrective, and in which heretical or scandalous popes could be opposed, either through an ecclesiastical council or by the intervention of a lay ruler.¹²⁴

As for the argument that corporeal beings are ruled by spiritual beings and depend on them as on a cause, I answer that an argument so constructed fails ... because it assumes that royal power is corporeal and not also spiritual and that it has charge of bodies and not also of souls, which is false.... [Royal power] is ordained, not for any common good of the citizens whatsoever, but for that which consists in living according to virtue. Accordingly, the Philosopher says in the *Ethics* that the intention of a legislator is to make men good and to lead them to virtue, and in the *Politics* that a legislator is more to be esteemed than a physician, since the legislator has charge of souls, the physician only of bodies.¹²⁵

Ludwig of Bavaria, aspiring to be the Holy Roman Emperor, protected two brilliant critics of papal power in his conflicts with Popes Boniface VIII, Clement V (1305-1314), and John XXII (1316-1334). The first, the Englishman William of Ockham, articulated perhaps the most consistently dualistic argument among medieval philosophers, defending radical Franciscan arguments that Christ called the church to poverty and rejecting the notion that secular rulers received their authority from, or were in any way responsible to, the papacy.¹²⁶ The second was the Italian Marsilius of Padua.

¹²³Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 138.

¹²⁴Watt, “Spiritual and Temporal Powers,” 407-410.

¹²⁵Cited in Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 148. For an English translation of the work see John of Paris, *On Royal and Papal Power* (trans. J. A. Watt; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1971).

¹²⁶See Arthur Stephen McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham*, (London: Cambridge University, 1974); David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 36-42. Another Englishman, John Wyclif, made even more radical arguments defending the absolute right of temporal rulers over Church property. Both Ockham and Wyclif, of course, were excommunicated by the papacy. Janet Coleman,

Marsilius developed the conciliarist position to the point of rejecting the divine origin of the papacy wholesale. Rather than articulate a subtle dualism of spiritual and temporal power, Marsilius defended the caesaropapist position that the secular power possesses exclusive authority in temporal matters and even ultimate authority in matters of church doctrine or scriptural interpretation. He rejected the right of the church to use coercive punishments such as excommunication, limiting it to spiritual, other-worldly functions that were largely sacramental, pedagogical, and moral. Marsilian arguments would become particularly important to Henry VIII in his sixteenth century usurpation of headship over the English church. As Ozment observes, he was the original expositor of the caesaropapist theory that in Protestant circles became associated with Zwingli, Bullinger, and the royal supremacy in the Church of England, a view later labeled Erastianism after the Calvinist critic Thomas Erastus.¹²⁷

Ironically, soon after the promulgation of *Unam Sanctum* the papacy relocated to the French speaking city of Avignon, where its pandering to the French crown was illustrated by the repeated selection of Frenchmen as new cardinals over the course of the next 70 years (an era that many Italians came to label the 'Babylonian Captivity of the Church'). Through the 14th and 15th centuries the power of the papacy was drastically weakened and secular powers increased their control over their respective territorial churches. The extent of the imbalance of power between the papacy and secular powers was dismally revealed when, in the Great Schism that began in 1378, half of Europe rendered its support to the papacy at Avignon, while the other half rejected that papacy in favor of a line of popes reestablished at Rome. The result was the emergence of the conciliarist movement, as theologians and bishops alike searched for a means by which

“Property and Poverty,” *Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought: c. 350-c.1450* (Ed. J. H. Burns; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 645-647.
 127Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 149. Cf. Watt, “Spiritual and Temporal Powers,” 415-422. Another Italian, Dante Alighieri made an argument nearly as radical, advocating the universal lordship of the emperor without reference to any authority or interference from the papacy. Watt, “Spiritual and Temporal Powers,” 411-415.

the church as a whole, the congregation of the faithful, could bring erring popes back into line. Although the movement was not monolithic, Tierney points out, its unity lay in its “appeal to the underlying authority of the Church, understood as the *congregatio fidelium*.”¹²⁸ The key issues revolved around the sources and limits of ecclesiastical power, especially in cases of abuse. Papal authority was decisively affirmed, but “Even the Pope ... was held to possess only a derivative and limited right of government conferred on him by the Church.”¹²⁹

The inspiration for conciliarism did not come, as was once thought, from the writings of thinkers like Marsilius of Padua or William of Ockham, both rejected as heretical, but from the canon law itself. The canon lawyers had always insisted that a pope was not above judgment if he strayed from the true faith into heresy, and the canonist Huguccio had even extended the claim to any case of notorious immorality.¹³⁰ Resting on such legal claims and backed by secular rulers, in 1417 the Council of Constance proclaimed that as a general council it “has its authority immediately from Christ; and that all men, of every rank and condition, including the pope himself, are bound to obey it in matters concerning the Faith, the abolition of the schism, and the reformation of the Church of God in its head and its members.”¹³¹ The council succeeded in ending the Great Schism by choosing a new pope, Martin V (1417-1431). In the decree *Frequens* it mandated regular meetings of a general council in the future. The Council of Basel (1431-1449) later restricted traditional papal privileges, it limiting ecclesiastical appeals to Rome and removing papal rights to annates of benefices, and it negotiated significant (and largely permanent) concessions of power over the church to the temporal rulers of France, Germany, and even to the Hussites in Bohemia. Between

128Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory*, 4.

129Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory*, 5.

130Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory*, 8-9.

131Cited in Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 156.

1427-1436 papal revenues declined by almost two thirds.¹³²

Such moves increasingly intensified papal opposition, and that opposition intensified conciliarist disputes concerning the authority of church councils. When the Council of Basel deposed Pope Eugenius and declared a new pope, the credibility of the movement was shattered. By 1447 it had yielded in its opposition to papal power. Conciliar theory was never established in canon law, and in fact, in 1460 the papal bull *Execrabilis* explicitly rejected any right of appeal over the papacy to a council. Nevertheless, a modified conciliarism continued to shape the opinions of intellectuals, reformers and secular authorities alike well into the sixteenth century, ultimately taking expression in the counter-reformation Council of Trent.¹³³

But the real balance of power continued to shift toward temporal rulers. When Pope Leo X (1513-1521) reaffirmed *Unam Sanctum* at the Fifth Lateran Council in 1516, only a few short months before Luther's posting of the 95 Theses, its doctrine was a fiction with no resemblance to the actual state of affairs. The papacy was at the height of its corruption and the nadir of its reputation, confined in its focus to Italian politics and to artistic and architectural projects in Rome. Everywhere the church was becoming increasingly national in character. In England the pope's right to provide ecclesiastical benefices was struck down already in the late 14th century. The king won control over high ecclesiastical appointments, appeals beyond the king's court to the pope were forbidden, and clerical immunity from civil courts was challenged, all establishing effective royal control over the church long before Henry VIII's establishment of the royal supremacy in the 1530s. In France the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges, established with the Council of Basel in 1438, deprived the pope of traditional rights of appointment,

¹³²Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 172-174.

¹³³Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 156, 174-181; John A. F. Thomson, *Popes and Princes 1417-1517: Politics and Polity in the Late Medieval Church* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 3-28; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 26-52; Charles F. Briggs, *The Body Broken: Medieval Europe 1300-1520*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 179-199.

jurisdiction, and taxation in France, and the right of France to choose its own clergy, deny annates to the pope, and restrict appeals from French courts to the pope were declared to be fundamental Gallican Liberties, a state of affairs that was only slightly modified at the Concordat of Bologna in 1516. The Spanish monarchy had incorporated the inquisition as a tool of the state in 1479, and in the following years it won rights of patronage to all major ecclesiastical appointments. Even in the decentralized Holy Roman Empire, where after Italy papal power remained the strongest despite the Concordat of Vienna, and where prince-bishops and prelates governed almost half of the 364 registered polities authorities, many cities like Nuremburg and Augsburg established considerable legal control over their respective churches, eliminating clerical privileges and immunities and appropriating traditional ecclesiastical yet temporal functions such as education and poor relief, long before Luther's voice began to be heard.¹³⁴ As John Witte, Jr., observes, “these fifteenth-century legal reformations laid important groundwork for the massive shift of jurisdiction from the Church to the state in the sixteenth century.”¹³⁵

The practical implication was that there was strong precedent for appealing against the authority of the pope to the authority of secular powers. Even if an appeal could be made to an ecclesiastical council, the existence and authorization of that council itself depended on secular authority. On the other hand, if one sought the reformation of the church without the support of either papacy or secular power, a crisis of authority

¹³⁴Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 182-190. Thomson, *Popes and Princes*, 29-53; MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 43-52; Briggs, *The Body Broken*, 91-116. The classic argument about the imperial cities is found in Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 41-115; Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 1-46; Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 33-34, 42-46, 177-182.

¹³⁵“One of the cardinal teachings of the early Lutheran Reformation was that law was the province of the state not of the Church. This Evangelical teaching built squarely on the fifteenth-century legal reformations that had already truncated the Church's temporal jurisdiction and policed closely the Church's spiritual jurisdiction. The Lutheran Reformation embraced and accelerated this trend, often shifting to the local magistrate principal legal authority over the clergy, polity, and property of the local church, as well as over marriage, education, poor relief, and other subjects traditionally governed by the Church and its canon law.” Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 179.

was inevitable. There was no critical tradition of argument for spiritual authority that had any moral authority on the eve of the Reformation, free from at least one of the pope, a secular power, or a general council. This goes a long way in explaining why Luther and Huldrych Zwingli turned to civil magistrates to authorize their reformations and subsequent ministries. As Diarmaid MacCulloch writes,

With the trend in late medieval central Europe for local secular rulers to take more and more power and responsibility away from leading churchmen, it was not surprising that the first reformers in the 1520s looked to princes rather than bishops or abbots to undertake a new round of reforms in the Church, or that much of the Reformation continued to develop with the assumption that the godly prince was the natural agent of religious revolution.¹³⁶

One of the most significant intellectuals who encouraged this tendency was the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus, who spent the prominent part of his career in what would become the Reformed city of Basel. In his 1516 classic *The Instruction of a Christian Prince*, as well as in other writings, Erasmus argued that it is the responsibility of a prince not simply to rule justly, or even merely to exercise the sword cooperatively with the church, but that the prince must rule as a Christian prince responsible for the spiritual welfare of his subjects and of the church within his realm. Indeed, echoing classical figures like Plato and Aristotle, Erasmus wrote of the territorial state or city as a distinctively religious institution, with the church and the clergy defined only from the perspective of that more fundamental institutional context. The common good for which the prince is responsible, he argued, includes the spiritual welfare of the prince's subjects, brought about through education, wise civic discipline, and ecclesiastical stability conducive of peace, order, and virtue. Erasmus articulated no substantive ecclesiology, and he tended to define the church spiritually, without reference to an essential external order. True, only priests could perform the crucial spiritual tasks associated with the spiritual sword, but princes, with the temporal sword, were also the servants of Christ and obligated to follow their Lord's example. Together they were to

¹³⁶MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, 51.

cooperate to advance the spiritual good of those under their care, but from the perspective of the welfare of the community, the prince was of preeminent importance.¹³⁷ Erasmus was by no means the originator of these ideas, but he was one of their most persuasive and prominent advocates on the eve of the Reformation. Most of the prominent early reformers, including Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Melancthon, and Bucer, were deeply influenced by Erasmus, coming to the Reformation only after years of formative humanist education.¹³⁸ The great exception was Martin Luther.

Luther's Two Kingdoms

The foundation for Martin Luther's assault on the Roman Catholic Church during the early years of the Reformation was his contrast between the inward and spiritual nature of the gospel, and the outward and temporal pomp of the church's clerical hierarchy, canon law, and sacramental system. In an early sermon of 1518/1519 Luther declared that there are two kinds of righteousness, the alien righteousness that comes from God and purifies the sinner, and the actual righteousness that believers practice as a result of their salvation in this world. In the same sermon Luther taught that believers

¹³⁷"In short," Estes writes, "Erasmus' definition of the relationship between prince and clergy means that for all practical purposes the church is absorbed into the state. The state has been turned into something so overwhelmingly religious in nature that the church is left with no separate, distinct goal or identity. Its activity of Christian education is, in effect, only one of the means whereby the prince fulfills his paternal obligation to educate his subjects in Christian virtue. In their goal, church and state are one, and leadership clearly belongs to the state." James M. Estes, "*Officium principis christiani*: Erasmus and the Origins of the Protestant State Church," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 83 (1992): 49-72 [62-63]. Estes argues that this was basically the pattern later enacted in the Protestant territories during the Reformation.

¹³⁸Indeed, both Zwingli's right-hand man in Zurich Leo Jud and one of Luther and Melancthon's allies in Saxony, Georg Spalatin, court chaplain to the Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, produced German editions of *The Instruction of a Christian Prince* and some of Erasmus' other writings in 1520-1521. In his first published work of 1523, the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer borrowed from *The Instruction of a Christian Prince* extensively. As James M. Estes puts it, "If the *Institutio* [*Instruction of a Christian Prince*] was not exactly 'original,' it certainly was rare, possibly unique, in the intellectual power with which such a broad array of classical and Christian sources was formed into a genuine synthesis. More important, no other pre-Reformation writer that the author has been able to identify, certainly none whom the reformers esteemed as highly or read as reverently, ever transformed all those commonplaces about the ideal prince and the common good into a Christian state so completely religious in content and aim that it could scarcely be called secular any more, much less be expected to play second fiddle to the church even in matters of religion and ecclesiastical order." Estes, "*Officium principis christiani*," 63-64.

must interpret Christ's commands to them in light of their dual responsibilities as public individuals – with responsibilities toward others – and private individuals – with responsibilities toward God.¹³⁹ A few years later in his treatise on the Freedom of a Christian (1520), before his excommunication by the pope, Luther proclaimed, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” At the heart of this paradox, he argued, is the reality that “Man has a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily one. According to the spiritual nature, which men refer to as the soul, he is called a spiritual, inner, or new man. According to the bodily nature, which men refer to as flesh, he is called a carnal, outward, or old man.” The clergy were entirely focused on the fleshly man, but “It does not help the soul if the body is adorned with the sacred robes of priests or dwells in sacred places or is occupied with sacred duties or prays, fasts, abstains from certain kinds of food, or does any work that can be done by the body and in the body.” Only faith in Christ can produce true righteousness. And yet by that faith the Christian attains to a liberty that “makes our hearts free from all sins, laws and commands ... It is more excellent than all other liberty, which is external, as heaven is more excellent than earth.”¹⁴⁰ Here, already, was that fundamental distinction between law and gospel.

These ontological, anthropological, and soteriological distinctions, along with related ones that were epistemological and eschatological, overlapped in various ways, not always precise or systematic, to form what Witte calls “the broad umbrella of the two-kingdoms theory.”¹⁴¹ Luther articulated them in a myriad of dialectical formulations and applications, only one of which was the distinction between secular and spiritual

139Martin Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, second edition (Ed. Timothy F. Lull; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 134-140. Torrance Kirby stresses that this distinction is the foundation for the entire two realms trajectory of orthodox Reformation theology. See W. J. Torrance Kirby, *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

140Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, second edition (ed. Timothy F. Lull; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 393, 408.

141Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 89.

power, in response to various challenges and opportunities as they arose. Yet he did not always clarify how one formulation corresponded to another, nor was he always consistent in his terminology, all of which has made the precise meaning of his two kingdoms theology a matter of continuous scholarly analysis and debate over the years.¹⁴² Here I focus on Luther's application of the doctrine to questions of spiritual and secular power, though always in the context of these more basic theological distinctions.

By 1520 Luther had become disillusioned with the likelihood of papal support for reformation. Reading the humanist Lorenzo Valla's work exposing *The Donation of Constantine* as a forgery confirmed Luther's worst suspicions about the Roman hierarchy. As a result, he began to turn to his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers to articulate an alternative authority for reform. Categorically rejecting claims of papal supremacy by divine right, he argued that within the community of believers there is an equality before God. By virtue of this equality, any believer can take the necessary steps within his power to reform the church if the clergy fails to do so. In his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* Luther called the nobility and the emperor to intervene to save Christendom by summoning a council. Nevertheless, he was careful to clarify the nature of the authority secular powers had over the church. Over matters of property and morality, such as control over ecclesiastical benefices and the conduct of the clergy, he argued, secular government has direct authority and ought to protect the German people from papal abuses. Regarding spiritual matters, on the other hand, secular powers have no such

¹⁴²Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 87-117. William J. Wright identifies the origins of the two kingdoms doctrine with the strand of Renaissance Humanism associated with Lorenzo Valla that embraced skepticism but rejected Neoplatonism. Wright argues that this tradition shaped Luther's skepticism regarding human righteousness and the affairs of this world, in contrast to Neoplatonists like Erasmus, leading him to turn instead to the authority and certainty of the gospel as pertaining to an entirely different kingdom from that of this world. Wright therefore argues that the basic elements of the two kingdoms doctrine appear in Luther's work even before 1517, and he highlights their significance in Luther's embrace of the law/gospel distinction and justification by faith alone apart from works. William John Wright, *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). Other prominent interpretations include

right. Luther then distinguished between this office of secular authority and the power that Christian rulers possess by virtue of the priesthood of all believers. The latter was the basis for the nobility's right to intervene in the church, not the former. Just as any citizen, regardless of office, is obligated to sound the alarm and mobilize the city when there is a fire or an attack by enemies, so any Christian must, when necessary, take action necessary for the preservation of the church. Even here, Luther was careful to say that the task of the nobility was to call a council which would in turn reform the church. The nobility itself was not to intervene in spiritual affairs, in which secular government has no authority.¹⁴³

The nobility did not respond as Luther hoped. Although the Elector Frederick of Saxony protected him, at the Imperial Diet of Worms in January 1521 the emperor supported the Pope's excommunication of Luther with his own imperial ban. In the Edict of Worms of May 1521 he outlawed Luther's works and supporters, an edict that was variously enforced. Luther's response was to emphasize the power of the word to do its own work of reforming. Continuing to develop his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, he defended the right of local congregations of Christians to call their own pastors and enact their own reforms where secular and clerical authorities failed to do so. He also attacked secular authorities for using their power to interfere with the dissemination of the gospel.¹⁴⁴ It was this sort of rhetoric that inspired Luther's supporters to inaugurate a series of radical reforms in Wittenburg in 1521-1522 while Luther was in hiding after the Edict of Worms. On Christmas Day in 1521, Andreas

¹⁴³Martin Luther, "An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality as to the Amelioration of the State of Christendom, 1520" in *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings* (trans. John Dillenberger; New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 403-485. Already in his *Treatise on Good Works* (1520) Luther argued that temporal authorities are responsible only for temporal affairs, not for matters pertaining to the soul. Temporal government "has nothing to do with the preaching of the gospel, or with faith, or with the first three commandments." Cited in James M. Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melancthon 1518-1559* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 11. See *Luther's Works* (55 vols.; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, et. al.; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-), 44:88, 90-91. Cf Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 17-30.

¹⁴⁴Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 30-36.

Karlstadt offered the Protestant Eucharist. In the following weeks images were removed and destroyed, sometimes violently, and a series of further reforms were initiated, all without authorization from the Elector of Saxony. Though agreeing with the reforms in substance, Luther was horrified because of the lack of authority for the actions, and he defended the Elector for restoring the status quo, so breaking with Karlstadt. He insisted that radical reforms had to be conducted with the approval of the proper authorities and in respect of weaker consciences.

The compounding confusion was the context for Luther's attempt to clarify his own views of the relation between the church and secular authority in his classic *On Secular Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed*. Luther began his argument by invoking Augustine's eschatological distinction between the city of God and the city of man: "we must divide the children of Adam and all mankind into two classes, the first belonging to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world. Those who belong to the kingdom of God are all the true believers who are in Christ and under Christ ... All who are not Christians belong to the kingdom of the world and are under the law."¹⁴⁵ Believers and nonbelievers, he made clear, are two mutually exclusive bodies of people. No person can be in both kingdoms at the same time. But Luther then went on to argue, now moving beyond Augustine, that in relation to these two groups of people God has established two governments. "For this reason God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that—no thanks to them—they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace."¹⁴⁶ Christ governs the first group of people – a minority – by exclusively non-coercive

¹⁴⁵Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, second edition (ed. Timothy F. Lull; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 435-436. See Johannes Heckel, *Lex Charitatis: A Juristic Disquisition on Law in the Theology of Martin Luther* (trans. Gottfried G. Krodel; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010 [1973]), 25-38, 145-215.

¹⁴⁶Luther, "Temporal Authority," 436.

means, the word and Spirit, producing in them external righteousness consistent with their justification. The second group of people is governed by the only means possible for the rebellious, coercive force.

Of course, Luther insisted that believers must still submit to temporal authority as an expression of love for their unbelieving neighbors. He likewise affirmed that Christians could serve in positions of temporal authority and was emphatic that temporal authority “is to be exercised in a Christian and salutary manner,” his occasional rhetoric notwithstanding.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, he offered a lengthy analysis of what this meant “for the sake of those very few who would also like very much to be Christian princes and lords.”¹⁴⁸ To be sure, “Who is not aware that a prince is a rare prize in heaven? I do not speak with any hope that temporal princes will give heed, but on the chance that there might be one who would also like to be a Christian, and to know how he should act. Of this I am certain, that God's word will neither turn nor bend for princes, but princes

¹⁴⁷Luther, “Temporal Authority,” 444.

¹⁴⁸Luther, “Temporal Authority,” 452. Thus Luther could say that he need not address the “temporal dealings and laws of the governing authority” because the writings of the jurists could be consulted on that point, and because a prince was to use his own judgment and prudence to “determine in his own mind when and where the law is to be applied strictly or with moderation, so that law may prevail at all times and in all cases, and reason may be the highest law and the master of all administration of laws.” Luther was not interested in offering particular advice on matters of law and policy because he did not think the word gave him the authority to do so. But that did not make the principles of fidelity to Christ and to his word any less applicable to a prince, for no one should “think it sufficiently praiseworthy merely to follow the written law or the opinions of jurists.” A prince was to “depend neither upon dead books nor living heads, but cling solely to God, and be at him constantly, praying for a right understanding, beyond that of all books and teachers, to rule his subjects wisely.” But following Christ amounted to more of a general perspective and controlling ethos than it did a set of particular laws and policies. “For this reason I know of no law to prescribe for a prince; instead, I will simply instruct his heart and mind on what his attitude should be toward all laws, counsels, judgments, and actions” (453). Christ's calling on princes amounted to a set of principles. A Christian prince devotes himself to the service of his people. “He should picture Christ to himself, and say, 'Behold, Christ, the supreme ruler, came to serve me; he did not seek to gain power, estate, and honor from me, but considered only my need, and directed all things to the end that I should gain power, estate, and honor from him and through him. I will do likewise, seeking from my subjects not my own advantage but theirs... In such manner should a prince [conduct himself] ... For this is what Christ did to us; and these are the proper works of Christian love” (453-454). After identifying further principles of governance and justice binding on a Christian prince, Luther wrote, “A prince must act in a Christian way toward his God also ... Then the prince's job will be done right, both outwardly and inwardly; it will be pleasing to God and to the people. But he will have to expect much envy and sorrow on account of it; the cross will soon rest on the shoulders of such a prince” (457).

must bend themselves to God's word."¹⁴⁹

A Christian who occupies such an office must know how to distinguish the tasks of temporal government from those of spiritual government, "lest it extend too far and encroach upon God's kingdom and government."¹⁵⁰ Temporal rulers, even when believers, must leave the government of souls to God, and focus their attention on life, property, and external affairs. "Heresy can never be restrained by force... Here God's word must do the fighting. If it does not succeed, certainly the temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood. Heresy is a spiritual matter which you cannot hack to pieces with iron, consume with fire, or drown in water."¹⁵¹ It is a constant strategy of the Devil, Luther insisted, to confuse the two kingdoms, which he succeeded in doing when popes and bishops ruled over temporal affairs or when magistrates sought to interfere with the gospel.¹⁵²

At the same time, frustration with disorder and the pace of reform was already testing Luther's initial support for religious liberty. The rejection of Roman worship was giving way to liturgical and doctrinal anarchy, and ecclesiastical wealth was being appropriated by secular authorities for their own use at the expense of education, poor relief, and provision for pastors. But what really brought matters to a head was the outbreak of the Peasants' Revolt in 1524. Although most historians agree that the revolt was not caused by the Reformation or inaugurated by preachers, prominent peasant leaders justified their actions in the language of Christian liberty, invoking the authority

149Luther, "Temporal Authority," 454.

150Luther, "Temporal Authority," 444.

151Luther, "Temporal Authority," 450.

152In 1524 in his *Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit* he argued that the secular powers should not use coercive force against heretics, like Thomas Muntzer, who preach falsely but do not engage in rebellious activity. Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 37-41; LW 40:49-59. Emphasizing the difference between the two governments in relation to the absolute difference between believers and nonbelievers led to some of Luther's most radical rhetoric about the nature of the church. He insisted that there can be no authority among Christians other than that of Christ himself. "What kind of authority can there be where all are equal and have the same right, power, possession, and honor, and where no one desires to be the other's superior, but each the other's subordinate?" Luther, "Temporal Authority," 452.

of Luther and Melanchthon. Horrified, Luther was adamant that the two kingdoms doctrine did not allow the peasants to justify using violence to defend their temporal concerns on the basis of Christian freedom. He charged that neither temporal concerns nor violence had anything to do with the affairs of the kingdom of Christ, a kingdom of love, forgiveness, peace, and suffering. “Suffering! Suffering! Cross! Cross! This and nothing else is the Christian law!”¹⁵³ The earthly concerns of the peasants placed them in the realm of the temporal government and that was a realm in which magistrates must be obeyed, with wrath as the penalty for disobedience. “Now he who would confuse these two kingdoms ... would put wrath into God's kingdom and mercy into the world's kingdom; and that is the same as putting the devil in heaven and God in hell.”¹⁵⁴

Interestingly, in light of later developments between the Swiss magisterial reformers and the Swiss Anabaptists, Luther attacked the radicals of the Peasants' Revolt by challenging their assumption that the Mosaic Law is normative for Christian society. Here again he appealed to the distinction between the two kingdoms, one which is temporal, visible, and uses the sword, and the other which is eternal, invisible, and rules in the heart by grace. In between these two kingdoms, he argued, “still another has been placed in the middle, half spiritual and half temporal. It is constituted by the Jews.” The Mosaic Law was limited to that mixed kingdom, of which Moses was mediator, but was appropriate neither for the spiritual kingdom nor for the temporal kingdom. It was binding on Christians only insofar as it coincides with natural law and the New Testament, and it was of use to secular authorities only as one possible approach to policy among others.¹⁵⁵

In this context, by September 1525 Luther had become convinced that the Elector

153 Martin Luther, “Admonition to Peace,” in LW 46:29.

154 Martin Luther, “An Open Letter on the Harsh Book,” in LW 46:70.

155 Luther, “How Christians Should Regard Moses,” *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, second edition (ed. Timothy F. Lull; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 124-132 [126]. Cf LW 35: 161-174. Luther thus clearly affirmed the substance of a third use of the law.

should conduct a territorial visitation for the purpose of bringing order to the church. Indeed, he had been moving in this direction even before the Peasants' Revolt. In 1522 he attempted to persuade the Elector to abolish the Mass, and in 1524 he attacked the Mass as an idolatry and blasphemy that the secular authority should suppress. When opponents cited Luther's arguments in *On Temporal Authority* as counter-arguments, he retorted that suppressing public blasphemy fell under the secular authority's realm of responsibility over external matters and that it was necessary for peace and order.¹⁵⁶ He returned to the argument he had initially articulated in 1520, suggesting that as a Christian, sharing in the priesthood of all believers, a temporal ruler could intervene in ecclesiastical affairs just as could any other believer. This did not mean the secular authority could impose a church order from the top down, a step Luther successfully persuaded the Landgrave Philip of Hesse not to take in 1527. Instead, Luther called for the Elector to authorize an ecclesiastical consistory of theologians and lawyers to prescribe a church order for Wittenburg. As he wrote in his preface to the *Instructions of the Visitors to the Parish Pastors* in 1528, the church order would have no binding authority, but the clergy were to embrace it voluntarily. If they refused to do so, the Elector should intervene to enforce the church order by virtue of his obligation to establish peace and order.¹⁵⁷

Luther's increasing justification of the use of secular authority in ecclesiastical affairs was accompanied by his new acceptance of the need for secular authorities to suppress religious deviance in the form of blasphemy or heresy. In large part due to his

¹⁵⁶Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 42-45; LW 36:311-328. Estes points out that Luther was making use of two old distinctions here. "One was that a community divided in religion is ungovernable. The other was that the wrath of God is not just the distant fate of private individuals in eternity but rather the impending historical experience of the land and people whose ruler tolerates idolatry and blasphemy... At the same time, Luther was also giving expression to the idea ... that personal freedom of faith does not include freedom of public worship." (44-45)

¹⁵⁷See W.D. J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1984), 145-150; James M. Estes, "The Role of Godly Magistrates in the Church: Melancthon as Luther's Interpreter and Collaborator," *Church History* 67.3 (September 1988): 463-483 [472-473]; LW 40:269-320.

insistence that the Anabaptists were the heirs of Muntzer, Karlstadt, and the Peasants' Revolt, and that their professions of nonviolence were simply a cover for rebellion, Luther reversed his conviction that the word alone should be used to oppose such radicals. In contrast, his opponents and critics, who included civil officials and Evangelical pastors in addition to Anabaptists and radicals, appealed to the arguments of Luther's earlier works, particularly *On Secular Authority*. One of the most prominent examples was Georg Frolich, a clerk in the Nurnberg city chancellery, who in 1530 submitted an (until recently) anonymous memorandum to the secretary of the city council. That the memorandum was taken so seriously is evidenced by the fact that no fewer than three leading reformers, in addition to Luther, responded to it.¹⁵⁸

In his memorandum Frolich challenged the typical arguments used to defend magisterial coercion in religious matters. On the basis of experience and history he argued that religious toleration is actually more conducive of peace and order than is religious uniformity, and he pointed to the kingdom of Bohemia as an example. He observed that while the Lutherans claimed that religious persecution was in accord with scripture, their arguments came exclusively from the Old Testament. In response to such uses of the Old Testament, he argued on the basis of Galatians 5 that Christians are no longer bound by the law, for “if we are bound in one matter on the ground that it is commanded in the Old Testament, how shall we avoid being bound in other such matters [i.e., circumcision]?”¹⁵⁹ He then argued that the two kingdoms doctrine, as originally articulated by Luther, is taught in the New Testament. Each kingdom has its own distinct king, scepter, goal and end, and in all their actions and teachings, both Christ and the

¹⁵⁸For an account of the circumstances surrounding Frolich's submission of his memorandum and the responses of Johannes Brenz and the other reformers (probably Andreas Osiander and Wenzeslaus Linck), which were virtually identical with Melanchthon's developing thought at the time, see Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 101-111.

¹⁵⁹For a translation and commentary see James M. Estes, “Whether Secular Government Has the Right to Wield the Sword in Matters of Faith: An Anonymous Defense of Religious Toleration From Sixteenth-Century Nurnberg,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49.1 (January 1975): 22-37 [29]. Note that at the time Estes published this article it had not yet been demonstrated that Frolich was its author. Estes discusses the case for Frolich's authorship in Estes, *Order, Peace and the Glory of God*, 104.

Apostles demonstrated that the kingdom of Christ operates by the power of the word alone. To seek by the sword either to advance the cause of the kingdom, or to persecute those who oppose or reject it, is therefore to rebel against Christ's kingship. Secular authorities had the right to appoint pastors to preach true Christianity, Frolich conceded, but they must allow dissenters, whether papists, Anabaptists, Turks, or Jews, to choose their own pastors and to regulate their own religious affairs. Magistrates could punish crime and rebellion but they could not persecute entire religious groups.

In his 1530 commentary on Psalm 82, having been informed of some of Frolich's arguments, Luther responded with the insistence that secular authorities "shall honor God's Word above all things and shall further the teaching of it."¹⁶⁰ They were to ensure that sects and false teachers were given no opportunity to mislead the people, whether openly or covertly. The magistrates were thus responsible to suppress not only seditious teachings, such as those that asserted that Christians could not be magistrates, or that called for the holding of property in common, but also heretical teachings about the nature of Christ and eternal life. Where there is division in a community over the nature of the gospel, the authorities should refuse to tolerate the party not in agreement with scripture. Where there are disputes over external matters, the magistrates should demand silence and peace. Finally, neither the Anabaptists nor other radicals should be permitted to teach privately or in secret, because such covert practices were precisely what had caused the Peasants' Revolt in the first place.¹⁶¹ By 1532 Luther even yielded to Melancthon's argument that the Anabaptists should face capital punishment. Yet throughout this time he insisted that his position was justified by the two kingdoms doctrine, claiming that blasphemy and false teaching were matters that affected external order and therefore fell within the prerogative of the magistrate.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰LW 13:57.

¹⁶¹Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 181-188. LW 13:41-72.

¹⁶²Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 159-162. Cf. Luther's *On Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers*, published in January 1532, in LW 40:383-394.

Other Evangelical leaders did not find it difficult to respond to interpretations of the two kingdoms doctrine such as that of Frolich. They simply stressed the inward nature of the spiritual kingdom and placed all outward affairs – including public teaching – within the realm of the secular kingdom. And as Luther's actions and writings of the 1530s make clear, this was consistent with his own inclination. Luther's increasing emphasis on the inward/outward distinction appears in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, which he published in 1532. Seeking to find an interpretation of Matthew 5-7 that avoided the medieval view that elements of Jesus' teaching were simply spiritual counsels not binding on all Christians, as well as the Anabaptist tendency to take Christ's commands both literally and absolutely, Luther insisted that the sermon regulated the conduct of Christians as individuals, but not in their vocations. Inwardly Christians were always to follow Christ's radical commands, but outwardly they might take up the sword or maintain property out of love for others. “Thus every human being on earth has two persons: one person for himself, with obligations to no one except to God; and in addition a secular person, according to which he has obligations to other people.” Christ, Luther argued, “is not talking about the way a secular person should work and live, but about the way you should live uprightly before God as a Christian, as one who does not have to be bothered about the world, but who should direct his thoughts exclusively to another life.”¹⁶³

Nevertheless, there were clearly growing tensions between Luther's two kingdoms doctrine and his teaching about the obligations of magistrates. Luther attempted to sort out these tensions in his commentary on Psalm 101, published in 1535. Paradoxically, he pointed to King David's oversight of doctrine and worship as a model

163LW 21:171. As he illustrated his point, “That person of mine which is called 'Christian' should not worry about money or save it, but should give its heart to God alone. But outwardly I may and I should use temporal goods for my body and for the needs of other people. As far as my secular person is concerned, I may and I should accumulate money and treasures—yet not too much, so that I do not become a greedy belly that seeks only its own benefit and can never be satisfied.”

for princes inspired by God, while insisting at the same time that magistrates not similarly gifted should refrain from interfering in religion and limit themselves to protecting the freedom of the word. It is by the inspiration of the Devil, he declared, that secular leaders seek to “be Christ's masters and teach him how he should run His Church and spiritual government.”¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, when a godly prince like David calls people to the obedience of God such a prince is being an obedient servant, not a domineering master, just as when a faithful pastor calls a prince to rule according to God's commandments he too is submitting to God's governance rather than mixing the two kingdoms.

For with respect to God and in the service of His authority everything should be identical and mixed together, whether it be spiritual or secular—pope as well as emperor.... All should be identical in their obedience and should even be mixed into one another like one cake, everyone of them helping the other to be obedient. Therefore in service or submission to God there can be no rebellion among the spiritual or the secular authorities.¹⁶⁵

On the other hand, when pastors seek to dictate or dominate the civil law, or when princes “want to change and correct the Word of God in a dictatorial and dominating fashion,” the kingdoms are inappropriately mixed.¹⁶⁶ Luther maintained his insistence that secular government, as such, “is to have no jurisdiction over the welfare of souls or things of eternal values but only over physical and temporal goods.”¹⁶⁷

During the late 1530s and early 1540s Luther continued to complain about the heavy-handedness of secular authorities in interfering with ecclesiastical matters. He argued that the consistories of theologians and lawyers established to oversee the church order should be viewed as ecclesiastical institutions, and that while a prince could serve as an “emergency bishop” (*Notbischof*) in this procedure, this was not to be an ordinary affair. He even supported the use of canon law and the church fathers as a basis for

164LW 13:194.

165LW 13:195-196.

166LW 13:196. Cf. Estes, “The Role of Godly Magistrates in the Church,” 474-483.

167LW 13:198.

ecclesiastical ordinances that could guide church life.¹⁶⁸ But while he opposed the sort of civil control of the church that is sometimes attributed to him, he never developed a normative theological model of church government, nor did he find a way to establish church discipline, though he seems to have found it desirable. With respect to the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual, Hopfl notes, for Luther “the worldly order of the church seems to occupy the interstices.”¹⁶⁹ Torn between the extremes of magisterial domination, papal tyranny, and Anabaptist anarchy, Luther was “extremely loath to make organizational matters into doctrinal ones.”¹⁷⁰ For Luther, Witte argues, the ecclesiastical order of the visible church was part of the earthly kingdom rather than the spiritual.¹⁷¹

Nevertheless, Luther's direct influence was waning. In part because of the increasingly ad hoc and tortuous nature of his political theology, in part because of his public praise of Melanchthon, and in part because Melanchthon claimed that Luther's writings supported his own arguments, by the mid-1530s it was Melanchthon, not Luther, whom virtually all Lutheran theologians followed in their arguments on the subject.¹⁷² Melanchthon had articulated his version of the two kingdoms doctrine in his *On the Double Magistracy*, a series of 34 theses that were debated at the University of Wittenburg in July, 1522. He argued that spiritual government is the preaching of the word and pertains to matters of eternal righteousness and the Spirit, while corporal government administers external things. Significantly, from the very beginning

168Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 72-74.

169So often his reflections in these later years come across as “the *ad hoc* responses of a desperately overworked man to a succession of crises crowding in on him, responses governed as much by practical exigencies and inherited assumptions as by theological principle.” Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 26.

170Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 27.

171Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 97-99.

172See Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 183-184, 208-212. Estes writes, “There is virtually nothing in Luther's commentary on Psalm 101 that cannot be read as a relatively lengthy and discursive equivalent of Melanchthon's position on the *cura religionis* of secular magistrates. The feature of Luther's argument that seems most alien to Melanchthon's way of thinking is his pessimistic insistence that so few princes will be able to follow David's example of Christian rule. But the difference is one of rhetoric and tone rather than of substance” (205).

Melanchthon placed ecclesiastical traditions and ceremonies firmly in the realm of external matters not pertaining to conscience, and therefore under the authority of the magistrate. “Ecclesiastical traditions are civil laws and a means of instruction, pertaining not at all to spiritual government.”¹⁷³ At the same time, unlike Luther, Melanchthon followed Erasmus in characterizing the office of secular authority as involving responsibility for both the physical and spiritual welfare of its subjects. Promoting godliness by ensuring good instruction for the people through preachers and teachers would be conducive of peace and order in a Christian commonwealth. By the late 1520s Melanchthon defended the suppression of the Anabaptists on this ground, associating them with the Peasants' Revolt.¹⁷⁴

The solidification of the Lutheran movement and the intellectual challenges to its magisterial character led Melanchthon to develop his version of the doctrine more systematically and to bolster its exegetical support. In response to the argument that religious persecution was not necessarily conducive of peace and order, he offered the more principled argument that magistrates have the obligation to enforce both tables of the Ten Commandments for the purpose of maintaining the glory of God, which he argued was a higher obligation than that of peace. Although Melanchthon agreed that the civil law of the Old Testament was not binding on Christians, he began to array a plethora of Old Testament texts that described the religious character and obligations attached to the office of civil magistrate, arguing by way of 1 Timothy 1:9 and 1 Timothy 2:2 that these obligations endured in the Christian era. He first articulated this more mature conception of the obligations of magistrates in a letter he wrote on March 15, 1534 to Martin Bucer, the reformer of Strasbourg, and he published his developed arguments in his updated *Loci Communes* of 1535.¹⁷⁵ Of particular importance was

173James M. Estes, “Erastus, Melanchthon, and the Office of Christian Magistrate,” *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 18 (1998): 21-39 (31).

174Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 53-92.

175See Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 93-177. On the letter to Bucer see pp. 114-119. On the

Melanchthon's shift, in his interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:2, from an emphasis on “peaceful and quiet lives” as the objective of magisterial involvement in religion, to an emphasis on fostering “godliness and holiness” as the higher priority for magistrates, a move that would be followed by Calvin.¹⁷⁶ Melanchthon's arguments were clearer and more systematic than were Luther's adjustments of his early doctrine. Estes concludes, “So clear and persuasive to adherents of the magisterial Reformation were those arguments that it is difficult to find a German Protestant theologian from 1535 onward (until well into the following century) who did not take them over virtually unchanged.”¹⁷⁷

Before turning to the Reformed branch of the Reformation, it is important to note that like Luther, Melanchthon never developed a vigorous theological paradigm for the institutional church beyond the tasks of preaching and the administration of the sacraments. As the Lutheran tradition developed, external matters such as discipline,

1535 *Loci Communes* see pp. 119-128. The texts Melanchthon began to invoke include Daniel 3:28-29, Psalm 2, Psalm 82, Proverbs 25:5, and 1 Samuel 2:30.

176Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 126-128.

177Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 177. Cargill Thompson argues that Luther was opposed to the increasing magisterial character of the churches in Germany, and that while Luther viewed the exercise of secular authority in the church as a temporary emergency measure necessary to solve the problem of authority in the church, Melanchthon turned into a permanent, theologically-grounded state of affairs. All the way until his final statement on the issue appeared in 1541, Cargill Thompson maintains, Luther demonstrated concern at the way in which the consistories of lawyers and theologians prescribed by the visitation of 1528 were acting as extensions of civil power into the spiritual affairs of the church (Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 150-154). Cargill Thompson concludes that “Luther was in no sense an Erastian” (154). In its final version “his thought is much closer to that of Calvin than is often recognized – indeed, Calvin's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is clearly derived from Luther's and represents a development from it” (153). Estes agrees that “Luther was still anxious lest the magisterial authority in the church that he had now so positively endorsed be abused and ... he continued to dream of a church with a greater degree of administrative independence than circumstances allowed” (Estes, “The Role of Godly Magistrates in the Church,” 481). He also agrees that Luther and Melanchthon always differed in emphasis. Luther “never tired of emphasizing that the state, though part of the divinely established order of the world whose proper functioning provided the peace and stability necessary to the survival of the church, is not something intrinsically Christian and that secular authority per se is *secular*.” (467). At the same time, Estes points out that Melanchthon was also very concerned about magisterial domination of the church. It was Melanchthon who argued that it was ideal for theologically educated bishops, not ignorant laymen, to oversee ecclesiastical matters. Melanchthon wrote as early as 1534 that “[T]he church needs governors who will examine and ordain those called to ecclesiastical ministries, ... [and] inspect the doctrine of the priests. If there were no such bishops, we would have to invent some” (Quoted in Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 174).

ecclesiastical government, and even worship were increasingly subject to civil control. Although Melancthon hoped to see the church reunified and strengthened under the authority of bishops and the guidance of theologians, he continued to insist upon the obligation of the secular magistrates to bring this to pass.¹⁷⁸ Luther's early two kingdoms doctrine notwithstanding, the form that the Reformation ultimately took in Lutheran territories looked a lot like the caesaropapism that had been advocated in the 13th Century by Marsilius of Padua, and that eventually came to be known in Protestant circles as erastianism.¹⁷⁹

Zwingli's Corpus Christianum

In the same years that Luther was developing the two kingdoms doctrine in Wittenburg the Reformation was getting another start in Zurich, in the Swiss Confederation. The priest Huldrych Zwingli had begun preaching against Catholic abuses in 1518, influenced by his extensive training under Erasmus and other humanists in Basel, by his reading of Luther's writings, and by his study of scripture. Zwingli quickly came to share Luther's convictions regarding justification by faith alone and the difference between divine and human righteousness, between inward and outward realms.¹⁸⁰ Like Luther, Zwingli rejected the ecclesiastical infrastructure of the Catholic Church with all of its properties, temporal jurisdictions, and laws, and he insisted on the authority of scripture and on the right of the church to follow the teachings of scripture contrary to the tyranny of ecclesiastical authorities. He pushed further than Luther in his rejection of the Mass and the various ceremonies of medieval worship. Unlike Luther, however, Zwingli was shaped by the communal culture of the Swiss cities, as well as by

178Cargill Thompson, 131-132; Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 128-133, 163-176.

179See Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 119-303.

180Indeed, Bruce Gordon goes so far as to argue that the relationship between the spiritual and the material constituted “the absolute nucleus of Zwingli's thought.” See Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 80.

Erasmus, maintaining a commitment to the unity of city and church in one Christian commonwealth, under the guidance of the pious magistracy. While Luther refused to move down the path of reformation at the pace demanded by his followers because of his insistence on order and authority, Zwingli broke with his more radical followers primarily because of his commitment to the unity and integrity of the Christian commonwealth.¹⁸¹

Similar to Luther and Melanchthon during their crisis of authority, Zwingli offered a definitive statement of the relationship between civil and spiritual power. His 1523 sermon *Divine and Human Righteousness* may have been influenced by Melanchthon's *On the Double Magistracy*, a copy of which Zwingli had received, but it was quite different from Luther's two kingdoms doctrine as stated in *On Temporal Authority*.¹⁸² The foundation of the sermon was Zwingli's distinction between "divine righteousness and our miserable human righteousness."¹⁸³ The former is the perfect righteousness God demands of human beings, the righteousness that calls us to forgive freely, never to be angry, engage in lawsuits or quarrels, or swear oaths, to give away all our possessions to the poor, to do good to our enemies, and more. These are not mere counsels, but absolute commandments. Yet no one can attain to this kind of righteousness, so God has given human beings commandments regarding external or human righteousness. Human righteousness reflects divine righteousness, but it is distinct from it in that it refers only to external matters and that it accommodates human weakness. Based on these two kinds of righteousness Zwingli distinguished between two types of law. "One type of law looks only to the inward person, such as how one is to love God and neighbor. These laws no one is able to fulfill. Just as there is no one who is

181 See Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation*, 75-103. Cf. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*, 131-138.

182 Robert C. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 23-24, 168-170.

183 Huldrych Zwingli, "Divine and Human Righteousness," in *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*, vol. 2 (ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian; trans. H. Wayne Pipkin; Allison Park, Pa: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 1-41 [5].

righteous except for the one God and the one who by grace, of which Christ is the guarantor, is made righteous through faith. The other type of law looks only to the outward person.”¹⁸⁴ It permits people to covet, but not to steal. It allows divorce, but only under certain circumstances.

Zwingli argued that the calling of pastors is to preach pure divine righteousness without compromise, showing that all people fall short of this standard, and then pointing to the gospel as the only means of salvation. Pastors are also to teach God's commandments regarding human righteousness, but beyond this they are not to seek authority over temporal matters. Criticizing the temporal jurisdiction of the Catholic hierarchy he declared, “Human righteousness or authority is no more than orderly authority which we call temporal power; for so-called spiritual authority has no basis in Scripture for its rule.”¹⁸⁵ The primary obligation of temporal authority is to give the clergy freedom: pastors the freedom to preach the gospel, and priests and monks the freedom to abandon old superstitions. “One ought not appeal to the magistrate in such matters; for it has not been set over God's word and Christian freedom as over temporal goods.”¹⁸⁶ At the same time, Christians are to obey the magistrates in all matters not pertaining to conscience, even if their laws fall well short of divine righteousness.¹⁸⁷ But magistrates are obligated to govern in accord with scripture, the ultimate standard even for human righteousness. They are therefore to submit to the faithful preaching of the clergy, which will have a sanctifying influence on the general society, its laws, and its welfare.

Francis Oakley points out that despite certain similarities with Luther's two kingdoms doctrine, Zwingli had a tendency “to detect reverberations of harmony where

¹⁸⁴Zwingli, “Divine and Human Righteousness,” 12. Cf. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy*, 158-170.

¹⁸⁵Zwingli, “Divine and Human Righteousness,” 22.

¹⁸⁶Zwingli, “Divine and Human Righteousness,” 32.

¹⁸⁷Thus, contrary to Conrad Grebel and his followers, Zwingli insisted that the magistrates possess authority over property and have the right to require the payment of tithes, even for the support of the clergy. The magistrates should prohibit the taking of interest, but where it is established in law it must be paid.

Luther had heard only discord, to move towards reuniting what Luther had put asunder, and, having discriminated so sharply the invisible church from the visible, to identify the latter with the assembled civic community itself.”¹⁸⁸ It is noteworthy, as Walton similarly observes, that Zwingli did not speak of the church in the sermon, but simply of the offices of magistrate and of pastor. In accord with the corporate conception of society there was no such thing in Zurich as a congregated church separate from the body of the city's inhabitants, and as long as pastors were free to preach freely and refrain from offering the Mass, Zwingli was willing to allow the magistrates to dictate the pace of reform with respect to ecclesiastical property, ceremonies, and the discipline of morals. In that sense Zwingli was closer to Melanchthon than to Luther. Yet much more than Melanchthon, Zwingli emphasized the complete identity of church and city. He thus declared pointedly, “when the gospel is preached and all, including the magistrate, heed it, the Christian man is nothing else than the faithful and good citizen; and the Christian city is nothing other than the Christian church.”¹⁸⁹ While he agreed that true Christians would always be a minority even within Christendom, he believed the church encompassed all those who are baptized, come with age to profess faith in Christ, and live generally consistently with this profession. In such a city, or church, the office of magistrate simply becomes an office of the church, considered as the body of the baptized. Hopfl concludes, “Zwingli's thought ... was inherently communal. The 'particular churches' were for Zwingli communities which he without question equated with the secular political unit: its agents were the secular authorities acting on behalf of their citizens/congregations, and reformation was a political activity, with the magistrates acting as 'school-masters' over faith, worship and morals of clergy and laity

188Francis Oakley, “Christian Obedience and Authority, 1520-1550,” *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700* (ed. J.H. Burns and Mark Goldie; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 184.

189Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy*, 169.

alike.”¹⁹⁰

Zwingli thus argued that although the church needed its own elders and deacons in the early centuries, once civil governments were converted to Christ, magistrates fulfilled those functions according to the example of Old Testament Israel. “Seeing, then, that there are shepherds in the church, and amongst these we may number princes ... it is evident that without civil government (*magistratu*) a church is maimed and impotent... we teach that authority (*magistratum*) is necessary to the completeness of the body of the church.”¹⁹¹ Even crucial matters of doctrine and worship were to be under the oversight of the civil government. Of course, it must be stressed that in Zwingli's view the point was not that the church was to submit to civil government, but that the civil government was part of the church and the authoritative body *within* the church. Stephens writes, “He does not envisage a separate gathering of the church to make decisions in church matters, but sees the church making these decisions through its civic assemblies and leaders.”¹⁹² The relation, again, was akin to that of the soul and the body. “For just as a man must consist of both soul and body, though the body is the humbler and lesser part, so the church cannot exist without the magistracy, even though it should take care to only dispose of the more worldly matters which have less to do with the spirit.”¹⁹³

The image of soul and body corresponding to the prophetic and magisterial offices came to define the structure of the Christian commonwealth in Zurich. With Zwingli's support, in 1525 the city council established the *Ehegericht*, a marriage court made up of pastors and council members and exercising wide-ranging jurisdiction over matters that had formerly been within the realm of the church's canon law. In 1528 the council established a synod made up of clergy to oversee and discipline the clergy. The

¹⁹⁰Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 24-25.

¹⁹¹W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 269-270.

¹⁹²Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*, 289.

¹⁹³Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 78.

result was two complementary bodies, one dominated by the council with oversight over the laity, the other administered by the clergy and with oversight over the clergy. The net result was a significant shift of authority from the church to the magistrate. Moral discipline of Christians was separated from the question of access to the Lord's Supper and distanced from the authority of the clergy.¹⁹⁴ A second important result was that Zwingli came to endorse the need for the magistrate to suppress those who disturbed the church by preaching or practicing false doctrine. When Anabaptists associated with Konrad Grebel began to separate into their own communities and practice re-baptism in January, 1525, Zwingli supported their suppression by the city council. He endorsed a law enacted by the Zurich city council that authorized capital punishment for Anabaptist leaders, and with his approval, Zurich executed the capital sentence by drowning four Anabaptists in 1526.¹⁹⁵

By 1528 Zwingli's model of reform was coming under criticism from Lutheran circles for conflating the two kingdoms. Zwingli sought to respond to such criticism in a fascinating letter he wrote that year to Ambrosius Blarer, the reformer of Constance. In particular, Zwingli challenged Luther's statement that "Christ's kingdom is not from without [external]." He pointed out that Luther and his followers loved to emphasize texts in which Christ spoke of the freedom of believers, but they ignored passages such as his command to the apostles to travel with simplicity and moderation, "entirely a matter of external provision."¹⁹⁶ Zwingli then went on to explain to Blarer that the example of the early church in Acts 14 demonstrates that it is within the right of the church to regulate external matters. If in the New Testament that task fell to elders and apostles,

¹⁹⁴Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 251.

¹⁹⁵For a comparison of Zwingli's view of the Anabaptists to Calvin's, see Akira Demura, "From Zwingli to Calvin: A Comparative Study of Zwingli's *Elenchus* and Calvin's *Briève Instruction*," *Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte* (ed. Alfred Schindler and Hans Stichelberger; Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 87-99.

¹⁹⁶See the translation and commentary in George Richard Potter, "Church and State, 1528: A Letter from Zwingli to Ambrosius Blarer (4 May 1528)," in *Occasional Papers of the American Society for Reformation Research* 1 (December, 1977): 108-124 [113].

now it falls to those who fulfill their role in the contemporary church, the civil magistrates. “For it is clear enough that those who in this passage are called presbyters were not ministers of the word but venerable men of substance, prudence and faith who in directing and carrying on business were to the church what the Council is to the city.”¹⁹⁷ The only limitation is that the regulations need to be consistent with scripture and pertain only to matters that are external. Then Zwingli addressed the particular claim that the city is not the church. “I know that the only church we are speaking of is that which is the common voice of your whole local church.”¹⁹⁸ Why should that common voice be represented in anything other than the leadership of the city? Zwingli suggested that the separation of religion from the concerns of civil government was a recipe for tyranny. Associating Luther's position with that of the Anabaptists, he suggested that the riots and disorder plaguing Germany were “caused by Luther's word, [that] 'the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world'.”¹⁹⁹

Zwingli's model of reform was also challenged by one of his own Reformed colleagues within the Swiss Confederation. In 1530 Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531), pastor of Basel, argued to the Basel city council that ecclesiastical and secular power were essentially different from one another and that the church should therefore administer its own system of discipline and excommunication. Whereas civil discipline involved punishment, ecclesiastical discipline was restorative, an expression of the gospel, and vital to the integrity of the Lord's Supper. Oecolampadius was convinced that some of the Catholic and Anabaptist complaints about the Reformation were legitimate: “we are not a Christian church, [for] we have no keys [with which] to lock up, nor any ban.”²⁰⁰ In fact, Oecolampadius nearly persuaded Zwingli of his views before Berchtold

197Potter, “Church and State, 1528,” 114.

198Potter, “Church and State, 1528,” 115.

199Potter, “Church and State, 1528,” 117.

200J. Wayne Baker, “Church Discipline or Civil Punishment: On the Origins of the Reformed Schism, 1528-1531,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23.1 (Spring, 1985): 3-18 [9]. For the most thorough study of Oecolampadius's views, see Akira Demura, *Church Discipline According to Johannes*

Haller, the Reformed pastor in Bern, and Martin Bucer helped to bring Zwingli back to his earlier position. After Zwingli's death Oecolampadius complained that Zwingli's successor Heinrich Bullinger misunderstood the nature of the word 'Christian' as well as the nature of the church and the Lord's Supper, thereby confusing the kingdom with civil government. Before his death in 1531 he participated in the establishment of disciplinary ordinances in both Basel and Ulm, although in both cases his proposals were modified by the city councils to preserve magisterial control of excommunication.²⁰¹

Of course, Zwingli did not believe the magistrates possessed discretionary authority over matters of divine righteousness. While the magistrate was in the place of the Old Testament Israelite king, the pastor stood in the authoritative position of the Old Testament Israelite prophet. When the pastor proclaimed the word of God on a given matter, the magistrate was obliged to obey it. In reality, Zwingli's understanding of the pastor's role in the unified Christian society led him to become far more involved in civil matters than his theory might have suggested. From the very beginning he devoted tremendous energy to ending the Swiss practice of sending their men as mercenaries to fight in foreign wars, a practice that involved a system of payments and pensions that

Oecolampadius in the Setting of His Life and Thought (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1964). Demura argues that Oecolampadius's extensive ties and familiarity with Anabaptists makes their influence on his views of discipline and the church plausible but concludes that there is no concrete evidence to establish that influence as certain (291-337). It is important to note that Oecolampadius entirely shared Zwingli's view of the city as a Christian commonwealth. At times he could sound quite a bit like Zwingli. As he wrote to a friend, "All has become new to us through Christ ... and so the magistrate is new. He defended the citizen as fellow-citizen; now he defends them as member of Christ and son of God." Oecolampadius thus believed, like Zwingli, that it was legitimate for the civil magistrate to oversee the external implications of the kingdom of Christ. "If the magistrate performs the duty [commissioned] by Peter, teaches by words, exhorts, consoles, eliminates heresies, establishes peace, protects the oppressed, then is this [oversight over external religious matters] not merely worthy of a Christian magistrate?" (247, 250). Cf. Kenneth R. Davis, "No Discipline, No Church: An Anabaptist Contribution To the Reformed Tradition," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13 (1982): 43-58.

201 Baker, "Church Discipline or Civil Punishment," 7-13. Elsie Anne McKee identifies Oecolampadius as the first Reformed theologian clearly to develop an understanding of multiple ecclesiastical orders distinct from secular authority on the basis of Romans 12:8, a passage that would play a significant role in Calvin's development of an exegetical basis for the offices of deacon and elder. See Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 1984), 191-193. McKee notes, however, that Oecolampadius did not articulate a clear theory of the various orders as offices in the church.

constituted a significant portion of the Swiss economy. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, he used his prophetic authority to push Zurich into an aggressive and militant foreign policy designed to place the city at the head of an alliance of Reformed territories committed to the spread of the Reformation. In his preaching and writing Zwingli was explicit about his vision for Zurich, and he made many enemies among those who thought he was driving the city toward its ruin. A trusted counselor within the inner circle that controlled the city's foreign policy, he wrote most of the key letters of negotiation with governments in the Swiss Confederation, Germany and France. But in the end Zwingli's role led to a disastrous war with the Catholic cantons of the Swiss Confederation, in which Zurich was decisively defeated. Zwingli himself was killed after taking up the sword in the Battle of Kappel on October 11, 1531.²⁰²

The fallout was dramatic, and some viewed Zwingli's death as the sign that he had been a false prophet. Luther observed that "those who live by the sword, die by the sword."²⁰³ Zurich, Bern, and other cities were forced to pay massive reparations that

²⁰²My account of Zwingli's political legacy is drawn from Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 119-144, as well as from Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 19-48. One of Zwingli's chief opponents in the Swiss Confederation was Niklaus Manuel, a pious layman and artist and a leading political figure in Berne. Manuel had embraced the Reformation due to his disgust at clerical corruption and abuse of power, as well as due to his horror at the extent of the human depravity he experienced in military service. He emphasized the important role of civil magistrates in upholding peace and order and in fostering the preaching of the true gospel in such a way as to bring about gradual change in the populace. Although he was initially highly optimistic about the speed at which the countryside population would turn to the Reformation, that optimism quickly turned to a realistic assessment about the attachment of the peasants to traditional piety and about their suspicion of the reforms occurring in the urban centers that held power over them. Although Manuel believed magistrates should support substantive freedom of conscience, he believed toleration functioned primarily at the canton level. The way forward for the Reformation in the Swiss Confederation was therefore to allow each canton to choose its own way forward, while maintaining peace with the other cantons. This was in stark contrast to Zwingli, who insisted on suppressing Catholic teaching in Evangelical cantons, while demanding the freedom of Evangelical preachers in Catholic territories. While Zwingli emphasized the authority of Scripture in the Confederation, Manuel took seriously the exercise of legitimate authority in Evangelical and Catholic canton alike. While Zwingli gambled all on war, Manuel believed long-term peace would gradually bring victory to the cause of the Reformation. He died shortly before the Second Kappel War, but his legacy shaped the Swiss Confederation's response after the war, and his arguments won many followers in Berne and Geneva. See Gordon, "Toleration in the Early Swiss Reformation: The Art and Politics of Niklaus Manuel of Berne," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (ed. Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 128-144.

²⁰³Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 144.

hampered them for the next decade, while significant parts of the Swiss Confederation were brought back into the Catholic fold or decisively barred to further Reformed expansion. The backlash against clerical interference in the affairs of civil government spread to all of the Swiss Reformed cities. In Zurich the Meilen Articles prescribed new limits to the office of pastor, declaring, “Let the clergy ... not undertake or meddle in any secular matters either in the city or the countryside, in the council or elsewhere, which they should rather allow you, our lords, to manage.”²⁰⁴ When Heinrich Bullinger was brought in to succeed Zwingli as pastor, he was required to agree that ministers should avoid making political comments in their sermons. Similarly the city of Bern adopted a series of articles drafted by the Strasbourg reformer Wolfgang Capito giving the magistrates full authority over spiritual matters and limiting the freedom of pastors to express their political views. The first sentence of the *Berner Synodus*, adopted in 1532, declared, “Great men agree that in matters that pertain to the administration of external affairs, nothing may be either instituted or established by the ministers of the word of God without the administration and authority of the civil magistrate.”²⁰⁵ The document appealed to the teaching of a twofold government but interpreted it in distinctly Zwinglian terms: “The greater and more sublime is the spiritual and heavenly government.... The lesser, which belongs to the Bernese magistrates, is the earthly government. The Christian falls under the jurisdiction of both. In his conscience, which God alone judges, he belongs to the spiritual government without the intervention of any creature. But with regard to his body and temporal goods, the Christian is subject to the external sword and human administration.”²⁰⁶ The magistrates were to maintain all external matters of religion, including discipline, the court charged with its oversight being conceived of as a distinctly magisterial, rather than ecclesiastical institution.

204Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 139.

205Michael W. Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground: Conflict and Reform in the Pays de Vaud, 1528-1559* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 65.

206Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 66.

Although excommunication could be exercised in certain circumstances, its use was to be kept to a minimum.²⁰⁷ Indeed, in places like Bern and Basel – the important Reformed cities in whose sphere of influence Calvin's Geneva fell – the clergy preserved even less authority over spiritual affairs than they did in Zurich, where Bullinger managed to preserve some clerical autonomy. In general, the model among the Swiss Reformed became that of direct magisterial control over ecclesiastical affairs, including both doctrine and the life of the clergy. Gordon comments on the effect of Zwingli's prophetic-political legacy, "The Reformation had survived, barely, but the bill had now to be paid, and the price was full subordination to the state."²⁰⁸

Once the Reformation was "politicized," as Steven Ozment notes, the differences between reformers were often "more theoretical than practical." In that respect the legacies of Luther and Zwingli were not so different.²⁰⁹ The magisterial reformers emphasized the inward over the external, and with respect to the outward order of the church, as Hopfl puts it, "the Reformation was in the first instance negative and destructive."²¹⁰ Furthermore, "Magistrates and laity, having at the invitation of evangelicals eliminated clerical autonomy and power, were now quite unprepared to relinquish any part of their new-found independence to an evangelical clergy."²¹¹ His Whiggish interpretation of the Reformation notwithstanding, Herbert Darling Foster is correct when he concludes that in Lutheran and Zwinglian contexts the church was

207Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 63-72.

208Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 142; Cf. p. 255.

209Ozment makes this statement with specific reference to Luther's argument that a Christian magistrate could interfere in ecclesiastical matters as a "Christian brother" but not by virtue of the magisterial office itself. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*, 137. Yet he goes too far when he writes, "Both Lutheran and Reformed Protestants maintained a basic separation of church and state within the basic unity of religion and society. Luther's insistence on the uniqueness of Christian righteousness was no more a disjunction of religion and society than Bucer's and Zwingli's subjection of rulers to evangelical norms was an identification of Christian and civic righteousness. Scholars have greatly exaggerated their differences." The second statement here is correct, but the first is misleading. Neither Lutherans nor Zwinglians separated church and state in any meaningful sense of the term, and while the Lutherans at least distinguished the two, the same could hardly be said of the Zwinglians.

210Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 24 (Cf. 23-31).

211Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 31.

largely viewed as a phase of the state, not as its own organic, corporate entity. “The way was therefore open in 1536 for a new conception of church and state as two distinct and balanced organisms, each co-operating with the other.”²¹²

The Anabaptists

Despite the trend within both Lutheran and Reformed territories towards greater power of the civil magistrates over religion, the early preaching and writing of both Luther and Zwingli contained ideas that could be taken in much more radical directions. Followers of Luther like Thomas Muntzer and Andreas Karlstadt, and followers of Zwingli like Konrad Grebel, Wilhelm Reublin, and Felix Manz, advocated ideas and practices that strained the solidarity of the reforming movement. Within only a few short years, that solidarity gave way to enmity and open fracture. Those who opposed the magisterial reformers became known after 1525 as the Anabaptists because of their rejection of infant baptism. But Anabaptism was never a unified movement except in the rhetoric of its opponents. It came to encompass individuals and movements with various similarities and relationships of mutual influence as well as substantive and ultimately irreconcilable differences. Much could be included under the umbrella of the epithet 'Anabaptist,' which made the movement an easy foil for Lutheran and Reformed apologists. Even relative to the relationship between the church and civil government, Anabaptists were all over the map, the reformers charging them with theocratic and revolutionary tendencies on the one hand, and spiritualizing and pacifist practices on the other. Either way, to the magisterial reformers, they were guilty of undermining the social order.²¹³

212Herbert Darling Foster, “Calvin's Programme for a Puritan State in Geneva, 1536-1541,” *Harvard Theological Review* 1 (1908): 403-404.

213The broad details of my account of Anabaptism are taken from the following works, in addition to specific sources cited: William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1975 [1963]); Hans Jürgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists* (trans. Trevor Johnson; New York: Routledge, 1996 [1980]); James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal: McGill-

One of the most significant intellectual fathers of the Anabaptists was Luther's early colleague in Wittenburg, Andreas Karlstadt. Unlike Luther, Karlstadt did not believe the reformation of the Mass or the removal of images should be delayed in deference to either the magistrates or weaker consciences. He rejected infant baptism and insisted on the importance of church discipline and excommunication. He charged Luther with clericalism and insisted on the right of lay Christians to celebrate the Lord's Supper in their homes. Maintaining the right of Christian congregations to choose their own pastors, Karlstadt resigned his government sponsored pastorate and ministered freely to his congregation.²¹⁴

Throughout this time Karlstadt pressed Luther's two kingdoms doctrine to increasingly radical conclusions, his understanding of the relation between the church and civil government, like that of Luther, changing with his experience. Christian government, he initially believed, was established by God and should advance the cause of Christ by reforming the church when the clergy fail to do so. During the 1520s Karlstadt advocated government sponsored reforms in Wittenburg and Denmark. He supported the duty of government to exile heretics and confiscate their property, though not to kill them. But when the governments under which he resided rejected the gospel as he understood it, Karlstadt aligned them with the Devil and insisted that they must be resisted. In this mode he spoke in terms of two kingdoms radically opposed, that of those who serve God and that of the world that follows the Devil in opposition to God.²¹⁵ Following Luther's teaching in *On Temporal Authority*, Karlstadt came to the conviction that the magistrates were wrong to use the sword in matters of religion. He began to argue that Christians should not defend themselves with violence, although he

Queen's University Press, 1991); Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*.

²¹⁴For the general details of Karlstadt's biography and theology see Calvin Augustine Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

²¹⁵Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptists*, 84.

acknowledged that magistrates retained the right to exercise violence for legitimate defensive purposes. Although in the late 1520s Karlstadt recanted some of his radical ideas, made amends with Zwingli and became a professor in Basel, his early works were widely influential among Zwingli's more radical followers in Zurich as well as on apocalyptic preachers like Thomas Muntzer and Melchior Hoffman.

In Zurich the Anabaptist movement arose when Konrad Grebel and others became disillusioned with the pace of magisterial reform. While Zwingli was willing to be patient with the city council in its slowness to abolish the Mass, Grebel and his followers were not. They gradually became committed to a conception of the church as a self-governed body of the faithful preserved by vigorous church discipline and mutual provision of material needs. They began to agitate for the abolition of the tithe in the rural areas, for the establishment of popular control in the churches, and for the establishment of excommunication, practices they claimed were consistent with Zwingli's own early teaching.²¹⁶ In 1523 Wilhelm Reublin, supported by Grebel, led six villages in refusing to pay tithes to the Grossmunster Chapel in Zurich. When the Zurich city council investigated Reublin's preaching it discovered that Reublin had accompanied attacks on the clergy with criticisms of civil magistrates.²¹⁷ The city expelled him, along with Grebel and numerous others, in 1525, and they spread out establishing congregations in the Swiss countryside just as the Peasants' Revolt in southern Germany was spilling across the Swiss frontier.

Accusations regarding who was to blame for the Peasants' Revolt of 1524-1525

²¹⁶At this point, as Hans Jurgen-Goertz points out, they continued to seek the reformation of the broader society, reflecting popular demands for justice in the manner of a "popular church." Jurgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 12-13.

²¹⁷Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 61-62. While Zwingli agreed with Grebel and Reublin that the tithe was not required by divine law, he defended the tithe on the basis of human law. As Stayer puts it, "At stake behind the quarrel over the tithe was whether the Reformed church in the rural Zurich territories was to be centrally controlled by the council or transformed into a series of independent congregations locally directed by village communes. The obvious link between the radicals' agenda of reconstituting the church through local direct action and the desire of the 1525 rebels to free local communities from the heavy hand of territorial authority explains how the proto-Anabaptists anticipated articles 1 and 2 of the Twelve Articles" (62).

flew around as soon as the revolt began and the debate has continued to this day. The rhetoric of *sola Scriptura*, of the supremacy of divine law over canon law, and of the liberty of the Christian was easily applied by lay pamphleteers and radical preachers to the concerns of peasants and commoners frustrated with the system of tithes and benefices that they believed exploited the people for the well-being of corrupt clergy and self-interested political elites. As James Stayer observes, “The early years of the Reformation contained many anticipations of the appeals to divine law or Christian Reformation that became the trademark of the rebel programs of 1525 and 1526.”²¹⁸ In their early demands formulated in the Memmingen League Ordinance and the Twelve Articles the peasants appealed confidently to the authority of Luther and Melancthon, claiming simply to be applying their teachings on matters like usury and the Old Testament law. Peasant demands grew increasingly radical during the course of the revolt, and the bitterness of defeat helped spawn the growth of Anabaptism after 1525.²¹⁹

The most infamous radical preacher implicated in the Peasants' Revolt was Thomas Muntzer, an early follower of Luther and Karlstadt. Muntzer came to view property as a result of sin and as part of a system of unjust exploitation. While many Evangelical leaders shared his conception of the abuses of the system, Muntzer went farther by insisting that an uprising against tyranny was morally justified. His advocacy of violence was sharpened by his proclamation of an apocalyptic judgment that would soon fall upon the establishment, separating the elect from the wicked. Muntzer was defeated in battle, tried, and executed.²²⁰ Although Karlstadt had tried to dissuade Muntzer from promoting violence and rejected any association with the Peasants' Revolt, to Luther they were forever associated. Radical teachings regarding the sacraments, the church, and the authority of civil government were inseparable from the spirit of

²¹⁸Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 46.

²¹⁹Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 19-60.

²²⁰Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 107-113.

disorder. Muntzer and the Peasants' Revolt became symbols of the need for suppressing radicalism of any sort.²²¹

Having been expelled because of their preaching against the civil government and their leadership in the refusal of several villages to pay the tithe, the circle of Grebel and Reublin was also implicated in the revolt in the minds of the magisterial reformers. It is true that most of them distinguished their criticisms of ecclesiastical tithes from the rights of magistrates to tax, insisted that only proper temporal authorities could bring about the reform of the tithe, and rejected Muntzer's advocacy of rebellion. Nevertheless, Gordon writes, "The radical circle in Zurich found itself aligned with the aspirations of the rural communities, where sympathy for the demands of the German peasants was rife. As the first acts of rebellion began to take place ... it was virtually impossible to distinguish between the rebellious peasants and those who would emerge as Anabaptists in 1525."²²²

The well-known Anabaptist leader Balthasar Hubmaier was a case in point. A former student of Johan Eck, Hubmaier was the reforming pastor of the town of Waldshut when he, along with the the pastor of Schaffhausen and several hundred others were re-baptized by Reublin in 1525. In his preaching Hubmaier supported many of the key demands of the peasants and encouraged Waldshut in an alliance with the rebels and resistance to the Empire. He may even have helped write some of the documents stating rebel demands.²²³ Yet he was one of the more moderate of the Anabaptist leaders. Viewed by some historians as Anabaptism's magisterial reformer, he insisted on the legitimacy of Christian involvement in coercive civil government, arguing that it didn't make much sense to acknowledge that God ordained civil government and provided it with the

221For Karlstadt's debate with Muntzer on whether or not to use violence to oppose tyranny as well as for the dispute between Karlstadt and Luther see Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptists*, 284-289.

222Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 196.

223Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 63-71.

sword, while at the same time insisting that it was immoral to use that sword.²²⁴ In 1526 he went to Moravia where he cooperated with the Count Leonhart von Liechtenstein of Nikolsburg to establish the town as a safe haven for Anabaptist refugees. He struggled to counter the influence of apocalypticism and a community of goods, but he was executed by Imperial authorities in 1528.²²⁵

The fact that a significant portion of the Anabaptist leadership was sympathetic toward the peasants' cause, or even directly involved in the revolt, inextricably associated Anabaptism with disorder and rebellion in the minds of European elites. Their fears were not groundless. Several of Muntzer's followers escaped and continued to preach his apocalyptic message. Hans Hut, who was baptized by Hubmaier, believed that the Peasants' War had been the tribulation foretold in the book of Revelation, and that Muntzer had been the apocalyptic witness described there. While publicly preaching pacifism, Hut taught his closest followers that Christ's return would follow three and one-half years after the war was over, and after Europe had suffered the tribulation of a Turkish invasion. At that time, believers had to be ready to take up the sword for the judgment of the wicked, and it was only in the meantime that they were to focus on sharing with the needy and practicing non-resistance in the face of hostile authorities.²²⁶

224What made the Christian's use of the sword different, he argued, was that it was exercised in obedience to the command of God and in love for the evildoer. While Hubmaier rejected the use of government power against heretics, insisting that it should be limited to use against temporal crimes and in just war, he did believe the civil magistrates should protect the church. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 51-69; Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1981), 244-264; Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 198-2005. Hubmaier was well-known to the reformers, as he participated in a disputation in Zurich before his conversion to Anabaptists, engaged in written debates with Zwingli and Oecolampadius, and later engaged in a further disputation with Zwingli, Leo Jud, and Oswald Myconius.

225In the years to come the Anabaptists in Moravia would divide repeatedly, but eventually Moravia became the home of the prominent Hutterite community who were devoted to a uniquely radical form of communal living that involved the abolition of property and that marked them off from the more moderate views of the rest of the Anabaptists. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and the Community of Goods*, 139-142; Jurgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 22-25.

226Hut's teaching clearly appealed to some who were embittered by and seeking revenge for the experiences of the Peasants' War, though many of his followers eventually abandoned his apocalyptic views. Hut eventually went for refuge to Moravia, like so many other Anabaptists in the 1520s. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 77-86, 113-114; Jurgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 16-18.

Nevertheless, in contrast to the activities of figures like Muntzer, Hubmaier, and Hut, after the Peasants' War a number of Anabaptist leaders began to articulate a very different theological vision, one committed to non-violence and separation from both civil government and popular protest. Particularly prominent were the Swiss Brethren, who endorsed the Schleitheim Confession written by the German monk Michael Sattler. Sattler had been converted by Reublin and was among the radicals expelled from Zurich in 1525. He lived in Strasbourg with the reformer Wolfgang Capito for a time, where he won the respect and friendship of Capito and Bucer. When he was executed in Germany in 1527 only a few months after writing the Schleitheim Confession, both Capito and Bucer mourned his death and described him as a faithful witness and martyr for Christ.²²⁷

Sattler's Schleitheim Confession called for the separation of the Christian community from the world due to the absolute conflict between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of darkness.

Separation should be made from the wickedness that the Devil has sown in the world and from evildoers, lest by associating with them we sink into the same abominations... From all of this we should learn that everything which is not united with our God and with Christ is nothing other than an abomination which we should shun and flee. By this we mean all papist and anti-papist works and services, assemblies, church-going, taverns, unbelievers' alliances and treaties and anything else which the world greatly values and yet which is carried out directly against God's command... We will therefore discard unchristian, devilish weapons of violence, including swords, armour and the like, and any employment of them, whether it be for our friends or against the enemy – just as Christ said:

²²⁷Robert S. Kreider, "The Anabaptists and the Civil Authorities of Strasbourg, 1525-1555," *Church History* 24.2 (June 1955), 99-118 [103]. Cf. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 40-47; Demura, "From Zwingli to Calvin," 87-90. An Anabaptist whose views of the Christian's relation to civil government were similar to those of Sattler was Hans Denck. Denck argued that while civil government is appointed by God, and while in theory Christians can participate in its work, the world's understanding of how government should operate – specifically by the use of the sword – makes such participation impossible in practice. The kingdom of Christ operates by the word and Spirit through love, and a Christian can serve in government only insofar as government work remains consistent with these means. Denck founded a congregation of Anabaptists in Strasbourg and was expelled from the city in 1526 after facing off in a disputation with Bucer, who referred to him as "the pope of the Anabaptists." But he maintained a friendship with Oecolampadius of Basel, and died of natural causes in Basel in 1527. See Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 72-79; William Klassen, "The Limits of Political Authority As Seen By Pilgram Marpeck," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 56.4 (October 1982): 342-364 [346-347]; Kreider, "The Anabaptists and the Civil Authorities of Strasbourg," 102-103.

'do not resist one who is evil' (Matthew 5, 39).²²⁸

The document endorsed believer's baptism, excommunication, and the free election of church leaders. It condemned oaths, so foundational to civic life in 16th Century Europe, and the use of the sword. "The sword is ordained by God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and kills the wicked and protects and assists the good... In order to exercise it, the temporal authorities are instituted. However, in the perfection of Christ the ban is only used to admonish and exclude a sinner." In response to the question of "whether a Christian too could and should use the sword against the wicked, out of love and in order to protect and assist the good," the confession pointed to Christ's refusal to condemn the woman taken in adultery in John 12:50, to Christ's refusal to judge between disputing brothers, to Christ's refusal to be made king by the Jews, and to a variety of express scriptural commands. It then concluded that believers cannot serve in government because of the absolute contrast between flesh and spirit, the world and heaven. "The rule of government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the spirit. Its homes and abodes are planted in this world; those of the Christians are in heaven." Only in absolute conformity to the example and commands of Christ can the church maintain its purity and unity.²²⁹

In contrast to apocalyptic radicals like Muntzer and Hut, the Swiss Anabaptists resisted using the Old Testament as an authority for church life because most of Zwingli's arguments for infant baptism arose from the presupposition of continuity between the two testaments. The Schleitheim Confession marked a new emphasis on discontinuity between the two testaments that only grew over time. By the Zofingen Disputation of 1532, the Reformed pastor of Bern, Berchthold Haller, was writing to Heinrich Bullinger

228Cited in Jurgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 153-155. The prominence of the Schleitheim Confession gives plausibility to Robert Friedmann's claim that a version of two kingdoms theology lay at the heart of Anabaptist thought. See his *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 36-48.

229Cited in Jurgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 153-155.

that one of the fundamental convictions of the Anabaptists was to reject the authority of the Old Testament for moral disputes in the church. Bullinger agreed that insisting on the continuing authority of the Old Testament was the key to defeating the Anabaptists in debate.²³⁰

Some Anabaptists embraced discontinuity between the testaments while rejecting the Schleithem call for radical separatism. A prime example is Pilgram Marpeck. Marpeck had served in various government positions during his life but categorically rejected the use of the sword even on the part of civil magistrates.²³¹ He argued that the common error underlying the Peasants' Revolt, Zwingli's tragic policy in the Kappel Wars, and the later Anabaptist revolution at Munster was the failure to distinguish between the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament is the authority for Christians, he insisted, and the New Testament highlights the spiritual and inward nature of the kingdom of Christ. "There need be no external power or sword, for the kingdom of Christ is not of this world."²³² In a debate with the reformer Martin Bucer he appealed to Luther's two kingdoms to demonstrate that magistrates should not use the sword in matters of religion. "To allow the external authority to rule in the kingdom of Christ is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, who alone is Lord and Ruler without any human assistance."²³³

But the rejection of the sword and the emphasis on the New Testament that characterized the Swiss Brethren and Pilgram Marpeck was not the only prominent form of Anabaptism after the Peasants' Revolt. In the minds of the magisterial reformers and

230Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 207-208; Jurgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 51-56; See a translation of Bullinger's letter with commentary in Heinold Fast and John H. Yoder, "How to Deal with Anabaptists: An Unpublished Letter of Heinrich Bullinger," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 33.2 (April 1959):83-95.

231"For none can serve two masters: Caesar, king in the worldly office, and Christ in the spiritual, heavenly kingdom (Matthew 6)." Klassen, "The Limits of Political Authority As Seen By Pilgram Marpeck," 356-357.

232Klassen, "The Limits of Political Authority As Seen By Pilgram Marpeck," 357-358.

233Klassen, "The Limits of Political Authority As Seen By Pilgram Marpeck," 353-354. Marpeck's rejection of militant apocalypticism made no difference to the authorities in Strasbourg or to Bucer, for whom Marpeck's teaching was still a challenge to the established order of the Christian society. He was expelled from the city.

many civil magistrates, on the contrary, the true nature of the movement was revealed by apocalyptic preachers like Hans Hut, Hans Romer, Melchior Rinck, and Melchior Hoffman, whose predictions of the imminent return of Christ, at which point the saints might take up the sword against the wicked, fostered the disruptive fear of social upheaval and violence.²³⁴ Whatever inclination they might have had to tolerate Anabaptism evaporated with the apocalyptic Munster revolution of 1534.

The story of the Munster Revolution, like Anabaptism as a whole, threatened to implicate the very origins and cause of the Reformation itself. One of the apocalyptic preachers influenced by Karlstadt, and thus by Luther himself, was Melchior Hoffman, whose followers were known as the Melchiorites. Hoffman declared the Emperor Charles V to be the antichrist and predicted the imminent coming of Christ following the establishment of the New Jerusalem at the city of Strasbourg in 1533.²³⁵ Like the followers of the Schleithem Confession, Hoffman rejected violence and believed the age of the Old Testament had passed, but the same could not be said for all of his followers. Although Hoffman was imprisoned in Strasbourg, another Anabaptist preacher, Bernhard Rothmann, succeeded in launching a magisterial Anabaptist reformation in the city of Munster. Many Melchiorites in Germany and the Netherlands interpreted the feat as a miracle. The Dutch prophet Jan Matthijs declared himself an apocalyptic messenger and adjusted Hoffman's prophecy of Christ's return to Easter, 1534, declaring Munster to be the New Jerusalem, a haven from the Great Tribulation. Although Rothmann, like Hoffman, had called believers to prepare for conflict without yet taking up the sword, Matthijs declared that in these apocalyptic circumstances believers should

²³⁴The events at Munster are well known, but other examples include a plot by Romer's followers to seize control of the city of Erfurt, turn it into the New Jerusalem, and continue the cause of the Peasants' Revolt in 1528, and sporadic violence and uprisings in the Netherlands. See Jurgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 19-22.

²³⁵After being driven from several regions, Hoffman was finally imprisoned in Strasbourg. For a helpful account of Hoffman's life and his relationship to Karlstadt, see Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movement*, 175-253.

take up arms to defend the city against besieging imperial forces.²³⁶

The events in Munster turned into a fiasco when Easter 1534 passed without Christ's return and Jan Matthijs died in a suicidal attack on the city's besiegers. In the months that followed, his successor King Jan of Leyden seized control of economic and social affairs in the city, attempting to establish the community of goods and polygamy. Arguing that God established government to punish the evil and promote the good, the Ordinance of the Twelve Elders of Munster declared that the sword should be used to reinforce the work of excommunication: "If we have become sons of God and been baptized in Christ, all remnants of evil must be rooted out of our midst, for which, after God, the government is most effective." It proscribed a long list of crimes and sins with accompanying Old and New Testament texts, decreeing excommunication and death as the penalty for all of them.²³⁷ Imperial forces ended the experiment when they captured the city in August 1534.²³⁸

The events in Munster were crucial for the legacy of Anabaptism because they seemed to prove the movement's complicity in the sort of apocalypticism that could, if only occasionally, turn even pacifist-minded Anabaptists into violent revolutionaries. If not all Anabaptists were susceptible to such apocalypticism, it was nevertheless impossible to distinguish those who weren't from those who were. As Stayer notes, "What was typically Anabaptist was not violence or non-violence but rejection of the wickedness of the world, as represented by the established church and government."²³⁹ For the magisterial reformers, as well as Catholic clergy and civil rulers throughout Europe, such insistence on radical separation between the kingdom of Christ and the

236Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and the Community of Goods*, 123-128.

237Cited in Jorgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 156-158.

238Melchiorite apocalypticism survived into the 1540s, however, until the movement finally came under the leadership of Menno Simons. At that point the apocalypticism was dropped in favor of the Schleithem emphasis on radical separation from the world, pacifism, and church discipline that has marked Mennonite communities ever since. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and the Community of Goods*, 128-131; Jorgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 31-33.

239Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and the Community of Goods*, 123.

kingdom of the Devil, manifestly undermined the stability of the social and political order.

Bullinger's Covenantal Commonwealth

After the disastrous Kappel War many in the Swiss Confederation blamed Zwingli and the clergy for causing the disaster by meddling in political and foreign affairs. When he arrived in Zurich as Zwingli's successor in 1532 Bullinger quickly agreed to minimize the involvement of the pastors in the political affairs of Zurich, and he recognized the right of the magistrates to intervene if the pastors were guilty of excessive political criticism. At the same time, in the ordinances adopted in October 1532 he managed to preserve and solidify the autonomy of the pastors in preaching – including the right to criticize the magistrates when they clearly acted against Scripture – as well as over the synod responsible for overseeing the pastors' life and work. The result, Andreas Muhling notes, was a new cooperative vision. “The council could reckon on the loyalty of the clergy and would therefore work towards the building of the Protestant state; the clergy would eschew political involvement as long as they retained their prophetic freedom.”²⁴⁰ Bullinger thus managed to reassure the Zurich magistrates while at the same time solidifying the intertwined character of civil and ecclesiastical power that had been promoted by Zwingli. In the years to come he strengthened the foundation of that model through his careful development of a covenant theology that stressed the unity and continuity of the Old and New Testaments, of Israel and the church.²⁴¹

One of the figures who was generally associated with the Anabaptists in the

²⁴⁰Andreas Mühlhling, “Heinrich Bullinger as Church Politician,” in *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575* (ed. Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 243-253 [249].

²⁴¹See Mühlhling, “Heinrich Bullinger as Church Politician,” 243-253; Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 251-257; Baker, “Church Discipline or Civil Punishment,” 13-17; J. Wayne Baker, “Church, State, and Dissent: The Crisis of the Swiss Reformation, 1531-1536,” *Church History* 57.2 (June, 1988): 135-152; J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), 107-163; W. J. Torrance Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 25-41.

minds of the magisterial reformers, although he was never an Anabaptist, was the spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld.²⁴² In his *Difference between the Old and New Testaments* (1531), Schwenckfeld argued that while the Old Testament was concerned with temporal promises contingent on Israel's obedience to the Mosaic Law, the New Testament is concerned with spiritual promises attained by faith. He maintained that Old Testament teachings concerning war and the coercion of the heathen do not pertain to New Testament believers obligated to live in love and forgiveness according to the kingdom of Christ. Schwenckfeld agreed that the Old Testament prefigures Christ, but he insisted that it was no longer the definitive statement of God's moral and political will for the Christian community. As he wrote to the reformer Leo Jud in early 1533, "one must correctly distinguish between ... the spiritual and the temporal, so that one does not mix together the two different kingdoms or regiments—the world and the kingdom of Christ."²⁴³ The task of magistrates pertains to purely temporal matters, not to religion. Schwenckfeld made his argument about the discontinuity between the testaments the foundation for his case for religious toleration. Israel was not the model for civil government, nor was the Mosaic Law binding on Christians, for in the New Testament era true Christianity is a matter of inward faith and righteousness. The magistrate has no right to infringe upon freedom of conscience because it has no power to advance the

242Schwenckfeld rejected both infant baptism and the right of civil magistrates to regulate matters of religion, and he called for the establishment of excommunication to protect the Lord's Supper. On the other hand, he argued that believers should not separate themselves from the official churches into their own communities, he rejected apocalypticism, and he affirmed the government use of the sword. Through letters and personal conversations as well as published writings, the nobleman Schwenckfeld persuaded many leading elites, both lay and clerical, to his views, including for a brief period even such leading Reformed figures as Leo Jud of Zurich, and Wolfgang Capito (in whose house he lived for several years) and Matthias Zell of Strasbourg. Schwenckfeld's biographer R. Emmet McLaughlin goes so far as to claim, "Schwenckfeld's teachings constituted the most thoroughgoing specifically Christian ideal of religious toleration produced by the Reformation." R. Emmet McLaughlin, *Caspar Schwenckfeld, Reluctant Radical: His Life to 1540* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 140. For the general information on Schwenckfeld in the following paragraphs see also Klaus Deppermann, "Schwenckfeld and Leo Jud on the Advantages and Disadvantages of the State Church," in *Schwenckfeld and Early Schwenckfeldianism: Papers Presented at the Colloquium on Schwenckfeld and the Schwenckfelders September 17-22, 1984* (ed. Peter C. Erb; Pennsburg, PA: Schwenckfelder Library, 1986): 211-236; Baker, "Church, State, and Dissent," 143-147.

243Cited in Baker, "Church, State, and Dissent," 144.

gospel.²⁴⁴

Schwenckfeld's arguments came to the attention of the leading magisterial reformers after he almost won Jud, Zwingli's right-hand man in Zurich, over to his position.²⁴⁵ Bucer, who had unsuccessfully sought to persuade the Strasbourg city council to condemn Schwenckfeld's teachings, wrote to Jud associating Schwenckfeld's ideas with the disaster then unfolding at Munster and accusing him of having cooperated with Hoffman in sending Rothmann to Munster in the first place.²⁴⁶

Bullinger was likewise concerned, and he was convinced that the decisive Reformed response had to be to emphasize the unity and continuity of the covenant. When asked by Berchthold Haller about how to deal with the Anabaptists at the upcoming Disputation of Zofingen in 1532, he stressed that from the very beginning of the debate the Old Testament as well as the New Testament had to be established as the basic authority for all questions of disagreements. When Hebrews 8:13 spoke of the law as having been done away with, Bullinger insisted, it meant the ceremonial law, not the law as an expression of the "eternal will of God."²⁴⁷ The next year Bullinger wrote his classic *Treatise on the Unity of the Old and New Testaments* (1533), arguing that the Old and New Testaments contain one continuous covenant of grace covering the period from Adam all the way to Christ and the church. The following year he published *The One and*

244Schwenckfeld's argument clearly persuaded Jud initially, but by July, 1533 he had rejected it, largely due to the intervention of Bucer and Capito (himself once a friend of Schwenckfeld's). He now spurned Schwenckfeld's pleas to be "a servant of the Spirit and of the New Testament, not a servant of Moses and of the letter." Cited in Baker, "Church, State, and Dissent," 144.

245In March 1532 Jud wrote a letter to Zwingli's successor Bullinger, criticizing the lack of ecclesiastical discipline at Zurich and proposing the establishment of an ecclesiastical court with the power of excommunication. Arguing that the church and commonwealth are not coterminous, he urged, "there remains to each kingdom its own sound, intact, and uninjured jurisdiction. The magistrate has his own laws, his own courts for the state, over which he presides; and the church has its own laws, the word of God, the sacraments, exhortation, discipline, excommunication." Baker, "Church, State, and Dissent," 142.

246Deppermann, "Schwenckfeld and Leo Jud on the Advantages and Disadvantages of the State Church," 227; McLaughlin, *Caspar Schwenckfeld, Reluctant Radical*, 146-159. Schwenckfeld left Strasbourg that year, but the magisterial reformers would continue to find themselves responding to the legacy of the Anabaptists and Schwenckfeld throughout the 1530s.

247Fast and Yoder, "How to Deal with Anabaptists," 86.

Eternal Testament (1534), arguing that although the promise of the land of Canaan was intended to foreshadow spiritual promises for the people of God, similar promises of earthly blessing remain for the church. For this reason, even the civil laws of the Old Testament are binding on all ages, including the laws specifying capital punishment for dozens of crimes. As he put it, “in respect to the Decalogue and civil laws, no difference at all has arisen regarding the covenant and the people of God.”²⁴⁸

Bullinger accordingly argued that just as in Old Testament Israel, both the prophetic office (the pastor) and the kingly office (the magistrate) are necessary within the church, which he identified as the covenantal community that constitutes the commonwealth. Indeed, he argued, the very character of the prophetic office is wrapped up with the covenant community as governed by the magistrate.²⁴⁹ God had given the magistracy as spiritual gift for the government of the church, Bullinger argued from 1 Corinthians 12:28.²⁵⁰ Following Erasmus, Zwingli, and Melancthon, he emphasized that that magistrate is the one responsible for religion within his covenanted community. On their own, in fact, bishops ordinarily have no right to reform the church, for as he wrote to Henry VIII of England in 1538, “first and above all it belongs to the ruler to look after

248See a translation with commentary in Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 99-138 [122, 128].

249In fact, Bullinger believed that the way in which God brings most people into his kingdom is through the conversion of magistrates, who then lead their people into the faith. See Pamela Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness: Heinrich Bullinger and the Zurich Clergy 1535-1575* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991), 33. In his *Decades* Bullinger later wrote, “Our disputation tendeth not to the confounding of the offices and duties of the magistrate and ministers of the church ... The church of Christ hath, and retaineth, several and distinguished offices (*officia distincta*).” Cited in Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology*, 33, from *Decades* 1:329.

250“So we may understand those who have been established in command, and therefore the magistracy itself, which is in the church and which ... indeed is necessary for the church.” Cited in Elsie Anne McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin's Theology* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988), 199. Elsie Anne McKee writes with respect to the exegesis of this text, “Among the Zurich theologians, however, there seems to be no clear sense of the *gubernationes* or *opitulationes* functions being distinctly ecclesiastical offices, as opposed to offices of the Christian community. This is in accord with the Zwinglian understanding of ecclesiastical-civil relationships, and it becomes plain in later 'Zwinglian' exegetes.” McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 74.

religion and faith.”²⁵¹ He put the point succinctly in his *Decades* years later, “For I know that many are of the opinion that the things of religion and their ordering belong to the bishops alone and not to the kings, princes, and other magistrates. But the catholic truth teaches that the things of religion especially belong to the magistracy and that the same not only may but also should and ought to order and promote religion.”²⁵² The prince is to his realm, in both its civil and ecclesiastical elements, as the soul to the body.²⁵³

Given such a view it makes sense that Bullinger adamantly rejected excommunication, arguing that both baptism and the Lord's Supper are to remain open to all members of the covenantal society. Of course, this did not mean pagans, heretics, or the immoral would participate, because in a Christian commonwealth such persons would be coerced into right profession and practice. The civil government could not coerce human beings inwardly, but it could require at least outward obedience to the covenant, using capital punishment to free the commonwealth of false teachers, blasphemers, adulterers, or other offenders. Bullinger also placed care for the poor under the oversight of the magistrates, who were responsible to ensure that ecclesiastical property was used properly to that end.²⁵⁴

All of these responsibilities of civil magistrates, Bullinger believed were to be fulfilled in obedience to the word as proclaimed by faithful pastors who exercise the prophetic office. For while ministers should not interfere with the affairs of civil government, they must preach the whole counsel of God even when that requires rebuking civil government on matters like morality, ecclesiastical property, marriage, or

251Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness*, 34.

252Cited in Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness*, 20.

253Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology*, 27.

254In fact, this was a point of some conflict in Zurich over the years, as Bullinger complained that the council was using ecclesiastical funds for its own secular purposes and pointed to the proper use of ecclesiastical property as an important issue to be addressed through the prophetic office. Nevertheless, the resulting system as he supported it in Zurich fused together the tasks of magistrate and pastor. As Biel puts it, “When the clergy ministered to the sick, adjudicated marital problems, or aided in the distribution of poor relief, they distinguished themselves both as pastors and as functionaries of an increasingly centralized government.” Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness*, 137. Cf. pp. 137-165; Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant*, 107-120.

usury. Thus the magistrate was not free to rule arbitrarily or unjustly. Rather, just as pastors had to submit to the magistrates in their direction of temporal and ecclesiastical affairs, so magistrates were obligated to submit to the teaching of pastors in their prophetic ministry. When they submitted to the word in this way, the magistrates fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about kings entering the kingdom of Christ.²⁵⁵

While Bullinger distinguished between two kinds of power, therefore, he rejected any distinction between two kingdoms in the context of a Christian commonwealth.

As long as the rulers of the temporal kingdom remain under the prince of the world and of darkness, not believing in Christ, ... then certainly the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of Christ should not at all be drawn together. But if the rulers of the temporal kingdom abandon the prince of darkness and cling to the Prince of light, Christ Jesus, in whom they have faith, whom they worship and honor, and also if they further and protect the Christian faith, then they are no longer in the kingdom of this world but in the kingdom of Christ and therefore no longer temporal but Christian principles.²⁵⁶

Torrance Kirby argues that Bullinger's covenantal commonwealth, the “Zurich model,” was the great alternative to the “Geneva model” established by Calvin, and developed by his successor Theodore Beza and others, in repeated ecclesiastical and political controversies during the second half of the 16th Century. Although he supported Calvin's determined efforts to establish ecclesiastical discipline in Geneva, he did so only to preserve the broader unity of Reformed cities with different models of government. When debates over Geneva-style ecclesiastical discipline arose during the 1560s at Heidelberg between Thomas Erastus, who opposed it, and Caspar Olevianus, who favored it, Bullinger advocated for Erastus. Bullinger likewise vigorously defended the royal supremacy in England from the time of Henry VIII through the Elizabethan settlement.²⁵⁷ While the Calvinist disciplinarians claimed that the royal supremacy

²⁵⁵Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology*, 25-41; Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant*, 149-151.

²⁵⁶Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant*, 150.

²⁵⁷Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology*, 25-41. For an outline of the development of two kingdoms political theology in England before the establishment of the “Zurich connection” see Oakley, “Christian Obedience and Authority, 1520-1555,” 175-182. Oakley argues that while early English articulations of the doctrine followed Luther in sharply separating spiritual and temporal power, they followed the same trajectory as did Lutheranism in shifting toward a strong emphasis of

challenged Christ's sole headship over the church, Bullinger and the other defenders of the magisterial '*cura religionis*' insisted that the disciplinarian model amounted to a Protestant version of the old papal two swords theory.²⁵⁸ Bullinger came to conceive of the Royal Supremacy according to the Christological analogy of the two natures of Christ, a position that was systematically developed by the Italian reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli, and later by the English Archbishop John Whitgift and the great theologian of the Elizabethan settlement Richard Hooker, in their disputes with Calvinist disciplinarians during the 1570s and beyond. “[T]he institution of the Royal Supremacy with its *hypostatic* conjunction of supreme civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Prince, constitutes for Bullinger a vivid exemplar of the unitary character of Christian polity, and also of the distinction and cooperation of magisterial and ministerial power.”²⁵⁹

Yet at the foundation of Bullinger's political theology was his conviction about the eternal covenant and the model of Israel.

magisterial control over ecclesiastical affairs. Thus Stephen Gardiner argued already in 1533 that the crown possessed “the entire fullness of jurisdictional power *in foro exteriori*,” while redefining the spiritual authority of the clergy” in such a way as to limit it to the *potestas ordinis* and the *potestas jurisdictionis in foro interiori*” (180). Bullinger's political theology was in strong continuity with such arguments, which were brought to a head when Henry VIII assumed the title of head of the church of England in the Act of Supremacy (1534). Cf. J. Wayne Baker, “Erastianism in England: The Zurich Connection,” *Die Zürcher Reformation: Ausstrahlungen und Rückwirkungen* (ed. Alfred Schindler and Hans Stickleberger; Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 327-349. Baker writes, “By the 1550s, there were two approaches: the doctrine of the single sphere in Zürich and the two kingdoms theory in Geneva. Soon the disagreement spread from the Swiss cities into the Palatinate, France, the Netherlands, Scotland, and England. By the late sixteenth century, the two kingdoms theory of Calvinism had won victories in most of the Reformed churches – in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Scotland – but not in England” (328).

258 Bullinger summarized the Geneva model as claiming that “the Civil Magistrate can have no authority in ecclesiastical matters and, moreover, that the Church will admit no other government than that of presbyters and presbyteries.” Such views, he argued, were “held in common with the papists, who also displace the magistrate from the government of the Church, and who substitute themselves [i.e., the papacy and the church hierarchy] in his place.” Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology*, 37. The context here was the attacks on the royal supremacy by proto-puritans and presbyterians (including eventually Thomas Cartwright) that came to be known as the Admonition Controversy. For an account see Kirby, *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy*, Chapter 4.

259 Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology*, 40-41. In his *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* Kirby goes so far as to describe this view as representing the version of the two realms doctrine that was regarded as the “touchstone” of Reformed orthodoxy. Needless to say, Bullinger's and Hooker's critics in the Calvinist tradition would have disagreed. For Peter Martyr Vermigli's fuller development of Bullinger's model see pp. 59-1119.

From the standpoint of Bullinger's unique covenantal interpretation of history, it is certainly arguable that the Old Testament exemplar is more completely realised under England's monarchical constitution than under the republican conditions of Bullinger's own city and canton of Zurich. In this sense the institution of the Royal Supremacy in the reformed Church of England provided Bullinger throughout his career with an invaluable testing ground for the principles of his distinctive hermeneutic of salvation history.²⁶⁰

The Zurich model of a covenantal commonwealth thus represented much of mainstream Reformed practice in the early 16th Century. It was the great alternative to the model that was beginning to be worked out already during the 1530s by Martin Bucer in Strasbourg and John Calvin in Geneva.²⁶¹

Bucer and Church Discipline

It is ironic that although Bucer helped to persuade Zwingli and Jud to maintain the Zurich model of the magisterial reformation, Bucer himself was gradually persuaded, in part because of his debates with the many Anabaptist leaders passing through Strasbourg during the 1520s and 1530s, of the necessity of a system of ecclesiastical discipline and excommunication distinct from the magistrate's enforcement of the civil law.²⁶² At the same time, Bucer continued to maintain Zwingli's ideal of a unified Christian society under the authority of the magistrate, although even that commitment wavered in the face of consistent opposition from the Strasbourg city council. Bucer's attempt to maintain the ideal of the Christian society while establishing church discipline administered by the clergy increasingly led him to use language reminiscent of Luther's two kingdoms theology.²⁶³ His development is crucial for an understanding of Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine because it was within the context of Bucer's thinking and effort in

²⁶⁰Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology*, 41.

²⁶¹See J. Wayne Baker, "Christian Discipline and the Early Reformed Tradition: Bullinger and Calvin," *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin* (ed. Robert V. Schnucker; Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1988), 107-119; Baker, "Erastianism in England," 327-349.

²⁶²Davis, "No Discipline, No Church," 43-58.

²⁶³Van't Spijker, "The Kingdom of Christ According to Bucer and Calvin," 109-115. Van't Spijker writes, "What could quite easily with Luther become two kingdoms or a two kingdom teaching, is held together by Bucer in *Regnum Christi*. Because *Regnum Christi* is concerned with the kingship of Christ over all kingdoms" (115).

this direction that Calvin worked out his own views. Together, Bucer and Calvin are rightly viewed as constructing the foundation of a new Reformed model of the church in its relationship to civil government.²⁶⁴

Although as early as 1527 Bucer proposed the idea of a voluntary and private practice of church discipline among groups of Christians, as late as 1531 he continued to support Zwingli's position that church discipline was unnecessary where there was a Christian magistracy. Around this time, however, Bucer's views began to change.²⁶⁵ In Strasbourg Bucer's efforts to establish a system of discipline were caught up with his equally strident attempts to get the city council to take a more proactive role in advancing and enforcing the true religion, particularly in the wake of the steady stream of Anabaptists who found refuge in the relatively tolerant city after 1526. His constant encounters and debates with various Anabaptists – including Sattler, Hoffmann, Denck, Marpeck – and the spiritualist Schwenckfeld convinced him both of the need for the city council to suppress dissent (though not by capital punishment) and of the need for the church to have its own discipline as a response to the dissenters' criticism. The city magistrates were reluctant in both cases.²⁶⁶

264The general content of the following paragraphs on Bucer and his attempted disciplinary reforms in Strasbourg are drawn from Amy Nelson Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline* (Kirksville, Mo: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1994); Willem Van't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer* (trans. John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Lorna J. Abray, *The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500-1598* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

265He supported the measures passed in the city of Basel which adopted a system of discipline under careful magisterial control. But he worked with Oecolampadius and Blarer to draft a proposal for church discipline for the city of Ulm, a proposal that the city council found went too far in removing such discipline from its own oversight. The proposal of eighteen articles affirmed that the civil government had a right to replace episcopal marriage courts with its own secular marriage courts, but called for a separate committee of eight “ministers of discipline” (*Zuchtherren*) (two pastors, three members of the congregation, and three members of the city council) to exercise church discipline, in part by means of the “Christian ban” (*christlicher Bann*). The city amended the proposal such that it required four of the eight members of the committee to be members of the council, while permitting admonition but not excommunication. See Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer: A Reformer and His Times* (trans. Stephen E. Buckwalter; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 2004 [1990]), 107-109.

266In addition to Anabaptists and spiritualists, a number of pastors and other prominent persons opposed Bucer's efforts. In 1531 an attack on the use of secular authority in spiritual matters by Sebastian Franck was even published in the city. See Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 111; Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 116-121.

Finally in April 1533 the city council agreed to hold a synod for the purpose of establishing a church order and confession. The basis for the meetings was to be Bucer's summary of doctrine in Sixteen Articles, which called for a mild form of church discipline that fell short of the full separation and ostracism practiced by the Anabaptists, that called for excommunication only in the case of refusal to repent after grave sin, and that affirmed the use of the sword for the advancement of Christ's kingdom and the suppression of false teaching and worship.²⁶⁷ The articles were vigorously opposed by a group of individuals led by the pastor Antonius Engelbrecht. Engelbrecht advanced objections quite similar to those offered by Frolich in Nurnberg a few years earlier. He admitted that Christian magistrates should promote true preaching and piety, and even that they should punish extreme blasphemy, but he argued that while the sword was legitimately used to protect true worship in the Old Testament, in the New Testament Christ had established a spiritual kingdom governed by the word alone. Thus civil magistrates should never use the sword either to defend the gospel or to impose church discipline. Appealing to Luther's *On Secular Authority*, Engelbrecht insisted that the two kingdoms must be kept separate. Secular authority extends only to external matters and not to the soul or to spiritual offenses.²⁶⁸

Bucer's response to Engelbrecht is noteworthy because it echoed the arguments of Melancthon, Brenz, and other Lutheran leaders at virtually every point, except that Bucer refused either to affirm or reject the two kingdoms doctrine. When Engelbrecht challenged him to reexamine Luther's *On Secular Authority*, Bucer responded with a distinction between inward faith and external religious worship and teaching. Appealing to Romans 13:4 and 1 Timothy 2:2, he argued that the magistrate is to preserve public

267Specifically, it declared that government was appointed as God's servant "so that among his subordinates God's name may be sanctified, his Kingdom expanded." It then declared, "Those who desire that the magistrate should not punish the avowed perversion of Christian teaching, separation from the community, and wicked and ungodly service of worship only look for the room for disturbance and corruption." Quoted in Demura, *Church Discipline According to Johannes Oecolampadius*, 153.

268Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 112-114.

order by promoting the good and punishing the bad, so establishing peace and godliness. He argued that the Old Testament law, which faithfully teaches God's will relative to magistrates, clearly teaches that false teaching should be punished with the sword. He then appealed to Luther's later arguments articulated in 1528 in defense of the Elector of Saxony's right to enforce the results of the Saxon Visitation.

The city council was reluctant to tighten its control over religious dissenters, but when news arrived of the Anabaptist takeover of Munster in March 1534, the council adopted Bucer's Sixteen Articles and banished all who would not affirm them. Around this time Melanchthon wrote to Bucer articulating his mature view of the responsibilities of secular authorities, soon to appear in his 1535 *Loci Communes*. Arguing that magistrates are to enforce both tables of the Ten Commandments, Melanchthon assured Bucer that he was entirely in agreement with his views, as were the theologians at Wittenburg, including Luther.²⁶⁹

Despite the ambiguity of his attitude toward Luther's two kingdoms doctrine, or perhaps because Melanchthon confirmed his sense that the doctrine was compatible with magisterial control over the externals of religion, soon after the synod Bucer and his fellow pastors proposed a city ordinance that carefully distinguished between the the work of civil government and spiritual government in the process of church discipline, while outlining a means of cooperation between the two. However, the Ordinance of 1534 – like those proposed in Basel and Ulm – was significantly revised by the Strasbourg city council so as to shift the balance of power and control to the magistrates. Indeed, all mention of a ban or excommunication was excised. Burnett notes, “As in Ulm, the Strasbourg city council had little understanding of or appreciation for Bucer's distinction between the responsibilities of the church and those of the magistrate, and consequently it regarded the *Kirchenpfleger* [wardens overseeing church discipline] as

²⁶⁹Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, 114-119; Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 121-127.

its own representatives in regulating church affairs.”²⁷⁰

Over the next few years, however, Bucer continued to develop his ecclesiology in conversation and debate with Catholics, Anabaptists, Lutherans, and Reformed alike. In his 1536 commentary on Romans he interpreted Romans 12:8 as the basis for a theory of ecclesiastical offices, describing the administration and ministry of the church in terms of “doctrine, exhortation, administration of poor care, government, and finally, personal charity.”²⁷¹ Bucer identified the office of deacon as one such office, stressing that while many interpret these gifts in terms of individual charity “the apostle is speaking here about public offices and gifts of the Church.”²⁷² In the same commentary Bucer interpreted Paul's reference to the one who rules with “the office of pastoring and ruling the church with diligence,” identifying it with Paul's reference to governors in 1 Corinthians 12:28.²⁷³ Already at this time Bucer was distinguishing between the offices of apostle, teacher, helper, and ruler, though not as clearly and definitively as Calvin later would.²⁷⁴

In his classic *On the True Care of Souls*, published in 1538, Bucer explicitly rejected the argument of Zwingli and Bullinger that the New Testament office of elder was abolished when civil authority became Christian. “Even when the civil authority fulfills its office of warning against and punishing wrong with the greatest diligence, it is still necessary for the church to have its own discipline and correction, which are practiced in the name of Christ and by his Holy Spirit in accordance with his command

270Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ*, 71; Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 126-127.

271Cited in McKee, *On the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 193.

272He described the deacon as “the minister of the Church who distributes its resources and the collections of the saints, for the use of the poor,” implicitly distinguishing that office from the one “who has the duty of consoling the afflicted and unhappy.” Cited in McKee, *On the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 193-194. McKee notes, though, that Bucer never seems to have cited this passage with reference to the diaconate in later years.

273McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 51.

274McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 75-76. Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 149, writes, “Bucer thus did not formulate a sophisticated doctrine of ecclesiastical offices as Calvin did later. He did not define the specific tasks of the different offices and meticulously differentiate between them.”

about the keys.”²⁷⁵ To be sure, he continued to affirm that both magistrates and pastors had a responsibility to care for souls, and he unsuccessfully sought to persuade the magistrates to require Strasbourgers to attend church and have their children attend instruction at appointed times. He also continued to affirm the need for the magistrates to ensure that the pastors preached right doctrine and that church discipline was properly carried out. Nevertheless, he charged that those who suggest that it is enough for the magistrates to administer discipline “do not sufficiently know or consider how great a difference there is between the government of rulers and the care of souls by the elders in the Christian congregation.”²⁷⁶

Throughout this time Bucer wrote letters and dedicated books to the Munster Anabaptists seeking to demonstrate that an ecclesiastical system that included instruction, profession of faith, and church discipline would ensure that the baptism of infants would not produce a church of mere hypocrites. He began to describe church discipline as one of the keys of the kingdom that was exercised by the ministers of the church, not under the authority of the magistrates, but as commanded by Christ, a development crucial for his later claim that church discipline is the third mark of the true church. He increasingly described the keys of the kingdom in jurisdictional terms, comparing the church to a republic or city and calling for it to establish its own offices of elder and deacon.²⁷⁷ While Bucer's doctrine of church discipline contained serious differences from that of the Anabaptists, the continuing influence of the movement on his own thinking and motivation during this time was quite clear. In 1538 Bucer went to Hesse both in order to win over a number of Anabaptist followers of Melchior Hoffman in a debate at Marburg and to advise the authorities in Hesse on the establishment of

275Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls* (trans. Martin Beale; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 143.

276Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, 140.

277Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ*, 91-92. See Note 104.

church discipline.²⁷⁸ The effort was an impressive success. Not only did he succeed for the first time in writing an ordinance of church discipline that was actually enacted, he also succeeded in winning approximately two hundred Anabaptists back to the church.²⁷⁹ In the church ordinance he wrote that the ministers of the word are to be provided with a number of presbyters or elders elected by the church from among the magistrates and the broader congregation. The office of elder was to be an office honored by the magistrate as “the most necessary and salutary office in the church next to the office of teaching.”²⁸⁰

That same year John Calvin, having already failed in an attempt to establish church discipline in Geneva, arrived in Strasbourg. He became the pastor of the French refugee church in the city and was able to establish church discipline overseen by elders. For the next three years Calvin and Bucer would establish a close working relationship

278Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 153-156. The Anabaptist movement, which rejected the state-church apparatus, was growing rapidly in Hesse at this time and was seen as a significant challenge to the civil authorities. As Greschat puts it, “If Anabaptism was a marginal problem elsewhere, here it challenged the very foundations of the state.” That was the reason for the summons of Bucer, whose strengths were considered to be just the sort that could address the Anabaptists' concerns (154). As he wrote to Philip Landgrave of Hesse, “the most obvious objection of these people, unfortunately, is that we administer [the church] so badly, and with this argument they lead many people astray. May the Lord help us to eliminate this argument of the Anabaptists and the papists, and even of our own consciences and of the Lord.” He made it clear in the same letter that he hoped “to achieve reformation of the church, for the sake of the Anabaptists and others.” Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ*, 114.

279Franklin Littell, “What Butzer Debated with the Anabaptists at Marburg: A Document of 1538,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (1962): 256-276. On the other hand, as Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 155-156 notes, the Ziegenhain disciplinary ordinance was not enforced successfully. Philip gave orders but top-down decrees could do little where there were not devoted congregations and energetic pastors, a point Bucer seems to have acknowledged in a letter to Philip in 1540.

280Cited in McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 98. Van't Spijker argues that later Bucer's views were also influenced by his correspondence with leaders of the Bohemian Brethren. One of the distinctives stressed by the Bohemians in letters to Bucer was the fundamental difference between the spiritual power of the church and the worldly power of the civil government. And while Bucer continued to believe that civil government could be used by God for the advancement of his spiritual kingdom, Van't Spijker argues that after this point “Bucer now keeps these two apart more strictly than in the preceding decade.” Delegates from the Hussite group came to Strasbourg in 1540, and according to one report, when they described their practice of church discipline, Bucer could not withhold tears. Van't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, 339. Greschat notes that the Bohemians pointedly challenged Bucer's assumption that the civil magistrate should reform the church or play a role in church discipline. Bucer responded by insisting on the obligation of magistrates to enforce the whole Ten Commandments. It is fascinating to note that Bucer explicitly permitted the Bohemians to publish a Czech translation of *Von der wahren Seelsorge* that omitted the references to the obligation of the civil magistrates. Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 204-205. Calvin would also write admiringly to the Bohemian Brethren. Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 101.

that would endure even after Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541. The two theologians would continue to shape one another's work.²⁸¹ But if in the 1530s Bucer was optimistic that he could persuade the magistrates and lay population of Strasbourg to enact church discipline, by the 1540s he was losing that optimism. The system of discipline established in 1535 was floundering due to lack of cooperation from the officials appointed to cooperate with the pastors.²⁸² Bucer complained that while people used the fear of papal tyranny and the doctrine of Christian freedom to justify their lack of discipline, the real cause was their hypocrisy and their refusal to see the kingdom of Christ established in its fullness. As he wrote in *On the True Care of Souls*, “We need to decide once and for all whether we really want to be Christians.”²⁸³

As a result of his deepening sense of the difference between the church and the civil realm, in the early 1540s Bucer changed tactics, calling for voluntary “Christian fellowships” (*christliche Gemeinschaft*)” in which devout Christians could submit themselves to discipline administered by the pastors with the assistance of elected

281It is important to note that the influence was not simply from Bucer to Calvin, as is often assumed. Calvin's establishment of the office of elder and of church discipline in the French congregation in Strasbourg and in Geneva preceded any similar concrete template proposed by Bucer. See Van't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, 339-343; Willem Van't Spijker, “Calvin's Friendship with Martin Bucer: Did It Make Calvin a Calvinist?,” *Calvin Studies Society Papers*, 1995, 1997: *Calvin and Spirituality*, *Calvin and His Contemporaries* (ed. David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 1998), 169-186; Willem Van't Spijker, “Bucer's Influence on Calvin: Church and Community,” *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community* (ed. D. F. Wright; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 32-44. Throughout this time Bucer's colleague Wolfgang Capito was moving in step with Bucer. In 1532 Capito helped compose a document for the church in Bern intended to clarify the relationship of the church and the civil magistrate in the wake of the disaster of the Second Kappel War. In that document he had written, in quite Lutheran language, “The order of God demands two regiments among men. The higher and greater regiment is spiritual and celestial, which is promoted through the Church; the lesser and smaller regiment is temporal, for which our benevolent gentlemen and other magistrates are set up everywhere by God.” Demura, *Church Discipline According to Johannes Oecolampadius*, 157. Capito, who like Bucer had had significant interaction with Anabaptists over the years, supported Bucer's attempts to establish church discipline in Strasbourg, and by 1539. With reference to church discipline he wrote, “The civil magistrate and the pastor of the Church are different ... The pastors use the spiritual jurisdiction which ignores the power of iron, neither do they use any other power than the Word of the Lord... The ecclesiastics imbue the soul and mind with the celestial gifts, the civil magistrate adorns the people with virtues” (159).

282Indeed, the *Kirchenpfleger*, who never regarded themselves as ministers of the church, did virtually nothing that Bucer had called for. Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 143.

283Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, 145-146.

elders.²⁸⁴ Van't Spijker argues that during these later years Bucer shifted from his early overriding commitment to the ideal of the *Corpus Christianum* to a growing emphasis on the difference between the kingdom of Christ and civil power. Already in *On the True Care of Souls* Bucer had argued that “in the church nothing other than the only power and the pure regime of Christ is allowed to be or remain and that all those who have been elected to pastoral care and the pastoral office faithfully serve that regime.”²⁸⁵ Yet in these later years “his entire line of thought is controlled by the fundamental dissimilarity between ecclesiastical and secular power. Everything depends on 'learning to rightly distinguish the two governments.’”²⁸⁶ In his *On the Church's Defects and Failings* (*Von der kirchen mengel und fahl*) Bucer distinguished spiritual and temporal rule, ecclesiastical and civil power, demanding “that temporal authority limits itself to its sphere and does not arrogate to itself more power than God granted and entrusted to it, in other words, that it does not seek to interfere with the matters of the church.”²⁸⁷ The city council rejected Bucer's arguments and outlawed the fellowships just prior to Bucer's exile as a result of the Augsburg Interim in 1549.²⁸⁸

Despite these efforts, Bucer's legacy remains somewhat mixed. After his exile and arrival in England Bucer sought to synthesize a two kingdoms approach with the ideal of

284Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 149-150. Burnett notes, comparing the fellowships to earlier church discipline proposals, “the pastors played a much more prominent role, and they made clear to those summoned that their disciplinary authority rested not on the city council's mandates but upon the word of God.” Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ*, 108.

285Quoted in Van't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, 172. Cf. pp. 160-161.

286While civil government has basic concern for the external context of the kingdom, it has nothing to do with the keys of the kingdom, over which there can be no coercion. “The civil government has nothing to say over these things ('since they are determined by the Word of God'), just as, for that matter, the preachers may not in any way damage the secular government with their churchly regimen.” Van't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, 318. Bucer's thinking increasingly implied, Van't Spijker argues, that “The church community is severed from the structure of the civil community. The government exercised in the Body of Christ is purely spiritual.” Van't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, 330.

287Quoted in Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 217.

288Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 144, 211-217. Bucer viewed the disaster of the Schmalkaldic War as the result of God's judgment on the German cities for their failure to bring about a full reformation of faith, love, and discipline, and his energetic attempts to bring the city to repentance and full reformation in these last years should be viewed in part in this light (211-212).

a Christian society. In his classic *On the Kingdom of Christ*, written in 1551 and dedicated to the reforming King Edward VI (though not published until 1557 in Germany), he clearly and repeatedly distinguished between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of this world, using the distinction to structure and outline the book, and he repeatedly and explicitly identified the kingdom of Christ with the church.²⁸⁹ On the other hand, he explained in extensive and practical detail what it means for the king to establish the kingdom of Christ in his land and to allow its influence to permeate society, its institutions, and its laws. Acknowledging that most citizens of a Christian commonwealth may not be genuine believers, he followed Bullinger in maintaining that magistrates are responsible to lead their people in a covenant relationship with God along the lines of the Israelite covenant in scripture. The laws of scripture, he argued, are timeless, and even the judicial laws of the Old Testament remain normative for Christians.²⁹⁰

289See Martin Bucer, *De Regno Christi* (trans. Wilhelm Pauck) in *Melanchthon and Bucer* (ed. Wilhelm Pauck; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1969). In the first part of the book, on the kingdom of Christ proper, Bucer focuses on the three marks of the church, including church discipline. He admits that while church discipline a mark of the kingdom of Christ, virtually nowhere had it been established on the continent. Everywhere magistrates feared that church courts possessing the power of excommunication threatened their own authority, associating such courts with the abuses of the papacy, or even with the excesses of the Anabaptists, and Bucer seeks to alleviate such fears. As Van't Spijker writes, "That kingdom of Christ is the church. Church and kingdom, entities which in later theology were sometimes too much disjoined, are identical in the thought of Bucer." Van't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, 61.

290Calvin, of course, also believed that government and its laws are under the lordship of Christ, but Calvin never emphasized social and political reform in the sustained, detailed, and even utopian way that Bucer did in *On the Kingdom of Christ*. Van't Spijker suggests that Calvin distinguished more sharply between the spiritual and political jurisdictions than did Bucer. Van't Spijker, "The Kingdom of Christ According to Bucer and Calvin," 117; Van't Spijker, "Bucer's Influence on Calvin," 42-44. T.F. Torrance writes that in contrast to Luther's two kingdoms doctrine, and somewhat different from that of Calvin, for Bucer "The Word of God is communicated to the State through the Church, and in obedience to that Word the State creates within the world a sphere of liberty, setting bounds to the kingdom of Satan, so that the life of the Church protected by the State may freely grow in obedience to God's Word and in the exercise of love, and so assume the character of a *Respublica* or *Societas Christiana*.... Thus the *Regnum Christi* reaches out primarily through the Church, but also through the Commonwealth that is obedient to the Will of God, to the final advent of Christ and the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in glory and power." Thomas F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956), 87. For Bucer's impact on English "imperial political theology" see Thomas Dandeleit, "Creating a Protestant Constantine: Martin Bucer's *De Regno Christi* and the Foundations of English Imperial Political Theology," *Politics and Reformations: Communities, Polities, Nations, and Empires: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady, Jr.* (ed. Christopher Ocker, et. al.; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 539-550. Cf. Basil Hall, "Martin Bucer in England," *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community*

For all of Bucer's efforts in Germany, Strasbourg, and later England, therefore, it was Calvin who would win a lasting legacy for the two kingdoms doctrine and the autonomy of the church through his work in Geneva, with its legacy in France and beyond. Oakley writes, "Among the theological initiators of Reformed Protestantism, indeed, it was left to Calvin to sound a clear note of reserve about the role of the temporal authority in matters religious, to emphasize in such matters the independence and superiority of the clerical authority, and to do so in so forceful a manner as to make that emphasis henceforth a distinguishing feature of the Reformed tradition."²⁹¹ Ultimately it was Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine that would endure in the coming centuries.

(ed. D. F. Wright; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 144-160. Greschat argues that Bucer believed church and state should act "in unison" to bring about the godly society, but that he nevertheless distinguished the kingdom of Christ and secular authority: "Bucer described the relationship between temporal rule and the rule of Christ as one of mutual submission: just as the person who is subject to Christ's rule – the Christian, in other words – obeys government and therefore finds a place for himself within the existing political and social orders, in the same way do those who govern, wherever their place in government may be, submit themselves and their political power to the rule of Christ. Thus, as the kingdom of Christ subjects itself to the kingdoms and powers of the world, so in turn every true kingdom of the world (I say kingdom, not tyranny) subjects itself to the kingdom of Christ, and the kings themselves are among the first to do this, for they are eager to develop piety not for themselves alone, but they also seek to lead their subjects to it." Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 240-241. Greschat goes on, "As much as Bucer allowed temporal authority to intervene in church matters, he made it clear beyond all doubt that the state was not free to do as it pleased but rather bore the responsibility of helping the church become once again an independent institution. Bucer therefore vigorously upheld the autonomy of the church in *De Regno Christi*" (243). Cf. Martin Greschat, "Church and Civil Community," *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community* (ed. D. F. Wright; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17-31.

291 Oakley, "Christian Obedience and Authority, 1520-1550," 185-186

CHAPTER 2

CALVIN, GENEVA, AND THE FRENCH REFORMED CHURCHES

Calvin articulated the two kingdoms doctrine before he ever arrived in Geneva, a young French refugee fleeing the persecution in his native land. But in the following years, through his first stint in Geneva (1536-1538), his exile in Strasbourg (1538-1541), and his permanent return to Geneva (1541-1564), he increasingly worked out and sought to apply the doctrine's institutional implications for both church and commonwealth. Calvin was never the dictator of Geneva, of course, and until 1555 his time there was characterized by a struggle with the civil government over the autonomy of the church with respect to its discipline and order. Even after 1555 Calvin was not always pleased with the state of affairs with respect to church government, and he certainly never insisted that the forms and practices adopted in Geneva were to be accepted as a normative model by other Reformed churches. What he *did* argue was normative was the outline of the spiritual government of the church as he presented it in the *Institutes* – including the functions and associated offices of the word and sacraments, discipline, and poor relief – and its much broader outline of the nature of civil government.

Here I outline Calvin's involvement in political and ecclesiastical affairs in Geneva and France for several reasons. First, whether Calvin advocated, tolerated, or opposed particular practices and institutions reveals a great deal of what he thought was crucial to his two kingdoms theology, what he thought was consistent with it, if not necessarily ideal, and what he thought blatantly contradicted it. In other words, it tells us a lot about Calvin's priorities and level of flexibility.

Second, although scholars often assume that mid-sixteenth century Geneva represents Calvin's model society, the reality is more complicated. Not only was Calvin often in conflict with Geneva's civil government, but during his time there he nurtured a quite distinct body of French Reformed refugees who maintained their ties with the

burgeoning Reformed churches in France. The forms of discipline and order favored by these French Reformed Christians, both in Geneva and under the cross in France, were distinct from Genevan practice. They were clearly approved, and sometimes even preferred, by Calvin himself. The result, as Heiko Oberman suggests in his *John Calvin and the Reformation of the Refugees*, is not one but two very distinct models of how a Calvinist two kingdoms political theology might be worked out, one in the context of a consolidated *corpus Christianum* in which church and commonwealth were co-terminous, the other in a context of religious pluralism, where the church was persecuted by the civil authorities. Of course, Calvin had significant influence on countries like Scotland, the Netherlands, and beyond, but I focus on France because to a degree surpassing any other country, Calvin's involvement in the affairs of the French church and in the training of its pastorate was direct and substantive.

Third, paying attention to the nature of Calvin's involvement in Geneva and France highlights what was Calvin's greatest concern and his greatest legacy: the autonomy and integrity of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which is to say the church. For all of the attention that has been devoted to Calvin's economic, social, and political legacy, Calvin devoted the overriding balance of his terrific energies to the establishment of the church with its word, sacraments, and discipline. His interaction with political affairs was decisively controlled by his desire to see the church independently established and vigorously defended, regardless of the attitudes and preferences of the magistrates in power. This, in the final analysis, was the great practical implication of Calvin's two kingdoms political theology.

The Genevan Reformation

The Reformation came to Geneva just as the city's decades long struggle for independence from foreign and ecclesiastical rule was coming to a climax. The French

speaking city was tightly nestled between three significant powers, the powerful kingdom of France to the west, the rising Swiss Confederation to the east, and the declining Duchy of Savoy to the south. Geneva had long been ruled by a bishop and his appointed representative, the Vidomne, but the city's ultimate master was Savoy, from whose family most of the bishops came. The more than two hundred clergy in the city were mediocre at best, much like the bishops whose priorities did not always mesh with those of most Genevans. By 1530 roughly one third of the city's wealth was in ecclesiastical hands, the bishop receiving a full two thirds of municipal tolls and duties. Relatively little of this ecclesiastical wealth found its way back to projects benefiting the common good. William C. Innes writes, "Clearly, the top ecclesiastical officials were not good citizens, especially in the medieval conception of city and community. They occupied expensive homes, took rents and benefices, but contributed little in return."²⁹²

The Reformation of Geneva was thoroughly political in its origins, and Monter is correct when he warns, "It should not be forgotten that the Genevan revolution, in its origins and development, was political rather than religious."²⁹³ When the Reformation did come to Geneva, it followed the pattern of reformation in Zurich, Berne, and the other Swiss cities. Trade connections with the Swiss and the gradual decline of Savoyard power made it inevitable that many Genevans would chafe at the control of the latter,

²⁹²William C. Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1983), 42. The city had once been a center of international trade but by the early sixteenth century it was only a regional trading center. It had no guilds, no great scholars or writers, few printing presses, only rudimentary schools, and few genuinely wealthy inhabitants. Its population inside the city walls was substantive, ranging around 10,000 inhabitants, but unlike the Swiss cities of Zurich and Berne Geneva possessed only minor rural territories. Because Geneva sat squarely on major routes of trade and travel connecting France and northern Italy with Germany to the north, none of the major powers were eager to see the city under the control of any of its rivals. This made it possible for the city to play its rivals against one another, culminating in its eventual independence. The general details of the Genevan revolution and reformation in the following pages are drawn from William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 12-25; E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1967), 29-59; E. William Monter, *Studies in Genevan Government (1536-1605)* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1964); Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 78-81; Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin and the Government of Geneva," *Calvinus Ecclesiae Genevesis Custos* (ed. Wilhelm Neuser. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), 49-67.

²⁹³Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 49 (44-49).

and be exposed to the influence of the former. In February, 1519 the city signed a pact of *combourgeoisie* with Fribourg, against the wishes of Duke Charles III of Savoy, leading him to occupy the city. Soon after Bishop Jean de Savoie arrived and executed the leader of the Fribourg faction, Philibert Berthelier, dismissed Geneva's four elected syndics from power, and replaced them with others more favorable to him, insisting that from now on all syndics were to be chosen with the bishop's consent.²⁹⁴

Despite the actions of the Duke and the Bishop, in 1524 Geneva established an alliance with Fribourg and Berne. By 1527 the pro-Swiss faction, known as the Enfants, were able to banish from the city dozens of their leading pro-Savoyard opponents, known as the Mammelukes, effectively rejecting Savoy's control over the city, though not that of the Bishop. It increasingly became obvious that the Bishop and the foreign clergy were the greatest obstacle to Genevan independence, and many Genevans increasingly resented the church's powerful control over the city's wealth and revenue. Already in December, 1527, before the Reformation had really touched Geneva, the Petit Conseil (Small Council) began to consider following the path of other Swiss and German cities in asserting greater control over the city's temporal and ecclesiastical affairs.²⁹⁵ Over the next few years the city removed all judicial cases from the Bishop's authority except those pertaining to ecclesiastical persons.²⁹⁶

In 1528 Pope Clement VII placed the city under an Interdict, and with support from the Duke and the Bishop, loyal Mammelukes began to launch a campaign of harassment and guerrilla warfare in Geneva's rural territories. Geneva increasingly relied on support from Berne and Fribourg, while incurring a massive public debt to Basle that would bind the city for well over a century. When Berne embraced the Reformation in

²⁹⁴Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 33-37.

²⁹⁵Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 12-17.

²⁹⁶In addition, the Conseil de Deux Cents (Council of Two Hundred) was established as a new representative body, and the city's chapter of canons was removed from episcopal authority. Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 39-44.

1528, it made it inevitable that it would come to Geneva. In the early 1530s evangelical preachers began to arrive in Geneva, stirring up religious dissent, disorder, and even violence in the already anti-ecclesiastical atmosphere. In 1532 the fiery preacher Guillaume Farel made his first appearance in the city under a guarantee of safe conduct from Berne. The initial response of the city government was to prohibit public preaching and to urge the clergy to preach the “pure Gospel ... without mixing any fables or human inventions,” a response that paralleled that of other Swiss and German cities concerned about their inhabitants' welfare but uncommitted to the Reformation.²⁹⁷ When in 1533 Berne demanded that Farel be permitted to preach openly in Geneva, the city politely declined. Still, rioting and violence between supporters and opponents of reform provoked intervention on the part of Fribourg, which in turn persuaded the Bishop to return and reassert control over the judicial process for the first time in five years. Only the reverse intervention of Berne forced the Bishop to depart for the last time, Geneva's Council of Deux Cents declaring that in its struggle to maintain its rights and independence “we have had little help from our Bishop and Prince, from the members of the Cathedral Chapter, and from the other priests.”²⁹⁸

By now the politics of the Reformation were thoroughly intertwined with the city's conflict with the Bishop. A disputation between Farel and a Dominican from the Sorbonne in January, 1534 led to accusations that Farel was a pro-Swiss stooge, provoking further violence and rioting, while in July the Duke and the Bishop launched another attack against the city. Finally, in October the Petit Conseil deposed the Bishop, who retaliated by excommunicating 250 leading Genevans. An attempted assassination of Protestant preacher Pierre Viret, further disputation, and an outburst of iconoclasm led the Deux Cents to issue a decree provisionally suspending the Mass. That same month the city government began to inventory and confiscate all church property, taking

²⁹⁷Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva*, 65.

²⁹⁸Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva*, 70 (65-70). Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 49-51.

full control of formerly ecclesiastical functions. The Duke and the Bishop continued to siege the city through the fall and winter of 1535-1536, but the siege was lifted by Bernese troops, with French help, on February 2, 1536. While Berne won control over the Savoyard territories around Geneva, known as the Pays de Vaud, the Genevan government managed to avoid yielding its autonomy to either Berne or France. In the context of this decisive victory over Savoy the citizens of Geneva unanimously ratified the Deux Cents' decision to abolish the Mass and the authority of canon law in a meeting of the Conseil General on May 21, 1536.

Up to this point the reformation in Geneva was thoroughly magisterial in character, much like the reformations of other Swiss cities. Philip Benedict writes,

During these same months, many of the pieces of an austere civic reformation along Swiss lines were put in place. A radically simplified liturgy was instituted. All holidays and feast days were abolished. Revenue from seized church property was allocated for new schools and a reorganized system of civic hospitals. Edicts expelled prostitutes and ordered fornicators and adulterers to 'abandon their wicked life' or face a whipping or banishment.²⁹⁹

The city had purged itself of the old clergy and the church was under the administration and control of the civil government, which in turn was beholden to the military power of Berne for its survival. Aside from the inflammatory preaching of Farel and the consequent abolition of the Mass and certain other Catholic practices, however, little had been accomplished in the way of positive reformation.

It was at this time that John Calvin arrived. The young French Protestant had fled

²⁹⁹Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 81. Geneva's consolidation of its hospital system reflected broader trends in 16th Century Europe toward laicization, secularization, centralization and rationalization. The city had contained no less than eight different institutions designed for the care of the needy, each of which was organized and operated by some combination of ecclesiastical and lay personnel. In 1535 the eight institutions were consolidated into one General Hospital overseen by five civil officials known as procureurs and one resident superintendent known as a hospitallier. Robert M. Kingdon, "Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva," *The American Historical Review* 76.1 (February, 1971): 50-69; Robert M. Kingdon, "The Deacons of the Reformed Church in Calvin's Geneva," *Melanges D'Histoire Du XVIIe Siecle* (ed. Henri Meylan; Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970), 82-83. Cf. Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin's Ideas about the Diaconate: Social or Theological in Origin?" in *Piety, Politics and Ethics: Reformation Studies in Honor of George Wolfgang Forell* (ed. Carter Lindberg; Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1984), 167-180; Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin and Social Welfare," *Calvin Theological Journal* 17.2 (1982): 212-230.

the persecution in his native land and was passing through Geneva on his way to Strasbourg when Farel persuaded him – with the aid of prophetic threats – to help with the reformation in Geneva.³⁰⁰

Calvin's First Stint in Geneva (1536-1538)

Calvin's first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* had just been published that year. The work already contained the Frenchman's classic statement of the two kingdoms concept, but it said very little about the institutional form a reformed church should take, nor did say much about the role of civil magistrates might play in the process of reformation.³⁰¹ Nevertheless, the direction of the institutional implications that Calvin would find in the doctrine can already be detected during these first few years in Geneva. In early 1537 Calvin, Farel and the other pastors presented to the Petit Conseil a series of articles for the organization of the church. They called for monthly celebration of the Lord's Supper, the affirmation by oath of the Geneva Confession of Faith (submitted to the magistrates in 1536) by all inhabitants of Geneva as a condition of participation in the Supper, and the establishment of a system of church discipline through which the ministers could bar the unrepentant or unbelieving from communion.³⁰² Notably, the articles specifically declared it to be the magistrates'

300For reflections on the potential significance of Calvin's stay in Basle see Akira Demura, "Calvin's and Oecolampadius' Concept of Church Discipline," *Calvinus Ecclesiae Genevesis Custos* (ed. Wilhelm Neuser; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984), 187-189. Given his friendship with Bucer Calvin no doubt became aware of Oecolampadius's views, but there is no evidence that Oecolampadius shaped his views, as Baker implies. J. Wayne Baker, "Christian Discipline, Church and State, and Toleration: Bullinger, Calvin, and Basel 1530-1555," *Das Reformierte Erbe: Festschrift für Gottfried W. Locher zu seinem 80. Geburtstag* (vol. 1; ed. Heiko A. Oberman, et. al.; Theologischer Verlag Zürich: 1992), 37.

301During these early years Calvin viewed the church almost purely in the "invisible" sense that Luther emphasized, but he was already talking about church discipline. See Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (trans. Willem Heyner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 49-51.

302The Geneva Confession of 1536 outlined the two marks of the church as the true preaching of the gospel and the observance of the sacraments (Article 18). It described "the discipline of excommunication to be a thing holy and salutary among the faithful, since truly it was instituted by our Lord with good reason" (Article 19). But the only ecclesiastical office it recognized was that of the "pastors of the Word of God," who are "to conduct, rule, and govern the people of God committed to them by the same Word" (Article 20). It declared the magistracy to be "a holy thing" and "sacred commission from God." Magistrates "serve God and follow a Christian vocation." They are "vicars and

obligation to establish the church along these lines. It called the councilmen to consider its importance “for the maintenance of the honor of God in this State and the conservation of the Church in its integrity,” reminding them to execute diligently “what you see not only to belong to your office, but also to be so necessary for the maintenance of your people in good order.”³⁰³

The articles declared that “the ordinances by which the Church is preserved are that it be truly and as nearly as possible conformed to his Word, which is the certain rule of all government and administration, but especially of ecclesiastical government.”³⁰⁴ The Lord's Supper was to be a weekly celebration of the unity of the faithful as the body of Christ. Christopher Elwood notes that in contrast to the Swiss Reformed, Calvin “did not view the body of Christ created by the eucharist as coextensive with society at large.”³⁰⁵ Rather, as the articles stated, it was necessary that the Eucharist, “ordained and instituted for joining the members of our Lord Jesus Christ with their Head and with one another in one body and one spirit, be not soiled and contaminated by those coming to it and communicating, who declare and manifest by their misconduct and evil life that they do not at all belong to Jesus.”³⁰⁶ In Matthew 18 Christ thus established the “correction and discipline of excommunication” in order that those who refuse to repent “should be

lieutenants of God, whom one cannot resist without resisting God himself” (Article 21). See “Confession of Faith which all the citizens and inhabitants of Geneva and the subjects of the country must promise to keep and hold (1536),” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (trans. J.K.S. Reid; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 26-33.

303“Articles concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva proposed by the Ministers at the Council: January 16, 1537,” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (trans. J.K.S. Reid; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 55.

304“Articles concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship,” 48-49.

305Christopher Elwood, *The Body Broken: The Calvinist Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 148. Cited in Michael W. Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground: Conflict and Reform in the Pays de Vaud, 1528-1559* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 259-260. This is why Calvin's understanding of the Eucharist and of church discipline could be perceived to be a threat to the civil government. Bruening writes, “The need for excommunication stemmed from Calvin's redefinition of the primary meaning of the 'body of Christ' from the consecrated host, as was commonly understood in the medieval church, to the church itself, properly understood as Christ (the head) and the faithful (the members). And just as the medieval church went to great lengths to prevent the pollution of the consecrated host, so also Calvin required ecclesiastical discipline to prevent similar pollution of the body of Christ” (161).

306“Articles concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship,” 50.

expelled from the body of the Church ... until they come to repentance.” The church “cannot retain its true condition without observing this ordinance.”³⁰⁷

The document clarified that the pastors did not seek the kind of discipline the popes turned into “tyranny,” declaring that such abuse took place because bishops confiscated the right of excommunication from “the assembly of the faithful.”³⁰⁸ To prevent this evil they called the magistrates “to ordain and elect certain persons of good life and witness from among the faithful” to exercise oversight among the people. Upon witnessing faults of note, these persons would discuss them with some of the ministers and admonish and exhort those at fault. If this failed, the matter would be reported to the church, and if there was still no repentance, the minister would declare a sentence of excommunication. The excommunicated person would be refused communion and “intimate dealings” but would be required to continue attending the sermons.³⁰⁹ Those who rejected such discipline would be dealt with by the magistrates.³¹⁰

The magistrates accepted most of the articles, but they followed the example of the Swiss cities in limiting the celebration of the Supper to four times a year, and they issued a decree clarifying that no one should be barred from the Lord's Supper due to a failure to swear the oath.³¹¹ It would become clear soon enough that they did not understand the distinction between the commonwealth and the church in the same terms as did Calvin.

Calvin's time in Geneva would be a tumultuous one, at least for the first two

307“Articles concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship,” 50-51. The three reasons for excommunication provided are that Christ's name will not be dishonored, that sinners might be corrected, and that others will not be corrupted (51).

308“Articles concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship,” 51.

309“Articles concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship,” 52.

310The articles also called for the establishment of a court consisting of magistrates and ministers to handle conflicts pertaining to marriage. “Articles concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship,” 55.

311Calvin never did get his way on the oath. Adrianus D. Pont, “Citizen's Oath and Formulated Confession: Confession of Faith in Calvin's Congregation,” *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture* (ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 237-239; Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 92-93.

decades. At the heart of the problem was Calvin's desire to establish a relatively autonomous church distinct – though not separate – from the commonwealth. But it is important not to reduce the tumult of these years to a conflict over the appropriate relationship between church and state, or even over church discipline. The factionalism that plagued Geneva throughout its struggle with Savoy remained, complicating the city's attempt to reconstruct its social and ecclesiastical order. The city had emerged from the struggle with autonomy over its domestic affairs, but it was still subject to the powerful influence of its protector, Berne. The 1536 treaty gave Berne significant control over Geneva's foreign relations, and Geneva was involved in continual negotiations with Berne over shared jurisdictions and disputed properties. In addition, Bernese authorities wanted to maintain a degree of religious influence over the city for whose reformation they were largely responsible. Like the other Swiss cities, Berne did not allow its pastors to exclude persons from the Lord's Supper, nor did it require its citizens to sign an oath pledging their allegiance to a confession.³¹²

It was when the city council was controlled by a pro-Farel faction known as the Guillermins that it selectively approved Calvin's agenda, but even this cautious acceptance provoked opposition from the population. The elections of early 1538 carried into office the Articulant faction, which was interested in improving relations with Berne rather than following the lead of the pastors. Calvin's personal interaction with the Bernese magistracy was rocky from the start. Calvin and Viret clashed sharply with Pierre Caroli, whom Berne had appointed chief preacher of Lausanne, particularly after he accused Calvin of failing to hold to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. While the council of Berne frustrated Calvin by summoning him and Viret to explain themselves, Calvin urged his ally Kaspar Megander, the leading pastor of Berne, to take action

312Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 29-41. Naphy offers significant evidence, consistent with what we know from the magisterial reformations of other Swiss and German cities, that there is no clear correlation between those who opposed church discipline and a reluctance to preserve and enforce moral order.

against Caroli without the authority of the Berne council. But Megander was dismissed from Berne in early 1538 and Calvin lost his ally. That year Calvin attended the Synod of Lausanne where he received a discouraging report on the progress of reformation in the Vaud (under Bernese control).³¹³

In Geneva Calvin and Farel became increasingly associated with those citizens who wanted to distance the city from Bernese control. When the council ordered the pastors to reintroduce Bernese practices with respect to the Lord's Supper, baptism, and feast days, Farel and Calvin preached sermons denouncing council's actions, Calvin referring to it as a "council of the devil." The council responded by forbidding the pastors to preach on political matters and informing them that their continued ministry in Geneva would require them to conform to Berne's demands. Yet Calvin and Farel were insistent that the magistrates did not have the authority to dictate church practice. When they refused to administer the Lord's Supper that Easter they were removed from office and banished from the city.³¹⁴ Although Geneva council told a different story, three days after his expulsion Calvin told the Bernese authorities that the problem was not with indifferent ceremonies and feast days but with the lack of discipline: "for without any punishment meted out publicly, there would be a thousand derisions of the Word of God and the Supper."³¹⁵ For Calvin it was a matter of loyalty to Christ over loyalty to the state. "If we served men, we would be badly rewarded. But we serve a great master, who will recompense us."³¹⁶

Naphy agrees that for all the international politics involved, the central issue in 1538 was "whether or not the magistracy had the power to order changes to the religious

313 Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 162-165. Bruening argues that Calvin's conflict with Caroli, and his disgust at the Bernese magistrates played a much more significant role in shaping Calvin's suspicion of magisterial control over the church than historians have appreciated.

314 Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 72-77, 78-81; Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 93-95; Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 93-94.

315 Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 162-165.

316 Cited in Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography* (trans. M. Wallace McDonald; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000 [1995]), 131. Cf. Harro Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 77-78.

practices of Geneva without consulting the ministers or getting their approval.”³¹⁷ The desire to appease Berne was real, but the reality is that it would have been a hard sell for any city in mid-16th Century Europe, having finally overthrown the despised rule of a bishop and won control over ecclesiastical functions and property, to agree to ceding that control to a new ecclesiastical body, and one made up of Frenchmen at that. Calvin's proposals smacked of the ecclesiastical tyranny from which Geneva had just liberated itself, and few Protestants were eager to turn back the clock. All Protestant cities maintained magisterial control over ecclesiastical affairs, including the Lord's Supper and discipline, and Geneva had little reason to try something different. In fact, the leading Swiss churches addressed the Geneva crisis at a synod in Zurich on May 2. To Calvin's distress, the delegates agreed that Calvin and Farel had acted improperly, some even accusing them of seeking to introduce a new papacy.

One of the key reformers present at the synod, however, despite growing tension in his relationship with Heinrich Bullinger and the Swiss Reformed, was Martin Bucer. Although Bucer agreed that Calvin had acted without tact or wisdom, he was sympathetic to the young reformer's view of the church. He invited Calvin to pastor the French refugee congregation in his own city of Strasbourg.

Calvin in Strasbourg (1538-1541)

Calvin arrived in Strasbourg shortly after Bucer returned from Hesse, where the Strasbourg reformer had played the key role in drafting Reformation Europe's first ordinance establishing ecclesiastical discipline distinct from the control of the state. Bucer, like Calvin, had not succeeded in establishing church discipline in his own city. But the two reformers agreed that church discipline was a fundamental expression of Christ's spiritual government.³¹⁸

³¹⁷Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 33.

³¹⁸On Bucer's political theology and ecclesiology see Chapter 1.

Within his congregation of French refugees and apart from the jealous eyes of civil magistrates, Calvin was able to implement the church discipline he had failed to establish in Geneva. Here he had a willing congregation, one that had given up possessions, home, and country in order to practice the true faith. In the meantime he had steady interaction with Anabaptists passing through the city and was able to win a significant number over to the Reformed church (he ended up marrying Idelette de Bure, the widow of one of the Anabaptists he converted).³¹⁹ Witnessing Bucer's continuing yet ultimately futile efforts to establish discipline in Strasbourg, Calvin seems to have learned the importance of patience. When supporters from Geneva asked for advice on whether or not to participate in the worship and sacraments of the flawed Genevan church, Calvin answered in the affirmative, reminding his inquirers that where the gospel is preached and the sacraments observed there is a true church.³²⁰ He emphasized the centrality of these marks again in his famous refutation of the Roman Catholic Cardinal Sadoletto, though managing to stress the vital importance of church discipline at the same time.³²¹ In letters to Farel Calvin told his friend how appalled he was by accounts from Germany about magisterial resistance to pastoral attempts at church discipline.³²²

319Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer: A Reformer and His Times* (trans. Stephen E. Buckwalter; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 2004 [1990]), 147-148. Balke claims that one of the reasons Calvin was brought to Strasbourg was to counter Anabaptist influence among the French refugees there. He argues the Anabaptists were attracted to Calvin because sympathized with them on discipline and established it in the Strasbourg congregation. Between 1538-1540 Strasbourg expelled the Anabaptists that had long received toleration there. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 123-143. There was in Calvin "a critical affinity that enabled him to serve as a magnetic force drawing the Anabaptists toward the position of the reformers" (153).

320Heiko Oberman, *John Calvin and the Reformation of the Refugees* (Geneva: Droz, 2009), 27.

321Gordon, *Calvin*, 96-98.

322Calvin approved of the decision at Hagenau in July 1540 to hold a church council to address the problem, pending the support of Luther and the princes. But Melanchthon, among others, did not find Calvin's proposals regarding excommunication practical. Oberman, *Reformation of the Refugees*, 26; Gordon, *Calvin*, 99. Oberman argues that it was during his time in Strasbourg that Calvin became involved in the Reformation at an international level. Not only did Bucer initiate Calvin's involvement in ecumenical efforts, introducing him to key figures like Melanchthon, but in Strasbourg Calvin's call was to serve a congregation of refugees living under the cross. Oberman thinks this experience permanently altered Calvin's perspective, such that when he returned to Geneva his vision was international, rather than urban, and his conception of the church was that of a congregation of refugees

The effect of Bucer and the Strasbourg years on Calvin's understanding of the church is evident from the development of Calvin's *Institutes* over the course of the first three editions, appearing in 1536, 1539, and 1543. The 1536 edition clearly articulated Luther's two kingdoms doctrine, but it said very little about its potential institutional implications. Calvin did identify the offices of pastor and deacon but what he said about them was essentially a reaction to medieval abuses rather than part of a constructive plan for church order. He described the importance of church discipline, but he assigned its exercise rather vaguely to the "church." The 1539 edition, on which Calvin worked in Geneva, added relatively little to this, though it did contain one important addition. In the 1536 edition Calvin had followed Reformed precedent and identified the gift of 'ruling' in Romans 12:8 as referring to civil government. In 1539 he broke with that tradition, adding a sentence clarifying that the gift of 'ruling' given to the church refers primarily to "a council of sober men, who were appointed in the primitive church to preside over the ordering of public discipline (which office is called in the letter to the Corinthians [12:28], 'governments')," while agreeing that "because we see the civil power serving the same end" it could be applied *by extension* to "every kind of just rule" (4.20.4). Here was the seed of the fuller understanding of the office of elder that Calvin would develop in coming years, and a further indication of his break with the political theology of Zwingli and Bullinger.³²³

under the cross, rather than a *corpus christianum* under the direction of magistrates. Oberman, *Reformation of the Refugees*. Glenn S. Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism: The Development of Huguenot Ecclesiastical Institutions, 1557-1572* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2003), 20, points out that at this time Strasbourg was already becoming a model for French Protestantism, though the chief influence would shift to Geneva after the Augsburg Interim in 1547.

³²³On Bucer's influence on Calvin see Willem Van't Spijker, "Calvin's Friendship with Martin Bucer: Did It Make Calvin a Calvinist?," *Calvin Studies Society Papers, 1995, 1997: Calvin and Spirituality, Calvin and His Contemporaries* (ed. David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 1998), 169-186; Willem Van't Spijker, "Bucer's Influence on Calvin: Church and Community," *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community* (ed. D. F. Wright; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 32-44. See Elsie Anne McKee's description of the development of Calvin's ecclesiology in the three first editions of the *Institutes*, with rich attention to the reformer's exegetical work in relation to the broader history of exegesis, in Elsie Anne McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin's Theology* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988) and Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984). McKee notes

Calvin developed this interpretation of the passage in his commentary on Romans, which appeared in 1540. He distinguished between the “church” and the “whole community,” declaring the functions described in Romans 12:8 to be permanent and prescriptive for the church. The gift of 'ruling', he said, refers to “presidents, to whom was committed the government of the church, and they were the elders, who presided over and ruled others and exercised discipline.” Only by extension could the text be taken as a reference to “all kinds of governors ... who ought to watch day and night for the well-being of the whole community.”³²⁴ Elsie Anne McKee observes that Calvin did not provide a cross-reference to 2 Chronicles 19:6. This was significant because

Zwinglian theologians usually used the latter text as a cross-reference

that for Calvin the primary exegetical significance of Romans 12:8 was now ecclesiastical, while its civil significance was deduced from experience (*Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 40-41). She notes that in 1525 Martin Luther argued in a sermon that the reference to the one who rules is not to a secular leader but to an office in the church such as that described in 1 Timothy 3:5 (48). McKee identifies Luther and Calvin as part of a medieval tradition that had long interpreted this passage as describing an ecclesiastical office, in contrast to another medieval tradition, carried on by Zwingli and Bullinger. This second tradition associated it closely with 2 Chronicles 19:6, thus taking it as a reference to an ecclesiastical ruler *or* prince within a society in which church and commonwealth are one and the same (49-50). Cf. Richard R. De Ridder, “John Calvin's Views on Discipline: A Comparison of the *Institution* of 1536 and the *Institutes* of 1559,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 223-230; R. E. H. Uprichard, “The Eldership in Martin Bucer and John Calvin,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 61.1 (January, 1989): 21-37; Robert White, “Oil and Vinegar: Calvin on Church Discipline,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985): 25-40; Cornelis Augustijn, “Calvin in Strasbourg,” *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture* (ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 166-177; Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 31-35, 41-43, 79-89. In sharp contrast to McKee, T. F. Torrance argues that Calvin got the idea of elder from the example of early North African churches and then read it into scripture. But there is no evidence to substantiate this claim. Torrance's skepticism regarding Calvin's exegesis is in part due to his failure to recognize that Calvin did not begin by discovering the office of elder, and then seek to establish its function. He began by discovering the function of church discipline in scripture, and proceeded from that premise to the office of elder. See Thomas F. Torrance, “The Eldership in the Reformed Church,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984): 504-509. Hopfl also claims that Calvin's “interpretation of Scripture is often rather strained,” and that his ecclesiology was derived more from his practice and politics than from his exegetical theology. But while Calvin certainly drew parallels between the civil and spiritual governments, Hopfl hardly engages the reformer's constant emphasis on their differences. He also largely ignores the substantive exegetical work that underlies the reformer's ecclesiology, much of which is found in his commentaries, as well as his theology of the kingdom. Finally, Hopfl is too willing to assume that whatever was practiced in Geneva was a reflection of Calvin's influence. See especially Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 54-55, 105-107, 126, 138-140. Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. Olive Wyon; two vols.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992 [1912]), 2:592. ³²⁴Commentary on Romans 12:8 [1540]; CO 49:239-240. McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 52, notes that only in 1556 did Calvin add a note of explanation to the commentary as to why the passage was not originally addressed to rulers. “The circumstances of the period, however, prove that Paul was not speaking to rulers in general (for at that time there were no godly magistrates) but of the elders who were the judges of morals.”

to establish the office of moral discipline as properly pertaining to the civil rulers in a Christian state... In keeping with his insistence that the judicial regulations of Israel do not apply to Christians, Calvin bases the elder's office only, and apparently deliberately, on New Testament texts. The eldership is an office of the church as distinct from the Christian society, even though civil rulers are established by God and directly responsible to God, even though cooperation with the Christian magistracy is appropriate and some of the latter may also be elected as elders.³²⁵

Calvin thus rejected the Zwinglian conviction that Christian magistrates hold an office in the church.³²⁶

During these years Calvin's concept of the office of deacon developed in a similar way. In the medieval church the diaconate had developed into little more than a step on the way to the priesthood, with largely liturgical functions. The early reformers recognized the office of deacon as recorded in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3, but they regarded it as a temporary office now filled by the civil magistrate. It was Bucer and Calvin, perhaps independently, who described the diaconate as a permanent ecclesiastical office devoted to care for the poor.³²⁷ Calvin first mentioned the office in his 1536 *Institutes*, but in his 1540 commentary on Romans he developed a distinction between two kinds of deacons virtually identical to that drawn by Bucer in his 1536 commentary on Romans. He noted Paul's reference to one office that "presided in dispensing the public charities of the church" and another that included "widows and other ministers who were appointed to take care of the sick."³²⁸ Unlike Bucer Calvin would go on repeatedly to

325McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 53-54. The difference between the Zwinglian and Calvinist interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:28 was similar. The Zwinglians interpreted the reference to those who show mercy and those who govern without distinguishing between ecclesiastical and civil offices. "When the 'Calvinist' Reformed adopt or develop their interpretation of *opitulationes* and especially of *gubernationes*, although political rule continues to be included as a secondary meaning, the primary significance of the offices is distinctively ecclesiastical. Bucer is the first, but the discussion gains clarity with Calvin" (74).

326In that sense Calvin "did not hold to the *Corpus Christianum*." Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 213.

327McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 139-158.

328Commentary on Romans 12:8 [1540]; CO 49:239-240. Kingdon argues that the distinction of two kinds of deacons really came from Calvin's observation of the process of poor relief in Geneva, and that Calvin used Romans 12:8 to sacralize, the offices of procureur and hospitallier already in existence. In practice, he suggests, Geneva had a greater effect on Calvin than Calvin had on Geneva. "Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva," 59-61. But McKee shows that Calvin had sufficient exegetical warrant, both in the interpretive tradition and in the text, to render such assumptions about the role of his

reference the twofold diaconate as a prescriptive element of biblical church order.³²⁹

Bucer's influence on Calvin's ecclesiology is clear, but while Bucer had somewhat ambiguously described a fourfold office in the church, the Frenchman clarified and systematized the concept, bolstered its exegetical support, applied it consistently, and eventually realized its implementation in Geneva and beyond.³³⁰ In particular, Calvin systematically presented the four offices of teacher, pastor, deacon, and elder as permanent offices within a biblical church order.³³¹ Calvin's emphasis on the enduring prescription of ecclesiastical offices devoted to poor relief and discipline is significant because, arising out of his unique two kingdoms theology, it became the focal point for early Reformed struggles over the appropriate relationship between the church and civil government. By challenging the assumption of Zwingli and Bullinger that in a Christian

Genevan experience unnecessary. In addition, Bucer's thought was already moving in this direction by the time Calvin arrived in Strasbourg. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 193-200. Cf. Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva*, 115.

329 McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 195-197. Josef Bohatec argues that Calvin was much more concerned than was Bucer to emphasize the ecclesiastical or spiritual character of the diaconate. Josef Bohatec, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche* (Breslau: Marcus Verlag, 1937), 469-470.

330 McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 133-137; McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 75, 123-222. McKee suggests that Calvin brings to Bucer's general categories "his characteristic marks of lucidity, coherence, and theological integration," a clearer appreciation for the distinction between elders and the magistracy, and in the 1543 edition of the *Institutes* the clarification of the relationship between elders and pastors by means of 1 Timothy 5:17 (*Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 76). Cf. Uprichard, "The Eldership in Martin Bucer and John Calvin, 21-26.

331 Building on the work of Gottfried Hammann, *Entre la Secte et la Cite: Le Projet d'Eglise du Réformateur Martin Bucer* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1984), McKee writes, "Bucer thought of the church as having various layers requiring a great variety of ministers arising simultaneously from the priesthood of believers and the specific ministries. Calvin (on the other hand) set side-by-side four precise functions, called to be embodied in four types of ministers.' ... Hammann is clear that Bucer's theor[et]ical schema scarcely corresponded to the practice in Strasbourg. Calvin was determined to bring together theory and practice, and for that purpose theory had to be clear and precise." McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 125-126. McKee precisely compares how Bucer and Calvin interpreted and used the various relevant Scripture texts. "Martin Bucer is generally recognized as the first to assemble Eph. 4:11, Rom. 12:6-8, and 1 Cor. 12:28 as texts establishing a plurality of ecclesiastical ministries and ministers, but the clearest and most coherent formulation of the use of these texts is found in the third and subsequent editions of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1543)." (172). She notes that before the Reformation the various profane functions described in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 were generally viewed as belonging to the clergy though as secondary functions, given that the clergy were to be devoted to spiritual matters. The Zwinglians recognized that these texts gave religious significance to temporal functions, but used that principle to embrace the magistracy as a holy office within Christian society. But Calvin and his heirs identified the functions described in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 as "lay offices in the church as a body distinguishable from Christian society" (193).

society the functions of poor relief and discipline are to be yielded to civil government, Bucer and especially Calvin launched a new tradition of Reformed political theology dedicated to establishing the autonomy of the church from the political kingdom.³³²

The Consolidation of Church Government in Geneva (1541-1546)

In the Geneva elections of 1540 the Articulants, who had clashed with Calvin and driven him out of Geneva, were defeated, in part because they had gone too far in their pro-Berne policies. Too many concessions of disputed rights and jurisdictions turned the citizens (some of whom had financial stakes in the lands under dispute), toward the Guillermins.³³³ Despite nearly five years having passed since Geneva embraced the Reformation, ecclesiastical and civil affairs remained in disarray. When the two leading pastors who had led the church in Calvin's absence resigned their posts, the new government decided to recall Calvin, assigning him the task of reorganizing the church. The decision was by no means unanimous, but with the help of Zurich and Basle, who were eager to see the Genevan church settled, Calvin was induced to return.

In fact, when Calvin returned in September 1541 it was under the condition that the city would establish church discipline along the lines proposed in 1537-1538. But now Calvin had a much more concrete idea of what that discipline should look like. Although his fuller theological account of church government would not appear until the 1543 edition of the *Institutes*, its basic outline appears in the 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* that he submitted to the council. The heading of the document situates ecclesiastical government within the context of Christ's spiritual government: "it appeared good to us

³³²As McKee puts it, "For sixteenth-century Protestants, the question of ecclesiastical autonomy is bound up with the theory of the plurality of permanent ecclesiastical ministries because the customary second office, the diaconate responsible for poor relief, and the most critical additional office, the ministry of discipline, were both functions disputed between civil and ecclesiastical authorities." McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 190.

³³³Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 38-41; Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 67-69.

that the spiritual government such as our Lord showed and instituted by his Word should be reduced to good order and have place and be observed among us. Hence we have commanded and established to be followed and observed in our city and territory the Ecclesiastical Constitution which follows, seeing that it is taken from the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Whereas the 1537 Articles spoke vaguely about discipline and said nothing about elders or deacons, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* reflect all the clarity gained during Calvin's time in Strasbourg, specifying the four concrete offices of pastor, doctor, elder and deacon that have been “instituted by our Lord for the government of his Church.”³³⁴

The pastors are called to preach and teach the word, administer the sacraments, “and to enjoin brotherly corrections along with the elders and colleagues.”³³⁵ In accord with the example of scripture, they are to be elected by the company of pastors and then presented to the Council for approval. When certified by the Council, they are to be presented to the people to be received by their consent.³³⁶ If the pastors fall into an intractable theological dispute they are to seek the assistance of the elders, and, that failing, the case is to be “referred to the magistrate to be put in order.”³³⁷ Similarly if a pastor commits serious sin he is to be investigated by the pastors and elders and then reported to the magistrate for deposition.³³⁸ The doctors are responsible to teach theology and related subjects in “the order of the schools,” which includes a college

334“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances: September and October 1541,” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (trans. J.K.S. Reid; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 58. For discussion of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* see Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 90-96. Hopfl writes, “his ideal of harmonious cooperation of magistrates and ministers in the disciplining of the people-congregation may be said to have institutionalized it at every point” (95). I discuss Calvin's mature ecclesiology as appears in the 1543 *Institutes* in Chapter 5. On the 1543 *Institutes* see Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 103-127.

335“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 58.

336“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 59. Cf. Robert M. Kingdon, “Calvin and 'Presbytery': the Geneva Company of Pastors,” *Pacific Theological Review* 18 (1985): 48-49. Note that in the *Institutes* Calvin does not promote a magisterial role in the selection of pastors. Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 111-112.

337“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 60.

338“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 61.

established for the young, “to prepare them for the ministry as well as for civil government.” The doctors are to be selected only with the approval of the pastors, and they are subject to the same discipline as the pastors.³³⁹

The elders are to exercise oversight over the people through admonition and correction. Unlike pastors, who are chosen by the Company of pastors, the elders are to be nominated by the Petit Conseil in consultation with the pastors, selected proportionally from the various governing bodies of the city, and representatively from the various quarters of the city. They are to be approved by the Deux Cents.³⁴⁰ Their task is to meet weekly with the pastors as the Consistory, “to see that there be no disorder in the Church and to discuss together remedies as they are required.” The consistory is to be charged to use discussion and admonition to discipline people who challenge church teaching, fail to attend church, or commit notorious sins. Where there is no repentance, the elders and pastors are authorized to excommunicate the person from the Lord's Supper. “If any in contumacy or rebellion wish to intrude against the prohibition, the duty of the minister is to turn him back, since it is not permissible for him to be received at the Communion.” But the ordinances also clarify that although the elders come from the ranks of the governing councils, as the Consistory they “have no compulsive authority or jurisdiction.” As a result, the Consistory is to be assisted by a government official who will ensure procedural cooperation on the part of recalcitrant Genevans.³⁴¹

The ordinances distinguish between two kinds of deacons, though the distinction is somewhat different from that found in Calvin's commentary on Romans. The “procurators” are described as those “disputed to receive, dispense and hold goods for

339“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 62-63.

340“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 63-64. The selection of elders and deacons actually took place at the same time as did the elections for Geneva's civil government. Robert M. Kingdon, “Calvin's Socio-Political Legacy: Collective Government, Resistance to Tyranny, Discipline,” in *The Legacy of John Calvin* (ed. David Foxgrover. Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2000), 120.

341“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 70-71. In addition to the discussion of the four offices the ordinances call for the establishment of a court of city representatives and pastors to handle matters pertaining to marriage, but they specify that marriage “is not a spiritual matter but involved with civil affairs” (67).

the poor, not only daily alms, but also possessions, rents and pensions.” The “hospitallers” are responsible to “Tend and care for the sick and administer allowances to the poor.”³⁴² The election of deacons will follow the same procedure as that of the elders. The deacons have oversight of the public hospital, which employed a doctor and surgeon and was funded by the city, overseeing the care of the sick, the elderly, widows, orphans, visitors and “other poor creatures.” By this means they are to ensure that begging, which was illegal in Geneva, is not necessary. The deacons operate under the general oversight of the pastors, who are to visit the hospital every three months, and where there is a problem, the Council is to be notified.³⁴³

The Council enacted the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* but only after making several significant clarifications. With respect to the discipline of pastors it added a note specifying that where civil crimes are in view the pastors must be reported to the magistrates for punishment, and that “the final sentence of punishment is to be reserved to the Seignury.”³⁴⁴ Where Calvin's initial draft implied a sharper separation between the spiritual authority of the elders and the civil authority of the magistrates than the Council desired, the latter amended the ordinances to specify that the elders are “to be sent or deputed by the Seignury to the Consistory.”³⁴⁵ And the Council added several sentences emphasizing the spiritual nature of the Consistory's authority: “All this is to take place in such a way that the ministers have no civil jurisdiction, nor use anything but the spiritual sword of the Word of God, as Paul commands them; nor is the Consistory to derogate from the authority of the Seignury or ordinary justice. The civil power is to remain unimpaired.”³⁴⁶ Eventually an oath was attached to the ordinances,

342Whereas Calvin's writings tend to assign the dispensing of material needs to the first group, in the ordinances he adapted to Genevan practice by associating it equally with the second. Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva*, 114-115.

343“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 64-66.

344“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 61.

345“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 63. See also Gordon, *Calvin*, 127; Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 71. The elders were said to be *commis* (representatives) of the magistrates.

346“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 70-71.

through which the pastors promised to “to guard and maintain the honor and welfare of the Seigneury and the City,” promoting its peace and unity, and “to be subject to the polity and constitution of this city.”³⁴⁷ Thus the final law blurred Calvin's sharp distinctions between the church's ministry and the civil magistracy, ensuring that Genevan practice would be somewhat more complicated than Calvin's two kingdoms theology implied. Gordon summarizes the law's mixed implications

The Consistory, a mixed body of clerical and lay officials, was to oversee the morality of the people, and in contrast to similar bodies in the Swiss Reformed churches it possessed the right of excommunication. Yet the *Ordinances* make it very clear that the ministers were entirely subject to the rule of the magistrates. They were paid officials of Geneva, and it was to the council they owed allegiance.³⁴⁸

Most ominous for the future was the fact that the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* never actually addressed the fundamental question of whether the Council or the Consistory had the final word on the excommunication of a particular individual. Given the compromise nature of the document, it was no doubt a deliberate omission.

The key to Calvin's eventual success in Geneva was the gradual establishment of a unified Company of Pastors and a unified Consistory, all committed to Calvin's vision of the church despite lackluster support from the civil magistrates. Yet this was far from the situation in 1542, as Calvin testified to Oswald Myconius, the pastor of Basle: “Our other colleagues are rather a hindrance than a help to us: they are rude and self-conceited, have no zeal, and less learning. But what is worst of all, I cannot trust them, even although I very much wish that I could.”³⁴⁹ Some of the pastors were seeking to

³⁴⁷“Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 72. This oath seems to have been added in July, 1542.

³⁴⁸Gordon, *Calvin*, 128. Naphy, “Calvin's Church in Geneva,” 107-108, agrees. “Calvin's overriding ecclesiological goal, of course, was to establish a system of church discipline with authority over spiritual affairs that was distinct from temporal government with its duty to uphold public order. His great accomplishment was to succeed in this regard to a greater extent than prior reformers such as Oecolampadius and Bucer ... If Calvin was able to take the Genevan church further down the road to independence from what strict Presbyterians would later cast as illegitimate, 'Erastian' government oversight of church affairs than the other urban reformers of his and the preceding generation had done, there was still much in the structure that developed in Geneva that was very 'Swiss.' As will be noted elsewhere, this was not without problems, as it certainly was not a full realization of the 'sphere of independence' that Calvin sought for the church.”

³⁴⁹Letter to Oswald Myconius, March 14, 1542; CO 11:377. Cited in Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*

persuade the magistrates to reject Calvin's model of discipline, secretly “exhorting them not to lay at our feet the power which was in their own hands (as they said), not to abdicate the authority which God had intrusted to them, and not to give occasion to sedition.” Yet while Calvin was not satisfied with the Consistory or the method of discipline as it was established in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, it was the best he could hope for at the time. “We at length possess a Presbyterial Court [*presbyterorum iudicium*], such as it is, and a form of discipline, such as these disjointed times permit ... [T]roops of unclean spirits break forth in all directions, who, in order that they may escape from healthy discipline, which they can in no way submit to, seek every sort of pretext for slipping from the authority of the Church.”³⁵⁰ Robert White is therefore correct when he cautions that Calvin's constructive vision for church discipline is best understood from the *Institutes*, because only there is it “untrammelled by the reality of Genevan politics (the church which he describes is independent of the apparatus of government).”³⁵¹

During the next five years Calvin devoted himself to consolidating his influence on Geneva's pastors and elders. Driving out the older pastors and bringing in new ones, after 1545 his efforts began to bear fruit. The new pastors were wealthier (and thus less dependent on the provision of the magistracy), better educated, more talented at preaching (and thus better equipped to challenge the magistrates), and zealously committed to reform, men like Nicolas Des Gallars, Reymond Chauvet, Francois Bourgoing, and Michel Cop. Crucially, all except one were French rather than Genevan, and they were devoted to the welfare of the church beyond the city-state. Naphy describes the impact of the new solidarity on Calvin's struggle with the magistrates:

It is essential to grasp the unique nature of this new Company of Pastors and the high level of learning, expertise and quality united in it. Not only was such a

of the Genevan Reformation, 54-55.

³⁵⁰Letter to Oswald Myconius, March 14, 1542; CO 11:379.

³⁵¹White, “Oil and Vinegar,” 35.

group able to provide a good quality ministry for Geneva, but it would prove to be a formidable force, rallied around Calvin, in the later struggles with some of the magistrates. The respect such qualified men must have commanded among the Genevans could well explain the apparent unwillingness or inability of their magisterial opponents to move against them ruthlessly in the later dispute.³⁵²

Calvin also consolidated his control over the Consistory in 1541-1546. This was a much more impressive achievement, because while the Company of Pastors was permitted to choose its own members, the Consistory's twelve elders were nominated by the Council and were themselves members of the city's various governing councils. They included one syndic, who was the presiding officer of the Consistory, and two other members of the Petit Conseil.³⁵³ But while the syndics and senators tended to have a high turnover rate, the other elders served longer. By 1546-1547 the Consistory possessed eight elders who would serve for the next six years. These men tended to be less well known because membership on the Consistory was not considered a significant prize. There is no evidence that they were strong supporters of Calvin when they were appointed as elders, but over time they became deeply committed to Calvin's vision of what church discipline should look like and solidly loyal to their leader. Through hard and persistent work, the Consistory came to wield impressive influence. "Together these men," Naphy infers, "provided Geneva with a united and secure ecclesiastical structure."³⁵⁴ By the late 1540s it was not easy for the magistrates to confront a body so unified that it could (and eventually did) threaten to resign *en masse* if necessary to protect its prerogatives. If the organization of the church in the late 1530s and early 1540s was marked by chaos and factions, the years after 1546 told a different story.³⁵⁵

³⁵²Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 72 (Cf. 59-68). Naphy points out that the pastors hired in the years 1541-1545 were generally of low caliber. Calvin made life intolerable for fellow ministers like Henri De la Mare and Sebastien Castellio. The Council wanted to ordain Castellio, the leading teacher of Geneva's youth, but Calvin and the Company of Pastors refused on theological grounds.

³⁵³Of the other elders four were to be drawn from the Soixante and six from the Deux Cents. In addition to the civil officer responsible to make sure people responded to the Consistory's summonses, the city provided a professional notary or secretary. Robert M. Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in John Calvin's Geneva* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 13-15.

³⁵⁴Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 78.

³⁵⁵Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 75-79.

Although historians used to portray the Consistory as harsh, invasive, and even tyrannical, Robert Kingdon and others have revised that picture by studying the institution's extensive records.³⁵⁶ In the early 1540s the Consistory focused on eliminating Catholic practices regarded as superstitious or idolatrous and ensuring the population's participation in worship and catechism. It had to make sure, as Kingdon puts it, "that everyone in Geneva had an elementary understanding of what the Christian religion as reformed by John Calvin and his associates really meant."³⁵⁷ This entailed memorization of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed and the regular attendance of children at catechism sessions. The Consistory also disciplined those who openly contradicted the teaching of the pastors, turning intransigent opponents over to the Council.

In later years the elders and pastors devoted more attention to interpersonal conflict, violence, sexual immorality, and marital problems. They became more involved in Genevans' personal lives and interaction, provoking some opposition. The records

³⁵⁶Kingdon's work is summarized in numerous essays, many of which overlap in their content. See Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva*; Kingdon, "Calvin and 'Presbytery'"; Robert M. Kingdon, "Anticlericalism in the Registers of the Geneva Consistory 1542-1564," in *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (ed. Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman; Leiden: Brill, 1993); Robert M. Kingdon, "Social Control and Political Control in Calvin's Geneva," *Archiv for Reformation History* (special volume, 1993), 521-532.; Robert M. Kingdon, "The Geneva Consistory in the Time of Calvin," *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620* (ed. Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke, and Gillian Lewis; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 21-34; Robert M. Kingdon, "A New View of Calvin in the Light of the Registers of the Geneva Consistory," *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex: Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion* (ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong; Kirksville, Mo: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1997), 21-33; Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin and the Establishment of Consistory Discipline in Geneva: The Institution and the Men Who Directed It," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 10 (1990): 158-172; Kingdon, "Calvin's Socio-Political Legacy," 120-123; John Witte, Jr., and Robert M. Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). For other analyses see Scott M. Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care: Church Discipline in Calvin's Geneva, 1542-1596," *Calvin: Saint or Sinner?* (ed. Herman Selderhuis; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 283-306; William G. Naphy, "Calvin's Church in Geneva: Constructed or Gathered? Local or Foreign? French or Swiss?," *Calvin and His Influence, 1509-2009* (ed. Irena Backus and Philip Benedict; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 102-118; E. William Monter, "The Consistory of Geneva, 1559-1569," in *Renaissance, Reformation, Resurgence* (ed. Peter De Klerk; Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1976), 63-84; Diane C. Margolf, "Calvin and Church Discipline: Penance, Apology, and Reconciliation," *John Calvin, Myth and Reality: Images and Impact of Geneva's Reformer* (ed. Amy Nelson Burnett; Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 53-66.

³⁵⁷Kingdon, "The Geneva Consistory in the Time of Calvin," 24.

suggest, however, that the Consistory was fairly effective in resolving disputes or bringing Genevans to repentance. Most cases ended with mere admonition or exhortation, though in some the Consistory required public displays of reconciliation or repentance. While a significant number of persons were temporarily barred from the Lord's Supper, hardly anyone was permanently excommunicated. Excommunicants could not marry, have their children baptized, or act as godparents, and they were often (though not always) subject to social ostracism. Those few individuals who refused to repent after being banned from the Supper were turned over to the civil government, as were those guilty of civil crimes, and in the latter cases the Consistory offered an assessment of the evidence and a recommendation of appropriate punishment.

But such civil penalties were carefully distinguished from church discipline itself, and excommunication was the exception rather than the norm. In that sense the Consistory truly was a pastoral body, its officers serving as counselors, arbiters, and instructors to ordinary Genevan Christians. Offering a judgment shared by most recent scholars of the institution, Scott Manetsch notes that the records “portray Geneva's ministers as conscientious pastors, concerned to protect their spiritual flock in a variety of important ways.”³⁵⁸ They show pastors and elders exhibiting a genuine concern for people and their very real problems, while emphasizing the importance of spiritual transformation expressed in outward repentance and communal solidarity. The elders regularly intervened on behalf of the poor or other vulnerable persons, rebuked fathers who abused their wives or children, and confronted sons who refused to provide for their aging parents. They disciplined landlords who took advantage of their tenants, doctors who were incompetent or took advantage of the sick, merchants guilty of price gouging or preventing economic competition, and employers for mistreating or failing to pay their workers. And they consistently tried to reconcile neighbors or family members

³⁵⁸Manetsch, “Holy Terror or Pastoral Care?,” 300.

involved in bitter disputes.³⁵⁹ By all accounts, they had a meaningful effect on Genevan society.³⁶⁰

Witte and Kingdon have shown that matters pertaining to sex and marriage encompassed nearly sixty percent of the Consistory's caseload.³⁶¹ These cases pertained to instances of sexual immorality but they also included conflicts among betrothed and married couples such as breach of promise, desertion, or unfaithfulness. Most often they did not result in a ban, let alone excommunication. Here, as with so many of the cases that came before the Consistory in general, the pastors and elders spent much of their time seeking reconciliation among those in conflict. Roughly half of the Consistory's cases resulted in some sort of deferral to the Council because they involved a severe violation of Geneva's civil laws, such as fornication, adultery, rape, bestiality, or sodomy. Such deferrals reflected the distinctly Protestant conviction of Calvin and the other reformers that despite the claims of the medieval church, marriage was not a sacrament that bestowed special grace, as were the Lord's Supper and baptism, but a temporal covenant designed to secure the temporal ends of love, chastity, and procreation. As an institution it was therefore not primarily subject to canon law and ecclesiastical courts but to civil law and civil courts. As Witte and Kingdon put it, Calvin viewed marriage, family and sexuality as matters of the "earthly kingdom" rather than the "heavenly

359Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care?," 300-305. Cf. Mark Valeri, "Religion, Discipline, and the Economy in Calvin's Geneva," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 123-142; Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Calvin's Relation to Social and Economic Change," *Church and Society* 74 (1984): 75-81; W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1971), 62-63; Jeffrey R. Watt, "Women and the Consistory in Calvin's Geneva," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1983): 429-439; Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin and the Family: The Work of the Consistory in Geneva," *Pacific Theological Review* 17 (1984): 5-18. Valeri places Calvin's approach to economic issues in the context of his theology of communion within the social body and the body of Christ. He argues that at the heart of Calvin's concern here was the sanctity of "truth – the reliability of language as a means of social communication – in the midst of entrepreneurial ventures and schemes to commodify credit" (123). About 5 percent of the 50-200 cases dealt with by the Consistory each year from 1542-1564 dealt with "commercial practices such as fraud, usury, price gouging, or hoarding" (128). See Calvin's Sermon on Deuteronomy 20:19-20; CO 27:639-640; Sermon on Deuteronomy 22:1-4; CO 28:5-27; Sermon on Deuteronomy 24:14-18; CO 28:196-197.

360See Kingdon, "Calvin's Socio-Political Legacy," 121.

361Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva*, 74 (Cf. 71-77).

kingdom.” It was the Consistory's responsibility to guide and discipline Christians according to the law of Christ, even in areas such as sex and marriage, but when the civil laws regulating the institution of marriage were violated, the case properly fell to the civil jurisdiction.³⁶² The Consistory therefore worked in close cooperation with the Council, each case being assigned to the respective spiritual and temporal authority as was necessary, an excellent example of the separation and cooperation of the two governments with respect to an institution that was temporal, but to which scripture was seen to speak with substantial moral clarity.³⁶³

In fact, the pastors and elders of the Genevan church, especially Calvin, were involved in civil affairs to a much greater extent than is implied by their particular spiritual functions. For instance, Calvin wrote a Marriage Ordinance for Geneva in 1545-1546, one that was eventually enacted as law in 1561. The ordinance rejected canon law provisions relative to nearly every dimension of marriage (not to mention the ideal of celibacy) from betrothal and formation to the possibility of divorce, turning to biblical and Roman sources to reform the institution and place it under the decisive authority of the civil magistracy.³⁶⁴ In 1541-1542 Calvin was also on the committee that revised Geneva's civil code, though Monter observes that “his role was passive and really little more than clerical.”³⁶⁵ In addition, Calvin and the Consistory often recommended particular policies or laws to Geneva's civil government.³⁶⁶ But Calvin and his fellow clergymen were involved in such matters in an advisory or personal capacity only.

³⁶²Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva*, 39 (Cf. 27-40).

³⁶³Witte and Kingdon correlate this to a “two-track system of marital morality” that corresponds to Calvin's civil and spiritual uses of the law, and to the respective jurisdictions of state and church. Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva*, 78-79.

³⁶⁴Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva*, 38-48.

³⁶⁵Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 72. Monter writes, “The finished product, Geneva's 1543 edicts on offices and officials, was essentially a codification of current practices. The best political historians concur in the judgment that Geneva's fundamental political dispositions were in no way modified by them. Calvin himself probably found the work very boring, for he never once mentioned it in his correspondence.”

³⁶⁶As Graham puts it, “Nothing seems to have been beneath his notice, and no duty too trivial for the Council to ask his advice.” Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 157 (Cf. 110-144). Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva*, 69-70.

Everyone agreed that neither the pastors nor the Consistory held legal or civil authority, and that it was the Council's responsibility to draft and enforce appropriate laws. What *was* part of the responsibility of the pastors was to call the civil authorities to make just laws, in accord with the moral law of God, and what *was* part of the authority of the Consistory was to hold Christians accountable to that high standard, above and beyond what the civil law could enforce.

Confrontation, Crisis, and Triumph (1546-1555)

Despite the solidarity of Geneva's ecclesiastical government after 1546, Calvin received continual opposition from prominent citizens and skeptical civil magistrates. Because of the ambiguity of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* regarding the final authority over excommunication, many of the magistrates continued to view the Consistory simply as a committee of the state. And although Calvin always insisted that the Consistory was an ecclesiastical body distinct from the civil government, certain prominent historians have argued that in practice the Consistory was precisely what the magistrates thought it to be. Naphy insists,

I cannot stress this point strongly enough.... [O]ne cannot consider the struggle about excommunication purely as a clash between the church and its ministers, on the one hand, and the state and its magistrates, on the other. Instead, as I said, it is a question of jurisdiction in the institutional structure of the state between one magisterial body, the Consistory, and another, the Petit Conseil.³⁶⁷

According to Naphy, the Consistory was not an ecclesiastical challenge to the state so much as it was as a “potential rival to the Petit Conseil as an alternative focus of political and social power.”³⁶⁸ In Geneva “it is almost impossible to speak of the church and state as separate units... [T]he Consistory was as much an expression of state and magisterial

367Naphy, “Calvin's Church in Geneva,” 108-109. Kingdon observes, “The Consistory legally was a standing committee of the city government. It was made up of all the pastors on the city payroll and twelve lay commissioners or elders, elected every year for this purpose in the elections that renewed the entire Genevan government.” Kingdon, “Calvin's Socio-Political Legacy,” 120.

368Naphy, “Calvin's Church in Geneva,” 109.

power as it was of religious and ministerial authority.”³⁶⁹

Naphy's assessment reflects the way many of Geneva's magistrates and leading citizens saw the situation, and structurally it accurately describes the situation as it existed in the early years. The problem with Naphy's argument, however, is that it prejudices what was an ongoing conflict with strongly divergent perspectives. However his opponents saw it, Calvin and his supporters interpreted the conflict as a struggle for the integrity of Christ's spiritual government of his church, distinct from the civil government that is part of the political kingdom. Naphy's argument ignores this dogmatic theological conception of the Consistory, articulated in Calvin's *Institutes*, commentaries, and sermons, and it ignores Calvin's belief, shared by many of his admirers and critics alike, that during the later years this conception *was* established in Geneva, if imperfectly. This perspective is vital because it lies at the foundation of Calvin's political theological legacy.³⁷⁰

In 1546 Calvin and the Consistory became embroiled in a series of high profile disputes that fed opposition to Calvin and the Consistory.³⁷¹ The most important of these

369Naphy, “Calvin's Church in Geneva,” 111. Cf.

370Naphy's judgment in his own earlier work confirms this point. At times it seems like he wants to have it both ways. On the one hand he claims that “It would be a serious mistake to view the crisis of 1538 as the first round of a dispute which ended in 1555.” But it is clear by what he goes on to say that this reflects the perspective of the magistrates rather than that of Calvin, and yet it was Calvin whose perspective ultimately won the day: “The ministers in no way played a major role in the 1538 events. They were simply caught up in a political dispute in Geneva which revolved around the issue of the Republic's relationship with its military protector, Berne. The importance of political concerns remained after Calvin's return. It is clear from the changes to Calvin's original proposals for the Ecclesiastical Ordinances and the later rulings on excommunication that the Guillermins had every intention of creating a state Church along Swiss lines. From the start, though, Calvin had little or no intention of adhering to the Swiss model; his vision of the correct relationship between the Church and State in Geneva differed radically from that of the magistrates who recalled him.” Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 222. Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, argues that Calvin fought a “bitter battle ... over the independence of the church” (59). “At first the civic authorities tried to operate the church as one of the departments of the city's uplift program. On the other side, the church, led by Calvin, tried to guarantee its freedom in matters ecclesiastical and disciplinary” (60-61). Cf. Cf. J. Wayne Baker, “Christian Discipline and the Early Reformed Tradition: Bullinger and Calvin,” *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin* (ed. Robert V. Schnucker; Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1988), 107-119.

371The first pertained to a man named Pierre Ameaux, whose divorce was opposed by Calvin. Ameaux publicly criticized Calvin and his teaching in a manner Calvin deemed blasphemous. He also complained about the power that Calvin and the other French pastors were exercising over native Genevans and over the city government, giving vent to a broader undercurrent of xenophobia in

arose from a set of clashes over moral offenses (fornication, dancing, playing games during the Eucharist) between the Consistory and the prominent Favre family. The Favres despised and frequently defied the authority of the Consistory, insisting that they were only accountable to citizens of Geneva who were duly elected to serve in the administration of justice (i.e., the magistrates). The Favres claimed they had no problem with the ministers' preaching but denied their right to judicial or disciplinary powers. In the short run these challenges to the Consistory's authority failed, but they contributed to the rise of a faction of opposition to Calvin that would eventually be led by the son-in-law of Francois Favre, Ami Perrin.³⁷²

Broader clashes revolved around the pastor Nicholas Cop's preaching against a theatrical play and around an attempt by the magistrates, in response to the urging of the pastors, to replace the city's taverns with 'abbayes' for Bible reading and other spiritual activities.³⁷³ The most divisive clash between the pastors and Genevan society took place when the pastors persuaded the city government to prohibit names associated with Catholic superstition, including some prominent family names associated with local saints. When the pastors enforced the prohibition by refusing to baptize certain children, or by applying Christian names without warning to infants presented for baptism, they repeatedly provoked disorder and rioting. The Consistory tried to use excommunication against the disorderly but were rebuked by the Council in 1547.³⁷⁴ As a rule, Geneva's pastors did not push the city in legal directions any different from those that

Genevan society. He was imprisoned by the Council and ordered to reconcile with Calvin, and at Calvin's insistence the Consistory required him to undergo a humiliating public display of penance. In a second case Jacques Gruet was found guilty of blasphemy, public attacks on the pastors, and treason, for which he was condemned to death and executed. Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 74-77; Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 93-98; Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in John Calvin's Geneva*, 31-70.

³⁷²Kingdon, "Anticlericalism in the Registers of the Geneva Consistory," 617-623.

³⁷³Cop's sermon provoked a violent response and a rebuke from the Petit Conseil. As for the experiment with the 'abbayes,' it lasted only one week. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 98-100;

³⁷⁴Nevertheless, the Council continued to stand by the pastors when it came to the prohibition of certain names. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 146-148.

characterized other European cities, Protestant and Catholic alike. For instance, Geneva's sumptuary laws, designed in large part to conserve resources and prevent poverty, its price and wage controls, and its prohibitions of gambling and dancing, were typical of laws across Europe. What made Geneva unique, for the most part, was the level of enforcement. The pastors and the Consistory lobbied the magistrates actually to enforce the laws that nearly everyone agreed reflected basic justice.³⁷⁵

Still, the assertiveness of the unified Company and Consistory after 1546 seems to have surprised the magistrates. On at least two occasions, in 1548 and 1552, the Petit Conseil rebuked Calvin for specific comments he made in his sermons against the civil government, and the other pastors were also rebuked from time to time.³⁷⁶ And throughout this time Calvin complained that the magistrates were insufficiently supportive of the Consistory's discipline, blaming their reluctance on a refusal to embrace the yoke of Christ.³⁷⁷ Later Calvin wrote that because of certain "wicked libertines ... I was under the necessity of fighting without ceasing to defend and maintain the discipline of the Church."³⁷⁸ In fact, there is little evidence that the magistrates were much more tolerant of immorality than was Calvin. Rather, Naphy argues,

the overwhelming number of cases, criminal and Consistorial, involved problems related to interpersonal disputes, not immorality as such. These cases put the

³⁷⁵Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 73-75, 110-112, 127-128, 133-141. Hopfl argues, "no part of Genevan law or civic order owed its existence, form or legitimacy to Calvin except the Consistory and the Venerable Company. The *esprit des lois* is another question." Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 138. What was unique was "the rigour and impartiality with which these laws were enforced at Geneva, and the single-mindedness and lack of concession to current practice with which the organization of the church and the practice of pastors and magistrates were directed to its end" (188). Cf. 197-201. Cf. Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 152.

³⁷⁶As this implies, the reformer sometimes criticized the city, the council, or a particular group within the populace in terms that made it obvious to all what he was talking about. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 160. But Calvin's proclivity to making political statements from the pulpit should not be exaggerated. Hopfl correctly notes that Calvin "was far from using the pulpit for political speeches to the Genevans, at least in the sermons that have come down to us." Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 143. Even in his sermons on Deuteronomy, "Calvin was exceedingly sparing in direct comment on the domestic issues of the day, and his allusions to his own times are somewhat general and not very revealing" (145).

³⁷⁷Naphy lists numerous examples largely drawn from letters Calvin wrote to Farel and Viret in the years 1545-1547. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 120 (footnote 183).

³⁷⁸Commentary on the Psalms, Preface [1557]; CO 31:27.

Consistory in the position of being very intrusive in the private lives of many Genevans in an extremely public manner. The complaints of those Genevans who were examined supports this general interpretation; the source of contention is usually the perceived arrogance of the ministers.³⁷⁹

The real issue, in many of these cases, was whether the pastors and elders held the spiritual authority of discipline distinct from the civil authority of the magistrates.

That issue was increasingly tied up with the foreign identity of the pastors and the international character of the faction that supported them. The city was being inundated with refugees, a major source of discontentment among native Genevans.³⁸⁰ Already in the late 1530s Geneva was providing considerable hospitality to thousands of foreigners passing through the city. Yet after 1546 many of these refugees began to stay in Geneva. It is probably not accidental that this development closely coincided with the rise in tension between the pastors and the magistrates over discipline. The Genevan government encouraged wealthy refugees to become permanent bourgeois inhabitants of the city, in part because it brought revenue and in part because securing their allegiance was necessary for the security of the city. While poorer refugees required greater aid, the more affluent refugees who began to arrive after 1549 brought economic, social, religious, and eventually political competition.³⁸¹

The *Bourse Francaise* was established in the late 1540s as an independent diaconate responsible for the material needs of French refugees. Unlike the General Hospital it was operated solely by the deacons under the oversight of Calvin and the other pastors without any involvement from the civil magistrates, and its deacons were popularly regarded as deacons and ministers of the church. Jeannine Olson, whose

379Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 111.

380Naphy asserts that “there can be little doubt that the single most common complaint in Geneva was this very issue.” Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 121.

381In a one year period in 1538-1539 the General Hospital helped more than 10,000 strangers, this from a population of a little over 10,000 itself, and in which there were some 600 permanent inhabitants who received various forms of public aid. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 121-127. In the years 1535-1554 around 250 people were awarded bourgeois status, a relatively small number per year but a significant total when considered cumulatively. After all, it would not take much to tip the balance of power in a city of only 10,000 (127-138).

Calvin and Social Welfare remains the authoritative study of the *Bourse Francaise*, notes that while Calvin's attempt to sacralize the work of the General Hospital in certain respects failed, the *Bourse* “fit much more closely the ideal of an organization headed by officers of the church.”³⁸² In part because the refugee oriented *Bourse* established international ties with Protestant refugees throughout western Europe, it was the model of the *Bourse*, not that of the General Hospital, that influenced the Reformed churches outside of Geneva.³⁸³

But by the early 1550s so many were settling in the city – and so many were receiving bourgeois status – that it threatened the balance of power. Most of the French refugees were sufficiently committed to the Reformed faith that they were willing to flee home and country in order to practice it. Accustomed to such devoted participation in a church separate from the state, they overwhelmingly supported Calvin's vision of the church and church discipline. They also tended to avoid full integration with Genevan society, while those Genevans with whom they did involve themselves tended to be supporters of Calvin. In 1551 the Petit Conseil recommended that bourgeois residents be denied the vote for twenty-five years. The controversial proposal failed because longtime bourgeois residents resented the attempt to diminish their influence, but the magistrates did succeed in banning bourgeois pastors (with their education and rhetorical skill) from the General Council.³⁸⁴

In 1553 the long-brewing faction led by Ami Perrin won control of the government. The Perrinist government sought to weaken the Consistory by replacing some of its longstanding elders with men less sympathetic to Calvin's approach to

382Jeannine E. Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse francaise* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), 32.

383“As local Reformed churches were organized and a network of communication developed, the *Bourse* became a model for deacons' funds, much as so many other aspects of Reformed polity and worship in Geneva became prototype for other communities.” Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare*, 28. Cf. Jeannine E. Olson, *One Ministry Many Roles: Deacons and Deaconesses Through the Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992).

384Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 127-138.

discipline, ultimately replacing two thirds of them, and they sought to reduce admissions to bourgeois status.³⁸⁵ Yet all of this was overshadowed by the arrival in Geneva of the famous heretic Michael Servetus. In a letter to Farel back in 1546, Calvin had noted that Servetus requested permission to visit him in Geneva. Servetus was guilty of various errors Calvin associated with the Anabaptists, but his notoriety owed to his vigorous public rejection of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Calvin made his intentions quite clear to Farel. “But I am unwilling to pledge my word for his safety, for if he shall come, I shall never permit him to depart alive, provided my authority [*mea autoritas*] be of any avail.”³⁸⁶ When Servetus was recognized at a sermon in Geneva, Calvin did not hesitate to have him accused. The subsequent trial was entirely a civil affair. Servetus never appeared before the Consistory, but Calvin led the effort to show that Servetus was guilty of heresy and worthy of death.³⁸⁷ When Geneva condemned Servetus it not only did what almost every other Protestant city in Europe told them to do, it also followed the fervent urging of the other Swiss cities. Leaders in the Reformed world were eager to demonstrate that Protestantism was orthodox and had an answer to the proliferation of theological anarchy and heresy. Calvin sought to have Servetus simply executed, rather than burned at the stake, but his appeal was rejected by the Petit Conseil, controlled by the Perrinists. Servetus died on October 27, 1553.³⁸⁸

For all the criticism that his case received across Europe, Servetus was the only

385Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 176-178.

386Letter 154, to Farel, February 13, 1546; CO 12:282-284.

387Shortly before Servetus was burned, Calvin told Simon Sulzer, Myconius's successor in Basle, that civil magistrates armed by God with the sword “for the vindication of the glory of his name” were being far too passive, being unwilling to use force to protect “certain truth.” To be sure, the “furious intemperance” of the papists was not to be imitated, but still, “there is some ground for restraining the impious from uttering whatever blasphemies they please with impunity, when there is an opportunity of checking it.” Letter to Sulzer, September 8, 1553; CO 14:614-616.

388Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 82-83; Baker, “Christian Discipline, Church and State, and Toleration,” 44-48. On the Servetus case see Marian Hillar and Claire S. Allen, *Michael Servetus: Intellectual Giant, Humanist, and Martyr* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002); Eric Kayayan, “The Case of Michael Servetus,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 8 (1992): 117-146. Servetus's thought in particular see Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Geneva: Droz, 1978).

person ever executed in Reformation Geneva for heresy.³⁸⁹ That was not because there were no other heresy trials. On the contrary, during Calvin's early years in Geneva a number of Anabaptists were arrested and tried for their theological teachings. Like Strasbourg, but in sharp contrast to Basle, Zurich and Berne, Geneva refused to subject such persons to capital punishment, preferring to banish those who were intransigent.³⁹⁰ Several pastors and teachers, the most famous of whom was Sebastien Castellio, had also been driven from the city over the years. Geneva came under the criticism of the Swiss cities for being too harsh in the case of Jerome Bolesec, a French refugee who in 1551 publicly challenged Calvin's teaching on predestination. The Geneva council banished Bolesec (who like Servetus, never appeared before the Consistory), and he found refuge in Berne, where he became a constant thorn in the flesh to Calvin and Geneva.³⁹¹ Yet in none of these cases did the Geneva city council seek capital punishment.

As a humanist-trained theologian, Calvin was no doubt surprised that his support for the execution of Servetus came under such heavy criticism. That heresy should be punished by death was embedded in the Justinian Code, which was basis for European civil law for a thousand years and was commonly seen as a reliable reflection of natural law.³⁹² Calvin's sharpest critics came from the circle of humanist writers gathered in Basle, many of whom were Italian refugees like Servetus and sympathetic to the heretic's theology, and most of whom blamed Calvin for what had happened. The most important was Castellio. Bullinger and other reformers urged Calvin to write a response.³⁹³

Calvin did so in his *Defense of the Orthodox Faith against the Errors of Michel*

389Between 1542 and 1564 139 convicted felons were executed in Geneva; only Servetus was executed for heresy. See William E. Monter, "Crime and Punishment in Calvin's Geneva, 1562," *Archive for Reformation History* 64 (1973): 281.

390Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 37, 80-93, 195.

391Gordon, *Calvin*, 205-210; Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 171-172; Baker, "Christian Discipline, Church and State, and Toleration," 38-40.

392Mark J. Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory, The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 85.

393Baker, "Christian Discipline, Church and State, and Toleration," 44-48.

Servetus in 1554.³⁹⁴ While the emphasis of the work was on Servetus's theological errors, it began with a passionate argument about the obligation of civil government to suppress open heresy. Calvin acknowledged that the papists and others horribly abused their authority by persecuting the true church in defense of superstition and falsehood, but he insisted that this does not take away from magistrates' obligation to use the sword in defense of certain truth.³⁹⁵ The alternative was relativism and uncertainty. "How will the religion persist, how will one be able to recognize the true Church, what will indeed Christ himself be, if the doctrine of piety becomes uncertain and doubtful?"³⁹⁶ Soon after Castellio published his *Concerning Heretics and Whether They Are to Be Persecuted*, a systematic refutation of the use of force against heresy that shrewdly quoted earlier statements by Luther and Calvin against religious persecution.³⁹⁷ This time Calvin entrusted his French protégé Theodore Beza with writing a response, and Beza's *Antibellius* appeared in September, 1554.³⁹⁸ Yet Calvin would revisit the issue vigorously in his sermons on Deuteronomy, which he began to preach in March, 1555, and again in his 1563 commentary on the Torah.³⁹⁹

Just as important for Calvin's legacy in Geneva was the growing number of individuals willing to challenge the authority of the Consistory in 1553. The first case actually involved an elder, Jean-Philibert Bonna, who had been at the center of the baptism controversy of recent years. Bonna demonstrated disrespect for the Consistory in a variety of ways, resulting in his expulsion from the Consistory by the pastors and other elders. But he continued to criticize the ministers and run afoul of the Consistory, and in 1553 he was excommunicated. Rejecting the excommunication, he successfully

394See Hillar, *Michael Servetus*, 190-201, as well as Chapter 8 below.

395Gordon, *Calvin*, 224-228; Christoph Strohm, "Calvin and Religious Tolerance," *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society* (ed. Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Smallmann; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 184-186.

396Cited in Strohm, "Calvin and Religious Tolerance," 185. CO 8:464.

397See Hans R. Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio, 1515-1563: Humanist and Defender of Religious Toleration in a Confessional Age* (trans. Bruce Gordon; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

398Gordon, *Calvin*, 228-231.

399See analysis below in Chapter 8.

received communion. Calvin appealed to the Petit Conseil for the enforcement of the Consistory's authority, but when the Council demanded that Bonna reappear before the Consistory, the former elder insisted that he was accountable to the Council alone. In the end Bonna appeared before the ecclesiastical body, repented of his actions, and his excommunication was lifted.⁴⁰⁰

That same year Bonna's friend Philibert Berthelier also challenged the Consistory. Berthelier struck the Consistory at its most vulnerable point: the ambiguity of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* on the ultimate authority over excommunication. He penitently appeared before the Petit Conseil, expressing his repentance and asking that his excommunication be lifted. The Petit Conseil, without consulting with the Consistory, declared him eligible for communion. Calvin and the pastors were furious. In an echo of the confrontation of 1538, they declared that they could not tolerate this usurpation of the Consistory's spiritual power by the civil government, and that they would accept death rather than serve Berthelier communion. The Council, stunned, sought to avoid confrontation by advising Berthelier to refrain voluntarily from the Supper. The Petit Conseil and the Deux Cents then determined that civil control over discipline had to be strengthened. They declared that the Petit Conseil had concurrent jurisdiction over church discipline with the Consistory and could overturn sentences of excommunication. Meanwhile the Council sent letters requesting advice to the magistrates of Berne, Zurich, Basle, and Schaffhausen, while Calvin sent his own pleading letters to the pastors of those cities. The response was mixed, generally reflecting the Swiss cities' commitment to magisterial control over discipline, but hardly favorable to a purge of the pastors.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰Kingdon, "Social Control and Political Control in Calvin's Geneva," 523-524.

⁴⁰¹Berne advised that no excommunication be permitted independent from the civil jurisdiction. Basle simply submitted a copy of its own law, which declared excommunication to be a civil matter. Zurich – without committing itself theologically – suggested that Geneva maintain the status quo. Schaffhausen, the least important of the four cities, supported Calvin's position. Kingdon, "Social Control and Political Control in Calvin's Geneva," 524-526; Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 184-185. Bullinger's influence in leading Zurich to support Calvin was pivotal. It was also ironic, given his fundamental rejection of Calvin's position. Cf. Baker, "Christian Discipline and the Early Reformed Tradition," 115-118; Baker, "Christian Discipline, Church and State, and Toleration,"

This left an impasse, with Calvin and the Consistory refusing to administer communion to excommunicants, and the civil government maintaining its claims but unwilling to force the collective resignation of the pastors.⁴⁰² In early 1555 the various councils agreed to deliberate once again, asking Calvin to make his case from Scripture for autonomous church discipline. The result was a decisive victory for Calvin, as the *Soixante and Deux Cents* overruled the *Petit Conseil* in favor of Calvin. The councils reaffirmed the order of discipline found in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, but now clarified for the first time that the Consistory's authority was supreme in matters of church discipline. Excommunicants had no right of appeal to the civil authorities. Calvin thus won the autonomy of what he believed was a fundamental expression of Christ's spiritual kingdom, the exercise of spiritual discipline by elders and pastors.⁴⁰³

But his victory was by no means secure. By 1555 Genevan society was becoming quite polarized between those who were pro-French and pro-Consistory, and their opponents, who still dominated the government. In addition, popular resentment toward the increasingly elitist Perrinist faction, with its continued pro-Bernese stance, was growing. In 1554 a series of high profile displays of immorality shocked the city, and on January 27, 1555, three days after the councils affirmed his position on church discipline, Calvin preached sharply against the moral and civil laxity that was clearly spawning moral disorder. His sermons seem to have touched a nerve. In the elections of that year there was a substantial shift towards Calvin's supporters. The new government immediately admitted a large number of French refugees to bourgeois status. At the same time, political and legal action was taken against more than 50 Perrinists, several of whom were executed as a result of an allegedly treasonous riot on May 16.⁴⁰⁴ They

40-44.

402In July, 1554 Andre Vulliod took communion while under excommunication, appealing to the magistrates' ruling on Berthelier. The Council punished him by piercing his tongue with a hot iron and exiling him from the city. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 187.

403Kingdon, "Social Control and Political Control in Calvin's Geneva," 527.

404In particular, a cases involving sodomy horrified the population. Five of the guilty, on the advice of the

were charged with conspiring “to propose the abolition of the Consistory by the general assembly” and seeking to “destroy the ecclesiastical discipline and the Reformation, principally the ordinances of 1541.”⁴⁰⁵

The harsh suppression of the Perrinists did not please the Swiss cities. In Berne Calvin was profoundly unpopular, and the city's treaty with Geneva was permitted to lapse in 1556. There was even loose talk of war. Yet for Calvin Berne's continual interference in Genevan affairs demonstrated all the more clearly the importance of ecclesiastical autonomy from the state. As Gordon puts it, “The Bernese church, for Calvin, was the anti-model of the Reformation, an object lesson in the consequences of permitting civil rulers, untrained in exposition of scripture, to interfere in spiritual matters. It was a false rendering unto Caesar.”⁴⁰⁶ In Basle, Castellio and other critics continued to batter the reformer, adding the mistreatment of the Perrinists to that of Servetus. And every single Swiss canton wrote to Geneva appealing the Perrinists' cause.⁴⁰⁷

Although it was not evident at the time, the events of 1555 secured Calvin's position. From this point on there was a marked stability in Genevan politics, with no major changes in leadership through the rest of Calvin's life. Many of the new magistrates were former elders who were devoted to Calvin's vision of the church. In fact, Naphy argues that the one thing that held the Calvinist faction together was its ties to the Consistory.⁴⁰⁸ Over the next decade the Consistory's caseload increased

Company of Pastors, were burned at the stake. Soon after a number of young people were arrested for engaging in a drunken and blasphemous procession through the streets. As for the riot of May 16, there is little evidence that it was actually treasonous. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 187-194.

405Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 88.

406Gordon, *Calvin*, 216.

407Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 197, 209.

408In 1556-1560 somewhere between 68 and 74 per cent of the members of the Petit Conseil were former elders. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, 212, Cf. 221. Naphy goes so far as to say that “Consistorial experience was fast becoming the *sine qua non* of political advancement” (217). “Many of the leading Calvinists were drawn from the group of citizens, the elders, who had the most frequent and intimate contact with the ministers. It is reasonable to conclude that the elders were the dedicated core of the Calvinist faction” (228).

significantly, reaching its apex a few years after Calvin's death.⁴⁰⁹ In 1560 the magistrates legislated an important symbolic shift in the makeup of the Consistory, declaring that from now on elders could be chosen from among the foreign born, and that when the syndic presided over the Consistory he was no longer to carry his official baton, the sign of magisterial office.⁴¹⁰ Both changes substantively clarified the distinction between spiritual and temporal government in Calvin's Geneva.

A similar shift took place with respect to Geneva's diaconate. Robert Kingdon argues that in practice Geneva's diaconate had come "to constitute a kind of standing committee or department of the city government."⁴¹¹ Although the pastors were supposed to have the same role in the selection of procureurs and hospitalliers as they did of elders, they were rarely as involved. But again, what was practiced in Geneva was not always what Calvin envisioned, and as will be seen in Chapter 5, Calvin repeatedly criticized the tendency to view the deacons as secular or political officials rather than as spiritual ministers of the church. Around 1561-1562 the Council finally began to select nominees for the office of deacon, like that of elder, in close consultation with the pastors.⁴¹²

Years of preaching, discipline, catechesis, and immigration had had their effect, and the shape of the city's reformation was distinctly Calvinist, sharply differentiated from that of the other Swiss cities. Calvin had implemented his model of a genuinely Reformed, autonomous church, albeit it one fostered by a supportive state, and he was increasingly absorbed in seeing that model embraced abroad. His heart was especially set on a land where there was no religious uniformity and no supportive state: his native

409Manetsch, "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care?," 290-297.

410Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 139; Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 152. Cf. Baker, "Christian Discipline and the Early Reformed Tradition," 119.

411Kingdon, "Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva," 56-57. "In almost every respect the deacons of the Genevan Church became an administrative department of the Genevan government." Kingdon, "The Deacons of the Reformed Church in Calvin's Geneva," 84.

412Kingdon, "The Deacons of the Reformed Church in Calvin's Geneva," 85-87; Kingdon, "Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva," 62-63; Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 139.

land of France.

Geneva and the French Reformed Churches

The Pays de Vaud

The struggle to establish church discipline in Geneva was paralleled by a less successful struggle in the lands north of Geneva that had been conquered by Berne in 1536, the Pays de Vaud. Here Berne was sovereign but the inhabitants were French speaking and therefore culturally closer to Geneva. Many of the pastors were allies of Calvin, eager to establish autonomous church discipline under the authority of the skeptical Bernese civil magistrates. In fact, Michael Bruening argues,

Calvinism emerged as a theological system and cultural identity distinct from the Swiss Reformed Church, principally through a series of conflicts in the Pays de Vaud between the French-speaking ministers who followed Calvin and the German-speaking Zwinglian ministers and magistrates of Bern over the issues of predestination, the Eucharist, and ecclesiastical discipline. Although these issues can by no means be said to constitute the whole substance of Calvin's theology, the conflicts that arose over them nevertheless shaped a unique Calvinist identity during the Reformation.⁴¹³

It was here that Calvin emerged as a regional leader beyond the walls of Geneva.⁴¹⁴

Although Berne established consistories charged with the discipline of morals, these courts were under the tight control of the civil magistrates. They were not viewed as ecclesiastical bodies and they could not administer excommunication. Despite a plethora of legislation against immorality and Catholic practices in the Vaud, however, neither the Bernese courts nor the pastors had much success in bringing transformation. The problem was not with a lack of skilled pastors. In 1537 the Lausanne Academy was established as the only French-speaking institution for the training of pastors in Europe. The school eventually trained hundreds of students, including key figures like Pierre

⁴¹³Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 2.

⁴¹⁴Bruening agrees with Heiko Oberman's provocative thesis regarding Calvin's focus on a "Reformation of the Refugees," but suggests that it was only after the reformation in Vaud failed that Calvin focused his attention on France. *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 6.

Viret, Theodore Beza, Marthrin Courdier, Francois Hotman and Conrad Gessner, who stood solidly with Calvin in favor of church discipline. In 1542 Viret went to Berne to advocate for such discipline but to no effect. Instead, the city forbade new practices and doctrines, leading Calvin to complain to Viret, “Who does not know that they intend under this title the very things – excommunication, more frequent celebration of the Supper, and many other things – that we want and desire to be restored.”⁴¹⁵

By 1547 the Vaud pastors were dividing into two factions, with a Calvinist faction led by Viret and a pro-Berne faction led by Andre Zebedee, whom Berne had appointed a professor at Lausanne in place of Guillaume Farel, recommended by Calvin and Viret. That year Viret published *De la vertu et usage du ministere de la Parolle de Dieu et des sacraments* in which he defended church discipline and the Calvinist view of the Lord's Supper, while arguing that the civil government's role in ecclesiastical affairs should be limited. “Christian excommunication must have a place. Those who hinder and resist it, under whatever pretext they may allege, clearly resist God and his word and the pure ordinance of Jesus Christ.” The church “cannot be perfect and whole without this discipline.”⁴¹⁶ Zebedee reported Viret's theses to Berne, but Calvin urged him to stand firm. In 1549 the Bernese city council, with the support of its pastors, voted to abolish the weekly colloquies of pastors and professors that met in Lausanne. Even as French refugees were pouring into Geneva, such anti-ecclesiastical action demonstrated that the attempt to establish Calvinism under the authority of Swiss magistrates had failed. Bruening argues that together these factors turned Calvin's eyes westward, redirecting his energies from what magistrates could enact, to what could be accomplished under the cross. Echoing Heiko Oberman, Bruening writes, “If the French nation was to be

415Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 180. Viret and his fellow pastors wrote to the magistrates, charging them with usurping ecclesiastical authority, but the magistrates ruled in February, 1543 that the consistories already established were preferable to “ecclesiastical discipline, also called excommunication” (181). For a thorough analysis of Viret's political thought see Robert Dean Linder, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1964).

416Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 184-185.

reformed, it would have to take place through the movement of refugees and the illegal establishment of churches in the realm. In 1550, political Calvinism had failed. The Reformation of the Refugees had just begun.”⁴¹⁷

To be sure, Viret and the pastors quixotically continued to press for church discipline. In 1558 they sent a new proposal to Berne that included a discussion of the difference between civil magistrates and ecclesiastical order. They explicitly rejected the Zwinglian argument of Berne theologian Wolfgang Musculus that excommunication was appropriate for the early church but not for Christians living under Christian rulers. In contrast, they wrote, excommunication “does not pertain to the civil magistrate, nor to the ministers of the Word, nor to the people as a whole, but to the assembly of the elders legitimately ordained by the church.”⁴¹⁸ When the pastors postponed the sacrament of the Lord's Supper without permission from Berne, claiming that its authorized visitation of the population was incomplete, the city cracked down. It expelled Viret and at least fourteen other pastors and closed the Lausanne Academy, driving several of its professors and many of students to Geneva, where the Academy of Geneva had already been established under Theodore Beza.⁴¹⁹

417Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 209 (Cf. 207-209). In 1549 Berne refused to adopt the *Consensus Tigurinus*, drawn up by Calvin with the approval of Bullinger, and designed to bring harmony between the Swiss and Geneva on the Lord's Supper. In addition, attempts at the establishment of an alliance between the Swiss and France – for which Calvin was secretly yet fervently lobbying – broke down (194-204). While Bullinger and the Swiss were horrified at the thought of forging an alliance with Henri II, persecutor of the French Protestants, Calvin's mind worked more pragmatically. “If I were to consult my own life or private reasons, I would immediately think otherwise, but when I carefully consider how much this particular movement in time could help the propagation of the kingdom of Christ, I am rightly moved to support it” (202). Although Berne affirmed the *Consensus Tigurinus* in 1551, by this time predestination had replaced it as an issue estranging the city from Calvin, Berne receiving Bolsec as a refugee from Geneva. In 1552 Calvin had to go to Berne to answer charges regarding his alleged control over the churches in the Vaud, which were using his catechism and liturgy. In 1554 Berne prohibited preaching on predestination and the next year it ordered that Calvin's books be burned (219).

418Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 247.

419Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground*, 211-255. Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France 1555-1563* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2007 [1956]), 15, 20-22. One Bernese pastor estimated that over a thousand people left Lausanne for Geneva at this time. See Karin Maag, *Seminary or University?: The Genevan Academy and Reformed Higher Education, 1560-1620* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1995).

France

Pastors trained in Lausanne and Geneva and devoted to Calvin's political theology began to flood France in 1557, playing leading roles in the development of French Reformed ecclesiology and discipline. Robert Kingdon has shown that the Company of Pastors directed this whole process, often acting secretly so as to avoid implicating the city government in actions sure to upset the French monarchy. Of course, the city paid the professors' salaries and provided for the families of some of the student-pastors who were dispatched temporarily to France, though the students themselves were often supported by their sending churches in France. The students were also provided apprenticeships in Geneva, which exposed them to Calvinist ecclesiology and church discipline.⁴²⁰ And sitting under his lectures on scripture, especially on the Old Testament prophets, they absorbed Calvin's theology on the kingdom as it proceeds through the proclamation of the word, in defiance of hostile magistrates.⁴²¹ In 1557 Calvin appeared before the Petit Conseil, requesting permission to send pastors to the church in Paris and "begging them to grant this request without inquiring further since these things if very secret would be less dangerous."⁴²² That is essentially what happened. In 1561 the King complained to the city about its actions, blaming the pastors sent by it for the troubles plaguing France and requesting that all such be recalled. The Council replied that it had not sent any pastors to France, which was, strictly speaking, correct, as

420Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 14-22. The majority of the students at the Academy of Geneva were French, although substantial numbers came from virtually every part of Europe where the Reformed had a presence.

421See Peter Wilcox, "The Progress of the Kingdom of Christ' in Calvin's Exposition of the Prophets," in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex* (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1997), 315-322; David Willis-Watkins, "Calvin's Prophetic Reinterpretation of Kingship," *Probing the Reformed Tradition* (ed. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian Armstrong; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 127-128.

422Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 34. The pastors were usually dispatched to specific congregations only after having been examined for their readiness and theology by the Company of Pastors in Geneva (25-29). Of course, the magistrates had to be more involved when one of Geneva's own pastors was sent abroad, as was Nicolas des Gallars to the French refugee church in London in 1560.

it was the Company that sent the pastors. However, by 1562 the Council was openly authorizing pastors to go to France.⁴²³

During the first few decades French Protestantism was quite diverse, subject to a variety of influences including French humanism, Lutheranism, and Martin Bucer. The churches were variously organized and were not unified. And especially after the Placards Affair of October, 1534, they were subject to persecution by the French crown.⁴²⁴ Persecution reached a high point toward the end of Francis II's reign in the mid-1540s, but it would continue during the reign of Henri II (1547-1559). Approximately 500 individuals were put to death for heresy in France between 1523 and 1560.⁴²⁵

Already during the 1540s, however, Calvin's writings were spreading throughout France and around two thirds of the books censored by the Sorbonne were from Geneva.⁴²⁶ As Gordon has noted, especially after the death of Marguerite of Navarre in 1549, "Calvin's was the voice of French reform."⁴²⁷ Genevan publishing surged in 1543 and then again in the late 1550s, reaching a peak during the last few years of Calvin's life in the early 1560s. Most of the master printers were French and much of the funding for the work came from Frenchmen as well.⁴²⁸ The magistrates worked closely with the

⁴²³Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 31-35. The Petit Conseil asked Calvin and the other pastors about it, who admitted that they sent pastors to France but denied any complicity in sedition, Calvin stressing that he urged men not to engage in such activity without the authority of appropriate magistrates.

⁴²⁴For centuries French kings had been regarded as sacred defenders of the faith, touched and blessed by God, and France was consequently considered to be a uniquely chosen nation. If God was to continue blessing the realm, the kings needed to defend the faith against all heresy and schism. Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 14; Benedict, "Catholic Reformed Co-existence," 68, writes, "The precocious development of French national identity in the later Middle Ages had highlighted the kingdom's special fervor for the defence of the church as one of the most evident marks of its status as God's chosen nation. The country was believed to have entered into a special covenant with the divinity at the time of Clovis that subsequently linked its continued existence to its enduring fidelity to the faith."

⁴²⁵Gordon, *Calvin*, 308; Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 133. In 1551 Henri II issued the Edict of Chateaubriand, calling for the persecution of Protestants, and in 1557 he tried to reinvigorate that persecution with the Edict of Compiègne. Two years later he confronted the Paris Parlement (whose members included Protestants) to discover why it was not better enforcing his edicts.

⁴²⁶Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 20.

⁴²⁷Gordon, *Calvin*, 304.

⁴²⁸In addition to Calvin's works and the works of other theologians the presses printed more than 27,400 copies of Beza's metrical psalms by 1562, most of which went to Protestants in France or French refugee congregations around Europe. Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 179-181. Of 35 master printers in

pastors to oversee the work of the printing presses, establishing an oversight commission composed of lay members chosen by the government and a representative from the Company of Pastors.⁴²⁹ By the time Strasbourg became Lutheran in 1547, when French refugees began to pour into Geneva, Geneva's influence over French Protestantism was unrivaled. In addition to the massive influx of literature, Genevan records show that at least 220 pastors were trained in Geneva and sent to France. Some 1,240 churches were organized in the kingdom during 1555-1570, most of them in 1559-1562. It has been estimated that approximately 1.5 to 2 million people became Reformed Protestants, about 10 percent of the population of France, including disproportionate numbers from the nobility and literate classes.⁴³⁰

Geneva did not control all of these churches, of course, but, especially early on, the Genevan church did serve as a court of appeals for theological and disciplinary matters in France. Genevan pastors were in constant contact with the French churches, and even after the establishment of the French National Synod, churches and synods continued to ask Geneva for advice on matters pertaining to discipline, the consistory, and the diaconate.⁴³¹ Geneva could also recall pastors it had sent, though it usually did so only on the request of French churches.⁴³²

Geneva who signed books in the years 1550-1564 only one was a native Genevan. When the magistrates officially regulated the printing industry in 1563 they licensed 24 master printers, all but two of whom were from France (181).

429Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 93-103.

430Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 134-137. The chief source on Geneva's role in training these pastors and sending them to France is the classic by Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France 1555-1563*. For the best analysis of the effect of Geneva's printing presses in France see Andrew Pettegree, *The French Book and the European World*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 89-106. Pettegree notes that by the 1560s, with the French Protestant population far outpacing Genevan supply, French printing presses began to eclipse the work of those in Geneva. In 1559 Genevan texts made up 78% of Evangelical texts printed in the French language (99-100).

431Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 43-47. For instance, Geneva advised the churches of Normandy in 1564 that excommunicated people should not be excluded from preaching services, that visitors need not prove good standing to be admitted for the Supper, and that deacons rather than ministers should handle the business affairs of the churches (47). But the Genevan pastors rarely overruled a French synod. Robert Kingdon admits that his classic *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, while solidly accurate in its presentation of the evidence, exaggerates the direct control or influence that Geneva held over the French churches.

432Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 47-51.

Although Calvin's theology in general had a profound influence on French Protestantism, it was his political theology, so uniquely applicable in a context in which state and church were separated, that distinctly shaped the French church. In contrast to Melancthon or Bullinger, Calvin stressed the distinction between the church and the political kingdom and he provided a model for a range of autonomous church government functions through the offices of pastor, elder and deacon. To be sure, Protestants among the nobility often embraced Calvin's theology in abstraction from his ecclesiology, seeking to maintain their social and political positions. But for those churches that did not meet under noble leadership (probably around half of the total), Calvin model of church government was a godsend, offering cohesion and a basis for broader unity in which there was parity among congregations and pastors. The first national synod of the French Reformed Church, meeting in Paris in 1559, operated under decisive Calvinist influence. Its president, Francois Morel, and its leading figure, Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, had both been trained in Geneva.⁴³³

The primary purpose of the Synod of Paris was to adopt a confession of faith and a church order. In part to demonstrate to the monarchy that it was a French church, not a Genevan church, the synod adopted its own distinct confession, but that confession may have been influenced by one written by Calvin in 1557.⁴³⁴ On substance, it followed Calvin closely. With respect to the government of the church, the confession declares, "Now as we enjoy Christ only through the gospel, we believe that the order of the Church, established by his authority, ought to be sacred and inviolable ... Not that God is bound to such aid and subordinate means, but because it pleases him to govern us by such

433Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 21-26.

434Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 46, declares that it was "practically dictated by Calvin." But Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 27, argues, citing a discussion in Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvin and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 25-30, that "differences in theological methodology and detail in a number of important articles make it unclear how much (if any) of the final text Calvin actually wrote."

restraints” (Article 25). It emphasizes that all Christians are responsible to join themselves to the ministry and discipline of the church “wherever God shall have established a true order of the Church, even if the magistrates and edicts are contrary to it”(Article 26).⁴³⁵

The French Confession identifies the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments as the two marks of the true church (Article 28), but like Calvin it goes on to stress the vital significance of discipline and poor relief as expressions of Christ's rule: “As to the true Church, we believe that it should be governed according to the order established by our Lord Jesus Christ. That there should be pastors, overseers, and deacons, so that true doctrine may have its course, that errors may be corrected and suppressed, and the poor and all who are in affliction may be helped in their necessities” (Article 29). Church order may not bind the conscience, must always promote concord and obedience, and may never contradict scripture. But the confession declares excommunication, appointed by Christ, to be “necessary” (Article 33), and it adheres closely to the Calvinist view of the Lord's Supper as a manifestation of the union of believers in Christ (Article 36). It also rejects episcopacy, following Calvin in declaring all pastors to “have the same authority and equal power under one head, one only sovereign and universal bishop, Jesus Christ” (Article 31).⁴³⁶

The confession closes with two articles on civil government. It declares that God has ordained magistrates in the world as a “holy authority,” “so that some restraint may

435See “The French Confession of Faith. AD 1559,” in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (ed. Arthur C. Cochrane; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 137-158. The confession also maintains Calvin's distinction between the revelation of Scripture and that of natural law (Article 2), and it declares the “ordinances of the law” to be at an end, but nevertheless helpful “for the ruling of our lives” (Article 23).

436Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 28, notes, however, that Calvin did not reject episcopacy as long as it was not too hierarchical. “Although, for example, Calvin and Beza both insisted on the equality of and collegiality of ministers, they also argued that a single minister needed to preside over the ministerial assembly as a *primus inter pares* to maintain order and see that the assembly's business was conducted in an appropriate manner.” Calvin and Beza saw this “limited” episcopacy in the early church as being within the bounds of the biblical parameters. The French church, however, would take equality between ministers and the autonomy of local congregations to a whole new level. See also Sunshine, “Reformed Theology and the Origins of Synodical Polity,” 141-148.

be put upon its disordered appetites” and specifies they are given the sword “to suppress crimes against the first as well as against the second table of the Commandments of God.”⁴³⁷ Like Calvin, the confession declares that the authority of magistrates is inviolable “even if they are unbelievers, provided that the sovereign empire of God remain intact,” and therefore declares its opposition to “all those who would like to reject authority, to establish community and confusion of property, and overthrow the order of justice” (Article 40). In fact, in the preface to the confession the Synod declared its loyalty to the King under God. But it also pleaded with the King to cease persecuting the church with “fire and sword” and to grant freedom of conscience and worship, in private, if not in public. Implicitly invoking Calvin's two kingdoms distinction, the preface declares that Christ, “having given you power over our property, our bodies, and even our lives, demands that the control and dominion of our souls and consciences, which he purchased with his own blood, be reserved to him.”⁴³⁸

The French Confession thus owed much to Calvin, but the distinctive legacy of the French Reformed Church was to apply Calvin's ecclesiological principles in a national context where the church was separated from the state. This application was codified in the *Discipline Ecclésiastique* of 1559. As Sunshine notes, “Perhaps the greatest challenge in the Discipline was to develop a system of collective church government that would unite the disparate Protestant churches in the kingdom without the support of the magistrate and in the totally unprecedented absence of any form of hierarchical relationships between the churches.”⁴³⁹ Adapted and revised over the years, it eventually called for four distinct levels of church government: the local congregation, the colloquy,

⁴³⁷The 1559 Synod actually affirmed that heretics should be put to death by the civil magistrates. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 46.

⁴³⁸Insisting that the Reformed church had in it “no rebellion or heresy whatsoever,” the delegates maintained, “For nothing will be seen but what is decent and well-ordered, and nothing will be heard but the praise of God, exhortations to his service, and prayers for the preservation of your Majesty and your kingdom.” In this way “we may thus be permitted, in serving your Majesty, to serve him who has raised you to your power and dignity.” “French Confession of Faith,” 141-143.

⁴³⁹Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 31. Sunshine's study, especially Chapters 3 and 4, is a detailed analysis of how this system of government developed at its various levels.

the provincial synod, and the national synod. The synodical or presbyterian system established by the French, built on the rejection of centralized control by magistrates and bishops alike, was probably the first thoroughly non-hierarchical system of government in church history.⁴⁴⁰

Of course, there were other differences between church government as it functioned in the French Reformed Church and in Geneva, not the least of which pertained to the nature of the consistory. On the one hand, given the lack of magisterial control over the church, elders were neither magistrates nor chosen by the magistrates. On the other hand, for the same reason consistories became responsible for much more than just discipline, taking up some of the administrative tasks that in Geneva were performed by the Council (though at least in theory such matters were to be dealt with at different meetings from those that handled discipline).⁴⁴¹ But the French church remained committed to the Calvinist understanding of church discipline. When the French learned in 1572 that at Heidelberg Thomas Erastus was vigorously advocating magisterial control over the church and rejecting church discipline – the position of Zwingli and Bullinger that would one day become known as erastianism – the national synod declared that it “rejects the error of the said Doctor [Erastus] and of all others who wish to abolish the Discipline of the Church, confusing it with the civil and political

440Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 32-39. In 1562 Jean Morély wrote a book attacking the consistorial model of church government derived from Geneva and advocating a form of congregationalism. When he refused to appear before the Consistory in Geneva he was excommunicated and his book publicly burned. See Gordon, *Calvin*, 326; Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement 1564-1572* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 43-137; Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 83-90.

441Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 120-142. This distinction of tasks reflects the implicit distinction between spiritual government and the administration of mundane ecclesiastical affairs. The French churches also expanded the role of the diaconate. Deacons served on consistories, were delegates to synods, carried out liturgical functions, taught, catechized, and exercised discipline. Elders, for their part, often supervised or assisted the deacons with poor relief and other charitable functions. Despite the efforts of various synods to prevent it, over time the two offices were essentially collapsed into one (94-119, 138-142). Cf. Glenn S. Sunshine, “Geneva Meets Rome: The Development of the French Reformed Diaconate,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26 (1995): 329-346; Raymond A. Mentzer, “Acting on Calvin’s Ideas: The Church in France,” *Calvin and the Church* (ed. David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC, 2002), 29-41.

government of the Magistrates.”⁴⁴²

It is also crucial to note that up to half of the Protestant churches in France did not participate in the synodical structure but operated under the authority of the nobility. The nobility were not eager to place themselves under the discipline of pastors and elders who were usually their social inferiors. Significantly, the political and military party known as the Huguenots that emerged at the beginning of the Wars of Religion in 1562 was led by these nobility and not the pastors, elders and deacons of the Reformed church. But the latter realized that they needed the nobility if they had any hopes of securing freedom of worship, let alone of seeing Protestantism established as the religion of France. The Reformed churches thus cooperated with the Huguenot leadership, supporting their political claims against the monarchy.⁴⁴³

In areas where the magistrates were Protestants the churches tried to clarify the proper relationship between the two kingdoms.⁴⁴⁴ For example, the Provincial Synod of Montauban distinguished between ecclesiastical and political governments, noting that the former were obligated to preach the word, administer the sacraments and conduct church discipline, while the latter were to manage temporal affairs, enforce justice, encourage piety and suppress heresy. In some places there were even localized

442Brian G. Armstrong, “*Semper Reformanda: The Case of the French Reformed Church, 1559-1620*,” *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives* (ed. Fred Graham; Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 126-127.

443Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 31, 46. When the Wars of Religion began, the boundaries between spiritual and civil action could become blurred, but even then, Sunshine argues, “Various other Protestant assemblies took care of political and military matters and nonecclesiastical administration” (59).

444One church order, the Discipline of Saint-Lô, even followed Theodore Beza (though not Calvin) in referring to the magistrate as one of the church's 'principal members' and called for a complementary relation between the magistrates and the consistory somewhat like that which existed in Geneva, with the magistrates protecting the church and enforcing both tables of the law. But this was an isolated case and may not have even been put into effect. Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 149. Beza spoke of the magistrate this way in his early *Confession* but tended to stress the distinction between civil and spiritual government more in later years. For an excellent study of Beza's ecclesiology and his conception of the relation between church and state see Tadataka Maruyama, *The Ecclesiology of Theodore Beza: The Reform of the True Church* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978). Cf. Scott M. Manetsch, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572-1598* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement*, 166-170.

magisterial reformations similar to that of Geneva.⁴⁴⁵

Yet much more common was the situation of churches under Catholic magistrates. In these territories churches sought to maintain their autonomy while securing legal status as corporations. As Sunshine puts it,

The *droit des corps* gave corporations the right to regulate their own affairs within the bounds of the legitimate interests of the *corps*. In other words, by assuming the *droit des corps* applied to them, the churches could freely regulate internal matters of faith and discipline. On the other hand, the *droit des corps* also gave royal officers the right to oversee the corporation (in this case, the church and specifically the consistory) to make sure it did not regulate matters which were beyond its rightful interests.⁴⁴⁶

In the interests of churches seeking the *droit des corps* the national synod sought to avoid addressing matters that were civil rather than ecclesiastical. The Synod of Lyons in 1563 expressly distinguished the way in which ministers were under the authority of magistrates relative to civil matters, but under the authority of classes and synods in spiritual matters. It also declared that consistories should not get involved in lawsuits or infringe upon the prerogatives of civil courts. It acknowledged the right of magistrates to sit in on consistory meetings, and, in theory, even meetings of classes or synods, while at the same time insisting that the estates had no authority to call or appoint ministers.⁴⁴⁷

In his assessment of its legacy Benedict describes the French Reformed

445Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming*, 86-87. Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 143, notes that civil-directed municipal reformations took place in Montpellier, Castres, Bazas, Nîmes, and Montauban. These cities witnessed "local churches stripped of their images and the mass eliminated, sometimes by authority of the city government and sometimes independently of it." During the war further reformations took place in occupied cities like Rouen and Orléans, in which a repeated cycle of early toleration, increasing violence, iconoclasm, and Catholic persecution ensued (145). In certain territories under the control of Protestant nobility such as Dauphiné, however, laws were passed requiring church attendance, demanding that magistrates sign the Confession of Faith, giving them authority to persecute Libertines and Anabaptists, enforcing consistorial authority with civil penalties, and regulating matters such as poor relief and the salaries and appointment of ministers. Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 157-158.

446Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 150. Apparently in some areas it was even common for the civil magistrates to provide this oversight by attending consistory meetings.

447Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 151-155. Sunshine quotes the Synod of Lyon in 1563: "[T]he office of ministers is to govern their flock according to the Word of God and the *Discipline ecclésiastique*, and it is the magistrate's task to see that all estates, even the ministers, walk roundly and rightly in their callings. And in those areas where the ministers fail, they are to have them admonished according to the order of the *Discipline ecclésiastique* by *classes* and synods, not intending this in any way to include faults punishable by the laws which are the jurisdiction of the magistrate" (152)

movement as

one that epitomized more unmistakably than any other a Reformed church that regulated its internal affairs and carried out its disciplinary tasks independently of the secular authorities... [I]n the majority of communities in which the new faith took root, the events of the Wars of Religion taught the churches to rely on their own resources to survive. At successive national synods, they increasingly marked their distance from the secular authorities. Synodal decrees warned against selecting magistrates to serve as elders, forbade consistories to denounce church members discovered to be guilty of heinous crimes to the secular judges, and declared all consistory proceeding secret, even those in which consistory members were insulted in manners that might be actionable before the secular courts... The French Reformed churches thus became the enduring model of a network of churches that maintained purity of doctrine, quality control over local clergy, ecclesiastical discipline, and reasonable uniformity of practice with a minimum of reliance on secular authorities.⁴⁴⁸

The establishment of a vigorous Reformed church in France, with its autonomous system of government separate from the state, if only by necessity, demonstrated how Calvin's suitable political theology was for a pluralistic context, one far removed from a unified *corpus Christianum* such as the Genevan city-state. It exhibits the richness of Calvin's two kingdoms theology, and its potential for circumstances far removed from those of Geneva and France alike.

The Huguenots and Resistance

But the legacy of Calvin's political theology extended beyond the autonomy of the French Reformed Church, helping to lay the groundwork for a model of political leadership and engagement that was increasingly distinct from the affairs of the church. Of course, it is misleading to draw simple lines and distinctions within a movement whose operations on the ground were various and complex. Still, the outlines of a distinct political vision can increasingly be detected in the policies and actions of Calvin and the Huguenot leadership alike, especially in their understanding of resistance to tyranny.

Before 1562 Calvin and the other Genevan pastors urged the French Protestants

⁴⁴⁸Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 148.

to act with circumspection and subtlety, preserving the gospel from slander. When a group of Protestants were arrested during a worship service in Paris in September 1557, Calvin urged them to devote themselves to prayer rather than sedition. A key concern in his mind was to attract the nobility to Protestantism, so improving its prospects both regionally and in France as a whole. Calvin worked hard at building relationships with leading French men and women, and the effort was remarkably successful. By the late 1550s a substantial portion of the nobility (ranging from 10-40 percent, depending on the area) supported the Reformation, including such high profile figures as Jeanne d'Albret, the Queen of Navarre (a niece of Francis I and the wife of Antoine of Bourbon, the First Prince of the Blood); Louis, the Prince of Condé (as Antoine's brother, also a prince of the blood); and Gaspard de Coligny, the Admiral of France.⁴⁴⁹

Although the conversion of such figures gave the Reformed churches a measure of security and confidence, it also provided the leadership so necessary for the legitimacy of the Huguenot political movement. Inspired in part by Calvin's justification of resistance to tyranny by lower magistrates, during the late 1550s and early 1560s key nobles became involved in a number of conspiracies, the most significant of which was the Conspiracy of Amboise. The background to these conspiracies was the accidental death of Henri II, which made Henri's fifteen year son King Francis II. Although Francis was legally of age, he lacked the skills and maturity to rule, so an informal regency was established. The Bourbon family, led by Antoine of Navarre, was closest to the throne by blood, and was therefore widely regarded as having the right to a leading role in the regency. But the regency was dominated by the Catholic House of Guise. When the Guises reinvigorated the persecution of Protestants, it became possible for the latter to find justification for resistance in the just grievance of Bourbon.⁴⁵⁰

449Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 54-64; R.J. Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion 1559-1598* (2nd. ed; New York: Longman, 1996 [1989]), 6-15; Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 137-139.

450Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 20-23. On Calvin and the Amboise Conspiracy see N. M.

The Conspiracy of Amboise of 1560 was the brainchild of a lesser nobleman, Jean du Barry, Sieur de La Renaudie. Its purpose was the “liberation” of King Francis II from his Guise regents and the delivery of the regency to the Bourbon family. Although none of Bourbon princes were directly part of the plot, Condé apparently agreed that it could be carried out in his name. La Renaudie requested the support of Geneva's pastors, but while a number of figures claimed that Calvin and Beza supported the conspiracy, Calvin consistently denied it, claiming that all along he had warned of the disaster such a conspiracy might bring. On the other hand, Calvin admitted that he had told the conspirators he would not oppose the conspiracy if it were led by Antoine de Bourbon, the first Prince of the Blood, “who ought to be chief of the Council of the King according to the laws of France.”⁴⁵¹ Kingdon suggests that Calvin would have been satisfied had Condé been more actively involved. When Condé did lead a revolt in 1562, Calvin supported his cause wholeheartedly.⁴⁵² But the Conspiracy of Amboise failed miserably.⁴⁵³

Although some of Geneva's pastors do seem to have given the plot significant support, including François Hotman and Theodore Beza,⁴⁵⁴ most of the Reformed churches in France followed the confession they had adopted at Paris and refused to support anything smacking of sedition. True, in March 1560 the National Synod of Poitiers drew up a memorandum questioning the right of the House of Guise to control

Sutherland, “Calvinism and the Conspiracy of Amboise,” *History* 47:160 (1962): 111-138.

451Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 69. Calvin claimed he had warned that “from a single drop [of blood] would immediately flow streams that would inundate France.” Letter to Peter Martyr Vermigli, May 5, 1560; CO 18:82. Cf. John T. McNeill, “John Calvin on Civil Government,” *Calvinism and the Political Order* (ed. George L. Hunt; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 27-29.

452Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 68-69; Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 22-25.

453In addition to La Renaudie, it cost the lives of some 1200 persons. Gordon, *Calvin*, 311.

454In his *On the Authority of the Magistrate in the Punishment of Heretics*, which Calvin warmly approved, Beza had argued that lesser magistrates, specifically municipal authorities, have the right to defy their superiors on religious matters. Eventually Hotman and Beza would become the two leading theorists of the Huguenot theory of the right to resistance. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 68-72; Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 24.

the French government and insisting that the princes of the blood had the right to choose the councilors of state in cooperation with the Estates General.⁴⁵⁵ This was the basic secular rationale for the Huguenot cause and it was supported by Calvin. But it was no defense of conspiracy. In practice, the attitude of the pastors was distinct from that of the nobility, many of whom unambiguously supported the conspiracy and some of whom became its leaders.⁴⁵⁶ In that sense the conspiracy was aristocratic rather than Protestant, even though the Guises blamed it on the “preachers of the new doctrine.”⁴⁵⁷

In fact, despite the Conspiracy of Amboise, under the influence of the Queen-mother, Catherine de Médici, who resented the domination of the Guises, the crown gradually relaxed its enforcement of anti-Protestant legislation, even tolerating private religious assemblies.⁴⁵⁸ Suggesting that the Pope and Emperor were taking too long to call a church-wide council, Catherine called Catholic and Protestant representatives together to a colloquy at Poissy to seek conciliation.⁴⁵⁹ But various plots against the Guise regime continued to fester. In 1561 Condé was captured by royal officials, tried for treason, and sentenced to death. Only the unexpected death of Francis II saved his life. Because Charles IX was only ten years old he required an official regency. By custom this regency should have belonged to Antoine of Bourbon, but this was deemed impossible in the context of compromised state of his brother. The result was that Catherine assumed the official regency. Determined to weaken the House of Guise by strengthening that of

455Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 10; Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 85.

456Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 74-75. Geneva did not make any attempt to prevent these nobles from getting involved in the plot, nor did it take any action against them when they returned to the city seeking refuge once again.

457Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 24.

458In part Catherine's actions were influenced by the views of her Chancellor de l'Hôpital, who was pressing for toleration for pragmatic reasons (an official counting of the Protestant churches of the kingdom came to some 2,150 churches). Philip Benedict, “*Un roi, une loi, deux fois*: parameters for the history of Catholic-Reformed Co-existence in France 1555-1685,” *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (ed. Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 69-70. Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 7, notes that more realistic estimates put the number closer to 1,200-1,250 churches.

459Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 25-27.

Navarre, Catherine released Condé while persuading Antoine to sign a private agreement waiving his right to the regency.⁴⁶⁰

The new toleration induced Geneva and the French Protestants to abandon secrecy in their actions, and many who had sought refuge in Geneva returned to France. There were outbreaks of rioting and iconoclasm, although pastors and consistories usually denounced this.⁴⁶¹ Concerned as always about the charge of disorder, Calvin defended the Protestant pastors in a letter to the King in 1561:

With regard to the charge of stirring up disturbances and seditions, they protest against ever having entertained any such intention, and declare, on the contrary, that they have employed all their influence to check and prevent them. Also, that they have never given advice to make any innovations, or attempted anything criminal with respect to the established order of the state, but have exhorted those who are disposed to listen to them to remain in peaceful subjection to their prince. And if any disturbances have arisen, it has been to their great regret, and certainly not by their having furnished any pretext for them. And so far have they been from countenancing any such enterprises, they would willingly have lent their aid to repress them.⁴⁶²

By then the Reformed movement in France was riding a wave of confidence.⁴⁶³ But the colloquy was a failure. Although Protestants were given free reign to speak at the forum, the last of its kind in the increasingly violent atmosphere of 16th Century Europe, sharply differing views of the Lord's Supper doomed it from the start.⁴⁶⁴

Still, in 1562 Catherine made a further effort to achieve peace. In the Edict of January she granted Protestants limited freedom of worship for the first time, permitting worship in the rural territories of the nobility but not in the towns and cities where most other Protestant churches were. Yet such a compromise satisfied neither the Protestant synods nor militant Catholics. When in March 1562 Francis, the Duke of Guise, attacked

460Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 75-76.

461Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 143; Gordon, *Calvin*, 323-324. Calvin, unlike Viret and Farel, was harshly and consistently critical of rioting, iconoclasm, or anything that smacked of disorder. Cf. Letter to the preachers of Lyons, May 13, 1562; CO 19:409.

462Gordon, *Calvin*, 325.

463Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 79-81. Beza was sent to lead the Protestant delegation at Poissy, nine out of eleven of whom had been trained in Geneva. Soon Beza was preaching regularly in Paris, and Catherine herself attended a Calvinist sermon with the King.

464Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 30-32.

a Reformed congregation meeting in a barn, killing a number of Protestants, war became inevitable. The Huguenot leadership had been preparing for this for a long time, and this was their catalyst for mobilization. But the Guises got to Catherine and the King first, and when the Huguenots began seizing control of cities, Catherine blamed them for the crisis.⁴⁶⁵

Condé's call for mobilization was accompanied by a Declaration of Protestation that articulated just the sort of political and legal rationale that was approved by Calvin and clarified that the war was a struggle of loyalty to the king rather than rebellion against him.

(1) Firstly therefore, he [Condé] protests that no selfish passion leads him, but that his sole consideration is of what he owes God, with the duty he has particularly to the crown of France, under the government of the Queen, and finally the affection he bears to this kingdom, constrain him to look for all methods legitimate according to God and men, and according to the rank and degree which he holds in this kingdom, to return to full liberty the person of the King, the Queen and messieurs her children, and to maintain the observation of the edicts and ordinances of his Majesty, and namely the last edict issued concerning religion.⁴⁶⁶

The document went on to describe matters of taxation and debt, the intimidation of the King by his councilors, Condé's loyalty to the King, and his willingness to lay down his arms for a just peace. A significant portion of the French nobility, perhaps even the majority, supported Condé, as did Calvin.⁴⁶⁷

But over the following months the war turned against the Huguenots. Condé was captured and Antoine of Bourbon, who was actually supporting the Guises by this time, was fatally wounded. In March 1563 Condé agreed to the Peace of Amboise, which guaranteed freedom of worship on the estates of nobility with rights of high justice, the right of private worship in the homes of lesser nobility, and freedom of worship in towns held by Protestants as of March 7. But no liberty of worship was granted in key cities like

465Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 35-38.

466Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 107.

467Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 108.

Paris, provoking intense criticism from the churches, from Coligny, and from Calvin.⁴⁶⁸

While the nobility was willing to sacrifice much for peace, most of the pastors insisted that there should be no peace that would sacrifice congregations or give up the right to worship. Eventually Condé, angered at the lack of realism on the part of the pastors, declared that in matters of high policy he would no longer consult with them in his negotiations. Kingdon summarizes the difference in perspective:

While it was almost always groups of nobles who provoked actual fighting, either by plot or by mustering or both, it was also groups of nobles who were usually the first to demand peace when military considerations made that desirable. While the pastors often opposed the beginning of war, particularly if its beginnings lay in a foolhardy plot of some sort, once war was underway they generally wanted it to continue until some tangible advantages had been secured for the Protestant cause.⁴⁶⁹

Thus unlike the Conspiracy of Amboise, the Protestant churches supported the Huguenot cause in 1562-1563. Yet such intransigence did little to assure the authorities that Protestant pastors were the obedient and peaceable subjects they claimed to be. After 1562 their churches faced increasingly difficult circumstances, and the rapid growth of previous years ground to a halt.⁴⁷⁰

Even so, the pastors were not as politically involved as it might have seemed. When the National Synod met in April 1562 in Orléans, just after Condé occupied the city at the beginning of the war, it touched hardly at all on political matters. The delegates even warned churches not to pass ordinances “touching the things which belong to the Magistrates.”⁴⁷¹ The Provincial Synod of Saintonge in 1562 found it necessary to pass a resolution clarifying the legitimacy of the war as a protection and defense of the King.⁴⁷²

There was also a clear distinction in many pastors' minds between the political and

⁴⁶⁸Knecht, *The French Wars of Religion*, 35-38. Gordon, *Calvin*, 322. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement*, 149-156. On the Catholic side, the Duke of Guise was assassinated, his assassin testifying under torture that the Huguenot Coligny was behind the crime.

⁴⁶⁹Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement*, 153. The pastors were less involved in the plotting and diplomatic efforts associated with the second war in 1567 (162-166, 176-177).

⁴⁷⁰Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 145.

⁴⁷¹Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 87.

⁴⁷²Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 108-113.

military affairs of the Huguenot leadership and the ecclesiastical affairs of the Synod, and as a rule, the general oversight of the military organization in all the Huguenot provinces was given to “assemblée politiques.” On the other hand, the Huguenot leadership used the ecclesiastical organization of the Reformed churches for purposes of mobilization, and many ministers acquiesced. The Huguenots sent letters to the churches requesting soldiers and support, requests that by all accounts were answered favorably. As early as November 1560 the Guyenne Synod of Clairac ordered the churches of the province to organize military units, and many pastors used their pulpits to lobby for the cause, or served as chaplains to Huguenot leaders.⁴⁷³ Sunshine concludes, “Unfortunately, the growing militarization and politicization of Protestantism in France only increased tensions and 'division' in the church. The Wars of Religion made the nobility the effective leaders within Protestantism instead of the pastors, though some pastors became involved in military activities as well, much to the chagrin of Calvin.”⁴⁷⁴

Calvin strongly supported the Huguenots during the War of 1562-1563. Indeed, he and the pastors worked hard to raise financial, military, and political support among the Swiss cities and the German princes. In all of this Calvin tried to walk a fine line. He sternly rebuked the ministers of Lyons for carrying weapons and acting violently. He utterly rejected riots and popular disorder, even when it was channeled in favor of the war effort. On the other hand, he wrote letters to churches in France appealing for money to pay for German mercenaries and rebuking churches for their stinginess.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³François Hotman was vigorously involved in the diplomatic campaign to secure foreign aid for the Huguenots, as was Beza, although most diplomatic activities were conducted by nobility under direction from Condé. Beza served Condé as a theological adviser, and he pressed him to advance particular military and political policies as well. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 108-113.

⁴⁷⁴Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism*, 145. Cf. 143-166.

⁴⁷⁵Gordon, *Calvin*, 321. Kingdon writes, “Rioting, which may inflame public opinion without profitable result, he rejected; businesslike financing, to lay a solid foundation for his cause, he encouraged. By no means pacifist, he accepted and supported religious war in exceedingly realistic ways.” Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France*, 111-112. Geneva sought to maintain a measure of neutrality, refusing to send troops but encouraging its citizens and pastors to support the war

Calvin's conduct in these very last years of his life confirmed his openness to a war of resistance that was duly led by appropriate magistrates and fought in the name of law and the king, even as he rejected, at least in theory, inappropriate involvement on the part of pastors and churches. His ultimate goal was the establishment of the Reformed church by the French monarchy, of course, but Calvin never claimed violent rebellion was justified in the cause of true religion. It was in defense of the French King, according to the law of his realm, and under the authority of prince of the blood that the Huguenots had the right to fight.

in various ways. The magistrates permitted no public criticism of the Huguenot cause, and at the urging of Calvin the city did surreptitiously organize one cavalry unit to accompany Swiss troops into France in 1562. But Geneva made no substantial financial contribution to the war, in contrast to cities like Lyons, Basle, and even Strasbourg. It even prohibited the sale of arms and ammunition to the Huguenots, although it provided exemptions to various manufacturers and traders (115-124).

CHAPTER 3

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

In Calvin's theology the kingdom of Christ is the consummation of God's purposes for creation and for human beings. Calvin wrote in his commentary on the Psalms that “the world was originally created for this end, that every part of it should tend to the happiness of man as its great object.”⁴⁷⁶ Human beings were made in the image of God, endowed with immortal souls that impel them upward and forward, in body and in soul, to seek happiness in communion with God. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, however, the order of the entire creation was disrupted and subjected to futility and chaos. Though humans retain the natural gifts of God, they, along with creation itself, can only be restored to their purpose in the spiritual kingdom of Christ. That kingdom has been inaugurated in the life and work of Jesus Christ. It transcends this temporal age in quality and time, but even now it is beginning to restore all things through the regeneration of human beings in union with Christ.

In this chapter I describe the bedrock doctrines that form the foundation or presupposition of Calvin's two kingdoms theology. These are the doctrines of creation, humanity, sin, preservation, natural law, the restoration of the world, the Spirit, the kingdom of Christ, and hope. Without these doctrines, Calvin's concept of the two kingdoms makes little sense. With them, it becomes a powerful way to describe the implications of the gospel for Christian social engagement in a fallen world.

Various scholars have claimed that Calvin's two kingdoms-related distinctions of body and soul, earth and heaven, temporal and spiritual, outward and inward, are dualisms that owe more to Neoplatonism than to the Bible. To some of these scholars, Calvin's theology amounts to nothing less than a negative rejection of the material world in favor of the ascent of individual souls to God.⁴⁷⁷ More influential, perhaps, is the

⁴⁷⁶Commentary on Psalm 8:6 [1557]; CO 31:94.

⁴⁷⁷See for example R.W. Battenhouse, R.W., “The Doctrine of Man in Calvin and in Renaissance

suggestion that Calvin's Neoplatonic philosophical inclinations lie in sharp tension with his fidelity to Christian scripture, and that while the latter finally proves decisive in Calvin's conclusions, his theology as a whole remains somewhat tainted. For instance, in his classic *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things* Heinrich Quistorp argues that there is in Calvin:

a certain tension between his loyalty to the Biblical message of the return of Christ and of the kingdom of God as a visible all-embracing reality, and on the other hand his humanistic tendency to confine and spiritualize the hope in the direction of the salvation of the individual. The Biblical contrast of the present and the future aeon is to this extent even in Calvin identified with the metaphysical antithesis between the temporal and the eternal, the earthly and the heavenly, the bodily and the spiritual. Hence he thinks of the future life preeminently as a heavenly and spiritual life which definitely begins at death with the liberation of the immortal soul, and which is completed in the immediate vision of God without the mediation of the humanity of Christ. For this reason the new creation, in so far as it is a new earth and the new Jerusalem, the fulfilled communion of the saints in the new world, is only occasionally referred to by Calvin. But we saw that this spiritualizing tendency in the eschatology of Calvin was constantly interrupted and rectified by the influence on his teaching of Holy Scripture with its concrete hopes, especially in regard to the resurrection of the flesh as the resurrection of this body. The orientation of Calvin's eschatology (and of his theology) as a whole towards the general resurrection preserves its Biblical character, even though that character is seriously threatened by the other aspect of his thought.⁴⁷⁸

Recent scholars challenge these claims. They point out that while Calvin – like

Platonism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (1948): 447-471. Battenhouse writes, “The otherworldliness of Calvin, it seems quite clear, is more Greek than Hebrew. A fundamental dichotomy is set up between the inner man, who is concerned for eternal life, and man's external conduct, which concerns civil justice... There is thus no genuine apocalypticism in Calvin. The hope of certain Anabaptists for a new heaven and a new earth found no sympathy from him. His outlook on the secular order was utilitarian, not radically eschatological.” (468-469) “The mortar of his edifice is possibly more Plotinian, actually, than Augustinian; and the details of its architecture more indebted to classical culture than Calvin realizes.” His use of scripture is “not quite so Biblical as its nuggets of quotation would like to impress upon us.” Battenhouse even goes so far as to suggest that Pelagianism was only “superficially” Calvin's arch-enemy. (469)

⁴⁷⁸Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), 192-193. See also J.H. Van Wyk, “John Calvin on the Kingdom of God and Eschatology,” *In die Skriflig* 35.2 (2001): 193, 197, 200-202; David E. Holwerda, “Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision,” in *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 314-318; Gordon J. Spykman, “Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition,” *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin* (ed. David E. Holwerda; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 189-192. Quistorp admits that usually philosophy is of “formal rather than material significance” for Calvin. It affords for Calvin “certain scheme of thought for the interpretation of Holy Scripture, but a scheme which Calvin allows from time to time to be shattered by the Biblical testimony” (53-54). But Quistorp nevertheless often confuses formal for material significance.

the New Testament and the Christian tradition – used Greek philosophical concepts and terms when discussing human nature or society, he consistently subjected such resources of natural knowledge to his broader biblical framework. Statements that sound Neoplatonic at first glance usually turn out to be biblical when interpreted in context. For as Charles Partee puts it, “Calvin was aware of the possibility of a Christian Platonism and rejected it in the strongest terms.”⁴⁷⁹

The key to properly interpreting Calvin's kingdom theology – and hence his theology of the two kingdoms – is recognizing its fundamentally eschatological character,⁴⁸⁰ for underlying much of the terminology that allegedly betrays Neoplatonic influence is Calvin's Pauline commitment to the eschatological distinction between creation corrupted and creation restored, the present age and the age to come. Because Jesus Christ is the one in whom creation is restored and the future age inaugurated, T. F. Torrance is correct to observe that for Calvin “eschatology is the application of Christology to the work of the church in history. It is the understanding of the church

479Partee notes that Calvin described Augustine as “an 'extreme Platonist'” and “he criticized Melancthon for speaking as a philosopher and having no better authority to rest upon than Plato.” “The lens of Calvin's spectacles may have been tinted by Platonism, but the source of Calvin's view of soul and body was not Plato's *Dialogues*, nor the *Theologia Platonica*, but the Scripture.” Charles Partee, “The Soul in Plato, Platonism, and Calvin,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (1969): 294-295. “It is not surprising that Calvin, like almost every other Christian thinker, adopts the soul-body dualism and that he exalts the soul's relation to God. However, to think that Calvin's anthropology is basically philosophical ignores or dismisses his criticism of the philosophers and the totality of the position he occupies.” Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 51. See also Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), 63-117; Thomas F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956), 92-93; P.F. Theron, “The Kingdom of God and the Theology of Calvin: Response to the Paper by Prof. J. H. Van Wyk,” *In die Skriflig* 35.2 (2001): 207-213. Backus concludes, “Calvin was not primarily a historian of Greek philosophy and his use of it is often superficial. The point remains that he found its conceptual framework indispensable for the elaboration of his anthropology and ethics.” Backus, *Historical Method*, 100. Cf. Harro Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 9-11.

480For an argument on how this emphasis distinguishes Calvin's kingdom theology from Bucer see Willem Van't Spijker, “The Kingdom of Christ According to Bucer and Calvin,” *Calvin and the State* (ed. Peter De Klerk; Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1993), 118, 121-122. Van't Spijker writes, “Bucer has more of an eye for the external entourage of the church and kingdom than Calvin, for with Calvin the internal and eschatological aspects receive particularly strong emphasis” (121). Tonkin argues similarly that it sharply distinguishes Calvin's two kingdoms theology from that of Luther. John Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 112-116. Cf. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 91, 155-163.

and all creation – in terms of the *Regnum Christi*.” Although in Christ the kingdom has already been established, it has not yet been consummated, and it is the resulting eschatological tension between the 'already' and the 'not-yet' that characterizes the kingdom in the present age. “On the one hand, union with Christ means that we are already in the new creation, and are so joined to the new humanity that our whole life reaches upward and forward in eager hope and joy to the renewal of creation; but on the other hand, union with Christ and participation in His new humanity means that we must live out that humanity from day to day in the midst of history.”⁴⁸¹

Creation and Anthropology

For Calvin the ultimate objective of human knowledge is the transcendent and future purpose for which humans were created: communion with God.⁴⁸² To put it in Calvin's terms, human beings are called to “meditation upon divine worship and the future life.” Calvin writes, “we cannot think upon either our first condition or to what purpose we were formed without being prompted to meditate upon immortality, and to yearn for the Kingdom of God... For what is that origin? It is that from which we have fallen. What is that end of our creation? It is that from which we have been completely estranged, so that sick of our miserable lot we groan, and in groaning we sigh for that lost worthiness” (2.1.3).

Even before the fall into sin, Calvin believed, following the Christian tradition before him, human beings were expected to attain to this eschatological purpose, transcending their temporal and potentially corruptible state. “[T]he state of man was not perfected in the person of Adam” but was “only earthly, seeing it had no firm and

481 Torrance, “Foreward,” in Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 8.

482 For excellent recent analyses of Calvin and the knowledge of God see Paul Helm, *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4-39. Cf. Edward A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952); T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (2nd edition; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969).

settled constancy.” Human beings possessed a “living soul” in the image of Adam but they had not yet received the “quickeningspirit” they inherit from Christ.⁴⁸³ To be sure, they were happy as well as righteous, their bodies not subject to mortality. But even if Adam had not sinned, “His earthly life truly would have been temporal,” and once he had fulfilled his calling from God, “he would have passed into heaven without death and without injury.”⁴⁸⁴ Humans would have been elevated, body and soul, into the heavenly kingdom of God. “Truly the first man would have passed to a better life, had he remained upright, but there would have been no separation of the soul from the body, no corruption, no kind of destruction, and, in short, no violent change.”⁴⁸⁵ Later Calvin writes, “The natural order was that the frame of the universe should be the school in which we were to learn piety, and from it pass over to eternal life and perfect felicity.” Human beings were created such that in response to the “magnificent theater of heaven and earth” they would naturally look upward and forward to the knowledge of God and to fellowship with him in his kingdom (2.6.1).

At the heart of Calvin's assessment of the nature and purpose of human life is his view of the immortal soul.⁴⁸⁶ Typical of his ordinary approach to matters of natural

483Commentary on Genesis 2:7 [1554]; CO 23:36.

484Commentary on Genesis 2:17 [1554]; CO 23:45.

485Commentary on Genesis 3:19 [1554]; CO 23:77. Elsewhere Calvin writes, “Christ reminds them that the *soul* of man was not created merely to enjoy the world for a few days, but to obtain at length its immortality in heaven... God gave them an immortal soul, in order that, when the course of the earthly life was finished, they might live eternally in heaven!” Commentary on Matthew 16:26 [1555]; CO 45:482. This point is fundamental to understanding the coherence of Calvin's thought, as is clear from a consideration of Richard Prins, “The Image of God in Adam and the Restoration of Man in Jesus Christ: A Study in John Calvin,” *Scottish Theological Journal* 25 (1972): 32-44. Prins thinks Calvin contradicts himself insofar as he makes Adam both earthly and potentially spiritual at the same time. He then charges Calvin with conflating two “two seemingly contradictory trains of thought” (40): Calvin sometimes says that human beings will be restored to Adam's original state, while in other places he says that they will be transformed into the image of Christ. But there is nothing contradictory about such references to the restoration of Adam's original state; they reflect Calvin's understanding of Adam's original eschatological teleology. Adam was always intended to attain to what Christ actually accomplished.

486Even before he wrote the first edition of the *Institutes* Calvin wrote his *Psychopannychia*, a tract whose purpose was to prove the immortality of the soul against the Anabaptist concept of soul-sleep. But as Balke points out, Calvin misrepresented the Anabaptists on this point. “The heretics whom Calvin attacked in *Psychopannychia* were not, in a true sense, Anabaptists.” Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (trans. Willem Heyner. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 31 (Cf. 33). For the text of the *Psychopannychia* see *John Calvin's Tracts and Treatises* (3 vols; ed. Henry Beveridge; Edinburgh,

revelation, the reformer articulated his understanding of the soul in conversation with leading pagan philosophers including Plato, Aristotle, Themistius, and the Stoics. But his conclusions were governed at every key point by Christian conceptions of sin and redemption and ultimately by his insistence on the decisive importance of the embodied nature of human life and the resurrection of the body.⁴⁸⁷

For Calvin the existence of the soul is an important species of natural human knowledge.⁴⁸⁸ Its primary evidence is the conscience. “Surely the conscience, which, discerning between good and evil, responds to God's judgment, is an undoubted sign of the immortal spirit. For how could a motion without essence penetrate to God's judgment seat, and inflict itself with dread at its own guilt?” The knowledge and fear of the soul proves the transcendent and immortal purpose of human beings. “Now the very knowledge of God sufficiently proves that souls, which transcend the world, are immortal, for no transient energy could penetrate to the fountain of life” (1.15.2).⁴⁸⁹

1844), 3:377-451; CO 5:165-232.

487While most scholars have focused on the influence of Plato, Backus shows that Plato made up only one part of the synthesis. Calvin abandoned Augustine's view of the soul as being too speculative. In its place, he wove together elements from Plato, Themistius, Aristotle, and the Stoics “so as to arrive at a sort of simple syncretic model firmly anchored in the pagan doctrines of the soul but incorporating the doctrine of the original sin.” Backus, *Historical Method*, 86. Calvin “reinterprets and simplifies” these sources, “without paying any heed to tradition, so as to make them compatible with his own theological doctrine of Creation and Fall. If this hypothesis is correct, this would show that Calvin, despite his avowed aversion for speculation, did make serious attempts to recouch some aspects of Greek philosophy in the Christian framework in a new way and that his reworking of the Greek concept or concepts of soul is more radical and creative than his reworking of the Greek theories of emotions.” Backus, *Historical Method*, 89. See also Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 55-63.

488Quistorp rightly observes that for Calvin “the immortality of the soul is not properly speaking a truth of revelation and faith,” but a product of natural human knowledge. This is in contrast to “the specifically Biblical message of the resurrection of the dead which he here characterizes in the most emphatic terms as the content of the Christian hope.” Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 128.

489Likewise “the many preeminent gifts with which the human mind is endowed” demonstrate both that “something divine” is in human beings and that they have an “immortal essence.” Animals, after all, do not sense anything beyond what is material, but human beings can investigate “heaven and earth and the secrets of nature,” ordering and arranging their knowledge, and making use of the memory of the past while inferring what may happen in the future (1.15.2). “The reason with which they are endued, and by which they can distinguish between good and evil; the principle of religion which is planted in them; their intercourse with each other, which is preserved from being broken up by certain sacred bonds; the regard to what is becoming, and the sense of shame which guilt awakens in them, as well as their continuing to be governed by laws; all these things are clear indications of pre-eminent and celestial wisdom.” Commentary on Psalm 8:5 [1557]; CO 31:92.

Calvin therefore praises Plato as the philosopher who succeeded in recognizing the immortality of the soul (1.15.6).⁴⁹⁰ He agrees with Plato that the soul is a substance separate from the body and immortal, gifted with reason and perception, and that as the nobler part of human beings it differentiates them from animals.⁴⁹¹ He likewise agrees that “although properly it is not spatially limited, still, set in the body, it dwells 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” (1.15.6). Calvin sounds nothing if not Platonic when he writes in the *Psychopannichia* that unlike animals, “the soul of man is not of the earth. It was made by the mouth of the Lord, i.e., by his secret power.”⁴⁹² Thus there is the same “difference between a celestial soul and an earthly body, that there is between heaven and earth.”⁴⁹³

On the other hand, Calvin's commendation of pagan philosophical accounts of the soul is “severely qualified.”⁴⁹⁴ He points out that the philosophers could come to no agreement on the nature or origin of the soul because they lacked the wisdom of scripture.⁴⁹⁵ After noting the philosophers' complex accounts of the various faculties of the soul, therefore, Calvin ends up presenting the soul simply in terms of two faculties,

490“Calvin shares Plato's fundamental conviction that the essential person is the soul and that the soul is a spiritual substance orientated towards God.” Backus, *Historical Method*, 94. On Plato's view of the soul she writes, “Plato's view of the soul went through several important changes but elements certainly remained constant. He was throughout loyal to the idea that the human soul or at least the most important part of it, far from being closely tied to the body by its nature, was in fact a stranger to it incarcerated at a stage of a long cycle of reincarnation.” Irena Backus, “Calvin's Knowledge of Greek Language and Philosophy,” in *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research, Princeton, August 20-24, 2002* (ed. Herman J. Selderhuis; Geneva: Droz, 2004), 346. Cf. Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 62-63.

491Calvin defines the soul as “an immortal yet created essence, which is his [the human being's] nobler part” (1.15.2).

492Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 3:387; CO 5:181.

493Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 3:407; CO 5:197.

494Partee, “The Soul in Plato, Platonism, and Calvin,” 291.

495“Here let human wisdom give place, for though it thinks much about the soul it perceives no certainty with regard to it. Here, too, let philosophers give place, since on almost all subjects their regular practice is to put neither end nor measure to their dissensions, while on this subject in particular they quarrel, so that you will scarcely find two of them agreed on any single point! Plato, in some passages, talks nobly of the faculties of the soul, and Aristotle, in discoursing of it, has surpassed all in acuteness. But what the soul is, and whence it is, it is vain to ask at them, or indeed at the whole body of sages.” Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 3:383-384; CO 5:178.

the understanding and the will (1.15.6).⁴⁹⁶ He rejects Plato's speculation about the future life and insists that the immortality of the soul is inseparable from the hope of the resurrection.

I readily acknowledge that the philosophers, who were ignorant of the resurrection of the body, have many discussions about the immortal essence of the soul, but they talk so foolishly about the state of the future life that their opinions have no weight. But since the scriptures inform us that the spiritual life depends on the hope of the resurrection, and that souls, when separated from the bodies, look forward to it, whoever destroys the resurrection deprives souls also of their immortality.⁴⁹⁷

The soul, for Calvin in contrast to Plato, does not have life in and of itself, but only as a gift from God. It can be distinguished from the body, but it cannot, in the final analysis, be forever separated from it.⁴⁹⁸

It is fair to say, as Margaret Miles does, that for Calvin “the soul *does* everything,” even if “the condition of the body accurately and intimately reflects the state of the soul.”⁴⁹⁹ But Quistorp goes too far when he claims that “The soul is for Calvin the real man.”⁵⁰⁰ To be sure, in the *Psychopannychia* Calvin argued that in the human body the “image nowhere shines forth.”⁵⁰¹ Even in the final editions of the *Institutes* he insisted

496See Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 64-65.

497Thus “the life of the soul, apart from the hope of the resurrection, will be a mere dream, for God does not declare that immediately after the death of the body souls live – as if their glory and happiness were already enjoyed by them in perfections – but delays the expectation of them till the last day.”

Commentary on Matthew 22:23 [1555]; CO 45:604-605. “Ever since both our souls and bodies were destined for heavenly incorruption and an unfading crown, we ought to strive manfully to keep them pure and uncorrupted until the Day of the Lord. These, I say, are the most auspicious foundations upon which to establish one's life. One would look in vain for the like of these among the philosophers, who, in their commendation of virtue, never rise above the natural dignity of man” (*Institutes*, 3.6.3). In his commentary on 1 Peter Calvin raises the question why the apostle encourages Christians by speaking of the salvation of their souls, rather than of their bodies. Calvin answers the question by agreeing, “As the soul is immortal, salvation is properly ascribed to it.” “At the same time, the body is not excluded from a participation of glory when annexed to the soul.” Commentary on 1 Peter 1:9 [1555]; CO 55:215. Cf. Holwerda, “Eschatology and History,” 322.

498Partee, “The Soul in Plato, Platonism, and Calvin,” 292.

499Margaret R. Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 310. Miles criticizes Calvin for failing to grasp the whole significance of the human body. “For Calvin the capacity of the soul to affect the body is not matched by any capacity of the body to affect the soul.” Calvin tends to assume that “the real significance of the human body is its capacity to reflect the dynamics of the soul” (318). Still, Miles recognizes that for Calvin, “The body, then, is not adventitious to human being, but an integral and permanent aspect” (319).

500Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 64.

501Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, 3:386; CO 5:180.

that the soul is the “proper seat” of the image of God, and that it is the image of God that pertains to “whatever has to do with spiritual and eternal life” (1.15.4). But in those later editions Calvin acknowledges that even in the body the image is “seen or glows in ... outward marks.” While the image cannot be “indiscriminately” extended to both the body and the soul, because to view it as such “mingles heaven and earth,” nevertheless “the likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man's nature towers over all the kinds of living creatures.” Thus the “primary seat” of the image is “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” (1.15.3).⁵⁰²

It is important to stress that for Calvin it is not the human soul *per se* that qualifies a human being for the kingdom of God. It is, rather, the faculties of the soul that render the human being capable of being fit it for this purpose by the Spirit of God. Calvin does not tend to conflate that which pertains to the Spirit with the human soul or spirit, as Quistorp argues.⁵⁰³ On the contrary, he distinguishes between 1) animal life, which consists in “motion and the bodily senses,” 2) human life, which consists in the soul and the gifts associated with the image of God, and 3) the spiritual life, which is attained by those who participate in the heavenly kingdom.⁵⁰⁴ The animal man is “any man that is endowed with nothing more than the faculties of nature,” while the spiritual man “denotes the man whose understanding is regulated by the illumination of the Spirit

⁵⁰²Schreiner writes, “Calvin defined the image as the original order in the soul and the relationship whereby Adam 'truly referred his excellence to the exceptional gifts bestowed on him by his Maker.' Because the soul was rightly ordered, the will was free to follow reason, the affections were kept within bounds, and the reason was capable of knowing and loving God.” Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 65.

⁵⁰³Quistorp writes, “In this connexion 'spiritual' means for Calvin ... both pertaining to the spirit (the Holy Ghost) and intellectual (pertaining to the mind of man). The spiritual element in man or the soul stands for him in a special analogy to God and His spirit, at least originally.” Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 65. “It is significant that Calvin relates mainly and almost exclusively the mind or the soul and its gifts to eternal or future life, and equates spiritual and eternal life without making any distinction between life flowing from the spirit of God and the life of the human spirit in man” (66).

⁵⁰⁴Commentary on Ephesians 4:18 [1548]; CO 51:205. This contradicts Prins's claim that Calvin identifies “the body entirely with man's earthly nature, the image entirely with his spiritual nature,” with the soul playing a mediating role. Prins, “The Image of God in Adam and the Restoration of Man in Jesus Christ,” 34.

of God.” The natural man possesses the soul with its faculties in a “purely natural condition.” The spiritual man, on the other hand, possesses the soul formed by the gifts of the Spirit. “For the soul belongs to nature, but the Spirit is of supernatural communication.”⁵⁰⁵ In the final analysis it is the soul that renders the human person capable of being directed upward and forward to her ultimate purpose by the Spirit of God, but it is the whole person, body and soul, that reflects God's glory and is destined for the kingdom of God.⁵⁰⁶

Susan Schreiner has shown that Calvin believed God designed creation as a theater through which humans could perceive God's glory and come to know God. “Human judgment, reason, and prudence sufficed, Calvin said, for the direction of earthly life and would have enabled the human being to rise up to God and eternal bliss.”⁵⁰⁷ God has inscribed a “sense of divinity [*divinitatis sensum*]” on every heart such that no person lives without a basic awareness and accountability to her creator, which explains why “from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short, no household, that could do without religion” (1.3.1).⁵⁰⁸ The skill with which the mind studies life and attributes to it meaning, the manner in which it detects the significance of time, and its impressive capacities of memory, imagination, and dreaming are all “unfailing signs of divinity” in human beings. Just as telling is the conscience. “Shall we,

505Commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:14 [1546]; CO 49:343.

506Cf. Benjamin Milner, Jr., *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 20-23. “There is, then, an 'integrity' of man corresponding to the 'integrity' (or, order) of the world, the proper functioning of which would have 'led to eternal life and perfect felicity.' Calvin identifies this capacity for self-transcendence with the soul, and it is primarily the soul, as distinct from the body, to which this 'integrity' is ascribed” (20). But “these encomiums do not have as their intention the exaltation of the soul at the expense of the body; rather, it is the exaltation of man, or more precisely, or man's original condition” (23).

507Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 65. Thus it is not God's sheer power, that was to direct humans to the service of God, as Hancock claims, but the contemplation of the order, providential governance, beauty and excellence of nature. See Ralph C. Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 148-153.

508The complexity and mystery of life is such that “even the most stupid tribe” cannot escape the sense that there is a God or gods before whom they live (1.5.1). Anyone who has “a single spark of sound judgment” should be able to see it. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:21 [1546]; CO 49:326-327; Cf. Commentary on Romans 1:19-23 [1556]; CO 49:23-26.

indeed, distinguish between right and wrong by that judgment which has been imparted to us, yet will there be no judge in heaven? Will there remain for us even in sleep some remnant of intelligence, yet will no God keep watch in governing the world?” (1.5.5)⁵⁰⁹ Likewise the cosmos, that “‘mirror,’ ‘theater,’ ‘open volume,’ or ‘book,’” was created that humans might know and praise God through the “contemplation of nature.”⁵¹⁰ Creation testifies that “the final goal of the blessed life ... rests in the knowledge of God” (1.5.1). Through God's artwork “the whole of mankind is invited and attracted to recognition of him, and from this to true and complete happiness” (1.5.10). Men and women long for the life that only the kingdom of Christ can bring. “Knowledge of this sort, then, ought not only to arouse us to the worship of God but also to awaken and encourage us to the hope of the future life” (1.5.10).

Sin, Natural Law, and the Need for Redemption

The fall of human beings into sin prevented them from attaining to their eschatological purpose and cast the entire creation into disorder. As Schreiner puts it, “The act of unbelief was, then, an act of disorder among the creatures, which unleashed disorder into God's fragile but ordered world. The oneness of the human being with creation is seen in the fact that the fall affected all of nature.”⁵¹¹ The material world as

509“Why is it that the soul not only vaguely roves about but conceives many useful things, ponders ..., even divines the future – all while man sleeps? What ought we to say here except that the signs of immortality which have been implanted in man cannot be effaced? Now what reason would there be to believe that man is divine and not to recognize his Creator?”

510Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 65. Even in creation “the Lord represents both himself and his everlasting Kingdom ... with very great clarity” (1.5.11).

511Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 28. On the rich theme of order and disorder in Calvin see also Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 7-70; David Little, *Religion, Order, and Law* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 33-79; Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought*, 119-130; Susan E. Schreiner, “Creation and Providence” *The Calvin Handbook* (ed. Herman J. Selderhuis; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 267-275; Derek S. Jeffreys, “It's a Miracle of God That There Is Any Common Weal Among Us': Unfaithfulness and Disorder in John Calvin's Political Thought,” *The Review of Politics* (2000): 107-129. Little writes that for Calvin man is “responsible for the maintenance or destruction of the full integration of creation... It is for this reason that man stands at the top of creation ... Its coherence depends (to a certain extent) upon man's obedience.” *Religion, Order, and Law*, 57.

well as human life and society gave way to disorder and confusion. For “so long as ungodliness has possession of the minds of men, the world, plunged as it is in darkness, must be considered as thrown into a state of confusion, and of horrible disorder and misrule; for there can be no stability apart from God.” Indeed, “no order can be said to prevail in the world until God erect his throne and reign amongst men.”⁵¹²

Because of sin humans turn away from the seed of religion that is within them, groveling like animals in what is earthly and transient. “There is, indeed, nothing more difficult than to keep our thoughts fixed on things in heaven, when the whole power of our [sinful] nature inclines downwards, and when Satan by numberless devices draws us back to the earth.”⁵¹³ Because it is impossible for humans to lose their religious sense entirely, they do not abandon religion. Instead, they develop conceptions of God measured according to “the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity.” Human religions are speculative and self-serving, ultimately forging an understanding of God that is idolatrous, “a figment and a dream of their own heart” (1.4.1). Indeed, “scarcely a single person has ever been found who did not fashion for himself an idol or specter in place of God” (1.5.12). In this context, the testimony of creation to the glory of God becomes vain. Because every people and tradition calls for allegiance to its own religion, even the pious find themselves unable to determine the right way to worship God. “Therefore, since either the custom of the city or the agreement of tradition is too weak and frail a bond of piety to follow in worshiping God, it remains for God himself to give witness of himself from heaven” (1.5.13).

Calvin's evaluation of the destructive and distorting consequences of human sin is thoroughly Augustinian. Whatever abilities and potential Adam and Eve once had to

512Commentary on Psalm 96:10 [1557]; CO 32:41-42. Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 5:25 [1563]; CO 37:635.

513Commentary on Hebrews 6:11 [1549]; CO 55:76. For “if all men are born and live to the end that they may know God ... it is clear that all those who do not direct every thought and action in their lives to this goal degenerate from the law of their creation” (1.3.3).

attain eternal life through the right use of their free will, the fall into sin virtually destroyed the image of God and corrupted the blessings associated with it (1.15.8).⁵¹⁴ It is not the body that is to blame for this fall but the will, that faculty of the soul that has turned against God. But the result is the corruption of the whole human being. “God's image is the perfect excellence of human nature which shone in Adam before his defection but was subsequently so vitiated and almost blotted out that nothing remains after the ruin except what is confused, mutilated, and disease-ridden” (1.15.4).⁵¹⁵

For Calvin, as for Augustine, the preeminent problem with human beings is pride, or self-love. “For since blind self-love is innate in all mortals, they are most freely persuaded that nothing inheres in themselves that deserves to be considered hateful. Thus even with no outside support the utterly vain opinion generally obtains credence that man is abundantly sufficient of himself to lead a good and blessed life” (2.1.2). Even “those of the philosophers who at any time most strongly contended that virtue should be pursued for its own sake were puffed up with such great arrogance as to show they sought after virtue for no other reason than to have occasion for pride” (3.7.2).⁵¹⁶ In general, the rejection of God's rule results in injustice and social chaos. “When, therefore, deceit, craft, treachery, cruelty, violence, and extortion, reign in the world, in short, when all things are thrown into disorder and darkness by injustice and wickedness, let faith serve as a lamp to enable us to behold God's heavenly throne, and let that sight suffice to make us wait in patience for the restoration of things to a better

514See Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 65-70.

515Miles notes that for Calvin “the soul, as the 'highest part' of human being is both the place of the image and likeness of God in the state of original integrity, and the location of the crippling effects of the corruption of the image through the sin of the first human beings.” Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” 309. On the other hand, “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’” (314). Schreiner agrees. “Calvin saw the body, by its subjection to corruption and death, as sharing the punishment of sin with the rest of creation. According to Calvin the body is the victim of Adam's transgression and as such suffers disease, decay, and death, contrary to its original nature.” Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 99.

516Cf. *Institutes* 2.1.1; Commentary on Isaiah 11:9 [1559]; CO 36:243-244.

state.”⁵¹⁷

But Calvin did not believe human beings are wholly corrupted by sin, nor did he think the creation has been abandoned to chaos. On the contrary, by his providence God continues to care for the creation, graciously restraining the effects of sin through his care for the material creation and his preservation of a modicum of human morality and society.⁵¹⁸ As Schreiner notes, this restraint is not merely external or coercive. On the contrary, Calvin “assumed that the ordered civilized life in society flourished because of natural instincts, perceptions, dictates, and abilities still present within the fallen soul.”⁵¹⁹

In the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin explains the extent of God's preservation of human society by appealing to the Augustinian distinction between supernatural gifts, which are entirely lost to sinful humanity, and natural gifts, which are corrupted but not lost.

517Commentary on Psalm 11:4 [1557]; CO 31:123. One day God, as the judge of the world, will punish all oppressors and “restore peace to the miserable, who are now unjustly harassed.” Thus “the present disorderly [*ataxian*] state of matters” anticipates a full judgment at which point “those things that are now confused must, of necessity, be restored to order [*restitui oportet*].” In this way God will one day “remedy the state of matters in the world [*statum huius mundi corrigat*], so as to bring them into a better condition.” Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 1:5 [1550]; CO 52:189 (Cf. 1:7; 52:191).

518Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 28-30, 79-82. For instance, God restrains wild animals.

Commentary on Hosea 2:18 [1557]; CO 42:248. Schreiner, following Bavinck and Kuiper, identifies this as Calvin's doctrine of common grace. See Herman Bavinck, “Common Grace,” (trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen) *Calvin Theological Journal* 24:1 (1989): 35-65. Bavinck defines common grace in Calvin as “a grace that, while it does not inwardly renew, nevertheless restrains and compels” (51). However, for criticism of Bavinck's interpretation of Calvin's concept of common grace see Helm, *Calvin at the Centre*, 308-339. See also Herman Kuiper, *Calvin on Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Smutter, 1928). Jeon closely identifies the distinction between special and common grace with the distinction between the two kingdoms. Jeong Koo Jeon, “Calvin and the Two Kingdoms: Calvin's Political Philosophy in Light of Contemporary Discussion,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 72.2 (Fall, 2010): 301-305. VanDrunen makes the same conceptual link but presents common grace as a concept worked out within Neo-Calvinism. David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 277-278, 294-313, 354-384. On the complementary relationship between common grace and natural law see Paul Helm, “Calvin and Natural Law,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 2 (1984): 18. Schreiner views the concept of providence as the “motivating principle” of Calvin's “quest for order” (3). While she rejects the notion that providence is a central doctrine for Calvin in the theological sense, she argues that it is nevertheless a “*Stammlehre* or, rather, a ‘proscenium arch.’” Significantly, however, Schreiner views providence as a “foundational doctrine not in terms of predestination or the work of Christ, but in terms of creation” (7). She also stresses that Calvin's view of providence was in fundamental agreement with the tradition of the church (22).

519Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 87 (Cf. 94-95).

Therefore, withdrawing from the kingdom of God, he is at the same time deprived of spiritual gifts, with which he had been furnished for the hope of eternal salvation. From this it follows that he is so banished from the Kingdom of God that all qualities belonging to the blessed life of the soul have been extinguished in him, until he recovers them through the grace of regeneration. Among these are faith, love of God, charity toward neighbor, zeal for holiness and for righteousness. All these, since Christ restores them in us, are considered adventitious and beyond nature: and for this reason we infer that they were taken away (2.2.12).

On the other hand, the natural gifts possessed by human beings are corrupted but “some sparks still gleam.” Such sparks include a measure of moral discernment, the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Human beings likewise maintain some freedom of the will, although that will is now bound to “wicked desires” such that it “cannot strive after the right.” Even the longing for truth remains, though it now labors vainly, obsessed with “empty and worthless things” rather than with the things that matter (2.2.12). What is more, to a certain extent human beings continue to “taste something of things above” (2.2.13).⁵²⁰

Calvin explains this crucial distinction between natural things and supernatural things, or between earthly things and heavenly things, in a passage that he added to the *Institutes* in 1539.

I call 'earthly things' those which do not pertain to God or his Kingdom, to true justice, or to the blessedness of the future life; but which have their significance and relationship with regard to the present life and are, in a sense, confined within its bounds. I call 'heavenly things' the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the Heavenly Kingdom. The first class includes government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts. In the second are the knowledge of God and of his will, and the rule by which we conform our lives to it (2.2.13).

The key to the distinction is Calvin's eschatological understanding of the kingdom of God. Heavenly things are those things which pertain to “God or his Kingdom,” to what is “true” and “pure” and participates in the “blessedness of the future life.” The “Heavenly

⁵²⁰In his commentary on 2 Peter 1:3 Calvin contrasts the “natural gifts of God” with the gifts that are “above the common order of nature.” “That we are born men, that we are endued with reason and knowledge, that our life is supplied with necessary support, all this is indeed from God.” Yet these are the gifts of nature, distinct from “the peculiar endowments of the new and spiritual life, which derive their origin from the kingdom of Christ.” Commentary on 2 Peter 1:3 [1551]; CO 55:445.

Kingdom” is the consummation of the blessed life in the age to come, the age characterized by true justice and righteousness. Earthly things, in contrast, pertain only to the “present life.” What makes them earthly is not their materiality but their temporality. Earthly things are secular in the classic sense of the term, things whose significance is limited to the present age, “confined within its bounds” such that they will not survive into the kingdom of God.

The distinction clearly reflects Calvin's two kingdoms paradigm, articulated in 1536, with “government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts” all lying within the bounds of the political kingdom. Calvin goes on to devote four sections to describing the achievements (and limits) of natural human activity in political government, the liberal and manual arts, and science. At the root of this remarkably positive evaluation of human capabilities in civil affairs is Calvin's concept of natural law.

[S]ince man is by nature a social animal, he tends through natural instinct to foster and preserve society. Consequently, we observe that there exists in all men's minds universal impressions of a certain civic fair dealing and order. Hence no man is to be found who does not understand that every sort of human organization must be regulated by laws, and who does not comprehend the principles of those laws. Hence arises that unvarying consent of all nations and of individual mortals with regard to laws. For their seeds have, without teacher or lawgiver, been implanted in all men (2.2.13).

Natural law is “that inward law [*lex ... interior*] ... written, even engraved, upon the hearts of all,” that “in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the two Tables” (2.8.1). Revealed in the Ten Commandments, it is “the law of God which we call the moral law” (4.10.16).

Some scholars have insisted, following August Lang, that for Calvin natural law has “almost no importance at all.”⁵²¹ They argue that for Calvin natural law plays only the negative role of convicting human beings of sin, and that where it does seem to play a positive role it rests uneasily in the context of Calvin's broader thought. Calvin is

⁵²¹August Lang, “The Reformation and Natural Law,” *Calvin and the Reformation: Four Studies* (trans. J. Gresham Machen; New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), 72.

therefore presented as standing in sharp discontinuity with the medieval natural law tradition.⁵²² However, in recent years numerous scholars have demonstrated that while there is important discontinuity between Calvin and the medieval scholastics with respect to natural law, there is more continuity, and that while Calvin did reject natural theology as a means of salvation, or of knowledge of *spiritual* things, he saw natural law as playing a fundamental and positive role in matters pertaining to the *present* life.⁵²³ Schreiner shows that Calvin understood natural law as a vital expression of God's providential and gracious preservation of order in the world. Calvin's

primary concern was not to formulate a theory of natural law but to use the idea of natural law as a way to explain the continuation of society after the devastating effects of the Fall... Calvin was keenly aware of the interconnection between the preservation of the cosmic and the societal realms. Like nature, the continuation

522For Barth's influential argument against natural theology see Karl Barth, "No!" in Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology* (trans. Peter Fraenkel; London: Geoffrey Bles: Centenary, 1946), 67-128. Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Methuen, 1956), 102-103; François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, (trans. Philip Mairet; London: Collins, 1963 [1950]), 206-208; Arthur C. Cochrane, "Natural Law in Calvin," in *Church-State Relations in Ecumenical Perspective* (ed. Elwyn A. Smith; Louvain: Duquesne University Press, 1966), 176-217; Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 180-187; William R. Stevenson, Jr., *Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 44-49. Cf. Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. Hesselink argues, "Calvin and the other Reformers broke, *in principle*, with the whole tradition of natural law. It is questionable, however, whether they did so *in practice*." He concludes, "Calvin's apparently unsuccessful synthesis of the humanist tradition with biblical revelation cannot be overlooked. For Calvin, who is the theologian par excellence of total depravity, is surprisingly optimistic concerning human possibilities in the realm of 'natural' morality on the social and civic levels." I. John. Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 69-70. A recent essay in this vein is Gene Haas, "Calvin, Natural Law, and the Two Kingdoms," *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (ed. Ryan G. McIlhenny; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2012), 33-63. Cf. Guenther Haas, "Calvin's Ethics," *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 93-94.

523Some of the best recent analyses include Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 70-97; Irena Backus, "Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 7-26; Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 73-95; VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 93-115; C. Scott Pryor, "God's Bridle: John Calvin's Application of Natural Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 22.1 (2006-2007): 225-254. Cf. Susan Schreiner, "Calvin's Use of Natural Law," *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics and Natural Law* (ed. Michael Cromartie; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 51-76; Helm, "Calvin and Natural Law," 5-22; David Little, "Calvin and the Prospects for a Christian Theory of Natural Law," *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics* (ed. Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey; New York: Scribner's, 1968), 175-197; Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*; John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," *Journal of Religion* 26 (1946): 168-182. For a summary of the natural law debate see William Kempa, "Calvin on Natural Law," *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform* (ed. Timothy George; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 73-76.

of the civil realm was due to God's providence and the continual bridling of disorder.⁵²⁴

Because of natural law the restraint of sinful human beings in this age need not be purely external and coercive. “Calvin did not emphasize only the external restraint by God; he also assumed that ordered, civilized life in society could flourish because of the remaining natural instincts, perceptions, and abilities present in man's soul. The ability of human beings to recognize the truths of natural law was a means whereby people could still participate in the formation of government and a stable civic life.”⁵²⁵

It is true that unlike Aquinas and other medieval theologians, Calvin never attempted to articulate a self-sufficient systematic theory of natural law.⁵²⁶ And while Aquinas defined natural law as the rational creature's participation in eternal law through the use of reason, Calvin rejected the scholastic overconfidence in reason, understanding natural law primarily in terms of the testimony of *conscience*. Here he followed Romans 2:14-15, Paul's declaration that the Gentiles “show that the work of the

524Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 79. Backus agrees. By drawing attention to pagan philosophers as testimony of natural law Calvin sought “to establish a direct link between pagan consciences – the seat of natural moral law – and the civil laws they produced.” Backus, “Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law,” 13. This enabled him to “view pagan legislative and moral thought as partly acceptable to Christians insofar as it issues from the same God-given natural law” (14). In contrast to Gratian, Backus observes, “Calvin separates natural moral law from biblical precepts and makes it stand for innate knowledge of right and wrong... Therefore by removing natural law in all its expressions from the purview of the church, Calvin automatically puts it in the purview of rulers and magistrates, in other words in chief *civil* legislators” (10). Backus demonstrates Calvin's extensive use of, and reliance on, pagan moral and legal concepts, including conscience, equity, clemency, See also Backus, *Historical Method*, 63-129.

525Schreiner, “Calvin's Use of Natural Law,” 68.

526Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, 91; Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 77-79, 94; Backus, “Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law,” 11-12; Haas, “Calvin's Ethics,” 93-94; Little, *Religion, Order, and Law*, 51. Grabill and Backus each reflect extensively on the key differences between Calvin's and Aquinas's views of natural law. Schreiner writes, “Calvin was not interested in natural law in and of itself. He did not develop a 'theology of natural law' but, rather, used the principle of natural law as an extension of his doctrine of providence to explain the survival of civilization. Therefore, his appeals to nature and natural law were on the level of appropriation, not of doctrine” (94). Little observes, “It ought not to be inferred, however, that Calvin is interested in developing a theory of natural law and conscience into a self-contained moral philosophy independent of Christian revelation” (51). Cf. David VanDrunen, “Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80 (2006): 77-98; David VanDrunen, “Natural Law, Custom, and Common Law in the Theology of Aquinas and Calvin,” *University of British Columbia Law Review* 33 (2000): 699-717; Allen Verhey, “Natural Law in Aquinas and Calvin,” *God and the Good: Essay in Honor of Henry Stob* (ed. Clifton Orlebeke and Lewis Smedes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 80-92.

law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their thoughts accuse them among themselves or excuse them before God's judgment." The basic principles of morality, for Calvin, are not primarily conclusions drawn from rational inquiry but inclinations and commitments deeply embedded in the human conscience. It is this conviction that enables Calvin to maintain a relevant concept of natural law while maintaining that humans are predisposed to suppress the truth. "[Paul] means not that it was so engraven on their will that they sought and diligently pursued it, but that they were so mastered by the power of truth that they could not disapprove of it. For why did they institute religious rites, except that they were convinced that God ought to be worshiped? Why were they ashamed of adultery and theft, except that they deemed them evils?"⁵²⁷

On the other hand, as Stephen Grabill cautions, "Calvin never intended to sever the connection between reason and conscience."⁵²⁸ The use of reason, for Calvin as for Aquinas, leads to genuine and useful knowledge. As human beings wrestle with the convictions of conscience, "which is equal to a thousand witnesses," they reason concerning morality and justice. "There is then a certain knowledge of the law by nature which says, 'This is good and worthy of being desired; that ought to be abhorred.'" At the prompting of such knowledge, grounded in the conscience, "reasons come to our minds by which we defend what is rightly done."⁵²⁹

Like Aquinas, Calvin believed natural law reveals only general moral and civil principles. Once particular interests and circumstances are in view, humans have no difficulty deceiving themselves as to right and wrong.⁵³⁰ As a result, in particular matters

⁵²⁷Commentary on Romans 2:15 [1556]; CO 49:38. Calvin writes that "as some principles of equity and justice remain in the hearts of men, the consent of all nations is as it were the voice of nature, or the testimony of that equity which is engraven on the hearts of men, and which they can never obliterate." Commentary on Habakkuk 2:6 [1559]; CO 43:540-541. Cf. Commentary on Romans 1:26-29 [1556]; CO 49:28-29.

⁵²⁸Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, 93.

⁵²⁹Commentary on Romans 2:15 [1556]; CO 49:38-39.

⁵³⁰Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, 96; Guenther Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 69-70.

there is all manner of disagreement and dispute, and the laws and customs of nations can not naively be embraced as a moral authority.⁵³¹ Still, “while men dispute among themselves about individual sections of the law, they agree on the general conception of equity.” Although they limp and stagger along, it is nevertheless clear that “some seed of political order has been implanted in all men” (2.2.13). Calvin could even say that “There is nothing more common than for a man to be sufficiently instructed in a right standard of conduct by natural law” (2.2.22).

[T]here is no nation so lost to everything human that it does not keep within the limits of some laws... they have some notions of justice and rectitude, which the Greeks call preconceptions, and which are implanted by nature in the hearts of men. They have then a law, though they are without law. For though they have not a written law, they are yet by no means wholly destitute of the knowledge of what is right and just, as they could not otherwise distinguish between vice and virtue, the first of which they restrain by punishment and the latter they commend, and manifest their approbation of it by honoring it with rewards.⁵³²

Calvin's confidence in what is known morally through the natural law is impressive. Among those moral principles generally received among the nations are: God ought to be worshiped; adultery, theft, and murder ought to be punished; good faith must be kept in bargains and contracts; honesty is commendable;⁵³³ the unjust accumulation of great wealth will overcome a person;⁵³⁴ the poor have a right to sufficient food;⁵³⁵ incest is shameful and abominable;⁵³⁶ trials must be conducted with evidence and just process;⁵³⁷ a man should marry his deceased family member's wife in

See *Institutes* 2.2.24; Commentary on Matthew 7:12 [1555]; CO 45:220.

531See Commentary on Micah 7:7 [1559]; CO 43:409; Commentary on Genesis 50:3 [1554]; CO 23:613-614; Commentary on Acts 19:27 [1554]; CO 48:452; Commentary on Daniel 6:24 [1561]; CO 41:29.

532Commentary on Romans 2:14 [1556]; CO 49:37-38. “The knowledge of good and evil is indeed imprinted by nature on men, whereby they are rendered inexcusable; nor has any amount of barbarism ever so extinguished this light as that no form of law should exist.” Commentary on the Law, “End and Use of the Law,” [1563]; CO 24:725.

533Commentary on Romans 2:15 [1556]; CO 49:38. “All the Gentiles alike instituted religious rites, they made laws to punish adultery, and theft, and murder, they commanded good faith in bargains and contracts. They have thus indeed proved that God ought to be worshiped, that adultery and theft and murder are evils, that honesty is commendable.”

534Commentary on Habakkuk 2:6 [1559]; CO 43:540-541.

535Commentary on Isaiah 21:14 [1559]; CO 36:362.

536Commentary on Romans 5:1 [1556]; CO 49:377-378. Cf. Commentary on Leviticus 20:11-24 [1563]; CO 24:666.

537Commentary on John 18:31 [1553]; CO 47:401-402.

order to preserve his family line;⁵³⁸ nations are to show hospitality toward their international kin and pity for the distressed, even among their enemies;⁵³⁹ nations are to be kind to international fugitives and exiles, especially those persecuted for their faithfulness to God;⁵⁴⁰ military captives should not be treated cruelly;⁵⁴¹ wars may be waged only for just and necessary reasons, and with a solemn and public proclamation;⁵⁴² a man should not have sex with a woman during her period;⁵⁴³ children must obey and honor their parents, people should obey their rulers, and slaves should obey their masters;⁵⁴⁴ the elderly should be honored;⁵⁴⁵ human beings look upward during prayer;⁵⁴⁶ and God will avenge those who cry out to him for justice.⁵⁴⁷ Calvin was sufficiently impressed with pagan morality to have speculated that among the pagans of Abraham's day there was greater integrity than among the Christians of Calvin's own.⁵⁴⁸

Calvin spoke even more positively about human abilities in the liberal and manual arts. Virtually everyone, he observed, has a certain aptitude or talent in one area or another. "There are at hand energy and ability not only to learn but also to devise

538Commentary on Genesis 38:8 [1554]; CO 23:495.

539Commentary on Obadiah 1:12-14 [1559]; CO 43:191.

540Commentary on Isaiah 16:4 [1559]; CO 36:302-303.

541Commentary on Isaiah 47:6 [1559]; CO 37:166.

542Commentary on Jeremiah 6:4-5 [1563]; CO 37:645.

543Commentary on Ezekiel 18:5-9 [1565]; CO 40:425-432. Cf. Commentary on Leviticus 18:19.

544Commentary on Exodus 20:12 [1563]; CO 24:602-606. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:37 [1546]; CO 49:425-426; Commentary on Ephesians 6:1 [1548]; CO 51:228.

545Commentary on Leviticus 19:32 [1563]; CO 24:610.

546Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:8 [1548]; CO 52:274.

547"When any one disturbs the whole world by his ambition and avarice, or everywhere commits plunders, or oppresses miserable nations, when he distresses the innocent, all cry out, How long? And this cry, proceeding as it does from the feeling of nature and the dictate of justice, is at length heard by the Lord. For how comes it that all, being touched with weariness, cry out, How long? except that they know that this confusion of order and justice is not to be endured? And this feeling, is it not implanted in us by the Lord? It is then the same as though God heard himself, when he hears the cries and greenings of those who cannot bear injustice." Commentary on Habakkuk 2:6 [1559]; CO 43:540-541. For a provocative analysis of the significance of this and similar passages for Calvin's theology of injustice, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Wounds of God: Calvin's Theology of Social Injustice," *Reformed Journal* 37.6 (June 1987): 14-22.

548Commentary on Genesis 12:15 [1554]; CO 23:186. Commentary on Genesis 20:4 [1554]; CO 23:289. For other lists see Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 180; Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 87-90. Given all of this evidence, Stevenson's comment that "the idea of an independent or independently reachable set of moral provisions apart from Scripture [i.e., natural law] was for Calvin unthinkable" is unwarranted. Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 44.

something new in each art or to perfect and polish what one has learned from a predecessor.” Such is clear evidence of that “universal apprehension of reason and understanding by nature implanted in all men” (2.2.14).

Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably? Shall we say that they are insane who developed medicine, devoting their labor to our benefit? What shall we say of all the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration. We marvel at them because we are compelled to recognize how preeminent they are (2.2.15).

Calvin waxes just as eloquently in his commentary on 1 Corinthians:

For what is more noble than man's reason, in which man excels the other animals? How richly deserving of honor are the liberal sciences [*doctrinae liberales*], which polish man so as to give him the dignity of true humanity! ... Who would not extol with the highest commendations civil prudence [*civilem prudentiam*] (not to speak of other things) by which governments, principalities, and kingdoms are maintained [*qua respublicae, principatus et regna sustinentur*]?⁵⁴⁹

Calvin did not hesitate to judge pagan societies superior in the liberal arts to the Christian society of his own day.⁵⁵⁰ Pagans achieve such preeminence in earthly affairs that Christians can only respond with deference and admiration.

The basis for Calvin's approval of much of pagan culture was his belief that “the knowledge of all that is most excellent in human life is ... communicated to us through the Spirit of God.” The Spirit's general work is pervasive as “he fills, moves, and quickens all things” according to “the law of creation.” Christians are thus obligated to learn from

⁵⁴⁹Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:20 [1546]; CO 49:325. In his commentary on Isaiah 3:4 Calvin praises “the mechanical arts, agriculture, manual occupations of every description, architecture, and such like, which we cannot dispense with.” The same must be said of “artisans of every kind, who contribute what is useful to men,” as well as those who excel in war (when it is just) or eloquence, for such are “the servants of God,” whose purpose is “the preservation of mankind.” Commentary on Isaiah 3:4 [1559]; CO 36:83. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 28:29 [1559]; CO 36:483-484.

⁵⁵⁰“Meanwhile, we observe, that learning and the liberal arts were not then so despised as they are in this age, and in those immediately preceding it. So strongly has barbarism prevailed in the world, that it is almost disgraceful for nobles to be reckoned among the men of education and of letters!” Commentary on Daniel 1:4 [1561]; 40:537-540.

and depend upon the contributions that are made by unbelievers. For “if the Lord has willed that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics, and other like disciplines by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use this assistance. For if we neglect God’s gift freely offered in these arts, we ought to suffer just punishment for our sloths” (2.2.16). Christians “shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God” (2.2.15).⁵⁵¹

On the other hand, Calvin was equally adamant about the limitations of natural law. He warns that it should not be concluded from Romans 2:14-15 “that there is in men a full knowledge of the law, but that there are only some seeds of what is right implanted in their nature.”⁵⁵² Only with scripture as a set of spectacles can they see the world rightly (1.6.2). In its ultimate aim the intent of the natural law is spiritual and fallen human beings can neither fully understand nor keep it. “Let us consider, however, for what purpose men have been endowed with this knowledge of the law. How far it can lead them toward the goal of reason and truth will then immediately appear.” From the perspective of its spiritual purpose Calvin defines natural law negatively as “that apprehension of the conscience which distinguishes sufficiently between just and unjust, and which deprives men of the excuse of ignorance, while it proves them guilty by their own testimony” (2.2.22).⁵⁵³

Calvin believed human inability is particularly obvious with reference to matters pertaining to the first table of the law, matters of piety and worship, and for this reason some scholars have suggested that Calvin conceived of natural law’s positive role simply with respect to the second table.⁵⁵⁴ But this assessment is simplistic. Calvin praised Plato

⁵⁵¹Those who “do not venture to borrow anything from heathen authors” are guilty of superstition. “All truth is from God, and consequently, if wicked men have said anything that is true and just, we ought not to reject it, for it has come from God.” Commentary on Titus 1:12 [1550]; CO 52:414-415. Cf. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 16-19. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8:1-2 [1546]; CO 49:428-429; Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:33 [1546]; CO 49:554.

⁵⁵²Commentary on Romans 2:15 [1556]; CO 49:38. Cf. Commentary on Romans 4:23 [1556]; CO 49:86.

⁵⁵³Cf. Commentary on the Harmony of the Law [1563]; CO 24:725.

⁵⁵⁴Thus Haas can emphasize that for Calvin “it is equity that is the basic principle of natural law and of the commandments of the Second Table of the law.” Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin’s Ethics*, 68.

and other pagan writers for recognizing the importance of the soul and of piety. On the one hand, he warned that even with respect to justice and civil affairs human achievements are but a pale imitation of true righteousness. Humans focus on outward actions while ignoring sins like concupiscence and lust (2.2.24). They understand and desire to practice a particular virtue, but fail (2.2.26). With respect to the second table of the law also, therefore, the power of natural law is limited.

In the writings of heathen authors there are no doubt to be found true and useful sentences scattered here and there, and it is also true that God has put into the minds of men some knowledge of justice and uprightness, but in consequence of the corruption of our nature, the true light of truth is not to be found among men where revelation is not enjoyed, but only certain mutilated principles which are involved in much obscurity and doubt.⁵⁵⁵

Human wisdom can never seem to get the affairs of society and politics quite right:

“matters are never so well regulated in this world but that many things are involved in darkness, and that there is never so much light, but that many things remain in obscurity.”⁵⁵⁶

The key to making sense of Calvin's variously positive and negative statements regarding the usefulness of natural law, therefore, is not interpreting them with respect to the two tables *per se*, but with respect to the difference between the law's *temporal* purpose and its *spiritual* purpose, between *earthly* things and *heavenly* things. Human reason cannot attain to “God's kingdom and to spiritual insight,” for in both of these areas “the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles” (2.2.18; Cf. 2.2.20). The problem is not that the philosophers know *nothing* of God or of the good life, but that they do not know how to attain to their eschatological purpose. “For whatever the philosophers may

Haas is more careful when he writes that “for Calvin the natural reason of conscience has hardly any understanding of the First Table of the Law” (72). Cf. Backus, “Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law,” 13-14. For a fuller picture see Potter, “‘The Whole Office of the Law’ in the Theology of John Calvin,” 123-128. Potter recognizes that for Calvin natural law includes “the restraint of impiety by the continuing existence of the *sensus divinitatis*, whereby God assures that the honor due him is maintained minimally in all cultures” (127).

555Commentary on Psalm 19:7 [1557]; CO 31:199-200.

556Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:5 [1546]; CO 49:365-366.

have ever said of the chief good, it was nothing but cold and vain, for they confined man to himself, while it is necessary for us to go out of ourselves to find happiness. The chief good of man is nothing else but union with God.”⁵⁵⁷ Without the doctrine of salvation, philosophy entirely fails to achieve its goal.⁵⁵⁸ David VanDrunen writes, “Natural law, therefore, has a positive function to play in the life of the earthly, civil kingdom, according to Calvin. But ... natural law has only a negative function to play in regard to spiritual things and the heavenly kingdom of Christ.”⁵⁵⁹ I. John Hesselink likewise concludes,

The clue to distinguishing Calvin's meaning as he speaks first positively of the knowledge and convictions of all people concerning God and his law and then negatively of their ignorance, errors, and complete failure, is this: the knowledge which humanity by nature possesses of the law, and their observance to a certain extent of what the second table of the law declares, though not unimportant, is nevertheless external, superficial, and thus finally worthless as far as in any way gaining God's approval.

Because “the law is spiritual and its requirements are spiritual,” fallen human beings

⁵⁵⁷Commentary on Hebrews 4:10 [1549]; CO 55:48. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 6:11 [1549]; CO 55:76; Commentary on Colossians 2:8 [1548]; CO 52:103.

⁵⁵⁸While they “speak excellently and with great judgment on the subject of morals, yet whatever excellency shines forth in their precepts, it is, as it were, a beautiful superstructure without a foundation.” Commentary on Romans 12:1 [1556]; CO 49:232-233. Even the best philosophers and statesmen of antiquity, “even Plato himself,” turned their natural knowledge of God and of his glory into an image that corresponded to their own corrupt reason. Commentary on Romans 1:23 [1556]; CO 49:26. “For there will not be found one of them, that has not from that first principle of knowledge, which I have mentioned, straightway turned aside into wandering and erroneous speculations and for the most part they betray a silliness worse than that of old wives. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:21 [1546]; CO 49:326-327. “Whoever then wishes to be truly wise, he must begin with the fear of God and with reverence to his word; for where there is no religion, men cannot certainly understand any thing aright. Let us suppose men endued, not only with great clearness of mind, but also with the knowledge of all the sciences; let them be philosophers, let them be physicians, let them be lawyers, let nothing be wanting to them, except that they have no true knowledge of eternal life, would it not be better for them to be mere cattle than to be thus wise, to exercise their minds for a short time on fading things, and to know that all their highly valued treasure shall perish with their life?” Commentary on Hosea 14:9 [1557]; CO 42:511. Cf. *Institutes* 3.6.1.

⁵⁵⁹VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 112. Grabill, like VanDrunen, rightly roots the distinction in Calvin's *duplex cognitio*, that is, the distinction between the knowledge of God as creator and the knowledge of God as redeemer. For Calvin, he argues, “the nonsaving, natural knowledge of God still functions competently in the earthly spheres of law, society, politics, economics, and ethics.” Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 84. Emphasis added. Cf. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 29-31; VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 99. Haas therefore puts it a little too strongly when he writes, “The insight that sinful humans have into the moral law of God is restricted to the second table of the Decalogue, the final six commandments,” though he is certainly correct to emphasize that they have a much better understanding of the second table. Haas, “Calvin's Ethics,” 94.

cannot keep it, even though they are “capable of a certain civil virtue.”⁵⁶⁰ They understand that God must be worshiped, but they fail to understand what true piety is. They recognize that it is wrong to commit adultery or murder, but fail to recognize the gravity of lust or malice.⁵⁶¹

This is why Calvin distinguishes civil virtue from true righteousness, the righteousness of man from the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God is “that which is approved before his tribunal,” in contrast to the righteousness of men, “which is by men counted and supposed to be righteousness, though it be only vapor.”⁵⁶² The former is inward while the latter is merely outward. For God “will not heed outward appearances, nor be satisfied with any outward work, except what has proceeded from real sincerity of heart.” He cares not only for “disguised righteousness,” but also for “secret motives and feelings.”⁵⁶³ Though there are “remarkable instances of gentleness, integrity, temperance, and generosity” in the unregenerate, these are in the final analysis “specious disguises” that are impressive “only in the sight of men and as members of civil society.”⁵⁶⁴ Even in its best works the world is guided by “mere ambition or by self-love, or some other perverse motive” (3.14.3). Yet such “acts of civility, which are customary among men, are no proof whatever of charity. To perform any act in the hope of a reward

560Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 64 (Cf. 58-59). Cf. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 87-94.

Schreiner writes, “Calvin also employed the distinction between the two realms of existence to discuss the role of reason in the temporal realm” (92). “Like Luther and Melancthon, Calvin distinguished carefully between the issue of justification and the role of reason within the natural created order. Their belief in human depravity did not imply the annihilation or the uselessness of the natural. The Reformers were well aware that just as divine providence preserved the cosmos, so God left to the human being the ability to foster political and social life. Calvin carefully reminded his readers that the human intellect and will did not simply disappear in the Fall; they were condemned with reference only to justification and salvation but continued to function in the formation of civilized life” (91).

561Commentary on Romans 2:15 [1556]; CO 49:38. Cf. Commentary on Romans 7:7 [1556]; CO 49:124.

562Commentary on Romans 1:17 [1556]; CO 49:20-21. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 11:3 [1559]; CO 36:237.

563Commentary on Romans 2:2 [1556]; CO 49:31. Cf. Commentary on Romans 2:11, 16 [1556]; CO 49:36, 39. In the *Institutes* Calvin compares the righteousness of God with three other forms of righteousness. There are (1) those who are “endowed with no knowledge of God and immersed in idolatry,” (2) people who are “initiated into the sacraments, yet by impurity of life denying God in their actions,” and (3) individuals who “are hypocrites who conceal with empty pretenses their wickedness of heart” (3.14.1).

564Commentary on Galatians 5:22 [1548]; CO 50:255.

to rich men, from whom we expect a similar return, is not generosity but a system of commercial exchange, and in like manner, kind offices rendered from mercenary views are of no account in the sight of God and do not deserve to be ascribed to charity.”⁵⁶⁵

This doesn't mean civic virtue and the righteousness of man is without value. On the contrary, unbelievers receive “notable endowments” as gifts from God, and while some are possessed by madness, intemperance, savagery, lust, and contempt for the law, others act with a degree of justice, moderation, equity, continence, and respect for the law. Reason requires that Christians acknowledge and honor such persons. Civic virtue is not to be taken for granted, for “if we confuse these things, what order will remain in the world?” (3.14.2)⁵⁶⁶ All virtues, even those that fall short of perfection, are gifts of God and worthy of praise, and God uses them “for the preservation of human society in righteousness, continence, friendship, temperance, fortitude, and prudence” (3.14.3).⁵⁶⁷ Christians must embrace such natural and political blessings for what they are, while directing them toward their higher spiritual purpose. The Christian calling is not to “renounce the wisdom that is implanted in us by nature, or acquired by long practice, but simply that we subject it to the service of God.”⁵⁶⁸ This service involves replacing pride

⁵⁶⁵Commentary on Luke 14:12 [1555]; CO 45:396. Quite often human “judgment does indeed agree with the law of God in regard to the mere outward actions, but sinful desire, which is the source of everything evil, escapes our notice.” Commentary on Hebrews 4:17 [1549]; CO 55:205. In fact, Calvin acknowledges that there could be “a man who, before the world, is not only innocent but eminent for distinguished virtues, and most praiseworthy for his life, yet because he is opposed to the doctrine of the gospel, and on account of the obstinacy of his unbelief, is reckoned one of the most heinous sinners.” Commentary on 1 Timothy 1:15 [1548]; CO 55:260. In contrast, there are others like the prostitute Rahab who “are hardly allowed a place among the profane and the reprobate,” and yet who are “by faith introduced into the company of angels.” Commentary on Hebrews 11:31 [1549]; CO 55:165. The “constant end of that which is right” is to serve God, and “whatever strives to another end already deservedly loses the name 'right'” (3.14.3).

⁵⁶⁶“For there is such a great difference between the righteous and the unrighteous that it appears even in the dead image thereof” (3.14.2). “[H]istory shows that there have been great men, endowed with heroic virtues, who yet were wholly unacquainted with Christ, and it seems unreasonable that men of so great eminence had no honor.” Commentary on 1 John 5:12 [1551]; CO 55:368.

⁵⁶⁷Indeed, God even blesses such virtues (3.14.2).

⁵⁶⁸Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:18 [1546]; CO 49:359. Calvin defined the wisdom of the world as “that which assumes to itself authority and does not allow itself to be regulated by the word of God, or to be subdued, so as to yield itself up in entire subjection to him.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:19 [1546]; CO 49:359-360.

with humility and turning all human endeavors toward the ends of piety and love. “We must therefore lay it down as a settled principle that knowledge is good in itself, but as piety is its only foundation, it becomes empty and useless in wicked men. As love is its true seasoning, where that is wanting it is tasteless.”⁵⁶⁹

Thus it is impossible on the basis of natural human knowledge to experience a true restoration of order or to attain to the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Humans are not simply alienated from God in body, or even in the “inferior part of the soul,” as the philosophers assume. They need a “renovation [*innovatio*]” that is “of the mind, which is the most excellent part of us, and to which philosophers ascribe the supremacy.”⁵⁷⁰ It is true that “the mind holds the highest rank in the human condition, is the seat of reason, presides over the will, and restrains sinful desires.” But, corrupted by sin, all of this is mere vanity, for “with respect to the kingdom of God [*Christi regniti*] and all that relates to the spiritual life, the light of human reason differs little from darkness.”⁵⁷¹ The world cannot attain to true happiness “when men foolishly and without the fear of the Lord exult in vanity, that is, in the world, and intoxicated with a transient felicity, look no higher than the earth.”⁵⁷² The world remains characterized by disorder, because as long as

569Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8:1 [1546]; CO 49:428-429.

570Commentary on Romans 12:2 [1556]; CO 49:235. The old man refers not simply to the “inferior appetites or desires” but also to “that part of the soul which is reckoned most noble and excellent.” Commentary on Hebrews 4:23 [1549]; CO 55:208. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:21 [1546]; CO 49:89-90.

571Commentary on Hebrews 4:17 [1549]; CO 55:204. “In short, natural reason never will direct men to Christ, and as to their being endued with prudence for regulating their lives, or born to cultivate the liberal arts and sciences, all this passes away without yielding any advantage.” Commentary on John 1:5 [1553]; CO 47:6-7. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:19 [1546]; CO 49:359-360; Commentary on Acts 1:7 [1552]; CO 48:9; Commentary on Acts 20:21, 27 [1554]; CO 48:463, 466-467; Commentary on Acts 28:23 [1554]; CO 48:569; Commentary on Hebrews 13:8 [1549]; CO 55:189; Commentary on Jeremiah 10:7 [1563]; CO 38:67.

572Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7:10 [1548]; CO 50:89. Human wisdom, including “everything that man can comprehend either by the natural powers of his understanding,” has “no standing in the kingdom of God.” It is madness to attempt to fly up to heaven or judge “the secret mysteries of the kingdom of God [*regni Dei*] on the basis of human wisdom for it “rests in the mere elements of the world [*mundi elementis*].” As valuable as they are for the practical ordering of life in this world, these choice gifts of God – expertness of mind, acuteness of judgment, liberal sciences [*doctrinae liberales*], and acquaintances with languages, are in a manner profaned in every instance in which they fall to the lot of wicked men.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:20 [1546]; CO 49:324-325. Cf. Commentary on 1 Peter 2:25 [1551]; CO 55:253.

humans are “outside Christ's kingdom [*extra Christi regnum*]” they remain under the “dominion [*principatum*]” and “kingdom of Satan [*Satanae regno*].”⁵⁷³

The Restoration of the World

The scope and purpose of the kingdom of Christ in Calvin's theology is nothing less than the restoration of all things. For human beings this includes a restoration to their eternal spiritual purpose. “The kingdom of God among men,” Calvin writes, “is nothing else than a restoration to a happy life, or in other words, it is true and everlasting happiness.”⁵⁷⁴ The hope of the resurrection entails “that we ought to expect from him the full restoration of all things and perfect happiness, and in short, that he was sent to erect and prepare the true and perfect state of the kingdom of God.”⁵⁷⁵ The reference to 'all things' extends to justice and reconciliation among the nations.⁵⁷⁶ It includes to the material creation as well. Calvin argues that the miracles that Jesus performed were in part “intended to inform us that he came to bestow upon us every blessing, to rescue us from the tyranny of Satan and of death, to heal our diseases and sins, and to relieve us from all our miseries.”⁵⁷⁷ When Jesus spoke of the peace intended for Israel, Calvin points out, he included, “according to the meaning of the Hebrew phrase, all that is essential to happiness.”⁵⁷⁸ The world was created good, designed for the purpose of

573Commentary on Ephesians 2:2 [1548]; CO 51:161. Cf. Commentary on Romans, Preface [1556]; CO 49:4; Commentary on 1 Timothy 5:15 [1548]; CO 52:314.

574Commentary on Matthew 3:2 [1555]; CO 45:111. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 9:35 [1555]; CO 45:262; Commentary on Psalm 85:10 [1557]; CO 31:789-790.

575Commentary on John 11:27 [1553]; CO 47:263.

576Calvin observes that “the ruin of the human race is that, having been alienated from God, it is also broken and scattered in itself. The restoration of it therefore, on the contrary, consists in its being properly united in one body.” Commentary on Acts 17:21 [1554]; CO 48:387. Through the world's “spiritual renewal [*instaurazione*]” all nations are brought into one body. Commentary on Ephesians 3:9 [1548]; CO 51:182. Although now the rich oppress the poor, this “confusion of things which is now seen in the world will not be perpetual, because the Lord at his coming will reduce all things to order.” Therefore Christians could live with hope “for it is not without reason that the restoration [*instauratio*] of all things is promised to us at that day.” Commentary on James 5:7 [1550]; CO 55:425. Cf. Commentary on Romans 3:6 [1556]; CO 49:50.

577Commentary on Matthew 10:8 [1555]; CO 45:275. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 14:16 [1555]; CO 45:438; Commentary on John 6:11 [1553]; CO 47:133.

578Commentary on Luke 19:42 [1555]; CO 45:576. Cf. Commentary on Romans 8:6 [1556]; CO 49:142.

human happiness, and despite all the worst that the devil, sin, and humans have done, the creation's destiny remains fixed in God's purposes.

While numerous scholars have drawn attention to Calvin's emphasis on the restoration of creation, some have suggested that Calvin minimized the theme. Quistorp recognizes that Calvin taught “a perfecting of the world or cosmos as a whole,” but he criticizes Calvin for failing to develop the point.⁵⁷⁹ VanDrunen gives little attention to the restoration of creation in his work on Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine, despite his interest in Calvin's distinction between creation and redemption.⁵⁸⁰ Hesselink merely suggests that “There are places – granted, not so many – where Calvin speaks of the kingdom of Christ in terms of the renewal and restoration of the *world*.” Even where Calvin does speak in this way, “he does not explain precisely what the term 'reform' or the renovation of the world involves.”⁵⁸¹

The tendency of scholars to downplay Calvin's emphasis on the restoration of creation is in part a reflection of Calvin's reluctance to speculate about the nature of the new creation given scripture's relative silence on the matter.⁵⁸² It also reflects the reformer's emphasis on the eschatological nature of the kingdom of Christ, and his

579 Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 12-13, 181-186. Quistorp complains that Luther and Calvin “fail to do justice to the ideas of the perfection of the new humanity as a whole, of the church in the coming kingdom of God and of the new creation in a new heaven and earth” (12-13). He admits, however, that Calvin “turns aside from any mystical spiritualism which considers the visible things of creation to be wholly worthless in the final state of glory” (185).

580 VanDrunen, “*Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*,” 69-93. Cf. Cornel Venema, “The Restoration of All Things to Proper Order: An Assessment of the 'Two Kingdoms/Natural Law' Interpretation of Calvin's Public Theology,” *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (ed. Ryan G. McIlhenny; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2012), 26-31. Venema, however, wants to press the continuity between creation and redemption much farther than Calvin does (26-27), as does Paul Helm, *Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clar, 2008), 134-135.

581 I. John Hesselink, “Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ,” *Religion Without Ulterior Motive* (ed. E. A. J. G. Van Der Borcht. Leiden: Brill, 2006), 156-157. He acknowledges “at least one place” where it “may, in fact, have to do with the renewal of society.” On the other hand, Hesselink agrees, “When the kingdom is viewed from an eschatological perspective, it is also clear that the kingdom transcends the church” (148).

582 Calvin warns that too many people spend too much time philosophizing about the likely state of the life to come but they forget entirely to make sure they will attain to that kingdom. Commentary on Acts 1:8 [1552]; CO 48:10. In Calvin, Quistorp observes, “cosmic eschatology is never divorced from the Christological and eschatological vision of the end.” Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 184.

consistent tendency to identify it with the church.⁵⁸³ Finally, as David Holwerda points out, most of the attention Calvin gives the theme appears in his commentaries, which receive much less scholarly attention than does Calvin's *Institutes*.⁵⁸⁴

These caveats aside, Calvin presents his understanding of the kingdom of Christ as the restoration of the world in clear and decisive terms. The sorts of words he typically uses are *instauro*, *restituo*, and *renovatio*, words often translated interchangeably as 'renewal,' 'restoration,' and 'renovation.' Calvin frequently alludes to Acts 3:21 in connection with "the day of renovation and restoration" that will take place at Jesus' return. The restoration that will occur is a restoration of 'all things' [*omnia*], or of the 'order' [*ordo*] or 'state' [*status*] of creation.⁵⁸⁵ When Christ returns he will "establish perfect order in heaven and earth."⁵⁸⁶

The *locus classicus* for Calvin's discussion of the restoration of creation is his commentary on Romans 8:19-21. Taking quite seriously Paul's declaration that the whole creation groans for its redemption, Calvin writes, "I understand the passage to have this meaning – that there is no element and no part of the world which, being touched as it were with a sense of its present misery, does not intensely hope for a resurrection." God

583Hesselink writes that while for Calvin the kingdom and the church are not coterminous, Calvin "usually simply identifies the kingdom with the church." "Calvin occasionally acknowledges the wider dimension, the 'more,' of the kingdom in relation to the church, but it is a muted motif. Generally, for him kingdom and church are interchangeable." Hesselink, "Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ," 145 (Cf. 145-148). Torrance notes that for Calvin considered from a certain perspective "the Church and the Kingdom are essentially correlative." Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 133-134. VanDrunen argues that Calvin made a "basic identification" of the kingdom with the church; The church is the "institutional manifestation of the spiritual kingdom in the present life" and it is the "only" such institutional manifestation, "notwithstanding the perpetuation of claims to the contrary." VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 79, 81.

584Holwerda, "Eschatology and History," 339. J. H. Van Wyk goes so far as to claim that in Calvin's work the kingdom of God "is neither used nor developed as a central theological theme," and that where he does discuss it, "the cosmic dimension (new earth) is underexposed, at least in the *Institutes*." Van Wyk, "John Calvin on the Kingdom of God and Eschatology," 202-203.

585In addition to the references engaged in the following pages, see Commentary on Colossians 1:22 [1548]; CO 52:91; Commentary on Acts 5:31 [1552]; CO 48:111; Commentary on Isaiah 35:1 [1559]; CO 36:590-591; Commentary on Isaiah 42:10 [1559]; CO 37:67; Commentary on Amos 9:11 [1559]; CO 43:170-171; Commentary on Zechariah 14:8 [1559]; CO 44:371; Commentary on Haggai 2:20-23 [1559]; CO 44:120-121.

586Commentary on Matthew 25:31 [1555]; CO 45:686.

has “implanted inwardly the hope of renovation [*renovationis*]” to all things.⁵⁸⁷ All creatures shall be renewed, not in the particular sense that individual human beings are, but in the sense that “they, according to their nature, shall be participators of a better condition, for God will restore [*restituēt*] to a perfect state [*modo melioris status*] the world, now fallen, together with mankind.”⁵⁸⁸ Calvin admits that it is not entirely clear just what this sort of restoration will entail and he warns against speculation. But he nevertheless specifies two of its most important features. First, the material creation will be liberated from corruption, decay, and death.⁵⁸⁹ Second, what it yearns *for* is “eternal” or “celestial glory.”⁵⁹⁰ In some sense, then, creation will undergo a qualitative transformation that will render it glorious and permanent. But Calvin does not speak of any sort of *progressive* transformation of the material creation prior to Christ's return, for creatures, “being now subject to corruption, cannot be restored [*instaurari*] until the sons of God shall be wholly restored [*restituantur*]. Hence they, longing for their renewal [*instaurationem*], look forward to the manifestation of the celestial kingdom [*regni coelestis*].”⁵⁹¹ The order and flourishing of creation is tied up with the order and flourishing of human beings. The creation longs for the restoration to which it will attain when humans have themselves been restored.⁵⁹²

In the commentary on Romans 8:19-21 Calvin cross-references similar passages

587Commentary on Romans 8:19 [1556]; CO 49:152. Cf. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 97-98.

588Commentary on Romans 8:21 [1556]; CO 49:153. Elsewhere Calvin writes that “things created are subject to decay, but Christ's kingdom is eternal; then all creatures must needs be brought into a better state.” Commentary on Hebrews 12:28 [1549]; CO 55:186.

589What matters is “that such will be the constitution and the complete order of things that nothing will be deformed [*deforme*] or fading [*fluxum*].” “But what that perfection will be, as to beasts as well as plants and metals, it is not meet nor right in us to inquire more curiously, for the chief effect of corruption is decay.” Commentary on Romans 8:21 [1556]; CO 49:153.

590Commentary on Romans 8:19 [1556]; CO 49:152. Cf. Commentary on Romans 8:17 [1556]; CO 49:150-151.

591Commentary on Romans 8:19 [1556]; CO 49:152. Peter Wilcox agrees that Calvin thinks of the kingdom and its history in terms of “progress,” but it is progress defined by the preaching of the gospel and the gathering of the church. Peter Wilcox, “The Progress of the Kingdom of Christ' in Calvin's Exposition of the Prophets,” in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex* (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1997), 319.

592See Holwerda, “Eschatology and History,” 338; Millner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 20, 37-38, 46-47; Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 99-100.

in 2 Peter and Isaiah.⁵⁹³ When Peter says that the earth will be consumed, Calvin argues, he did not mean that it would literally be destroyed. “Of the elements of the world I shall only say this one thing, that they are to be consumed only that they may be renovated, their substance still remaining the same, as it may be easily gathered from Romans 8:21 and from other passages.” Calvin warns against speculation, but his argument here presupposes the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accidents.⁵⁹⁴ In its substance creation will be restored and continue into the kingdom of Christ, but speculation as to what that will mean in practical terms must be avoided.

Calvin offers a similar interpretation of God's proclamation in Isaiah 65, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.” He suggests that the proclamation is “exaggerated” but that such hyperbole is an appropriate representation of the radical changes that accompany the coming of Christ. Pointing to Hebrews 2:5 and its reference to the renewed world as a 'new age,' Calvin affirms, “when we shall be perfectly renewed, heaven and earth shall also be fully renewed, and shall regain their former state.”⁵⁹⁵ Here again Calvin notes that the renovation of creation awaits the more particular renovation of human beings, and it is therefore human renewal that is the focus of Isaiah's prophecy. For humans “hold the first rank, and it is through our sin that 'the creatures groan, and are subject to vanity,' as Paul shows (Romans 8:20).”⁵⁹⁶ In that respect Calvin warns against taking Isaiah 65 too literally with reference to the particulars of creation, “that none may think that this relates to trees, or beasts, or the order of the stars, for it must be referred to the inward renewal of man.”⁵⁹⁷ When the prophet predicts that

⁵⁹³Commentary on Romans 8:21 [1556]; CO 49:153.

⁵⁹⁴Commentary on 2 Peter 3:10 [1551]; CO 55:476. Cf. Commentary on 2 Peter 2:5 [1551]; CO 55:462.

Calvin makes a similar move in his commentary on 1 Peter 4:7, where the Apostle declares, “The end of all things is at hand.” He interprets the end as referring to “the universal renovation [*reparatione*] of the world.” Commentary on 1 Peter 4:7 [1555]; CO 55:274. Cf. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 98-99; Venema, “The Restoration of All Things to Proper Order,” 30.

⁵⁹⁵Commentary on Isaiah 65:17 [1559]; CO 37:428-429.

⁵⁹⁶Commentary on Isaiah 65:17 [1559]; CO 37:429. “[T]hese things take place in us so far as we are renewed. But we are only in part renewed, and therefore we do not yet see a new heaven and a new earth.”

⁵⁹⁷Commentary on Isaiah 66:22 [1559]; CO 37:453.

“everything shall be fully restored when Christ shall reign,” therefore, he is primarily concerned with the order of *human* affairs. “But since it is the office of Christ to bring back everything to its condition and order, that is the reason why he declares that the confusion or ruin that now exists in human affairs shall be removed by the coming of Christ, because at that time, corruptions having been taken away, the world shall return to its first origin.”⁵⁹⁸

Two of the passages on which Calvin makes some of his most poignant remarks about Jesus' restoration of the world are John 12:31 and John 16:11. When Jesus spoke of his 'judgment' of the world and the devil, Calvin writes, he meant “that the world must be restored to a proper order, for the Hebrew word *mishpat*, which is translated judgment, means a well-ordered state. Now we know that out of Christ there is nothing but confusion in the world, and though Christ had already begun to erect the kingdom of God, yet his death was the commencement of a well-regulated condition and the full restoration of the world.”⁵⁹⁹ Christ has won the decisive victory over the devil through his death and resurrection, commencing the restoration of all things and the inauguration of his kingdom.

Judgment, therefore, is contrasted with what is confused and disordered, or to express it briefly, it is the opposite of confusion, or we might call it righteousness, a sense which it often bears in scripture. The meaning therefore is that Satan, so long as he retains the government, perplexes and disturbs all things, so that there is an unseemly and disgraceful confusion in the works of God, but when he is stripped of his tyranny by Christ, then the world is restored and good order is seen to reign.⁶⁰⁰

The means by which the order of human affairs is renewed is through the regeneration of human beings, for “it is in a manner a renovation of the world when men

⁵⁹⁸Commentary on Isaiah 65:25 [1559]; CO 37:433-434. The world is still characterized by disorder, of course, but while its complete renewal awaits the end of the age, “even now we are in the progress and accomplishment of it.” Commentary on Isaiah 65:17 [1559]; CO 37:428-429. What does it mean that God will “restore everything to its proper order?” Calvin answers, “in Christ,’ as Paul says, ‘are collected all things that are either in heaven or in earth’ (Ephesians 1:10).” Commentary on Isaiah 51:16 [1559]; CO 37:237.

⁵⁹⁹Commentary on John 12:31 [1553]; CO 47:293-294. Cf. Commentary on John 12:32 [1553]; CO 47:294.

⁶⁰⁰Commentary on John 16:11 [1553]; CO 47:360-361.

suffer themselves to be ruled by God.”⁶⁰¹ In a typical statement Calvin drives that point home:

Christ was sent in order to bring the whole world under the authority of God and obedience to him, and this shows that without him everything is confused and disordered... Now, we ought to judge of this government from the nature of his kingdom, which is not external but belongs to the inner man, for it consists of a good conscience and uprightness of life, not what is so reckoned before men, but what is so reckoned before God.⁶⁰²

Still, Calvin clearly avoids reducing the kingdom to a narrow salvation of individuals, or even of the church, despite concerns to the contrary.⁶⁰³ For while he certainly has an anthropocentric emphasis, it is consistently moderated by his insistence that renewed human beings are the firstfruits of a restoration of the entire physical creation.⁶⁰⁴ Holwerda thus correctly summarizes Calvin's thought: “The history of salvation which becomes visible in the church contains within it the meaning of the history of the world. And the renewal manifesting itself in the body of Christ is the renewal that embraces the whole creation.”⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰¹Commentary on Jeremiah 31:33 [1563]; CO 38:691-692. Cf. Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:23 [1550]; CO 52:178; Commentary on Acts 8:5 [1552]; CO 48:177.

⁶⁰²Commentary on Isaiah 42:1 [1559]; CO 37:59-60.

⁶⁰³See Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 161, 180, 192-193. Quistorp insists that Calvin underdevelops the church as “the corpus of a new humanity and its lordship over the world” “For he is less interested in the fulfillment of the church as a society than in the salvation of its individual members” (180). Cf. Hesselink, “Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ,” 156. To the contrary, Douglass argues, for Calvin “Restored humanity is not individual but social. To be redeemed by Christ and made a member of his body is to be incorporated into the church, the household of faith. The church represents the inbreaking of the kingdom of God; it already shows forth the new creation to some degree, though never fully in this fallen world.” Jane Dempsey Douglass, “Calvin's Relation to Social and Economic Change,” *Church and Society* 74 (1984): 75.

⁶⁰⁴For example, Calvin typically insists in his commentary on Colossians 1:15-20 that when the Apostle Paul describes Christ as having created and reconciled 'all things,' he likely has angels and humans primarily in view. But he admits that the statement is *true* if interpreted in a broader sense. Jesus has indeed reconciled 'all things' in the sense of the entire creation. Commentary on Colossians 1:20 [1548]; CO 52:88. It is of “no great importance” whether 'all things' be taken as a reference to all creatures or to everything absolutely. The phrase can be taken either way, and “the simple meaning is that all things are subjected to his sway.” His work of both creation and redemption extend to “the whole world [*toto quoque mundo*].” Commentary on Colossians 1:17 [1548]; CO 52:86 (Cf. 1:18; 52:87). Cf. Commentary on Micah 5:1-2 [1559]; CO 43:368.

⁶⁰⁵Holwerda, “Eschatology and History,” 337. “Calvin sees this reordering of all things occurring first of all in individuals and the church. There we can see 'the beginnings of God's Kingdom, for we now begin to be reformed to the image of God by his Spirit so that the complete renewal of ourselves and the whole world may follow in its own time’” (338). Tonkin writes, “For Calvin, the fulfillment of the kingdom includes within it the *renovation of the world* – the renewal and restoration of the whole created order.” Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in the Theology of the Reformers*, 116.

Calvin could wholeheartedly embrace the rhetoric of a passage like Psalm 96:11, “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it!” Although the psalmist makes use of literary hyperbole, Calvin admits, “the hyperbole here employed does not want a certain foundation of a more literal kind. As all elements in the creation groan and travail together with us, according to Paul’s declaration (Romans 8), they may reasonably rejoice in the restoration of all things according to their earnest desire.”⁶⁰⁶ Calvin interprets Isaiah’s prophecy of a wolf lying down with a lamb as a promise that “there will be a blessed restoration of the world,” a return to “the order which was at the beginning, before man’s apostasy produced the unhappy and melancholy change under which we groan.” Christ would not only defeat all evil, but he will “restore to its former beauty the world which lay under the curse.”⁶⁰⁷

The point is not simply abstract for Calvin. In various places the reformer carefully describes redemption in terms of the restoration of humans’ relation to the material world. For instance, in his commentary on 1 Timothy 4 he explains,

God has appointed to his children alone the whole world and all that is in the world. For this reason they are also called the heirs of the world, for at the beginning Adam was appointed to be lord of all on this condition, that he should continue in obedience to God. Accordingly, his rebellion against God deprived of the right, which had been bestowed on him, not only himself but his posterity. And since all things are subject to Christ, we are fully restored by his mediation, and that through faith, and therefore all that unbelievers enjoy may be regarded as the property of others, which they rob or steal.⁶⁰⁸

Emphasis Original. Cf. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 97-114.

606Commentary on Psalm 96:11 [1557]; CO 32:42.

607Commentary on Isaiah 11:6 [1559]; CO 36:241-242.

608Commentary on 1 Timothy 4:3 [1548]; CO 52:296. “For God had at the beginning constituted man as his son, the heir of all good things, but through sin the first man became alienated from God and deprived himself and his posterity of all good things, as well as of the favor of God. We hence only then begin to enjoy by right the good things of God when Christ, the universal heir, admits us into an union with himself, for he is an heir that he may endow us with his riches.” Commentary on Hebrews 1:2 [1549]; CO 55:11. Indeed, because believers are the heirs of the world, tyrants, “when they exercise supreme dominion, assume and arrogate to themselves the peculiar property of the sacred lofty ones, meaning the people of God.” Commentary on Daniel 7:17-18 [1561]; CO 41:66-67. Cf. Commentary on Romans 4:13 [1556]; CO 49:77; Commentary on Daniel 7:17-18 [1561]; CO 41:66-67; Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:27 [1546]; CO 49:548. Calvin did not invent this argument. Medieval theologians like Giles of Rome had gone so far as to suggest that unbelievers derive rights to property and rule only

While no human being has any right to the good gifts of creation, Christ has taken it upon himself to restore all these good gifts to those who follow him by faith.⁶⁰⁹ As Calvin puts it in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, for those who serve Christ, “If the fullness of the earth is the Lord's there is nothing in the world that is not sacred [*sanctum*] and pure.”⁶¹⁰

In his commentary on Romans 4:13 Calvin confesses that it is at first glance surprising that the Apostle Paul described Abraham as the “heir of the world” given that the great patriarch was famous for having looked beyond this world to a salvation that was spiritual and eternal. But, Calvin writes, the apostle “includes generally under this word 'world' the restoration which was expected through Christ. The chief thing was indeed the restoration of life. It was yet necessary that the fallen state of the whole world should be repaired. The apostle in Hebrews 1:2 calls Christ the heir of all the good things of God, for the adoption which we obtain through his favor restores to us the possession of the inheritance which we lost in Adam.” Lest the material significance of the point be lost, Calvin drives it home. When believers “enter on the full possession of their inheritance, ... all creatures shall be made subservient to their glory. For both heaven and

from the pope. See Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 231-236. But Calvin never suggested that believers could claim special prerogative over the material of this world. In his commentary on Hebrews 2:5 he specified that a distinction must be made between right and legitimate use by virtue of God's grace. Adam was denied the good things of creation, “not that he was denied the use of them, but that he could have had no right to them,” and futility, suffering, and death were to be constant reminders “of this loss of right.” Commentary on Hebrews 2:5 [1549]; CO 55:24. The full realization of Christ's lordship awaits Jesus' second coming. Commentary on Hebrews 2:8 [1549]; CO 55:25.

⁶⁰⁹Christ's lordship extends “not only [to] things needful for eternal blessedness, but also such inferior things as serve to supply the wants of the body.” Commentary on Hebrews 2:8 [1549]; CO 55:26. “Here it ought to be observed, that we cannot possess our wealth and have the peaceful and lawful enjoyment of it in any other way than by dwelling in the kingdom of Christ, who is the only heir of the world, and without being engrafted into his body.” Commentary on Isaiah 65:21-22 [1559]; CO 37:431. Cf. Commentary on 1 Timothy 4:5 [1548]; CO 52:297. Haas rightly refers to Christ's “restoration of humanity's calling of dominion and lordship over creation” in which believers participate by union with him. Haas, “Calvin's Ethics,” 96. Cf. Haas, “Calvin, Natural Law, and the Two Kingdoms,” 57; Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought*, 118.

⁶¹⁰“[A]ll things are sanctified through Christ.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:26 [1546]; CO 49:469. Even food is “in a manner sacred to God, inasmuch as it will be set apart for his service” (10:31; 471).

earth shall be renewed for this end, that according to their measure they may contribute to render glorious the kingdom of God.”⁶¹¹ The meek, Jesus said, will inherit the earth.⁶¹²

Thus the renovation of the world is presented in scripture as an event in chronological relation to time (albeit beyond ordinary history), rather than as a form of hierarchical transcendence understood in Neoplatonic terms. When the writer to the Hebrews speaks of “the world to come, or the future world, ... he understands by it the renovated [*renovato*] world. To make the thing clearer, let us suppose two worlds [*duplicem mundum*] – the first the old, corrupted by Adam's sin, the other later in time, as renewed by Christ.”⁶¹³

It is within this context of the renovation of the world that Calvin's insistence on the importance of the resurrection must be interpreted, and Quistorp is right to emphasize that Calvin places the resurrection “dead in the centre of the Christian hope.”⁶¹⁴ For Calvin the resurrection is “that by which we are translated from the kingdom of death [*regno mortis*] to the kingdom of life [*regnum vitae*].”⁶¹⁵ As was noted above, not even the souls of the faithful in heaven have the fullness of life without the resurrection of their material bodies. Rather “the whole of their felicity and consolation depends exclusively on the resurrection, because it is well with them on this account and no other, that they wait for that day on which they shall be called to the possession of the kingdom of God.”⁶¹⁶

Christians, Calvin argues, do not long for a day in which their immortal souls, having been liberated from the material creation, will inhabit an eternal afterlife in the “Elysian fields,” let alone dream of any other such ethereal fantasy. Christians, rather,

611Commentary on Romans 4:13 [1556]; CO 49:77.The godly acknowledge the earth as their own possession already in the present life, enjoying created things “as pledges and earnest of eternal life.”

612Commentary on Matthew 5:5 [1555; CO 45:162-163.

613Commentary on Hebrews 2:5 [1549]; CO 55:24.

614Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 108.

615Commentary on Romans 11:15 [1556]; CO 49:220.

616Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:18 [1546]; CO 49:543.

look forward to the day when they, along with the entire creation, will be restored to perfect life, order, and happiness in communion with God.⁶¹⁷ As Calvin writes in his commentary on Isaiah 32:20,

since Christ has restored to believers the inheritance of the world, with good reason do the prophets assert that he would renew the earth, so as to remove its filthiness and restore that beauty which it had lost. They who complain that it is not yet fulfilled ought to consider whether or not they themselves are purified from every stain of sin. And if they are still at a great distance from spiritual righteousness, let them be satisfied with enjoying the blessing of God according to the measure of regeneration, the full enjoyment of which we must not expect to obtain until, freed from the pollution of the flesh, we shall bear the perfect image of God.⁶¹⁸

The Spirituality of the Kingdom

Calvin introduces the kingdom in his *Institutes* with the declaration, “It would be pointless to speak of this without first warning my readers that it is spiritual in nature” (2.15.3).⁶¹⁹ By the word 'spiritual' Calvin does not mean that the kingdom is immaterial or ethereal in some way. Rather, the term spiritual means that 1) the power of the kingdom is that of the Holy Spirit, 2) the kingdom completes creation's eschatological purpose, and 3) the kingdom will be consummated only at Christ's return. Put simply, the kingdom is 1) from the Spirit of God, 2) leads human beings upward to God, and 3) leads them forward to eternity. The return of Christ “is for Calvin indeed a day in time,” Quistorp observes, “but as the last day of this time world it is also the dawn of quite another eon, of the new world and time of God to which our time measurements are no longer applicable and which is thus essentially beyond all human calculation.”⁶²⁰ In the

⁶¹⁷Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:19 [1546]; CO 49:544-545. Cf. Commentary on Luke 23:43 [1555]; CO 45:776.

⁶¹⁸Commentary on Isaiah 32:20 [1559]; CO 36:555. Holwerda does not exaggerate when he concludes, “Calvin's so-called unworldliness is in actuality a seeking for renewal and life in Christ who is now in heaven. Meditation on the future life is not a rejection of this created world in favor of another heavenly world unrelated to this one, but it is always a seeking of Christ in whom the renovation of this world has occurred.” Holwerda, “Eschatology and History,” 326-327. The life that the Spirit gives “flows from the new creation [*nova creatio*].” Commentary on Romans 10:19 [1556]; CO 49:209.

⁶¹⁹“Christ's kingdom is spiritual and far superior to the elements of the world.” Commentary on Hebrews 12:1 [1549]; CO 55:171. Cf. Commentary on Luke 1:33 [1555]; CO 45:29.

⁶²⁰Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 111.

meantime the kingdom breaks into the present age by means of the hidden work of the Holy Spirit, which is why Jesus describes the kingdom as inward. As he told the Pharisees in Luke 17, “because the Kingdom of God is within us, it will not come with observation.” Jesus' hearers may have taunted him for outward signs, but “he enjoined them to enter into their own consciences, because 'the Kingdom of God ... is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (2.15.4).⁶²¹

Calvin was convinced that it was a cardinal Jewish error to assume that the messiah's kingdom would be just like David's kingdom of old. His writings are scattered with criticisms of the Jewish expectation of an earthly kingdom, a false hope, he warned, that blinded them from seeing the kingdom of Christ.⁶²² He believed the same error plagued Christendom. In a typical statement he warns, “because we are more than we ought set upon the seeking of the peace of the flesh, whereby it comes to pass that many tie the grace of Christ unto the present life, it is expedient for us to be accustomed to think otherwise, that we may know that the kingdom of Christ is spiritual [*spirituale esse Christi regnum*].”⁶²³ But “Nothing is more contrary to our natural judgment than to seek life in death, riches in poverty and want, glory in shame and disgrace – to be wanderers in this world, and at the same time its heirs!”⁶²⁴

621Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 59:21 [1559]; CO 37:352. Cf. Hesselink, “Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ,” 143-145, 152-155. Hesselink writes, “It is spiritual and yet has earthly dimensions. It is eternal but has stages of development. It is invisible to human eyes but can be perceived by faith. It is in the world but not of the world” (152). “It is a kingdom of peace, but inevitably there is struggle and warfare.” It has “humble beginnings and weakness,” on the one hand, and “firmness and invincibility,” on the other (153).

622Commentary on Matthew 22:4 [1555]; CO 45:399.

623Commentary on Acts 2:20 [1552]; CO 48:35. The kingdom of God provides a happiness that is “not in this world, but in heaven and everlasting life.” That is, “its aim is spiritual happiness, for the kingdom of Christ is spiritual [*Christi regnum est spirituale*].” Commentary on Ephesians 1:3 [1548]; CO 51:146. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 13:13 [1549]; CO 55:192; Commentary on 1 Corinthians, 1546 Dedication; CO 12:258-260.

624Rabbi Abarbinel, Calvin writes, “rejects our idea of the spiritual reign of Christ as a foolish imagination. For the kingdom of God, he says, is established under the whole heavens and is given to the people of the saints. If it is established under heaven, says he, it is earthly, and if earthly, therefore not spiritual.” In a sense, Calvin grants, this seems quite logical, and it even contains an element of truth to it. But he responds that while it is true that Jesus' kingdom exists *in* this world, it is not *of* it. “God ... exercises his heavenly reign in the world because he dwells in the hearts of his people by his Spirit.” Commentary on Daniel 7:27 [1561]; CO 41:81-86.

The disciples themselves falsely imagined that “Christ would obtain a kingdom, an earthly kingdom, and would immediately rise to the highest prosperity and wealth.”⁶²⁵ Calvin identified the disciples' error as twofold, one corresponding to the nature or quality of Christ's kingdom, the other to the time of its completion. First, the disciples conceived of the kingdom according to their own carnal and earthly senses, rather than looking to heaven to understand its nature. Second, they expected the kingdom to be established immediately, failing to grasp that they had first to go the way of the cross.⁶²⁶ In his commentary on Acts 1 Calvin writes, “They ask him concerning a kingdom, but they dream of an earthly kingdom which should flow with riches, with dainties, with external peace, and with such like good things, and while they assign the present time to the restoring of the same, they desire to triumph before the battle.”⁶²⁷ In fact, the two errors are closely related. The disciples expected a *merely* earthly kingdom and they expected it right away. Jesus' kingdom will restore all things, but because complete restoration awaits Christ's return, in the present age this restoration is only experienced in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Yet Calvin concedes that the disciples' confusion is understandable. “Now we

⁶²⁵Commentary on Matthew 18:1 [1555]; CO 45:499. What the disciples expected regarding a “carnal kingdom” simply reflected “the common error of their nation.” Commentary on Acts 1:8 [1552]; CO 48:10. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 17:22 [1555]; CO 45:495; 20:21-22; CO 45:553; 24:29; CO 45:666-667. The Apostle Paul worked hard to persuade those who believed the kingdom would consist in “present good things” that “the kingdom of God is spiritual.” Commentary on Acts 28:23 [1554]; CO 48:568. Cf. Commentary on 2 Peter 2:1 [1551]; CO 55:459.

⁶²⁶Commentary on Matthew 24:4 [1555]; CO 45:650; Commentary on Luke 19:11 [1555]; CO 45:567; Commentary on Acts 1:8 [1552]; CO 48:10. In his commentary on Isaiah 9:7 Calvin explains what Isaiah meant when he prophesied that the government of the messiah would be perpetual: “Now, this continuance, of which Isaiah now speaks, consists of two parts. It belongs both to time and to quality. Though the kingdom of Christ is in such a condition that it appears as if it were about to perish at every moment, yet God not only protects and defends it, but also extends its boundaries far and wide, and then preserves and carries it forward in uninterrupted progression to eternity.” At the same time, “believers should not imagine that the splendor of Christ’s kingdom would consist in outward pomp or cherish vain hopes of worldly triumphs, but should only expect, amidst various calamities, an unseen extension of the kingdom, because it had been promised.” CO 36:198-199. In his commentary on Matthew 10:7 Calvin notes that the gospel writers use the phrases 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of heaven' interchangeably. Why? “It was to inform the Jews, first, that they owed their restoration to divine agency, and not to the kindness of men; secondly, that under the reign of God their condition would be prosperous; and, thirdly, that the happiness which had been promised to them was not earthly and fading, but heavenly and eternal.” CO 45:275.

⁶²⁷Commentary on Acts 1:6 [1552]; CO 48:8 (Cf. 1:8; 48:10).

know what splendid promises of peace, righteousness, joy, and abundance of all blessings are to be found everywhere in scripture.” The prophets tended to speak of the kingdom of Christ in sweeping images, portraying his first and second coming and everything in between as one decisive event. Given this prophetic tradition, it is no wonder that the Jews expected that at the messiah's coming they would be delivered from war, injustice, and suffering. But they failed to understand just when and how this would take place. “Not that those prophecies which I have just mentioned will fail to be accomplished, but because the full accomplishment of them does not immediately appear in one day. For it is enough that believers now obtain a taste of those blessings, so as to cherish the hope of the full enjoyment of them at a future period.”⁶²⁸

Calvin believed this same confusion continued to plague the church of his own day. “Now though our condition is different, because we have not been educated among the shadows of the law so as to be infatuated by that superstition of an earthly kingdom of Christ, yet scarcely one person in a hundred is to be found who does not labor under a very similar disease.”⁶²⁹ Christians often assumed they knew just what form the progress of the kingdom would take, “but when we think that the kingdom of God can, nay, must,

⁶²⁸Commentary on Matt 24:4 [1555]; CO 45:650. The ordinary mode of the prophets is to speak of “the whole kingdom of Christ, from the beginning to the end.” To be sure, this is not always the case. For “when the discourse is concerning Christ’s kingdom, they sometimes refer to its commencement only, and sometimes they speak of its termination.” Often, however, they simply “mark out by one delineation the whole course of the kingdom of Christ, from its beginning to its end.” Commentary on Joel 2:30-31 [1559]; CO 42:573-574. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 45:23 [1559]; CO 37:149-150; Commentary on Isaiah 60:21 [1559]; CO 37:368. Commentary on Isaiah 43:8 (1559); CO 37:86; Commentary on Isaiah 43:18 (1559); CO 37:94; Commentary on Isaiah 40:1 (1559); CO 37:3-4; Commentary on Isaiah 42:1 (1559); CO 37:58; Commentary on Isaiah 65:17 [1559]; CO 37:428-429; Commentary on Zechariah 14:21 (1559); CO 44:390; Commentary on Daniel 7:27 [1561]; CO 41:81-86. Wilcox writes that for Calvin prophecy has a triple reference, “first to an imminent historical event . . . ; second, to Christ (by which he can mean the 'incarnation,' 'the ascension,' or even 'the apostolic era and the preaching of the Gospel'; and third, to the whole course of history up until the Last Day (on which grounds he applies them to the sixteenth century church). As Calvin formulates it, the doctrine of Christ's Kingdom functions as a framework for his exposition of salvation history.” Peter Wilcox, “The Progress of the Kingdom of Christ' in Calvin's Exposition of the Prophets,” in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex* (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1997), 317. For a careful analysis of Calvin's exegetical method in such cases see Richard A. Muller, “The Hermeneutic of Promise and Fulfillment in Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament Prophecies of the Kingdom,” *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century* (ed. by David C. Steinmetz; Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990), 58-82. Cf. Holwerda, “Eschatology and History,” 327.

⁶²⁹Commentary on Matthew 24:3 [1555]; CO 45:649. Emphasis added.

be advanced in this particular manner or in that ... we are often mistaken in our opinion.”⁶³⁰ The papists were guilty of exploiting the prophets' declarations that the church will one day reign with Christ, claiming temporal dominion and magisterial authority over souls. “The papists seize upon such testimonies to clothe themselves in the spoils of God, as if God had resigned his right to them! But they are immersed in the same error with the Jews, who swell with pride whenever such dignity is promised to the elect people, as if they could remain separate from God and yet obtain the right of treading the whole world under foot.”⁶³¹

The chiliasts, for their part, erroneously imagined that Christ would establish a temporal kingdom as part of an age of prosperity before his return at the end of the age.⁶³² To be sure, the gospel will in the course of history “put to flight the darkness in which Antichrist will reign.” But why would Christ establish such a temporal kingdom only to see it pass away before the final destruction of Antichrist at “that final day of the restoration [*instauracionis*] of all things”?⁶³³ Referring to Isaiah's prophecy that one day every person will bow in submission to Jesus, Calvin cautions, “if we examine it more closely it will be evident that its complete fulfillment is not now taking place, nor has it ever taken place, nor is it to be hoped for in future ages.” By referring to 'future ages' Calvin is clearly thinking of *temporal* ages. The point is that only when Jesus returns at the end of the age can Christians expect to see this prophecy fulfilled.⁶³⁴

Christians should have had no trouble recognizing the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom in light of the poverty and weakness that characterized his life. The

630Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:8 [1546]; CO 49:140-141.

631Commentary on Daniel 7:27 [1561]; CO 41:81-86.

632Commentary on Acts 1:8 [1552]; CO 48:11.

633Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:8 [1550]; CO 48:201. Cf. Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:1-2 [1548]; CO 52:376. On Calvin's critique of millennialism see Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 158-160; Bolt, 257-260. Balke notes that Calvin viewed chiliasm as a “*horrendum dictu delirium* and a secularization of the *regnum Christi*.” Balke, *Calvin and the Radical Anabaptists*, 297 (Cf. 295-299).

634Commentary on Romans 14:11 [1556]; CO 49:263. It is only the last judgment that will bring “the full revelation of the heavenly kingdom [*plenam regni coelestis revelationem*].” Commentary on Romans 2:16 [1556]; CO 49:39. Cf. Commentary on Acts 4:25 [1552]; CO 48:91.

announcement of Jesus' birth, Calvin marvels, was made to lowly shepherds, the first people to recognize the new child as the Christ.⁶³⁵ Even more remarkable is Matthew's version of the story.

A beautiful instance of real harmony amidst apparent contradiction is here exhibited. A star from heaven announces that he is a king, to whom a manger intended for cattle serves for a throne because he is refused admittance among the lowest of the people. His majesty shines in the East, while in Judea it is so far from being acknowledged that it is visited by many marks of dishonor. Why is this? The heavenly Father chose to appoint the star and the Magi as our guides to lead directly to his Son, while he stripped him of all earthly splendor for the purpose of informing us that his kingdom is spiritual.⁶³⁶

The same paradox was communicated through his triumphal entry. “In order to lay claim to the honors of royalty, he enters Jerusalem riding an ass. A magnificent display, truly! more especially when the ass was borrowed from some person, and when the want of a saddle and of accouterments compelled the disciples to throw their garments on it, which was mark of mean and disgraceful poverty.”⁶³⁷ To be sure, Jesus exhibited astonishing power during the course of his ministry, but the gospel writers take pains to show that he worked only by the power of the Spirit and that the intent of his ministry was therefore spiritual.⁶³⁸ While neither the Jews nor Jesus' own disciples grasped what their messiah was doing, Calvin beams with admiration for the thief on the cross, who discovered Jesus' glory at the moment it was most shrouded in humiliation: “he adores Christ as a king while on the gallows, celebrates his kingdom in the midst of shocking and worse than revolting abasement, and declares him when dying to be the Author of

635Cf. Commentary on Luke 2:8 [1555]; CO 45:73.

636Commentary on Matthew 2:1 [1555]; CO 45:81.

637 “When he describes Christ as riding on an ass, the meaning is that his kingdom will have nothing in common with the pomp, splendor, wealth, and power of the world, and it was proper that this should be made known by an outward manifestation, that all might be fully assured that it is spiritual.”
Commentary on John 12:14 [1553]; CO 47:285 (Cf. 12:12; 47:281-282); Cf. Commentary on Matthew 21:1 [1555]; CO 45:572.

638 “[W]e must look at the design: for it would be idle to confine our view to a transitory advantage, as if the Son of God were a physician of bodies. What then? He gave sight to the blind, in order to show that he is ‘the light of the world.’” Commentary on Matthew 8:17 [1555]; CO 45:155-156. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 14:34 [1555]; CO 45:444; Commentary on Matthew 4:12 [1555]; CO 45:138; Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:16 [1548]; CO 52:290.

life.”⁶³⁹

Given the pervasiveness of Neoplatonist interpretations of Calvin's rhetoric, it is necessary to emphasize that Calvin did not view the kingdom of Christ as some sort of ethereal realm beyond the material creation. To be sure, like the broader Christian tradition, Calvin did sometimes use otherworldly rhetoric. For instance, commenting on 2 Peter 1:11 he writes, “He calls it the kingdom of Christ because we cannot ascend to heaven except under his banner and guidance.”⁶⁴⁰ Even more provocatively, in his commentary on John 6:32 he writes that Jesus “shows that the heavenly life ought to be preferred to this earthly life because the godly have no other reason for living here than that, being sojourners in the world, they may travel rapidly towards their heavenly country.”⁶⁴¹ Many similar passages could be cited.

The question is, did Calvin use such terminology to denote a literal place beyond this world that could be identified as heaven, or as the kingdom of Christ? In his commentary on Acts 1:11 Calvin notes that the word 'heaven' can have several meanings. “I grant that this word heaven is interpreted diverse ways, sometimes for the air, sometimes for the whole system of the spheres, sometimes for the glorious kingdom of God, where the majesty of God has its proper seat, even though it fills the whole world.”⁶⁴² Despite this flexibility of interpretation, Calvin explicitly rejected Neoplatonic speculation about heaven as an ethereal place hierarchically superior to the material world.⁶⁴³ He likewise rejected speculation about a created place to which Christ has

639Commentary on Luke 23:42 [1555]; CO 45:774. “Though proud men despise these feeble beginnings of the church, yet we ought to perceive in them a brighter display of the divine glory than if the condition of the kingdom of Christ had been in every respect from the outset splendid and magnificent, for we know to how rich a harvest this small seed afterwards grew.”Commentary on John 1:45 [1553]; CO 47:33. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 16:27 [1555]; CO 45:483.

640Commentary on 2 Peter 1:11 [1551]; CO 55:451.

641Commentary on John 6:27 [1553]; CO 47:139-140. Cf. Commentary on John 12:25 [1553]; CO 47:289; Commentary on Philippians 3:21 [1546]; CO 52:56.

642Commentary on Acts 1:11 [1552]; CO 48:13.

643From such speculation, he writes, “has sprung up a great part of scholastic theology and everything which that trifler Dionysius has been so daring as to contrive in reference to the heavenly hierarchies.” Commentary on 2 Corinthians 12:4 [1548]; CO 50:138. Cf. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 22.

ascended. “[Some,] cavilling, facetiously ask, 'In what region of the empyreal heaven does Christ sit?' Let them indeed enjoy these fine speculations. I am taught by the Holy Spirit that he is *above all heavens* [*supra omnes coelos*].”⁶⁴⁴ In fact, sometimes Calvin argues that the kingdom of Christ cannot be identified with heaven because it exists in this world. Some might ask, “Will his throne be in heaven or also on earth?” Calvin answers, “Christ reigns not only among angels but also among men, lest we should think that in order to seek him we must enter into heaven.”⁶⁴⁵ In his commentary on John 3 he writes, “they are mistaken who suppose that the kingdom of God means heaven, for it rather means the spiritual life which is begun by faith in this world and gradually increases every day according to the continued progress of faith.”⁶⁴⁶ When Paul wrote in Galatians 4 of the Jerusalem that is above, Calvin observes, he was not referring to a place at all.

The Jerusalem which he calls above, or heavenly, is not contained in heaven, nor are we to seek for it out of this world [*extra mundum*], for the church is spread over the whole world and is a 'stranger and pilgrim on the earth.' Why then is it said to be from heaven? Because it originates in heavenly grace, for the sons of God are 'born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,' but by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁴⁷

If the heavenly kingdom is not a place, what is it? Because Calvin used the word 'heaven' flexibly, any given instance has to be interpreted contextually. But as these few quotations suggest, he often used the word to denote the power of God that is qualitatively superior to any created power. Thus he could write in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 12, “the term heaven, taken by itself, denotes here the blessed and glorious kingdom of God which is above all the spheres and the firmament itself, and even the entire framework of the world.”⁶⁴⁸ That Christ ascended to heaven likewise means not

644“According to the common mode of speaking in Scripture, I call *whatever is beyond the world* [*extra mundum*] heaven.” Dedication to Commentary on Jeremiah [1563]; CO 20:75. Emphasis added.

645Commentary on Isaiah 16:5 [1559]; CO 36:304-305.

646Commentary on John 3:3 [1553]; CO 47:54.

647Commentary on Galatians 4:26 [1548]; CO 50:239.

648Commentary on 2 Corinthians 12:2-3 [1548]; CO 50:137.

that he has arrived at a particular location but that he possesses all power in heaven and on earth.⁶⁴⁹ In his commentary on Ephesians 1:20-22 Calvin argues that Christ's session at God's right hand is simply a metaphor taken “from earthly princes who confer the honor of sitting alone with themselves on those whom they have clothed with the highest authority.” Its purpose is to demonstrate that Christ has received absolute power from the Father, “that he may administer in his name the government of heaven and earth [*imperium administret*].” Its implication is not that Christ's kingdom exists in a place called heaven, but that it is universal. “As the right hand of God fills heaven and earth, it follows that the kingdom and power of Christ [*regnum Christi*] are equally extensive.”⁶⁵⁰ The kingdom of Christ is heavenly or spiritual, therefore, not because it constitutes a celestial realm above the material world, but because it exists wherever people submit themselves wholeheartedly to Christ's government through his Holy Spirit.⁶⁵¹

The primary purpose and effect of Christ's ascension was that Christ might commence his rule through the Holy Spirit, a reality that the disciples came to understand at Pentecost.⁶⁵²

Indeed, we see how much more abundantly he then poured out his Spirit, how much more wonderfully he advanced his Kingdom, how much greater power he displayed both in helping his people and in scattering his enemies. Carried up

649Commentary on John 20:17 [1553]; CO 47:33 The Apostle Paul describes Christians' citizenship as being in 'heaven' not because believers are destined for some sort of ethereal realm called heaven but because Jesus is in heaven and “it is not seemly that the members should be separated from their head.” Commentary on Philippians 3:20 [1548]; CO 52:56. Cf. Commentary on John 6:51, 58 [1553]; CO 47:152, 157.

650Commentary on Ephesians 1:20 [1548]; CO 51:158. “For where shall we erect him a throne, that he may sit at the right hand of God the Father, seeing God fills all things in such sort, that we ought to imagine no place for his right hand?” He goes on, “Therefore, the whole text is a metaphor.” Commentary on Acts 7:56 [1552]; CO 48:168. “This mode of expression, therefore, does not denote any particular place, but, on the contrary, embraces heaven and earth under the government of Christ.” Commentary on Matthew 22:44 [1555]; CO 45:619. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 1:13 [1549]; CO 55:19; Commentary on Romans 8:34 [1556]; CO 40:164; Commentary on John 20:18 [1553]; CO 47:435; Commentary on Mark 16:19 [1555]; CO 45:828; Commentary on 1 Peter 3:22 [1551]; CO 55:269; Commentary on Colossians 3:1 [1548]; CO 52:117-118.

651Tonkin writes, “Wherever order is re-created and things are brought into subjection to Christ, the *kingdom of God* comes to expression.” Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in the Theology of the Reformers*, 127. Emphasis Original. Cf. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 123; Hesselink, “Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ,” 155.

652Commentary on Matthew 16:28 [1555]; CO 45:483.

into heaven, therefore, he withdrew his bodily presence from our sight, not to cease to be present with believers still on their earthly pilgrimage, but to rule heaven and earth with a more immediate power... As his body was raised above all the heavens, so his power and energy were diffused and spread beyond all the bounds of heaven and earth (2.16.14).

It is therefore “the office of the Holy Spirit ... to establish the kingdom of Christ.”⁶⁵³ Two sections later Calvin outlines just what this spiritual rule looks like:

He therefore sits on high, transfusing us with his power, that he may quicken us to spiritual life, sanctify us by his Spirit, adorn his church with divers gifts of his grace, keep it safe from all harm by his protection, restrain the raging enemies of his cross and of our salvation by the strength of his hand, and finally hold all power in heaven and on earth. All this he does until he shall lay low all his enemies (who are our enemies too) and complete the building of his church. This is the true state of his Kingdom; this is the power that the Father has conferred upon him, until, in coming to judge the living and the dead, he accomplishes his final act (2.16.16).

When Jesus promised that he would be present with his church in John 14:18 he meant that he would be present by his Spirit. “When he says, *I will come to you*, he shows in what manner he dwells in his people, and in what manner he fills all things. It is by the power of his Spirit.”⁶⁵⁴

Calvin notes that the prophet Isaiah declared the messiah would be different from earthly kings in that the “spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might ... and of the fear of the Lord have rested upon him” (2.15.5). It is the Holy Spirit, therefore, who gave Christ the power and virtues associated with his kingship, in order that he might communicate these blessings to human beings.⁶⁵⁵ In the *Institutes* Calvin writes, “Christ's Kingdom lies in the Spirit, not in earthly pleasures or pomp... For the

653Commentary on John 16:14 [1553]; CO 47:363 (Cf. 16:11; 47:360-361). Cf. *Institutes* 3.3.2.

654Commentary on John 14:18 [1553]; CO 47:330. Calvin considered it “the highest ornament of the kingdom of Christ, that he governs his church by his Spirit.” Commentary on John 7:39 [1553]; CO 47:182.

655For this reason when Jesus was baptized at the beginning of his ministry the Spirit descended on him like a dove in order to demonstrate that despite his appearance as a humble servant, through him “the power of the Holy Spirit reigns.” Commentary on Matthew 3:16 [1555]; CO 45:126. Christ “received the Spirit not only for himself, but for his people; and on that account his descent was visible, that we may know that there dwells in him an abundance of all gifts of which we are empty and destitute.” Commentary on John 1:32 [1553]; CO 47:27. Cf. Commentary on John 1:16, 41 [1553]; CO 47:17-18, 31; Commentary on John 3:34 [1553]; CO 47:74-75; Commentary on John 7:38 [1553]; CO 47:181-182; Commentary on Isaiah 11:2 [1559]; CO 36:235.

Spirit has chosen Christ as his seat, that from him might abundantly flow the heavenly riches of which we are in such need. The believers stand unconquered through the strength of their king, and his spiritual riches abound in them” (2.15.5).

Upward to God

The Spirit leads fallen humans to rediscover the meaning of life, returning to the upward calling for which they were created.⁶⁵⁶ Calvin explains that “the word is called spiritual because it calls us upwards to seek Christ in his heavenly glory through the guidance of the Spirit, by faith, and not by our carnal perception.”⁶⁵⁷ When Calvin uses vertical images of believers' looking upward or ascending to heaven he is not echoing Neoplatonic philosophy but referring to a spiritual reorientation toward God. This is the case, for instance, when he writes that God blesses human beings with material things “that we may ascend, as it were by steps, from earth to heaven.”⁶⁵⁸ Humans are too enamored by the immediate enjoyment of this world and pay little attention to their spiritual purpose. As he puts it in one place, “he who does not aspire to the kingdom of God, but rests satisfied with the conveniences of the present life, seeks nothing else than to fill his belly... In seeking Christ, therefore, the chief point is to despise the world and seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”⁶⁵⁹ After all, “in what do the children of God differ from asses and dogs, except they aspire after spiritual life?”⁶⁶⁰

That the kingdom of Christ is spiritual therefore means that it is necessarily rooted in the sincere worship of God. God is uncreated spirit and therefore desires, as

656It is when human beings are absorbed with the present life without reference to God or to his kingdom that the created world becomes 'the world' in the Johannine sense – the world corrupted by idolatry and self-absorption. Commentary on 1 John 2:15 [1551]; CO 55:318-319. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 6:19 [1549]; CO 55:81; Commentary on Isaiah 36:17 [1559]; CO 36:610.

657Commentary on John 6:63 [1553]; CO 47:160.

658Commentary on Matthew 6:11 [1555]; CO 45:199. Cf. Commentary on Luke 2:12 [1555]; CO 45:75-76; Commentary on 1 Timothy 4:8 [1548]; CO 52:300.

659Commentary on John 6:26 [1553]; CO 47:138-139. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 6:33 [1555]; CO 45:212-213.

660Commentary on Joel 2:28 [1559]; CO 42:564-569.

Jesus declares in John 4:23, that human beings “worship the Father in spirit and truth.” The worship of God consists in the spirit “because it is nothing else than that inward faith of the heart which produces prayer, and next, purity of conscience and self-denial, that we may be dedicated to obedience to God as holy sacrifices.”⁶⁶¹ In the time of the Old Testament the spirituality of worship was obscured by outward types and shadows, but Christ having come, Christian worship cannot “consist in things outward and frail, which have no connection with the spiritual kingdom of God.”⁶⁶² The “spiritual kingdom of Christ” does not consist in “drink and food and clothing, which are things that are transient and liable to corruption and perish by abuse,” but in simple obedience to God's commands and the loving service of believers.⁶⁶³

That does not mean, to reiterate, that the kingdom of Christ does not extend to material things such as the body. Quistorp is utterly wrong to assume that “spiritual always implies for Calvin non-corporeal.”⁶⁶⁴ The spiritual kingdom of Christ does not abandon the body or creation but directs them to their spiritual purpose. Even now, Calvin insists, “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.” The union is “that of nature – full and complete.”⁶⁶⁵ Thus “religion is strictly spiritual,” but “the outward acknowledgment of it relates to the body.”⁶⁶⁶ Salvation “ought yet to be viewed as properly belonging to our souls,” but it also “extends to our bodies.”⁶⁶⁷ For this reason worship includes the sacrifice of material wealth to God, not in the form of beautiful

661Commentary on John 4:23 [1553]; CO 47:88-90.

662Commentary on Colossians 2:22 [1548]; CO 52:114.

663Commentary on Colossians 2:22-23 [1548]; CO 52:115-116.

664Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 171.

665Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:15 [1546]; CO 49:398. The believer's union with Christ, Miles notes, is an “embodied” experience. Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” 316.

666Commentary on Matthew 4:10 [1555]; CO 45:136.

667Commentary on Jeremiah 23:5-6 [1563]; CO 38:411. The same is true of his statement, “Every benefit which the bodies of men received from Christ was intended to have a reference to their souls.”

Commentary on Matthew 12:29 [1555]; CO 45:338.

cathedrals full of pomp and pageantry, but in service to the needs of the poor.⁶⁶⁸ For Calvin the kingdom of Christ is characterized by devotion to God that is expressed in service to one's neighbor in every area of life. Christians are to “lead a heavenly life in this world,” using and enjoying its resources while being “conversant with heaven in mind and affection.”⁶⁶⁹

In his commentary on the Psalms Calvin specifically refutes the assumption that bodily flourishing is unrelated to the purpose of the kingdom of God.

If it is objected that these two subjects – the spiritual kingdom of Christ and the fruitfulness of the earth – are improperly intermingled, it may be easily observed in reply that there is nothing at all incongruous in this when we consider that God, while he bestows upon his people spiritual blessings, gives them in addition to these some taste of his fatherly love in the outward benefits which relate to the life of the body.⁶⁷⁰

God created the world for the purpose of human happiness, and while human beings have fallen hard from this “happy condition,” there is still within them “some remains of the liberality which God then displayed towards him, which should suffice to fill us with admiration.” The faithful therefore “enjoy so much of the fragments of the good things which they lost in Adam as may furnish them with abundant matter of wonder at the singularly gracious manner in which God deals with them.” Such wonder enables them to rise above merely temporal blessings “to contemplate the invaluable treasures of the kingdom of heaven which he has unfolded in Christ and all the gifts which belong to the spiritual life.”⁶⁷¹

Forward to Eternity

668In his interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount Calvin synthesizes Matthew's account of Jesus blessing the 'poor in spirit' with Luke's simple reference to the blessing of the 'poor'. Unwilling to spiritualize Luke's version, he insists that Matthew's must be interpreted in such a way as to include material poverty. Commentary on Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20 [1555]; CO 45:161-162. Cf. Commentary on Luke 4:18 [1555]; CO 45:141-142.

669Commentary on Philippians 3:20 [1548]; CO 52:55. This is why “what Paul says ought to be sufficient – that to godliness is given the hope, not only of future life, but also of that which is present (1 Timothy 4).” Commentary on Joel 3:18-19 [1559]; CO 42:598.

670Commentary on Psalm 85:12 [1557]; CO 31:790.

671Commentary on Psalm 8:7 [1557]; CO 31:95. Cf. Commentary on Romans 2:4 [1556]; CO 40:32-33.

The kingdom of Christ also leads humans forward to the hope of the future life. “In short, when any one of us hears that Christ's kingship is spiritual, aroused by this word let him attain to the hope of a better life; and since it is now protected by Christ's hand, let him await the full fruit of this grace in the age to come” (2.15.3). The kingdom awaits its full manifestation and consummation even as its power is already displayed in a world that is temporal and will pass away. Calvin thus speaks interchangeably of the “future life [*futurae vitae*]” and the “heavenly life [*coelestis vitae*],” the “beginnings of which” are evident in the gospel, but the final completion of which will take place at “the coming of Christ.”⁶⁷²

In his discussion of the disciples' twofold mistake about the coming kingdom, Calvin describes the parable Jesus told to teach the disciples that he was not going to “commence immediately a course of prosperity.” For Calvin the meaning of the parable was obvious.

For, though he sits at the right hand of the Father and holds the government of heaven and earth, and though from the time that he ascended to heaven all power was given to him (Matthew 28:18) that every knee might bow before him (Philippians 2:10), yet as he has not yet subdued his enemies – has not yet appeared as judge of the world, or revealed his majesty – it is not without propriety that he is said to be absent from his people until he returns again, clothed with his new sovereignty.

Christ's kingdom is not entirely absent, however, for he already rules by the Spirit.

It is true indeed that he now reigns while he regenerates his people to the heavenly life, forms them anew to the image of God, and associates them with angels; while he governs the church by his word, guards it by his protection, enriches it with the gifts of the Spirit, nourishes it by his grace, and maintains it by his power, and in short, supplies it with all that is necessary for salvation; while he restrains the fury of Satan and of all the ungodly and defeats all their schemes. But as this way of reigning is concealed from the flesh, his manifestation is properly said to be delayed till the last day.⁶⁷³

T. F. Torrance writes, “It is clear then that Calvin thinks of the Kingdom of God in terms of two great eschatological moments, the *initium* and the *complementum*,” Christ

⁶⁷²Commentary on Romans 13:12 [1556]; CO 49:255-256.

⁶⁷³Commentary on Matthew 20:12 [1555]; CO 45:567-568.

himself being the medium between the two.⁶⁷⁴ Insofar as Christ has already completed the decisive work of defeating the devil, reconciling the world, and ascending to God's right hand, the kingdom is already complete. But insofar as this work must yet be applied in the world, "we cannot but think of it in a historical perspective in terms of growth and increase."⁶⁷⁵ Thus "Biblical language leads Calvin to draw a distinction between what he calls the two conditions of the Kingdom, i.e., 'between the present condition of the Kingdom and its future glory.'"⁶⁷⁶ The disciples' error was to "associate the coming of Christ and the end of the world as things inseparable from each other."⁶⁷⁷ But Christ taught his disciples that the kingdom consisted of two distinct phases or conditions, the first having been inaugurated by Christ at his incarnation and being primarily expressed in the ministry of the gospel, the second awaiting Christ's return at the end of the age. Calvin thus writes, "By 'the kingdom of Christ' I mean not only that which is begun here but that which shall be completed at the last day, which on that account is called 'the day of renovation and restoration' (Acts 3:21), because believers will never find perfect rest until that day arrives."⁶⁷⁸

Because of the kingdom's various eschatological conditions, Calvin could declare that it has already been established, is being established, and is yet to be established. In a definitive sense, God has already established Christ's kingdom and restored the world.

674Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 113. Torrance suggests that for Calvin the *Regnum Christi* usually denotes the ministry and work of Christ, while the *Regnum Dei* denotes the completed and comprehensive reign of God (95, 114). However, Hesselink rightly shows that Calvin uses the terms interchangeably. "The distinction is too neat; the evidence does not support it." Hesselink, "Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ," 142.

675Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 115.

676Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 122, citing Calvin's Commentary on Matthew 24:30.

677Commentary on Matthew 24:3 [1555]; CO 45:649. Emphasis added.

678Commentary on Isaiah 35:1 [1559]; CO 36:590-591. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 24:32 [1555]; CO 45:670. Thus it might seem disappointing that "the world is still in the same state of agitation as it was when Christ was manifest in the flesh, but as we shall afterwards see, Christ came for the very purpose of renovating the world, and since his gospel is a kind of perfection of all things, we are said to be 'in the last days.'" Commentary on Daniel 2:27-28 [1561]; CO 40:585. In the present life believers "taste but the beginning of Christ's kingdom." Their lives are characterized by struggle "until we obtain that everlasting peace which it will be our happiness to enjoy in the kingdom of God." Commentary on Isaiah 11:13 [1559]; CO 36:247.

“God, restoring the world by the hand of his Son, has completely established his kingdom.”⁶⁷⁹ The decisive event in history in which Jesus established his kingdom and in which all things “have been restored to order,” according to Calvin, was his resurrection and ascent into heaven to sit at God's right hand.⁶⁸⁰ In that event was inaugurated “the celestial government of Christ and the power of the Spirit in defending his own, in establishing justice and equity, in restoring order, in abolishing the tyranny of sin, and in putting to flight all the enemies of the church.”⁶⁸¹

On the other hand, the kingdom still awaits its perfect consummation. “As Christ carries on war continually with various enemies, it is doubtless evident that he has no quiet possession of his kingdom.”⁶⁸² The kingdom “lies hidden in the earth, so to speak, under the lowness of the flesh” (2.16.17). Christ is the heir of heaven and earth but “he has not as yet actually entered upon the full possession of his empire and dominion.” Sin, death, and the devil remain at large. “It follows then, that there remains the hope of a better state than the present.”⁶⁸³ Because “many still oppose and boldly despise him [Christ],”⁶⁸⁴ Jesus warned his disciples that the proclamation of his kingdom “would never be pleasant or agreeable to the world” but would be opposed by all nations.⁶⁸⁵ The two conditions of the kingdom mean that it is in a constant state of eschatological tension, caught between the already and the not-yet.

679Commentary on Matthew 5:19 [1555]; CO 45:173. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 19:28 [1555]; CO 45:545.

680Commentary on Ephesians 1:10 [1548]; CO 51:151.

681Commentary on Acts 1:21 [1552]; CO 48:21. Christ has been “invested with lordship over heaven and earth” (2.16.15), and having ascended into heaven “in our flesh,” humanity has already entered into the heavenly kingdom, for “we do not await heaven with a bare hope, but in our Head already possess it” (2.16.16). Cf. Commentary on Luke 24:31 [1555]; CO 45:809; Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:27 [1546]; CO 49:548.

682Commentary on Hebrews 2:8 [1549]; CO 55:26.

683Commentary on Psalm 8:6 [1557]; CO 31:94. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:25 [1546]; CO 49:547. Commentary on Hebrews 10:11 [1549]; CO 55:126. From this perspective ‘the world’ refers to “man separated from the kingdom of God and the grace of Christ” and it is “contrasted with regeneration, as nature with grace, or the flesh with the spirit.” Commentary on Galatians 1:4 [1548]; CO 50:170-171.

684Commentary on Isaiah 45:23 [1559]; CO 37:149-150.

685Commentary on Matthew 24:9 [1555]; CO 45:653.

[T]he kingdom of Christ is on such a footing that it is every day growing and making improvement, while at the same time perfection is not yet attained, nor will be until the final day of reckoning. Thus both things hold true – that all things are now subject to Christ and that this subjection will, nevertheless, not be complete until the day of the resurrection, because that which is now only begun will then be completed.⁶⁸⁶

Calvin believed that at Christ's return the creation, like the human body, will undergo a process of qualitative transformation.⁶⁸⁷ The *substance* of that which participates in Christ through the regeneration of the Spirit will enter the kingdom of God. All other things will pass away. Thus if anyone seeks the kingdom of Christ he must become a new creature, just as the world must become a “new heavens and a new earth.” Because “Christ's kingdom is spiritual, this change must take place chiefly in the Spirit.” All things that are not “formed anew by the Spirit of God” will pass away “as things that are of short duration are wont to fall off when they have passed their proper season. Hence it is only the new man that flourishes and is vigorous in the kingdom of Christ.”⁶⁸⁸

The way in which Calvin uses the word 'spiritual' to describe the transformation of the body in the age to come is instructive for how he uses the word 'spiritual' in general. It demonstrates once again that for Calvin spirituality does not denote immateriality, nor does it imply a relativization or marginalization of the body, let alone the creation. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15 Calvin describes the soul as the animating principle of the body in this passing mortal life, in contrast to that which is “more excellent,” the Spirit, who will be the inspiring principle of the body in the future life. “Now that is called animal which is quickened by the soul; that is spiritual which is

686Commentary on Philippians 2:10 [1548]; CO 52:29. The kingdom of Christ “is now present with us,” but on the other hand its “full fruition ... is deferred to the resurrection and the future world.”

Commentary on Hebrews 10:1 [1549]; CO 55:121. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 2:5 [1549]; CO 55:24-25; Commentary on Hebrews 2:8 [1549]; CO 55:25. If Jews tended mistakenly to identify the kingdom with the messiah's first coming, Christians often erred in the opposite direction by identifying it entirely with Christ's final return. Commentary on Isaiah 26:19 [1559]; CO 36:441-442.

687Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 137-140, 183-184.

688Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:17 [1548]; CO 50:69. When Paul declared in this context that all things are of God he was necessarily referring to “all things that belong to Christ's kingdom,” everything else passing away. “He does not, therefore, speak here of creation generally, but of the grace of regeneration” (5:18; 50:70).

quicken by the Spirit.”⁶⁸⁹ Jesus will not restore the body to its original state as experienced by the first human beings, but will “raise it up to a better condition than ever.”⁶⁹⁰ Christ “brought us from heaven a life-giving Spirit that he might regenerate us into a better life, and elevated above the earth [*terra*].” The contrast, stated in terms of earth and heaven, is between the corruptibility of the present world and the incorruptibility of the new. “[W]e have it from Adam that we live in this world ... Christ, on the other hand, is the beginning and author of the heavenly life.”⁶⁹¹

Calvin then uses the same Aristotelian logic to describe the body's transformation as he does with reference to that of the creation in 2 Peter 3. “Let us, however, always bear in mind what we have seen previously – that the substance [*substantiam*] of the body is the same and that it is the quality [*qualitate*] only that is here treated of. Let the present quality of the body be called, for the sake of greater plainness, animation; let the future receive the name of inspiration.”⁶⁹² The transformation that believers experience already during this life is truly spiritual, but it does not extend to full transformation of body and soul that, like the creation, they will undergo at Jesus' return. “For we now begin to bear the image of Christ, and are every day more and more transformed into it, but that image still consists in spiritual regeneration. But then it will be fully restored both in body and in soul, and what is now begun will be perfected, and accordingly we will obtain in reality what we as yet only hope for.”⁶⁹³ When the Apostle Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God he is not referring to the material body but to the human being corrupted by sin.

⁶⁸⁹Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44 [1546]; CO 49:557-558.

⁶⁹⁰Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:45 [1546]; CO 49:558-559.

⁶⁹¹Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:47 [1546]; CO 49:559. Quistorp thinks that “obviously Calvin is here contradicting his statements in the *Institutio*.” But Quistorp's own analysis is confused by his assumption that for Calvin the spiritual pertains to the soul and is ordinarily immaterial. See Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 68.

⁶⁹²Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44 [1546]; CO 49:557-558. Identifying the Manichees as the advocates of the heresy he has in view, Calvin insists that Paul is not talking about a change in substance, but of condition, or quality [*habitu ... qualitate*]. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:47 [1546]; CO 49:559.

⁶⁹³Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:49 [1546]; CO 49:560.

Mark how we shall live in the kingdom of God both in body and in soul, while at the same time flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God – for they shall previously be delivered from corruption. Our nature then, as being now corruptible and mortal, is not admissible into the kingdom of God, but when it shall have put off corruption, and shall have been beautified with incorruption, it will then make its way into it.⁶⁹⁴

How will this bodily transformation affect life in the coming kingdom? Calvin's tendency was to emphasize discontinuity and difference between the affairs of the present age and those of the age to come.⁶⁹⁵ Despite his warnings against speculation, for instance, he himself speculates that humans will no longer need drink, food, clothing, or sleep, having been freed from mortality.⁶⁹⁶ The Jews “committed the error of estimating the glory of the heavenly life according to the present state,” but Calvin rejected any such assumption, demonstrating by various arguments that the institutions of the present age will not be maintained in the kingdom. For instance, he explains Jesus' declaration that in the age to come there will not be marriage as owing to the fact that where there is no mortality there is no need for procreation. The resurrected “shall be free from every infirmity of the present life ... [and] they will no longer be exposed to the wants of a frail and perishing life... [T]hey can no longer die, and therefore there will be no propagation of their species, as on earth.”⁶⁹⁷ Sexuality, gender, and marriage, like food, sleep, and clothing, are temporal and will not be part of the kingdom of God.

694Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:53 [1546]; CO 49:562-563. “There let us await the Day of the Lord in which, having received incorruptible bodies, we will be carried off into the glory of the Heavenly Kingdom” (3.14.12).

695Commentary on Matthew 21:29 [1555]; CO 45:606. The Jews assumed that in the kingdom God would “restore whatever he had given to them in the world.” Commentary on Matthew 21:24 [1555]; CO 45:605.

696“For as to the soul's now quickening the body, that is effected through the intervention of many helps. For we stand in need of drink, food, clothing, sleep, and other things of a similar nature. Hence the weakness of animation is clearly manifested. The energy of the Spirit, on the other hand, for quickening, will be much more complete and consequently exempted from necessities of that nature.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44 [1546]; CO 49:557-558. Cf. Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:16 [1550]; CO 52:167; Commentary on Philippians 3:21 [1546]; CO 52:56. Of course, a seeming counterpoint to Calvin's claim here is that the apostles testified to the resurrected Jesus eating food. Calvin has difficulty with this, and he proceeds to explain that the resurrected Jesus would not have had to pass waste! Commentary on Luke 24:41 [1555]; CO 45:814-815.

697Commentary on Matthew 21:30 [1555]; CO 45:606. See Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 175.

Calvin makes a similar argument about the intellectual accomplishments of human culture. The Apostle Paul's comparison of love, which is eternal, with various virtues and gifts that will pass away raises a "question of no small importance – whether those who in this world excel either in learning or in other gifts will be on a level with idiots in the kingdom of God?" His response, true to form, is immediately to warn against speculation. "Let them rather seek the way by which the kingdom of God is arrived at than curiously inquire what is to be our condition there, for the Lord himself has by his silence called us back from curiosity." But then Calvin goes on to suggest that the gifts of knowledge and learning are indeed temporal. "So far as I can conjecture and am able even to gather in part from this passage, inasmuch as learning, knowledge of languages, and similar gifts are subservient to the necessity of this life, I do not think that there will be any of them remaining."⁶⁹⁸ All of these things will be transcended as humans finally attain to the purpose for which they were created. "That perfection, therefore, which will be in a manner a maturity of spiritual age, will put an end to education and its accompaniments."⁶⁹⁹ The kingdom of God will remain in substantive continuity with the original creation, but all things will be transformed as that creation is brought to perfection.

The Righteousness of the Kingdom

The kingdom of Christ breaks into the present age by "the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits" (3.1.1). Humans do not merely require the outward reformation of the body or its actions. Corruption extends to

⁶⁹⁸Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:8 [1546]; CO 49:512-513. Even the gifts of prophecy and of the ministry of the gospel will pass away, being intended only to lead human beings to the future kingdom, at which point "our souls, set free from the [mortal] body, will have no more need of the outward ministry [*externo ministerio*] or other inferior helps." Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:12 [1546]; CO 49:514-515. The reason why the resurrected will be able to see God apart from Jesus' mediation is because they have been given spiritual, immortal, and incorruptible bodies. Cf. Commentary on 1 John 3:2 [1551]; CO 55:331-332.

⁶⁹⁹Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:11 [1546]; CO 49:513-514. See Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 162-165.

the human soul, the primary seat of the image of God which was to direct humans to their spiritual purpose.⁷⁰⁰ The whole person, body and soul, must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and united with Christ. Spiritual regeneration enables believers to put off the 'old man', which refers to the corrupt nature humans inherit from Adam, and to put on the new man, Christ, in whom the sinful nature is transformed and the image of God is restored.⁷⁰¹ It should therefore be evident “how much is the difference between the children of Adam who are born only into the world, and the children of God who are renewed into a heavenly life.”⁷⁰²

Calvin discusses this process of salvation in Book 3 of the *Institutes*, before he proceeds to his analysis of the church in Book 4. It is important to remember, however, that for Calvin the renewal of the creation does not consist merely in the regeneration of individuals, but in the regeneration of a new humanity, the church.⁷⁰³ Torrance writes that “by substantial union with Christ the Church actually and continuously participates in the new humanity of the resurrection and in the *Regnum Christi*.”⁷⁰⁴ “The church is not so much an institution in history in which the restoration of order has been accomplished,” Milner clarifies, “as it is itself the history of that restoration.”⁷⁰⁵ I turn to

700See Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” 305-309, 314-315. Cf. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 106-107; Luicen Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974), 111-116; Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 101.

701“What we have from Adam tends toward ruin, but what we have from Christ is eternal and “not frail.” Commentary on Colossians 3:9 [1548]; CO 52:121. The old man refers to “the whole nature which we bring from the womb, and which is so incapable of the kingdom of God, that it must so far die as we are renewed to real life.” Commentary on Romans 6:6 [1556]; CO 49:107-108. The new life is a “type” of Christ's life and is “similar to his celestial life” (6:10; 109-110). “For since Christ came to redeem us from the calamity into which Adam had fallen ... we cannot see with so much clearness what we have in Christ, as by having what we have lost in Adam set before us, though all things on both sides are not similar” (5:12; 95).

702Commentary on 1 Peter 1:23 [1551]; CO 55:229-230 (Cf. 1:13-16; 220).

703See Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 95; Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in the Theology of the Reformers*, 106-111. Tonkin carefully refutes the claim that Calvin's soteriology is individualist. See Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 9.

704Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 116. “Launched into history, it grows and increases until the advent of Christ.” Merwin S. Johnson argues that participation with Christ is the core feature of Calvin's ethic. Merwin S. Johnson, “Calvin's Ethical Legacy,” *The Legacy of John Calvin* (ed. David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC, 2000), 63-83. Cf. Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 49.

705Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 47. Cf. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 131-133.

Calvin's understanding of the church as Christ's kingdom in Chapter 5. Here it is important to clarify his understanding of the gospel and the way in which it renews the world by establishing righteousness.⁷⁰⁶

Calvin describes the extent of Christ's reconciliation in universal terms. God “shows himself to be reconciled to the whole world when he invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life.”⁷⁰⁷ Faith is essential in Calvin's view, because it is the means through which the Holy Spirit unites human beings to Christ, and only through union with Christ can women and men enter into his kingdom. Jesus is the one in whom all the blessings of the kingdom exist, and it is only in him that believers discover what they cannot find in themselves:

When our minds rise to a confident anticipation of righteousness, salvation, and glory, let us learn to turn them to Christ. We still lie under the power of death, but he, raised from the dead by heavenly power, has the dominion of life. We labor under the bondage of sin, and surrounded by endless vexations, are engaged in a hard warfare, but he, sitting at the right hand of the Father, exercises the highest government in heaven and earth [*summam in coelo et terra gubernationem*], and triumphs gloriously over the enemies whom he has subdued and vanquished.⁷⁰⁸

One of Calvin's favorite analogies for the union that believers enjoy with Christ is that of Christ as the head and the church as his body. Christ has conquered sin and death, entering into the glory of the kingdom. “Yet, in consequence of the secret union [of the head with the body], it belongs truly to the members.”⁷⁰⁹ For “Christ did not ascend to heaven in a private capacity, to dwell there alone, but rather that it might be the common inheritance of all the godly, and that in this way the head might be united to his members.”⁷¹⁰ It is this union that gives Christians the confidence that they will be raised to new life in Christ's kingdom.⁷¹¹ The union is analogous to that of the soul and

706Cf. Wendel, *Calvin*, 242-254; Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 120-139; Haas, “Calvin's Ethics,” 94-96.

707Commentary on John 3:16 [1553]; CO 47:65.

708Commentary on Ephesians 1:20 [1548]; CO 51:157-158. Cf. *Institutes*, 3.2.24. Cf. Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 20-22; Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in the Theology of the Reformers*, 103, 113.

709Commentary on Ephesians 2:6 [1548]; CO 51:164.

710Commentary on John 14:2 [1553]; CO 47:322.

711Commentary on John 8:52 [1553]; CO 47:212. Calvin calls death “a passage into the heavenly

the body: “as the soul enlivens the body, so Christ imparts life to his members.” While believers continue in this “bodily life,” which is subject to corruption, they are shaped increasingly by the “heavenly life of Christ.” Thus “while we live in the world, we are at the same time in heaven, not only because our head is there, but because in virtue of union we enjoy a life in common with him.”⁷¹²

But while Christ is the source of all blessings, “Christ himself, with all his blessings, is communicated to us by the Spirit.”⁷¹³ Apart from the Spirit women and men are under corruption and sin and they “ought to be reckoned dead, whatever may be the pretended life of which they boast.”⁷¹⁴ If Jesus' primary purpose in ascending to God's right hand was to send the Spirit, it is the Spirit's “principal work,” in turn, to lead human beings into the kingdom (3.1.4). In a manner distinct from his general work in maintaining and enlivening creation, therefore, the Spirit is the “root and seed of heavenly life” in human beings (3.1.2), such that he “may rightly be called the key that unlocks for us the treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven” (3.1.4).⁷¹⁵ Indeed, “without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the word can do nothing” (3.2.33). Only through the Spirit's work can humans develop the sort of faith that is not mere intellectual assent but love and trust, a complete reorientation of the whole person (3.2.1).⁷¹⁶

kingdom” but only because “the Spirit, dwelling in them, is life on account of righteousness.” It is not death itself that brings believers into the kingdom but the union that they have with Christ, through the Spirit.

712Commentary on Galatians 2:20 [1548]; CO 50:199.

713Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:11 [1546]; CO 49:395. Through the Spirit Christ “adopts us as participants in his dominion [*dominii*].” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:27 [1546]; CO 49:548. Cf. Commentary on Galatians 6:15 [1548]; CO 50:266.

714Commentary on John 7:39.

715The Spirit is “the key which opens to us the door ... that we may also have entrance into the kingdom of God.” Commentary on Acts 2:17 [1552]; CO 48:32. Calvin argues that “the spiritual kingdom is a higher subject than what the human mind can succeed in investigating, except the Spirit be the guide.” Commentary on 1 Peter 1:10 [1551]; CO 55:217. Even the clearest teaching of the way of salvation is useless for human beings without the “special illumination of the Spirit.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:10 [1546]; CO 49:340-341.

716It is “more of the heart than of the brain,” Calvin writes, “more of the disposition than of the understanding” (3.2.8), and “consists in assurance rather than in comprehension” (3.2.14). The “mysteries of Christ's kingdom” are not so much difficult to grasp intellectually as they are “obscure” and “hidden ... to the perception of the flesh.” Commentary on 2 Peter 3:16 [1551]; CO 55:478. True faith requires more than the ‘implicit faith’ required by the papists (3.2.2). “It is not apprehended by the

The mark of the Spirit's work in a believer is the righteousness of the kingdom. Calvin typically summarized this in terms of the 'twofold righteousness' of the forgiveness of sins and active righteousness.⁷¹⁷ Most foundational is the forgiveness of sins, the doctrine of justification by faith that Calvin considered “the main hinge on which religion turns.” For “Unless this knowledge remains clear and sure, the conscience can have no rest at all, no peace with God, no assurance or security” (3.4.2). The one who is justified is the one who, “excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God's sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man” (3.11.2). Christians grasp that “their only ground of hope for the inheritance of a heavenly kingdom lies in the fact that, being engrafted in the body of Christ, they are freely accounted righteous” (3.13.5). Such a hope cannot be the result of outward exercises that comes between the individual and God (3.4.24). Peace of conscience must be preserved at all costs.⁷¹⁸

Because it is through the proclamation of the gospel that the Holy Spirit brings these blessings of the kingdom to human beings, Calvin typically describes the kingdom simply as the ministry of the gospel, a point to which I return in Chapter 5. But as Torrance notes, Calvin describes the present existence of kingdom in two respects, one referring to the ministry, the other to the church as the society of the pious, one to the

understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart... [I]ts efficacy ought to penetrate the inmost affections of the heart, take its seat in the soul, and affect the whole man a hundred times more deeply than the cold exhortations of the philosophers” (3.6.4). For Calvin's definition of faith see *Institutes*, 3.2.7. Cf. 3.2.41. See Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” 306-309, 314.

717The kingdom consists “first, in the free forgiveness of sins, through which God reconciles us to himself and adopts us to be his people; secondly, in newness of life, in which he fashions and makes us like his own image.” Commentary on Acts 19:8 [1554]; CO 48:443. Cf. Commentary on Acts 28:30 [1554]; CO 48:573-574.

718Commentary on Romans 5:1 [1556]; CO 49:88-89. Cf. Commentary on Luke 2:14 [1555]; CO 45:77. “We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body – in short, because he deigns to make us one with him” (3.11.10). Faith justifies because it “leads us into fellowship with the righteousness of Christ” (3.11.20).

building of the church, the other to believers' progress in active righteousness.⁷¹⁹

“Regeneration is the beginning of his kingdom, and the end is blessed immortality. The middle proceedings are in a more ample going forward and increase of regeneration.”⁷²⁰

For “the kingdom of God consists in righteousness, that is, in the newness of spiritual life.”⁷²¹

Perhaps the clearest place in which Calvin describes the active righteousness of believers as the expression of the kingdom is in his discussion of the Lord's Prayer. The third petition of the prayer, “Your will be done,” is an extension of the second, ‘Your kingdom come,’ an “explanation that God will be king in the world when all submit to his will” (3.20.43).⁷²² God's kingdom is present where people, “both by denial of themselves and by contempt of the world and of earthly life, pledge themselves to his righteousness in order to aspire to a heavenly life” (3.20.42). It exists “when they voluntarily devote and submit themselves to be governed by him... By this prayer we ask, that he may remove all hindrances, and may bring all men under his dominion, and may lead them to meditate on the heavenly life.”⁷²³

719Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 96, 115. “When we speak of the kingdom of Christ, we must respect two things; the doctrine of the gospel, by which Christ gathers to himself a church, and by which he governs the same, being gathered together; secondly, the society of the godly, who being coupled together by the sincere faith of the gospel, are truly accounted the people of God.” Calvin's Dedication to the Commentary on Acts [1552]; CO 14:293. Cf. *Institutes*, 3.3.19. Cf. Hesselink, “Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ,” 155-156; Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 179-188.

720Commentary on Acts 1:3 [1552]; CO 48:4.

721Commentary on Matthew 6:33 [1555]; CO 45:212-213. When anyone is reconciled to God “the kingdom of God [*regnum Dei*] fully prevails and flourishes in him.” The result is that such a person “with a quiet and peaceful conscience serves Christ in righteousness [*iustitiam*].” This means that wherever there is “righteousness and peace and spiritual joy [*iustitia et pax et gaudium spirituale*], there the kingdom of God is complete in all its parts [*regnum Dei suis omnibus numeris est absolutum*].” Commentary on Romans 14:18 [1556]; CO 49:266. Cf. *Institutes*, 3.2.33; Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:16 [1548]; CO 52:291; Commentary on 1 John 3:8 [1551]; CO 55:335; Commentary on Acts 1:3 [1552]; CO 48:4-5.

722“Christ has included in two petitions all that related to the eternal salvation of the soul, and to the spiritual life: for these are the two leading points of the divine covenant, in which all our salvation consists.” Commentary on Matthew 6:12 [1555]; CO 45:200-201. Calvin compares the division of the Lord's Prayer to the division of the Ten Commandments into two tables. Commentary on Matthew 6:11 [1555]; CO 45:198-200. Cf. 3.20.44.

723Commentary on Matthew 6:10 [1555]; CO 45:197-198. But, Calvin complains, people want Jesus to bring his kingdom without being willing to be transformed by it. Commentary on Matthew 12:29 [1555]; CO 45:339.

Calvin admits that the second petition of the Lord's Prayer calls for God's defeat of his enemies, but he emphasizes that its primary focus is on the establishment of the kingdom through the voluntary submission of human beings to God's righteousness. The intent is that God “would enlighten the world by the light of his word – would form the hearts of men by the influences of his Spirit to obey his justice – and would restore to order, by the gracious exercise of his power, all the disorder that exists in the world.” The kingdom is present insofar as order has been restored and justice is practiced, and in that sense the kingdom is “continually growing and advancing to the end of the world” even as we must yet pray that “it may come.”⁷²⁴ It is in this regeneration of human beings that the restoration of the world is beginning to take place, in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of true righteousness and peace among the nations.⁷²⁵ As Holwerda puts it, “the eschatological reordering of the world occurs here and now – at least in its beginnings – in the believer and the church.”⁷²⁶ In that respect Hesselink is right to suggest, though with caution, that Calvin “did think that the kingdom of Christ brings with it all the benefits of the gospel: reconciliation with God, the gifts of the Spirit, a new life style in so far as Christ rules in our lives as king, and, one might conjecture, a better society.”⁷²⁷

And yet, those scholars who see in Calvin an optimism regarding the progressive

⁷²⁴Commentary on Matthew 6:10 [1555]; CO 45:197-198. Christ therefore “continues our renovation throughout life,” and “as far as the kingdom of Christ prevails in them, sin is abolished.” Commentary on 1 John 3:5 [1551]; CO 55:333.

⁷²⁵In his commentary on Isaiah 2:4 Calvin connects Isaiah's prophecy of peace among the nations with the regeneration that takes place among human beings. The problem with such visions of peace, Calvin observes, is that “while all imagine that they desire it, every one disturbs it by the madness of his lusts, for pride, and covetousness, and ambition, lead men to rise up in cruelty against each other.” But “as the gospel is the doctrine of reconciliation, which removes the enmity between us and God, so it brings men into peace and harmony with each other.” “But this [progress in brotherly love] cannot be done before the consciences have been brought into a state of peace with God; for we must begin there, in order that we may also be at peace with men.” Commentary on Isaiah 2:4 [1559]; CO 36:65-66. It is the establishment of genuine righteousness that renders the kingdom a kingdom of peace not only in the subjective sense of justification, but in the full Hebrew sense of a “prosperous and happy state.”

Commentary on Hebrews 7:1 [1549]; CO 55:83. Typically, Calvin prefers to emphasize the inward meaning, but he acknowledges that scripture teaches the broader.

⁷²⁶Holwerda, “Eschatology and History,” 339.

⁷²⁷Hesselink, “Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ,” 158.

socio-political transformation of society as an expression of the kingdom of God take the reformer's understanding of progressive righteousness out of context. Calvin is adamant that even those regenerated by the Spirit continue to “carry about, in the remains of sin, the cause of death,” never attaining to the full blessings of the kingdom in the present life.⁷²⁸ Christians have no basis for triumphalism. “We have not a single work going forth from the saints that if it be judged in itself deserves not shame as its just reward” (3.14.9).⁷²⁹ That is why Christians must also pray daily, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Augustine was right when he said, “The righteousness of the saints in this world consists more in the forgiveness of sins than in perfection of virtues” (3.11.22).

Hope

In his classic *Kingdom and Church* T. F. Torrance justifiably characterizes Calvin's theology as a theology of hope.⁷³⁰ Hope is the virtue by which Christians navigate the tension between the two conditions of the kingdom, as they look forward to what is 'not yet, while clinging to its blessings 'already.' Quistorp writes that hope, for Calvin, is “the fundamental attitude determinative of the Christian life.” It is “the orientation of the Christian life towards the coming of Jesus Christ and thus towards the future generally.”⁷³¹

The basis for Christian hope, for Calvin, is the completed work of Christ.

728Commentary on John 7:38 [1553]; CO 47:181-182. Tonkin likewise puts it too strongly when he says that Calvin “expresses a note of triumphant optimism not easily detected in Luther” (112) or that he has a mood of “triumphant hope” (116). Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in the Theology of the Reformers*, 112.

729“Those who dream of attaining such perfection in this world ... renounce Christ himself, from whose church they banish themselves.” Commentary on Matthew 6:12 [1555]; CO 45:200-201. Calvin writes, “it is partly by this mark” that Christ excludes from the church those who are eager for revenge and slow to forgive (3.20.45).

730Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*. Moltmann traces his own theology of hope in part to that of Calvin. See Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 18-20.

731Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 15.

If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth. For by his birth he was made like us in all respects that he might learn to feel our pain. If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation, if remission of the curse, in his cross; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb, if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of the heavenly kingdom, in his entrance into heaven; if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in his kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given to him to judge (2.16.19).

On the other hand, so much of Christians' experience seems to contradict these blessings. In terms brutally accurate regarding life in sixteenth century Europe Calvin writes,

Various diseases repeatedly trouble us: now plague rages; now we are cruelly beset by the calamities of war; now ice and hail, consuming the year's expectation, lead to barrenness, which reduces us to poverty; wife, parents, children, neighbors, are snatched away by death; our house is burned by fire. It is on account of these occurrences that men curse their life, loathe the day of their birth, abominate heaven and the light of day, rail against God, and as they are eloquent in blasphemy, accuse him of injustice and cruelty (3.7.10).

During this life “death is always before our eyes. We are also subject to a thousand miseries and the soul is exposed to innumerable evils, so that we find always a hell within us.”⁷³²

Calvin aptly summarizes the tension into which hope enters as the Christian's anchor.

Promised to us is eternal life, but it is promised to the dead; we are assured of a happy resurrection, but we are as yet involved in corruption; we are pronounced just, as yet sin dwells in us; we hear that we are happy, but we are as yet in the midst of many miseries; an abundance of all good things is promised to us, but still we often hunger and thirst; God proclaims that he will come quickly, but he seems deaf when we cry to him. What would become of us were we not supported by hope?⁷³³

Salvation, in short, “lies hidden under hope.”⁷³⁴ Believers are united with Christ and

732Commentary on 1 John 3:2 [1551]; CO 55:330.

733Commentary on Hebrews 11:1 [1549]; CO 55:143-144. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 25:20, 34 [1555]; CO 45:569, 687; *Institutes*, 3.8.10.

734This phrase appears repeatedly in Calvin's writings. Commentary on John 16:21 [1553]; CO 47:36; Commentary on Matthew 13:44-52 [1555]; CO 45:375 (Cf. 371-376); Commentary on Philippians 1:6 [1548]; CO 51:9-10; Commentary on Isaiah 42:9 [1559]; CO 37:66.

enjoy his presence already now, “but that presence we enjoy only in hope.”⁷³⁵ Hope, as Paul teaches, necessarily looks forward to what is *not* yet seen: “since hope regards some future and not present good, it can never be connected with what we have in possession.”⁷³⁶ By looking beyond the “present aspect of things” or the “various shiftings of the world” toward the future life Christians are able “in the depth of despair to exercise nevertheless a feeling of hope, in the depth of poverty to see opulence, and in the depth of weakness to keep from giving way, and in fine, to promise ourselves that nothing will be wanting to us when we are left destitute of all things.”⁷³⁷

The Christian life is therefore characterized by meditation on the future life (*meditatio vitae futurae*), for the focus of hope is not primarily on what might happen during the present age but on the certainty of what will occur at Christ's return. “For if our life is shut up in Christ, it must be hid until he shall appear.”⁷³⁸ The content of hope is not abstract but concrete. The apostle speaks of believers' “waiting for Christ” because “without Christ we are ruined and thrown into despair, but when Christ shows himself, life and prosperity do at the same time shine forth upon us.” The believer should therefore “apply his whole mind to an expectation of Christ's coming.”⁷³⁹

Christian hope is so certain that it “may be justly compared to a present possession.”⁷⁴⁰ Christians are pilgrims on earth but “they yet by hope scale the heavens, so that they quietly enjoy in their own bosoms their future inheritance.”⁷⁴¹ By faith believers “already sit in the heavenly glory with Christ by hope, and they have the

735Commentary on Philippians 1:23 [1548]; CO 52:19.

736Commentary on Romans 8:24 [1556]; CO 49:155. Cf. Commentary on Romans 8:25 [1556]; CO 49:156; Commentary on Romans 12:12 [1556]; CO 49:242.

737Commentary on Philippians 4:7 [1548]; CO 52:62. Cf. 3.2.21, 28.

738Commentary on Colossians 3:4 [1548]; CO 52:119. Cf. Commentary on 1 Peter 1:7 [1551]; CO 55:213. See Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 40-49.

739Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 1:9 [1550]; CO 52:144-145. Cf. Commentary on 2 Timothy 4:8 [1548]; CO 52:390; Commentary on Philippians 1:6 [1548]; CO 51:9-10; Commentary on 1 Peter 1:3, 5 [1551]; CO 55:210, 211.

740Commentary on Romans 8:30 [1556]; CO 49:161.

741Commentary on Romans 5:2 [1556]; CO 49:89.

kingdom of God already established within them.”⁷⁴² Of course, believers do not yet fully possess the kingdom of God. They are “heirs of life, not because we have arrived at the present possession of it, but because hope brings to us full and complete certainty of it... [B]ecause we are still in the world we do not yet enjoy 'eternal life' but only obtain it by 'hoping'.”⁷⁴³ But through hope Christians can be said already to possess what they do not possess in point of fact. Having been united with Christ by faith, “we have already entered the kingdom of God, and as it is stated in Ephesians 2:6, we already, in hope, sit in heavenly places,” even though “we nevertheless have it not as yet in possession” but enjoy it only “in hope.”⁷⁴⁴ By virtue of this paradox “those that have already entered into the kingdom of God are exhorted to pray daily that it may come.”⁷⁴⁵

The essence of Christian hope is therefore patience, but Christian hope is not merely a passive attitude. On the contrary, Christian hope involves “a waiting and a hastening.”⁷⁴⁶ Christians demonstrate their hope by “hastening toward the heavenly kingdom” (3.10.1), applying themselves to the practices of justice and piety. Already now “eternal life begins in them” (3.18.1). Through virtues and good works believers are “trained” to meditate on the coming kingdom and “to hasten through them to seek the blessed hope held out to us in heaven” (3.18.3). Indeed, good works are nothing less than “a step toward immortality” (3.17.15). With meditation on the future life is stirred up the desire for love and service. “For the hope of eternal life will never be inactive in us so as not to produce love in us. For it is of necessity that the man who is fully persuaded that a treasure of life is laid up for him in heaven will aspire thither, looking down upon this world. Meditation, however, upon the heavenly life stirs up our affections both to the

742Commentary on John 5:24 [1553]; CO 47:116.

743Commentary on Titus 3:7 [1550]; CO 52:432.

744Commentary on Philipians 3:12 [1548]; CO 52:51.

745Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3:1 [1550]; CO 52:209. Cf. Commentary on Romans 8:31 [1556]; CO 49:162-163.

746Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 26. Quistorp identifies patience and hope as two sides of the same coin for Calvin. “Hope and patience are for Calvin almost synonymous” (27).

worship of God, and to exercises of love.”⁷⁴⁷

But Calvin emphasizes the limited degree to which the kingdom will be perfected during the present age. People naturally shrink back from suffering and the cross, he points out, and this leads them to strive “without moderation” for the perfection of the kingdom on earth. But such impatience ironically demonstrates itself to be “without hope” because it seeks “to rush forward unseasonably to the fruit of hope.” Those who fall into it this error “confound the perfection of Christ’s reign with the commencement of it, and wish to enjoy on earth what they ought to seek for in heaven.”⁷⁴⁸ Christ will indeed restore the creation, but “the full accomplishment of this promise ought not to be expected in the present life, for as it is through hope that we are blessed, so our happiness, which is now in some respects concealed, must be an object of hope till the last day, and it is enough that some taste of it be enjoyed in this world, that we may more ardently long for that perfect happiness.”⁷⁴⁹

Conclusion

Calvin's doctrines of creation, humanity, sin, preservation, natural law, the restoration of the world, the Spirit, the kingdom of Christ, and hope provide the fundamental premises for the reformer's two kingdoms theology. Calvin believed God had created the world and human beings for a purpose: communion with him and with one another. Had humans been obedient, they, along with the whole creation, would have been elevated into a state of eternal glory that Calvin describes as the heavenly or

⁷⁴⁷Commentary on Colossians 1:5 [1548]; CO 52:79. True godliness always begins with meditation on the “heavenly life.” Commentary on Titus 1:2 [1550]; CO 52:405-406. Even when righteousness seems futile, “yet the hope should be sufficient for stimulating us to doing well.” Commentary on Titus 2:12 [1550]; CO 52:423.

⁷⁴⁸Commentary on Matthew 24:3 [1555]; CO 45:649. Emphasis added.

⁷⁴⁹Commentary on Isaiah 35:7 [1559]; CO 36:594-595. Christians participate in the blessings of the kingdom – in peace, righteousness, and hope – but “those things which are annexed to it do now appear only in part.” It is only a foretaste, designed to hasten them on to what is still to come. Commentary on Acts 3:21 [1552]; CO 48:72-73. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 60:17-18 [1559]; CO 37:366-367; Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 1:10 [1550]; CO 52:192; Commentary on Matthew 5:2 [1555]; CO 45:161.

spiritual kingdom of Christ. But human beings sinned, and the creation fell into corruption. Humans have lost their spiritual gifts entirely, and their natural gifts have been corrupted. Only God's common grace – working through means such as providence, natural law, and civil government – preserves the order that makes human life possible. Yet the achievements of even unrepentant human beings in a context of such common grace are substantial.

In addition to this work of preservation God is restoring the world and human beings through the kingdom of Christ. This kingdom, the effect of the person and work of Jesus Christ, will one day restore all things, and it has begun that process by regenerating human beings through Christ's word and Spirit. But Christ's kingdom is spiritual. This does not mean that it is immaterial or ethereal in the Neoplatonic sense, but that it does not immediately take the forms of wealth and power. On the contrary, the spiritual kingdom of Christ is expressed in the regeneration that establishes true righteousness and peace among believers. Human beings take their place in this kingdom by holding fast to Christ, receiving the forgiveness of sins, and devoting themselves to the service of righteousness. They can live in hope that these are but the beginnings of a restoration that will one day encompass all things. Calvin's recognition that the coming of the kingdom is eschatological – with believers caught between the tension of the 'already' and the 'not yet' – provides the foundation for his two kingdoms theology.

CHAPTER 4

TWO KINGDOMS

Calvin's two kingdoms theology arises logically from his eschatological interpretation of creation, the fall, and the restoration of the world. All of life falls under the lordship of the ascended Christ and is subject to his law, but Christ exercises his lordship in two different ways, one preservative (the political kingdom), and the other restorative (the spiritual kingdom). In the latter kingdom, which Calvin identifies with the church, human beings are regenerated by the word and Spirit such that they voluntarily submit themselves to the love and justice of God. In hope, they begin to experience the perfect liberty, equality and peace that characterizes Christ's kingdom.⁷⁵⁰ At the same time, they continue to serve God in a fallen, temporal world, whose institutions and cultural phenomena, though governed by Christ's providence and law, are destined to pass away. Thus in the spirit of self-sacrificial service that characterizes the love of Christ, Christians continue to submit themselves where necessary to temporal institutions, even where they seem to contradict this liberty, equality and peace. Some such institutions are the expressions of the natural, created order, such as gender and marriage, while others are the products of the fall into sin, such as class and slavery, civil government and tyranny. Yet God uses all such institutions as a means of preserving what Calvin calls outward or civil righteousness for the welfare of human society. Civil government in particular acts coercively according to the civil use of the law to preserve a modicum of piety, justice and peace. But only the kingdom of Christ restores humans to the spiritual use of the law in such a way as to create inward, spiritual righteousness, the

⁷⁵⁰The church, as John Tonkin puts it, is “that sphere where God's work of reordering his creation, begun in Christ, is extended until the time when Christ will come again to establish his kingdom, the state of perfect order.” John Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 120. Calvin's eschatology is the vision that “shapes most clearly Calvin's distinctive approach to the question of the institutional Church” (113; Cf. 99). Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956), 90-164; Benjamin Milner, Jr., *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 164-188.

true forms of piety, justice and peace.

In this Chapter I describe the various layers or dimensions of Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine in its eschatological context. It is important to excavate Calvin's political theology in this way because many discussions of Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine focus on it primarily as a theology of institutions or differentiated spheres, without carefully taking into account the eschatological and theological concerns that provide its *raison d'être*.⁷⁵¹

Before outlining the various dimensions of Calvin's two kingdoms theology, it is useful briefly to define some of the reformer's key terms. It must be remembered, however, that Calvin uses all of these terms fluidly and sometimes interchangeably. Here I describe his *typical* use of concepts and terms.

The foundational dimension of Calvin's two kingdoms theology, the eschatological distinction between the present age and the eternal kingdom of Christ, has already been described in Chapter 3. When referring to this dimension Calvin tends to speak of the contrast between the “earthly” and the “heavenly,” or between the “temporal” and the “spiritual.” A second dimension is anthropological, distinguishing between human beings as they participate in the coming kingdom and as they participate

⁷⁵¹It is essential to grasp that Calvin understood the two kingdoms fundamentally in eschatological terms, as Milner rightly notes, not as “two externally divided and recognizable spheres.” Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 171. Scholars sometimes claim that Calvin's eschatology diminishes the significance of the two kingdoms concept in his thought. For instance, Torrance claims that “for Calvin the operative eschatological distinction is not so much that between the two kingdoms in Luther's sense, as between the two conditions of the Church.” Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 159. In my view it is clearer to say that for Calvin the eschatological nature of the kingdom (i.e., its two conditions) decisively shapes the two kingdoms distinction. Tonkin also contrasts Calvin's eschatological emphasis to that of Luther's two kingdoms. “The dialectical balance which Luther maintained between spiritual and worldly government, each having its own independent role, tends in Calvin to be broken down, to the point where the world practically loses its integrity and independent status and becomes an adjunct of the Church.” Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in the Theology of the Reformers*, 99 (Cf. 116). But, as Tonkin goes on to show, this point needs to be qualified in light of the eschatological tension, which Tonkin mistakenly places in contrast to Calvin's two kingdoms concept. “In Calvin, this kind of [two kingdoms] distinction enters only in relation to politics and ethics, and his thought is dominated rather by the eschatological tension between the present and future states of the one kingdom of Christ” (115). It does not seem to occur to Tonkin that Calvin understands the two kingdoms distinction eschatologically, which is why it remains relevant for politics and ethics.

in the present, mortal life. Here Calvin typically speaks of a contrast between the “outward” and the “inward,” “body” and “soul,” “flesh and Spirit.” A third dimension refers to the twofold way in which Christ governs human beings, the one by his word and Spirit, the other by political institutions. Here Calvin tends to speak of the “two kingdoms (or reigns)” or the “twofold government (or regiment).” The contrast intended is between the “political,” “temporal,” “secular,” or “universal,” on the one hand, and the “spiritual” or “peculiar” on the other. Finally, a fourth dimension denotes the specific institutions that correspond to the two kingdoms or governments, which Calvin follows medieval usage in speaking of as two “jurisdictions,” but which he also typically describes simply as two “governments.” These are the church with its “ecclesiastical” government, which is spiritual insofar as it expresses the rule of Christ's word, sacraments, and discipline, and various “civil” and “political” institutions, the most prominent of which is coercive civil government. It is in correspondence to these institutions and their functions that Calvin tends to distinguish between “civil” and “spiritual” righteousness, or between the “civil” and “spiritual” uses of the law. In Geneva the governing bodies of the church were the Company of Pastors, the Consistory (elders and pastors), and the Diaconate, whereas the civil government consisted of a series of councils, the chief of which, the Small Council, is often simply referred to as “the Council.”

In what follows I begin by describing the theological context in which Calvin introduces his classic statement of the two kingdoms doctrine, his discussion of Christian liberty. I then turn to his distinction between Christ's universal and spiritual government, which sets the stage for a discussion of the meaning and significance of the anthropological terms that Calvin uses to describe the difference between the temporal and the spiritual: outward/inward, body/soul, flesh/spirit, temporal/eternal. From here I turn to Calvin's conception of the nature of Christian service in the institutions of the political kingdom, focusing specifically on gender and slavery. Finally, I set the stage for

the second part of this dissertation by focusing on Calvin's understanding of the difference between civil and spiritual government, with the related distinctions between the two kinds of righteousness and the two (constructive) uses of the law.⁷⁵²

The Two Kingdoms in Theological Context

The immediate context for Calvin's classic statement on the two kingdoms is his discussion of Christian liberty. The doctrine of Christian liberty was the decisive and potentially revolutionary implication of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone.⁷⁵³ The reformers insisted that the decisive way in which human beings participate in the restoration of order in the world is through the forgiveness of sins by faith. They likewise maintained that the freedom that arises from this forgiveness must be protected at all costs. Even the practice of righteousness that necessarily arises from the Christian's justification must be understood only in light of the "prime necessity" of Christian liberty, for without it "consciences dare undertake almost nothing without doubting" (3.19.1).⁷⁵⁴ The driving concern of the reformers was that the papal church had burdened Christians with a host of ceremonies, laws, and works, thus destroying the liberty of the gospel. Anything that would place the soul of a Christian under the rule of another person was an assault on the kingdom of Christ.

⁷⁵²There are, of course, three uses of the law for Calvin, but in this chapter I focus on the critical distinction between the civil and spiritual uses. For a fuller discussion of the three uses see Chapter 7.

⁷⁵³On the revolutionary implications of Christian liberty see especially William R. Stevenson, Jr., *Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Roland Boer, *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). Stevenson's project is a fascinating exploration of the significance of Calvin's concept of Christian liberty as the dialectic that holds together Calvin's political theology. With respect to each of Calvin's three parts of Christian liberty he posits the doctrine's radical significance and potentially revolutionary implications. But every time he turns to the corresponding dialectic of God's providential and moral restraint of human beings, all of which turns out to make Calvin, in the final analysis, a stalwart conservative.

⁷⁵⁴Harro Hopfl is therefore unwarranted in suggesting that Calvin saw the doctrine of Christian liberty as anything other than pivotal for the Christian life. Harro Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 35, 69.

And yet, Calvin feared the *abuse* of Christian liberty. “Some, on the pretext of this freedom, shake off all obedience toward God and break out into unbridled license. Others disdain it, thinking that it takes away all moderation, order, and choice of things” (3.19.1).⁷⁵⁵ One of Calvin's primary reasons for writing the *Institutes*, he made clear in its dedication to King Francis, was that faithful evangelicals were being persecuted by the papists on the pretext that they held such radical views. Thus “certain wicked and lying pamphlets were circulated stating that none were treated with such cruelty but Anabaptists and seditious persons, who by their perverse ravings and false opinions, were overthrowing not only religion but also all civil order.”⁷⁵⁶ Political rulers had their own reasons to accuse the Reformation of such abuses. “Kings too are, for the most part, so fiercely haughty, that they reckon it impossible for Christ to reign without some diminution of their own power; and, therefore, they always listen favorably to such an accusation as that which was once brought unjustly against Christ.” Calvin regarded the charge of rebellion as one of the oldest and most dangerous threats to the kingdom of Christ, having been lodged against Christ himself.⁷⁵⁷

Clearly, then, the doctrine had to be addressed: “we must take care that so necessary a part of doctrine be not suppressed, yet at the same time that those absurd objections which are wont to arise be met” (3.19.1). It was to meet this great need, to defend the doctrine of Christian liberty and to clarify the relation of the kingdom of Christ to political order, that Calvin introduced the two kingdoms doctrine.

Calvin explained Christian liberty as having three basic dimensions. First, it refers to the liberty of conscience that believers have before the judgment seat of God by

755 Calvin understands the potential for the stirring up of “huge troubles” as a result of this teaching, “partly by the seditious, partly by slanders – as if all human obedience were at the same time removed and cast down” (3.19.14).

756 See Preface to Psalms, July 22, 1557. See Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 21.

757 The same tactic, he warned, had been used by the Jews in their lies about Jesus, “as if Christ, by erecting his kingdom, were overturning all the governments of the world and destroying the authority of kings and magistrates.” Commentary on Matthew 27:11 [1555]; CO 45:751.

virtue of the doctrine of justification. When justification is being discussed Christians need to lay aside all talk of law, works, or human power, and consider God's mercy in Jesus alone (3.19.2).

The second dimension of Christian liberty is freedom from the coercion and rigor of the law. Calvin argued that “consciences observe the law, not as if constrained by the necessity of the law, but that freed from the law's yoke they willingly obey God's will.” Christians must be freed from the binding legal authority of the law if they are to escape a state of “perpetual dread.” “For unless its rigor be mitigated, the law in requiring perfect love condemns all imperfection” (3.19.4). Christians know that they are “emancipated from the law by grace, so that their works are not to be measured according to its rules.” They are able to love and serve God as children serve a father who they trust is graciously disposed toward them (3.19.5).⁷⁵⁸ To be sure, the law, properly interpreted in light of the work, example, and teaching of Christ, continues to be the only perfect revelation of God's moral will.⁷⁵⁹ Conscience, reason, and philosophy may provide humans with some knowledge of God's will, but in the context of sin they utterly fail to

⁷⁵⁸“To be sure, love is the capstone of the law. When the Spirit of God forms us to such love, why is it not for us a cause of righteousness, except that even in the saints it is imperfect, and for that reason merits no reward of itself?” (3.11.17)

⁷⁵⁹Calvin argues that the gospel is worth more reverence than the law to the degree that Christ is greater than the angels through whom the old covenant was mediated. To be sure, Christ ought to be heard with “equal attention whenever he may speak.” Still, “the fuller he reveals himself to us, it is but right that our reverence and attention to obedience should increase in proportion to the extent of his revelations.” Commentary on Hebrews 2:1 [1549]; CO 55:21. Johnson observes that for Calvin Christ transforms the law so that “its force is descriptive rather than prescriptive.” Merwin S. Johnson, “Calvin's Ethical Legacy,” *The Legacy of John Calvin* (ed. David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC, 2000), 68 (Cf. 67-70). Haas also stresses that for Calvin the Christian life is that of the “imitation of Christ.” Guenther Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 58-60. Cf. Mary Lane Potter, “The 'Whole Office of the Law' in the Theology of John Calvin,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 3 (1985): 132; I. John. Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 278-281. For a good survey of Calvin's ethics more generally, see Eric Fuchs, “Calvin's Ethics,” *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society* (ed. Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Smallmann; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 145-158. The focus shifts from the law to the lawgiver. For while the law is a perfect statement of righteousness, it is on Christ that God has “stamped for us the likeness to which he would have us conform.” Christ “has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life. What more effective thing can you require than this one thing? Nay, what can you require beyond this one thing? For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption” (3.6.3). Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:1 [1546]; CO 49:472.

communicate the law's spiritual objective.⁷⁶⁰ But while the law is “the finest and best-disposed method of ordering a man's life” the “more explicit plan” by which believers are conformed to that law is the call of Romans 12:1-2 to “present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him” (3.7.1). For the gospel creates in believers not a “servile fear” but a “voluntary and cheerful love of righteousness” that results from God's astonishing favor.⁷⁶¹ “God wills to be freely worshiped, freely loved” (3.26.2).

The third implication of Christian freedom is the liberty from “outward things that are themselves 'indifferent.'” Whether Christians perform or do not perform these outward and indifferent activities is ultimately irrelevant from God's perspective, though love or even scripture may dictate one activity or another at any particular time (3.19.7). For “the kingdom of God, which is spiritual [*regnum Dei, quod spirituale est*], does not consist in these outward observances [*externis observationibus*],” and “things indifferent are in themselves of no importance in the sight of God.”⁷⁶² Calvin explains that “here are included all ceremonies whose observance is optional, that our consciences may not be constrained by any necessity to observe them but may remember that by God's beneficence their use is for edification made subject to him.” In outward matters Christians are free to do what is loving or edifying within the bounds of scripture (3.19.8) “Paul would exempt the consciences of the pious from all decrees, laws, and censures of men.”⁷⁶³

Scholars sometimes present Calvin's concept of *adiaphora*, or indifferent things,

760Secular philosophers “set up reason alone as the ruling principle in man, and think that it alone should be listened to . . . But the Christian philosophy bids reason give way to, submit and subject itself to, the Holy Spirit so that the man himself may no longer live but hear Christ living and reigning within him” (3.7.1). Renewed and brought into the kingdom of God, Christians bid “adieu to our own counsels and desires, and those of all men, [that] we may be attentive to the only will of God, the knowledge of which is true wisdom.” Commentary on Romans 12:2 [1556]; CO 235-236.

761Commentary on Romans 12:1 [1556]; CO 49:233.

762Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8:8 [1546]; CO 49:434.

763Commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:15 [1546]; CO 49:345. Calvin criticizes those who “dare to impose on our brethren our rule of life,” “as though our own morosity were the law.” The law of God, on the contrary, places all under itself. Commentary on James 4:11 [1551]; CO 55:419 (Cf. 4:12; CO 55:420). The one who judges a fellow Christian usurps Christ of his dominion as Lord, for within the kingdom of God “an equality ought to be preserved.” Commentary on Romans 14:10 [1556]; CO 49:262.

as if it refers to areas in which Christians have complete liberty of action.⁷⁶⁴ Where Calvin claims that scripture regulates certain indifferent matters, therefore, or where he calls Christians to submit to one another, or to the church, they see a contradiction. “Calvin seems constantly to be giving with one hand and taking away with the other,” Hopfl complains.⁷⁶⁵ But as John Thompson shows so thoroughly, the fundamental characteristic of indifferent matters (or matters of polity), for Calvin, is not that action with respect to them is unrestrained, but that it has no spiritual or eternal significance. “Calvin has used *police* not to designate a realm in which externals are subject to human or ecclesial discretion, but to distinguish the external orders of this present life from the spiritual concerns of the life to come. In this latter sense, *police* is by no means left to human discretion.”⁷⁶⁶ Indifferent matters are of merely temporal concern, pertaining simply to decorum and polity, or to decency and harmony among people, but they might still be regulated by scripture.

It is to clarify the difference between indifferent matters and spiritual matters that Calvin introduces the two kingdoms concept. After outlining the three dimensions of Christian liberty he cautions his readers that Christian liberty should not be mistaken for license. Christians are to use their liberty to serve God and edify their neighbors according to the governing principle of love. For while it is true that “Christ’s death is nullified if we put our souls under men’s subjection,” this hardly means that “all human obedience were at the same time removed and cast down” (3.19.14). Calvin thus declares,

764For instance, O’Donovan describes as one of Calvin’s enduring themes “the freedom of the individual’s conscience in relation to external ecclesiastical regulations not explicitly contained in Scripture (the *adiaphora*).” Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 663. See also Jane Dempsey Douglass, “Christian Freedom: What Calvin Learned at the School of Women,” *Church History* 53 (June 1984): 155-173.

765Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 37. Hopfl claims that Calvin could have avoided his biblicism had he “allowed more matters to fall within the area of things external and *adiaphora*” (108). Emphasis Original.

766See John Lee Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of John Calvin, His Predecessors and His Contemporaries* (Geneva: Droz, 1992), 262 (Cf. 246-264). Emphasis Original.

Therefore, in order that none of us may stumble on that stone, let us first consider that there is a twofold government in man [*duplex esse in homine regimen*]: one aspect is spiritual [*spirituale*], whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political [*politicum*], whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the 'spiritual' and the 'temporal' jurisdiction [*iurisdictio spiritualis et temporalis*] (not improper terms) by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the present life – not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby a man may live his life among other men holily, honorably, and temperately. For the former resides in the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior. The one we may call the spiritual kingdom [*regnum spirituale*], the other, the political kingdom [*regnum politicum*]. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are in man, so to speak, two worlds [*mundi duo*], over which different kings and different laws [*varii reges et variae leges*] have authority (3.19.15).

Calvin's explicit reference to the medieval categories of spiritual and temporal jurisdiction make it clear that he views the two kingdoms distinction as a revised version of the old medieval two swords doctrine. In the 1543 *Institutes* Calvin added a further statement: “Through this distinction it comes about that we are not to misapply to the political order [*politicum ordinem*] the gospel teaching on spiritual freedom, as if Christians were less subject, as concerns outward government [*externum regimen*], to human laws, because their consciences have been set free in God's sight; as if they were released from all bodily servitude because they are free according to the spirit.” The time to address “civil government [*civili regimine*],” as well as those “church laws [*legibus ... ecclesiasticis*]” that “seem to apply to the spiritual kingdom [*spirituale regnum*],” Calvin writes, will be Book 4 (3.19.15).

Like so much of the terminology Calvin uses to describe eschatological realities, this basic statement of the two kingdoms doctrine is readily subject to misinterpretation if read too rigidly. Spiritual government, spiritual jurisdiction, the spiritual kingdom, the conscience, the soul, piety, and the inner mind line up on one side. Political government, the political kingdom, the temporal jurisdiction, the present life, the duties of humanity

and citizenship, and outward behavior characterize the other. Interpreted too rigidly, the statement has been read to correspond to the difference between forgiveness and active righteousness, or even between piety and justice.⁷⁶⁷ Yet such readings place it in blatant contradiction to Calvin's understanding of the kingdom of Christ as extending to the restoration of the entire creation, including the human body and affairs among human beings. Yet Calvin's description of the spiritual kingdom in terms of piety and the soul should not be interpreted in an exclusive sense any more than should his numerous other statements that declare salvation to be an affair of the soul, or that describe the conscience only as pertaining to human interaction with God. Calvin's point is not sharply and precisely to delineate two hermetically-sealed realms or spheres into which life can neatly be divided, but to distinguish the spiritual kingdom of Christ from temporal affairs with respect to each kingdom's *most prominent and defining characteristics*. The point is not that Christ's spiritual kingdom has nothing to do with politics, humanity, citizenship, or outward behavior, but that it extends further than these phenomena toward spiritual matters, the conscience, the soul, piety, and the inner mind. On the other hand, Calvin's meaning is not that civil government should have no concern for spiritual realities, the conscience, the soul, piety, and the inner mind, but that the political kingdom is properly limited in its concern with mere polity, humanity, citizenship, and outward behavior.

Read in the context of Calvin's broader theology and exegesis, the two kingdoms distinction operates at multiple levels. At its most basic level, reflecting the eschatological distinction between the present age and the age to come, it refers to the distinction between Christ's universal government and his spiritual kingdom. Yet it is also expressed in a correlative set of distinctions between body and soul, flesh and spirit,

⁷⁶⁷Torrance Kirby, "A Reformed Culture of Persuasion: John Calvin's 'Two Kingdoms' and the Theological Origins of the Public Sphere," *Calvin@500: Theology, History, and Practice* (ed. Richard R. Topping and John A. Vissers; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, forthcoming), 62; Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 52.

the outward and the inward, the temporal and the spiritual. These distinctions characterize the nature of Christian service in the political kingdom. They also give rise to the specific institutions of civil and spiritual government.

Universal and Spiritual Government

At various places in his writings Calvin distinguishes Christ's rule over all things as creator from his renewal and regeneration of all things as savior. For instance, in his commentary on John 1:5 he writes,

For there are two distinct powers which belong to the Son of God: the first, which is manifested in the structure of the world and the order of nature, and the second, by which he renews and restores fallen nature. As he is the eternal Speech of God, by him the world was made; by his power all things continue to possess the life which they once received; man especially was endued with an extraordinary gift of understanding; and though by his revolt he lost the light of understanding, yet he still sees and understands, so that what he naturally possesses from the grace of the Son of God is not entirely destroyed. But since by his stupidity and perverseness he darkens the light which still dwells in him, it remains that a new office be undertaken by the Son of God, the office of mediator, to renew, by the Spirit of regeneration, man who had been ruined.⁷⁶⁸

The fundamental distinction here is between Christ's sovereignty over all things as the Son of God, by whom all things were created, and his sovereignty over all things as the human messiah, who has ascended in triumph to God's right hand. "As the eternal Word of God, Christ, it is true, has always had in his hands by right sovereign authority and majesty, and as such can receive no accessions thereto. But still, he is exalted in human nature, in which he took upon himself the form of a servant."⁷⁶⁹ Carefully distinguishing between Christ "as to his divine essence" and Christ "as a partaker of our flesh,"⁷⁷⁰ Calvin argues that "the word heir is ascribed to Christ as manifested in the flesh, for being made man, he put on our nature and, as such, received this heirship, and that for this purpose, that he might restore us to what we had lost in Adam."⁷⁷¹

⁷⁶⁸Commentary on John 1:5 [1553]; CO 47:6-7.

⁷⁶⁹Commentary on Psalm 2:8 [1557]; CO 31:47-48.

⁷⁷⁰Commentary on Hebrews 1:3 [1549]; CO 55:11.

⁷⁷¹Commentary on Hebrews 1:2 [1549]; CO 55:11. Calvin writes of Jesus' claim to all authority in heaven

This dynamic leads some scholars to interpret Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine within the context of what became known in sixteenth century polemics as the *extra Calvinisticum*. This doctrine taught that the Son of God's existence and power is not restricted to the embodied person of Jesus. David Willis writes,

The confession that the *Logos* is united to the flesh but exists *etiam extra carnem* corresponds to the relation between Christ's Lordship over the Church and his Lordship *etiam extra ecclesiam*.... Christ reigns particularly over the Church and generally over all mankind. His reign over the Church involves voluntary obedience from the faithful through the exercise of his gifts of grace and the secret operation of the Spirit where the Gospel is communicated. His reign over all men compels them, even against their will, to serve his purposes now and will finally drag them before his seat of righteous judgment.⁷⁷²

If the gospel is the means by which Christ rules his kingdom proper, Willis argues, Calvin “gives special attention to the order of nature as the instrument of Christ's reign *etiam extra ecclesiam*.” Thus “The theme of Christ's rulership over the world is surely present in Calvin's thought, but it never becomes synonymous with the primary meaning he gives to the kingdom of Christ: the spiritual reign over the Church.”⁷⁷³

The purpose of Christ's ascension was that he might receive all power in order to direct the world to its final restoration and to preserve his church in the process. “Christ left the world and ascended to the Father, first, to subdue all powers to himself and to

and earth at his ascension, “he does not lay claim to the eternal power with which he was endued before the creation of the world, but to that which he has now received, by being appointed to be Judge of the world.” Commentary on Matthew 28:18 [1555]; CO 45:820-821. In the dedication of the 1560 edition of his Commentary on Acts Calvin writes, “For although the Son of God has always reigned, even from the first beginning of the world, yet after he published his gospel, being revealed in the flesh, he began to erect a more famous tribunal-seat than before.” Commentary on Acts, Dedication to Second Edition [1560]; CO 18:157. This perspective on the kingdom sometimes leads Calvin to identify specific places – where the ministry is active – with the kingdom. See, for instance, Commentary on Psalm 66:7 [1557]; CO 31:612; Commentary on Galatians, Argument [1548]; CO 50:163; Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels, Dedicatory [1555]; CO 15:710-712.

772E. David. Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 135-136.

773“He never allows the specificity of the Church's task to preach the Gospel to be substituted with a general ethic which would blur the distinction between Church and world, and which would define the Church in terms of a works righteousness in social ethics rather than in terms of an open confession of Christ by his elected ones.” “Order and justice beyond the Church are not for salvation but are for the preservation and maintenance of society. Through them, God protects his creation from chaos so that it remains the milieu of redemption and sanctification.” Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, 145. Cf. Heiko A. Oberman, “The 'Extra' Dimension in the Theology of Calvin,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21 (1970): 43-64.

render angels obedient; next, to restrain the devil and to protect and preserve the church by his help, as well as all the elect of God the Father.”⁷⁷⁴ In his ascension to God's right hand, therefore, Jesus was given both “the government of heaven and earth and the perpetual government of the church.”⁷⁷⁵ The Father has given Christ “full power over all things in heaven and in the earth”⁷⁷⁶ so that by his authority and judgment he might bring about “the full restoration of all things.”⁷⁷⁷ This means that there can be no authority or power that is not subject to his reign, whether in this age or the age to come, as Paul declares in Ephesians 1. Calvin observes, “The age that is to come is expressly mentioned, to point out that the exalted rank of Christ is not temporal, but eternal [*non temporalem sed aeternam*], and that it is not limited to this world, but shines

774To be sure, “the events which the Prophet here narrates are not yet complete; but this ought to be familiar to all the pious, for whenever the kingdom of Christ is treated of, his glory is magnificently extolled as if it were now absolutely complete in all its parts.” Commentary on Daniel 7:14 [1561]; CO 41:62-63.

775Commentary on Acts 10:42 [1552]; CO 48:248.

776Commentary on John 5:27 [1553]; CO 47:118.

777Commentary on John 5:28 [1553]; CO 47:119 (Cf. 5:23; CO 47:114). Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8:6 [1546]; CO 49:432; Dedication to Commentary on Jeremiah and Lamentations [1563]; CO 20:74-75. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15 Calvin notes that as a man Jesus has been given all power in heaven and on earth, but as such he remains subject to God. As God, on the other hand, he must be the Father's equal. Calvin thus explains that once Jesus has brought all things in subjection to himself, he will give the “dominion of the world [*imperium mundi*]” to the Father, even as the Father has always preserved for himself the “principal right [*ultimi iudicii*].” “Christ will then restore the kingdom which he has received, that we may cleave wholly to God. Nor will he in this way resign his kingdom, but will transfer it in a manner from his humanity to his glorious divinity, because a way of approach will then be opened up, from which our infirmity now keeps us back.” Having transformed spiritual bodies, human beings will no longer need a messianic mediator but will be face to face with God himself. “Christ's humanity will then no longer be interposed to keep us back from a closer view of God.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:27 [1546]; CO 49:549. Cf. Commentary on John 14:28 [1553]; CO 47:336. Cf. Commentary on Romans 5:2 [1556]; CO 49:89-90; Commentary on Hebrews 1:13 [1549]; CO 55:19. On this basis Moltmann, following Quistorp, argues that Calvin sees Christ's human nature in purely functional terms, which helps explain his “generally acknowledged spiritualist eschatology” (259). “Finally, for Calvin, even the mediation of Christ himself and thus the humanity of Christ, assumed for the sake of his mediation, ceases when the kingdom is handed over to the Father” (258). See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974 [1973]), 258-259. Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), 166-171. Richard Muller shows, however, that in contrast to Moltmann's and Quistorp's assumptions, Calvin rejects the notion that Christ will ever set aside his humanity. When Calvin argues that the saints will enjoy God immediately he is describing changes that “are epistemological, not ontological. Human nature does not pass away – it simply no longer impedes perception” (37). For Calvin, Muller points out, the spirituality of the future body does not imply its incorporeality (36). See Richard A. Muller, “Christ in the Eschaton: Calvin and Moltmann on the Duration of the *Munus Regium*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74.1 (1981): 31-59. Cf. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 138.

illustriously in the kingdom of God.”⁷⁷⁸

But while Christ has been given all power in heaven and earth in order to bring about the restoration of all things, that restoration is not yet complete. For as was seen in Chapter 3, where there is not voluntary submission to Christ the kingdom has not yet been established. For this reason the whole world “is regarded as nothing but darkness in the sight of God, because apart from the kingdom of Christ there is no light.”⁷⁷⁹ Those who have not been regenerated by the Spirit remain exiles from Christ's kingdom and are under the dominion and government of the devil, for “there is no middle condition.”⁷⁸⁰

Calvin therefore consistently distinguishes between Christ's “spiritual government of the church [*spirituali ecclesiae gubernatione*]” and “the universal government of the world [*universali mundi gubernatione*],”⁷⁸¹ between “that government of God which is general in its nature,” and “that special and spiritual jurisdiction which he exercises over the Church.”⁷⁸² Both governments are of Christ, though one is more properly Christ's kingdom than is the other. Both governments are expressions of God's providence, though that providence is “especially acknowledged in the government of his own church [*regenda sua ecclesia providentiam*].”⁷⁸³ Jesus is lord of heaven and earth but “he is in a peculiar manner the Lord of believers, who yield willingly and cheerfully to his authority, for it is only of 'his body' that he is 'the head' (Ephesians 1:22-23).”⁷⁸⁴ Usually Calvin limits the term 'kingdom of Christ' to the

⁷⁷⁸Commentary on Ephesians 1:21 [1548]; CO 51:159. It includes “the administration [*dispensatio*] of all things,” and “the entire command and government [*potestas et administratio*] of the universe” (1:22; CO 51:159).

⁷⁷⁹Only believers experience “the beginnings of our blessedness, when we are translated into the kingdom of Christ.” Commentary on Colossians 1:13 [1548]; CO 52:84.

⁷⁸⁰Commentary on 1 John 3:8 [1551]; CO 55:334. Cf. Commentary on Romans 11:22-23 [1556]; CO 49:224-225; Commentary on Hebrews 2:5 [1549]; CO 55:24; Commentary on Ephesians 1:12 [1548]; CO 52:83; Commentary on 1 John 5:19 [1551]; CO 55:374.

⁷⁸¹Commentary on Ephesians 1:23 [1548]; CO 51:160. He admits that the statement that Christ has been set over all things can refer to either of these governments, but suggests that in this case it should be interpreted in terms of the spiritual government.

⁷⁸²Commentary on Psalm 67:3 [1557]; CO 31:618.

⁷⁸³Commentary on 1 Peter 4:17 [1551]; CO 55:281. Cf. Commentary on 1 Peter 2:7 [1551]; CO 55:238; Commentary on Isaiah 52:10 [1559]; CO 37:249.

⁷⁸⁴Commentary on Luke 1:43 [1555]; CO 45:35.

spiritual kingdom, and where he uses the term in a broader sense, he ordinarily qualifies it. As he puts it in his commentary on John, “the kingdom of Christ [*regnum Christi*] extends, no doubt, to all men, but it brings salvation to none but the elect, who with voluntary obedience follow the voice of the Shepherd; for the others are compelled by violence to obey him, till at length he utterly bruise them with his iron scepter.”⁷⁸⁵ As David Willis puts it, “The kingdom of Christ is, above all, for Calvin, that spiritual and heavenly reign exercised by Christ over his people through the Gospel.”⁷⁸⁶ Oberman agrees, but rightly adds, “Yet, from the fall of Adam onwards, the eternal Son of God manipulates the kingdom of Satan as part of his hidden and incomprehensible reign... Calvin wants it to be clearly understood that in this sense the rule of Christ obtains *etiam extra ecclesiam*.”⁷⁸⁷

Calvin often distinguishes Christ's spiritual and universal governments by virtue of the fact that the former pertains to believers while the latter extends to unbelievers. In his commentary on the Lord's Prayer, for example, specifically the petition 'Thy kingdom come,' Calvin carefully explains as the primary meaning of the petition that God would, by his Spirit, bring all people to voluntary allegiance to Christ. But he then goes on to distinguish this rule from the form of Christ's rule over his enemies. “There is still another way in which God reigns, and that is when he overthrows his enemies and compels them, with Satan their head, to yield a reluctant subjection to his authority.”⁷⁸⁸

785Commentary on John 17:2 [1553]; CO 47:376. Calvin occasionally uses the term 'kingdom of Christ' in the broader sense. In his commentary on Genesis he writes that in creation “the invisible kingdom of Christ [*invisibile Christi regnum*] fills all things, and his spiritual grace is diffused through all.”Commentary on Genesis, Argument [1554]; CO 23:10.

786Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology*, 136.

787Oberman, “The 'Extra' Dimension in the Theology of Calvin,” 47. Oberman highlights the transformative significance of this rule *extra ecclesiam*, but he also notes the priority of Christ's rule within the church. “The word 'etiam' is important because it underscores the fact that the primary and basic concern is the very *ecclesia, coena, caro, lex* and *praedicatio* itself” (62).

788Commentary on Matthew 6:10 [1555]; CO 45:197-198. Thus the Roman caesars perverted all laws, human and divine, but God maintained his sovereignty over them. “It was God then who delivered into the hands of that king [caesar] the saints, the political government, and the institutions of piety, allowing him to pour out. promiscuously human blood, to violate every national right, and to ruin as far as possible all religion.” Yet “when the possession of the tyranny appeared fierce, then suddenly and beyond the expectation of all, God at length snatched away his church, and then the evangelical doctrine

Although the petition focuses on God's reign through his word and Spirit, Calvin notes in the *Institutes*, it extends in a different way to those who refuse to submit to that reign, who are instead characterized by the “filthiness of vices” that plagues “human affairs.” Christians should pray that God will “cast down all enemies of pure teaching and religion; that he scatter their counsels and crush their efforts” (3.20.42). In his commentary on Psalm 2 Calvin offers the same distinction with reference to the subjection of the world to the Son's authority. The “beauty and glory of the kingdom ... are more illustriously displayed when a willing people run to Christ in the day of his power, to show themselves his obedient subjects.” But this is not the only way that the messiah rules. In his exaltation Jesus is “furnished with power by which to reign even over those who are averse to his authority, and refuse to obey him.” These “he shall subdue by force, and compel to submit to him.”⁷⁸⁹

Christ's universal government manifests his justice and care for human beings. It is God's responsibility “to govern the world and to exercise care over mankind, and also to make a difference between good and evil, to help the miserable, to punish all wickedness, to check injustice and violence.” That some people deny God's governance of the world is evident in the fact that they “seek to extinguish the distinction between right and wrong in their consciences.” They imagine that “God concerns not himself with human affairs, that he is contented with his own celestial felicity, and descends not to us, and that adversity as well as prosperity happens to men by chance.”⁷⁹⁰ But the rise and fall of nations testifies that God rules, graciously yet justly, over human affairs.⁷⁹¹ His providential rule is displayed in that he maintains complete control over kings,

emerged, and was celebrated everywhere.” Commentary on Daniel 7:25 [1561]; CO 41:76-80.

789Commentary on Psalm 2:9 [1557]; CO 31:48-49. In his lectures on Jeremiah he made the point with reference to God's judgment on the ancient Egyptians and Elamites. “God is properly said to rule or reign among the faithful, whom he governs by his Spirit. So God's kingdom begins and has its origin when regeneration takes place. But sometimes, as I have already said, God is said to reign in the midst of his enemies, as we have seen respecting the Egyptians. He then erected his throne when he executed his recorded judgment on the Elamites.” Commentary on Jeremiah 49:38 [1563]; CO 39:389.

790Commentary on Zephaniah 1:12 [1559]; CO 44:22.

791Commentary on Daniel 2:21 [1561]; CO 40:576-578. Cf. Commentary on Luke 1:52 [1555]; CO 45:41.

regardless of whether or not they serve him.⁷⁹² Civil magistrates, parents, masters, and all those in authority have been placed in power “not by chance, but by God's providence. For many are wont to inquire too scrupulously by what right power has been attained, but we ought to be satisfied with this alone, that power is possessed and exercised.”⁷⁹³

Outward and Inward, Body and Soul, Flesh and Spirit, Temporal and Eternal

As I noted above, the fundamental distinction underlying Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine is the contrast between the present age, marked by corruption and temporality, and the future eternal kingdom of Christ. “For we see that whatever is earthly is of the world and of time, and is indeed fleeting. Therefore Christ, to lift our hope to heaven, declares that his 'kingship is not of this world'” (2.15.3). In his commentary on 1 Timothy Calvin writes, “All that is in the world [*saeculo*] has the taste of its nature, so that it is fading and quickly passes away.”⁷⁹⁴ Indeed, “nothing on earth is solidly founded, but everything may be said to be in a floating condition.”⁷⁹⁵

One of the typical ways in which Calvin describes the difference between the two kingdoms is by describing the political kingdom as that which pertains to “food and clothing,” “outward behavior,” and “life among other men,” in contrast to the spiritual kingdom which pertains to the “soul,” to the “conscience,” and to the “inner mind” (3.19.15). Although such language might seem to be merely a reflection of the anthropological distinction between the body and the soul,⁷⁹⁶ Calvin actually uses it to refer to the eschatological difference between what is 'earthly' and what is 'heavenly', or between the affairs of the “present life,” and those of the life to come. Those things that

⁷⁹²Commentary on Daniel 5:18-20 [1561]; CO 40:711-713.

⁷⁹³Commentary on 1 Peter 2:13 [1551]; CO 55:244.

⁷⁹⁴Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:17 [1548]; CO 52:333.

⁷⁹⁵Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:18 [1548]; CO 52:334.

⁷⁹⁶For instance, VanDrunen wonders whether Calvin's “less than precise language [of external and internal, body and soul] contributed to the lack of full consistency between his theology of the two kingdoms and his views on concrete social matters.” David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 91.

pertain to the outward person are earthly things, things that will pass away. Those things that pertain to the inward person are heavenly things, things that will endure as part of the kingdom of Christ. In his commentary on 2 Corinthians 4:17 Calvin articulates this connection explicitly. When the Apostle Paul refers to the “outward man,” he argues, the term denotes “everything that relates to the present life. As he here sets before us two men, so you must place before your view two kinds of life – the earthly and the heavenly [*terrenam et coelestem*]. The outward man is the maintenance of the earthly life, which consists not merely in the flower of one's age, and in good health, but also in riches, honors, friendships, and other resources.”⁷⁹⁷

To be sure, often Calvin presents the outward/inward distinction using the language of body and soul. “By the inner man Paul means the soul, and whatever relates to the spiritual life of the soul, as the outward man denotes the body, with everything that belongs to it, health, honors, riches, vigor, beauty, and everything of that nature.”⁷⁹⁸ This leads Quistorp to claim, “for Calvin this mortal body is to be equated with the sinful flesh. Again and again he identifies the anthropological difference of the soul and body with the theological opposition of *sarx* and *pneuma* (in the Biblical-Pauline sense) although as an exegete he is well aware that these two antitheses are not the same.”⁷⁹⁹ But this is clearly wrong. In numerous places Calvin emphasizes that the contrast between the body and soul, like that between the flesh and the spirit, is not to be interpreted as a narrow anthropological distinction but as an eschatological distinction. For instance, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:16 he notes that when the Apostle Paul says Christians should no longer view a person according to the “flesh,” the term ‘flesh’ does not denote physical human embodiment. After all, Christians are called to fix their hopes on Jesus, who “does now as certainly lead a glorious life in our flesh as he

797Commentary on 2 Corinthians 4:16 [1548]; CO 50:58.

798Commentary on Ephesians 3:16 [1548]; CO 51:186.

799Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 57.

once suffered in it,” and it is by his body that Christ “has opened up for our nature the kingdom of God.”⁸⁰⁰ Christians should therefore regard Christ in the flesh, but “not in a fleshly manner.” Jesus “is spiritual to us, not as if he laid aside the body and became a spirit, but because he regenerates and governs his own people by the influence of his Spirit.”⁸⁰¹

Calvin thus uses the terms “body,” “flesh,” and “outward” to denote the *whole human being as a participant in the present passing age*, corrupted and marred by sin. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 3 he stresses, “the term flesh is not restricted to the lower appetites merely, as the Sophists pretend, the seat of which they call sensuality, but is employed to describe man's whole nature.”⁸⁰² Likewise when Paul refers to the mind he does not mean the rational part of the soul, as described by the philosophers, but the part of the soul illuminated by the Spirit of God.⁸⁰³ The soul, Calvin insists, is no more virtuous than the body, and it is the whole person, body and soul, that Paul describes as 'corporeal'. Thus “the nature of man is said to be corporeal because he is destitute of celestial grace and is only a sort of empty shadow or image. We may add that the body ... is said by Paul to be mortal ... to teach us that the whole nature of man tends to death and ruin.”⁸⁰⁴

In short, Calvin's language of body and soul, like the Pauline language of flesh and spirit, constitutes an analogy. Just as “the soul is the superior, and the body the

800Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:16 [1548]; CO 50:68. Paul uses the term 'flesh', rather, to refer to “all external endowments which mankind are accustomed to hold in estimation, and in short, everything which apart from regeneration is reckoned worthy of praise.”

801Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:16 [1548]; CO 50:69.

802“For those that follow the guidance of nature are not governed by the Spirit of God.” For Calvin “the flesh and man's natural disposition are quite synonymous.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:3 [1546]; CO 49:348. See Margaret R. Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 311-314. Miles writes, “Clearly, it is 'flesh,' and not the body which is the location of the 'sluggishness' which opposes the quickening of the Spirit of God” (314). “It is 'flesh' which is responsible for the painful insubordination of the immortality of the soul represented by death; again, the body is in the role of helpless victim” (319).

803Commentary on Romans 7:25 [1556]; CO 49:135-136.

804Souls are degenerate and “fixed to the earth, and so enslaved to our bodies, that they have fallen from their own superiority.” Commentary on Romans 6:12 [1556]; CO 49:111.

inferior part of man,” and just as “the spirit is superior to the flesh,”⁸⁰⁵ so the human being regenerated through union with Christ is superior to the same human being insofar as she remains corrupted by sin. But the analogy should not be taken too literally. “[B]oth terms, flesh as well as spirit, belong to the soul, but the latter to that part which is renewed, and the former to that which still retains its natural character.... The inner [*interioris*] man then is not simply the soul, but that spiritual part which has been regenerated by God, and the members signify the other remaining part.”⁸⁰⁶ Similarly, “the word body means the same as the external man and members,” the person insofar as she remains “carnal and earthly.”⁸⁰⁷ To summarize, when Calvin speaks of the two kingdoms distinction in the language of outward/inward he is not making an anthropological distinction but an eschatological one. The language of body and soul is not to be taken literally but analogically.

Why use such an analogy at all? The primary reason, for Calvin, is that the analogy comes from scripture. But why does the Apostle Paul use it? According to Calvin, the apostle wanted to “clearly show that the hidden renovation is concealed from and escapes our observation, except it be apprehended by faith.”⁸⁰⁸ The kingdom of Christ is future and Christians should not expect to experience complete renewal apart from the transformation of their bodies at the end of the age. To exaggerate the importance of temporal affairs distracts believers from this future hope.⁸⁰⁹ By distancing themselves from outward matters, on the other hand, Christians train themselves to seek first the kingdom of God. This is what Calvin means when he says, “it is necessary that the

805Commentary on Romans 7:22 [1556]; CO 49:133-134.

806Commentary on Romans 7:18 [1556]; CO 49:132.

807Thus “his soul, being degenerated, may be justly said to have passed into a body.” The death of the body is a remedy only because, according to the will of God, it involves the putting off of the sinful nature. Commentary on Romans 7:24 [1556]; CO 49:135.

808Commentary on Romans 7:22 [1556]; CO 49:133-134.

809The godly “seek celestial [*coelestem*] righteousness, hate sin, and yet they are drawn down to the earth [*terram*] by the relics of their flesh.” Commentary on Romans 7:15 [1556]; CO 49:130. The “kingdom of the Father,” as he put it in one place, “is contrasted with the earth, to remind them that here they are pilgrims, and therefore ought to look upwards towards heaven.” Commentary on Matthew 13:43 [1555]; CO 45:371.

condition of the present life should decay in order that the inward man may be in a flourishing state, because in proportion as the earthly life declines, does the heavenly life advance, at least in believers.”⁸¹⁰

The distinction between the outward person, characterized by bodily suffering, and the inward person, characterized by renewal, thus enables believers to make sense of the cruciform character of the Christian life.⁸¹¹ As Paul explains in Romans 8:25-31, in his decree of election God ordained that Christians must be conformed to the image of Jesus, so “connecting, as by a kind of necessary chain, our salvation with the bearing of the cross.”⁸¹² The decree of adoption “is inseparable from the other decree which determines that we are to bear the cross, for no one can be an heir of heaven without being conformed to the image of the only begotten son of God.”⁸¹³ Christ is the pattern: “he will have all those whom he adopts to be the heirs of his kingdom to be conformed to his example.”⁸¹⁴ Those who resent the call to suffering show that they place a much

810 Commentary on 2 Corinthians 4:16 [1548]; CO 50:58. For even “if in worldly matters we decay, our spiritual life becomes more and more vigorous.” Commentary on Ephesians 3:16 [1548]; CO 51:186. Christians must be taught the “connection between the death of our present life and spiritual renovation,” Calvin argued. Commentary on Romans 6:5 [1556]; CO 49:107.

811 Christians should not expect their participation in the kingdom to lead to anything other than the experience of life “under the cross, . . . harsh and wretched.” For this reason, “we ought to know that the happiness promised us in Christ does not consist in outward advantages – such as leading a joyous and peaceful life, having rich possessions, being safe from all harm, and abounding with delights such as the flesh commonly longs after. No, our happiness belongs to the heavenly life!” (2.15.4) Christians are called to endure the “ignominy of the cross [*crucis ignominiam*],” the “abasement of the cross [*humilitate crucis*],” and those “marks of Christ” emblematic of suffering. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:10-12, 14 [1546]; CO 49:369-370, 371. Through the experience of a “perpetual cross” the Father conforms believers into the image of his son, bringing them, like him, to heavenly glory (3.8.1). “This is obvious: the entire company of believers, so long as they dwell on earth, must be ‘as sheep destined for the slaughter’ to be conformed to Christ their Head” (3.9.6). “We cannot be Christ’s soldiers on any other condition than to have the greater part of the world rising in hostility against us and pursuing us even to death.” Commentary on Matthew 5:10 [1555]; CO 45:164. Cf. 7:15; CO 45:224-225; Commentary on Colossians 1:11 [1548]; CO 52:82; Commentary on Hebrews 1:13 [1549]; CO 55:19.

812 Commentary on Romans 8:28 [1556]; CO 49:158-159.

813 Commentary on Romans 8:29 [1556]; CO 49:160. The sufferings of the faithful are thus “nothing else than the manner by which they are conformed to the image of Christ” (159-160). Through his sufferings Jesus taught believers not only “how far God ought to be submitted to and obeyed,” but that obedience to God can take place under no other circumstances than the bearing of the cross. Commentary on Hebrews 5:8 [1549]; CO 55:63-64. Cf. Commentary on Acts 8:33 [1552]; CO 48:194. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 2:10 [1549]; CO 55:27.

814 Commentary on Romans 8:29 [1556]; CO 49:160. It is only through this process of humiliation that the faithful, “having obtained the glory of the celestial kingdom, may reach the glory of Christ’s

higher value on “fleeting and vanishing shadow of the present life” than on the future life to come.⁸¹⁵ Yet they should meditate on what Christ's suffering reveals about the love of God for humanity. It is “a striking and memorable proof of the love of God when he is so insulted, degraded, and loaded with the utmost disgrace, in order that we, on whom had been pronounced a sentence of everlasting destruction, may enjoy along with him immortal glory.”⁸¹⁶

Calvin explains that a person's participation in Christ's suffering and death involves her in a process of mortification that is twofold (3.20.42). “The one is inward – what the Scripture is wont to term the mortification of the flesh, or the crucifixion of the old man, of which Paul treats in the sixth chapter of the Romans. The other is outward – what is termed the mortification of the outward man. It is the endurance of the cross, of which he treats in the eighth chapter of the same epistle.”⁸¹⁷ Inward mortification is the experience of regeneration and sanctification, the gradual conformity of the believer to Christ's piety and justice. Through suffering believers learn humility (3.8.2-3), patience, and obedience (3.8.4-5), and are sometimes graciously corrected by God (3.8.6). Thus

“in the very act of afflicting us with the cross he is providing for our salvation. Believers

resurrection, with whom they are now crucified” (8:30; CO 49:161). Cf. Commentary on Colossians 1:24 [1548]; CO 52:93-95; Commentary on Philippians 1:29 [1548]; CO 52: 22; Commentary on Hebrews 12:3, 5 [1549]; CO 55:172-173.

815 Commentary on Matthew 10:28 [1555]; CO 45:288. “If we are branded with disgrace and ignominy, we but have a fuller place in the Kingdom of God. If we are slain, entrance into the blessed life will thus be open to us. Let us be ashamed to esteem less than the shadowy and fleeting allurements of the present life, those things on which the Lord has set so great a value” (3.8.7). Cf. Commentary on Luke 14:28 [1555]; CO 45:295-296.

816 Commentary on Isaiah 53:12 [1559]; CO 37:267. It is a testimony of the love of God that the glory of Christ was “hid under the contemptible abasement and simplicity of the cross.” Commentary on Colossians 2:3 [1548]; CO 52:100. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 16:20-28 [1555]; CO 45:479; 27:33; CO 45:764-765; Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:16 [1546]; CO 49:374; Commentary on 2 Corinthians 13:4 [1548]; CO 50:149-150; Commentary on Philippians 3:15 [1548]; CO 52:53; Commentary on 2 Timothy 2:11 [1548]; CO 52:364-365; Commentary on 1 Peter 4:12 [1551]; CO 55:278-279.

817 Commentary on Philippians 3:11 [1548]; CO 52:50. Elsewhere Calvin distinguishes between the mortification of the flesh and “the afflictions by which we are stirred up to meditate on the termination of the present life.” Through both of these forms of suffering and death believers commune with Christ, knowing that “as Christ's death is the gate of life, so we know that a blessed resurrection will be to us the termination of all miseries.” Later he adds that suffering under the “endurance of the cross” not only shakes believers from “carnal attachment to the present life,” but serves as “the path by which the heavenly kingdom is arrived at.” Commentary on 2 Corinthians 4:17 [1548]; CO 50:58-59 (Cf. 4:10; CO 49:54-55). Cf. Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 37-40.

can experience spiritual joy not because, like the Stoics, they think suffering does not harm them, but because the harm that they experience works toward their ultimate salvation” (3.8.11).

Equally central to the Christian life is the experience of outward mortification, a primary purpose of which is to prevent humans from inadvertently setting their hearts on the present life. In his commentary on 1 Timothy 4:8 Calvin notes that it is crucial for believers to “distinguish between the good things of the present and of the future life” in order that they might not make an idol of the former. For this reason God intentionally mingles the present life with “very many afflictions.”⁸¹⁸ He allows Christian nations to fall into war, Christian homes to be robbed or burned, Christian marriages to fall apart, and Christian children to abandon the faith.

Then only do we rightly advance by the discipline of the cross, when we learn that this life, judged in itself, is troubled, turbulent, unhappy in countless ways, and in no respect clearly happy; that all those things which are judged to be its goods are uncertain, fleeting, vain, and vitiated by many intermingled evils. From this, at the same time, we conclude that in this life we are to seek and hope for nothing but struggle. When we think of our crown, we are to raise our eyes to heaven. For this we must believe: 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.

In all of this “he sets before their eyes, through diseases and perils, how unstable and fleeting are all the goods that are subject to mortality” (3.9.1). Christians are “enclosed as slaves in the prison of our flesh,”⁸¹⁹ bound within “the earthly prison of the body” (3.6.5). For as the kingdom of Christ “lies beyond this world, ... we must, by contempt of this present life and mortification of the outward man, set ourselves with the whole bent of our mind to meditation on a blessed immortality.”⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁸Commentary on 1 Timothy 4:8 [1548]; CO 52:299-300.

⁸¹⁹Commentary on 1 John 3:2 [1551]; CO 55:330. Elsewhere he describes a person's body as “a house, as it were, in which he dwells.” Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:5 [1551]; CO 52:161.

⁸²⁰Commentary on 2 Corinthians, Argument [1548]; CO 50:7. In his comments on 2 Corinthians 5 Calvin writes that Christians are to display a healthy “contempt of the world” in order to replace their “misplaced attachment to this life” with the hope of the “felicity and glory of the future life.” The Apostle Paul can speak of the mortal body as a tent from which believers depart willingly because they recognize that it serves “a temporary purpose” and will be replaced by an eternal body (5:1-2; CO 50:60-61). “Accordingly, if we have any concern for eternity, we must strive diligently to strike off

As was discussed in Chapter 3, interpreted out of context these kinds of comments resemble a form of neoplatonic dualism. But Calvin's comments about the body must be read in eschatological rather than anthropological terms.⁸²¹ His disparaging comments about the body refer specifically to the body that is corrupted by sin and destined for death, and his exhortation to Christians to hold the world in contempt refers specifically to the world corrupted by sin and destined for judgment. They do *not* refer to the body or to the world as created by God and destined for restoration in the kingdom of Christ. Proper contempt for the mortal body and the fallen world is simply the recognition that these gifts are corrupted and destined for death until they are restored in the kingdom of Christ. It is *not* a rejection of the goodness of the body or creation. Calvin warns, "let believers accustom themselves to a contempt of the present life that engenders no hatred of it or ingratitude against God. Indeed, this life, however crammed with infinite miseries it may be, is still rightly to be counted among those blessings of God which are not to be spurned" (3.9.3). It is not *creation* that believers are to hold in contempt, nor is it *life*, both of which are good gifts of God. On the contrary, it is the *corruption* and *mortality* of this life that Christians despise. "Of course it is never to be hated except in so far as it holds us subject to sin; although not even hatred of that condition may ever properly be turned against life itself" (3.9.4). On

these evil fetters." All that human beings experience during the present life is like smoke, destined rapidly to pass away. It is for this reason that believers, "holding the world in contempt ... strive with all our heart to meditate upon the life to come" (3.9.2). "The true happiness which God offers to his children is eternal; it is then a shameful thing for us to be entangled with the world, which with all its benefits will soon vanish away." Commentary on 1 John 2:17 [1551]; CO 55:320. Cf. Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:16 [1548]; CO 52:331; Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 1:5 [1551]; CO 55:188-190; Commentary on Colossians 3:5 [1548]; CO 52:119; Commentary on 1 Peter, argument [1551]; CO 55:205; 1:13-16; CO 55:220; Commentary on James 1:10 [1550]; CO 55:388.

821 Luicen Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974); David E. Holwerda, "Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 318-321; Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 92-93. Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 44-47, 56-57. Quistorp notes that Calvin often portrays death as the experiential dividing line, for believers, between the present and future life, and argues that Calvin devalues the body by placing it, contrary to scripture, in "exclusive opposition to the soul" (60). But Quistorp fails to take seriously the extent to which Calvin's contempt for the present life is a longing for the resurrection rather than death. Instead of taking the reformer's comments in context, he too readily judges him to have contradicted himself (89; Cf. 171).

the contrary, as the heirs of the earth, Christians enjoy material blessings as down-payments of “the inheritance of eternal glory.” Thus “should we despise it as if it had no grain of good in itself?” (3.9.3).⁸²²

What is ultimately “perverse” for Calvin is an infatuation with this world that amounts to a love of sin and death.

When it comes to a comparison with the life to come, the present life can not only be safely neglected but, compared to the former, must be utterly despised and loathed. For, if heaven is our homeland, what else is the earth but our place of exile? If departure from the world is entry into life, what else is the world but a sepulcher? And what else is it for us to remain in life but to be immersed in death? If to be freed from the body is to be released into perfect freedom, what else is the body but a prison? (3.9.4)

Likewise, “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 ardently to seek what nature dreads?” In that sense it is not death for which the Christian yearns but for the life beyond death. “But, someone will object, there is nothing that does not crave to endure. To be sure, I agree; and so I maintain that we must have regard for the immortality to come, where a firm condition will be ours which nowhere appears on earth. For Paul very well teaches that believers eagerly hasten to death not because they want to be unclothed but because they long to be more fully clothed.” If mere animals, trees, and even stones “long for the final day of resurrection,” the end of their corruption, should not humans do the same? Believers “await the Lord's coming ... as the happiest thing of all” (3.9.5).⁸²³

822When Calvin says that believers die to the world he is not referring to the creation but to “whatever is opposed to the spiritual kingdom of Christ.” Commentary on Galatians 6:14 [1548]; CO 50:265. Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” 311-319. Miles emphasizes that for Calvin the body is good, the “helpless victim ... of the destructive hegemony of 'flesh'” (314).

823Calvin therefore argued that when the Apostle Paul declared that he desired to be with the Lord, his longing was not for death itself, but for the kingdom. “For death of itself will never be desired, because such a desire is at variance with natural feeling, but is desired for some particular reason, or with a view to some other end. Persons in despair have recourse to it from having become weary of life. Believers, on the other hand, willingly hasten forward to it because it is a deliverance from the bondage of sin and an introduction into the kingdom of heaven... believers do not cease to regard death with horror, but when they turn their eyes to that life which follows death, they easily overcome all dread by means of that consolation.” Commentary on Philippians 1:23 [1548]; CO 52:18. Cf. Commentary on Philippians

On the other hand, Christians should desire to remain in this world as long as they can be useful to their neighbors, maintaining their post like a soldier in battle (3.9.4). They need not renounce temporal goods or seek suffering for its own sake. What is more, they “wish well to others, and study so much as lies in them to ease them of all trouble.”⁸²⁴ But they always use temporal blessings “as they are helps to us in our pilgrimage [*peregrinationis adminicula*], and not that they may make us to forget our country [*patriae*].” In this way they “use this world [*praesenti saeculo*] without abusing it.”⁸²⁵ Against ascetics and libertines alike, Calvin declares, “Let this be our principle: that the use of God's gifts is not wrongly directed when it is referred to that end to which the Author himself created and destined them for us, since he created them for our good, not for our ruin” (3.10.2).

What makes the two kingdoms distinction useful is not that it consigns the Spirit's work to a certain sphere of life (it doesn't), but that it clarifies that the kingdom is only ever realized partially in the present age. Its establishment is always qualified, always conditioned by the cross.⁸²⁶ But the transient political and social circumstances in which believers find themselves must be distinguished from the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which is eternal. Such “outward things [*rebus externis*]” are to be used only for the “necessity of the present life [*praesentis vitae*], which passes away quickly as a shadow [*instar umbrae subito praeterfluit*].” Thus it is inappropriate “to contend for

2:27 [1548]; CO 52:40. As with other animals, a dread of death is “naturally implanted” in human beings, for “to wish to be separated from the body is revolting to nature.” Commentary on John 21:18 [1553]; CO 47:455. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:6 [1546]; CO 49:381-382; Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:4, 6 [1548]; CO 50:61-62, 63.

824Commentary on Acts 27:30 [1554]; CO 48:549. The Apostle Paul, Calvin suggests, distinguishes between the things in themselves and the “quality of them [*qualitate*].” Paul is not divesting himself of these good things but of his confidence in them. “It is not expressly necessary that you be a poor man in order that you may be a Christian, but if it please the Lord that it should be so you ought to be prepared to endure poverty.” Commentary on Philippians 3:8 [1548]; CO 52:47-48. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 12:1 [1549]; CO 55:171.

825Commentary on Romans 13:14 [1556]; CO 49:256. Christians are free to use the things of this creation just as they would have before the world was corrupted by sin (3.10.3). Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:29.

826For Calvin “the road to the establishment of the Kingdom was that of suffering witness.” Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 160.

outward things [*rebus externis*]” which are really “corruptible things [*rebus corruptioni*].”⁸²⁷ The kingdom of God does not consist in “external things [*rebus externis*]” like meat and drink, according to Romans 14:17, a text Calvin repeatedly quotes with this theme in view, but of “spiritual things [*rebus spiritualibus*]” such as “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”⁸²⁸ Believers live life modestly, “having their minds always intent upon the future manifestation of Christ's kingdom.”⁸²⁹

Christian Service in the Political Kingdom

Among those temporary things that will pass away, abolished when Christ presents his kingdom to the Father, Calvin includes “all powers that are lawful [*potestates legitimae*] and ordained by God.” For “we know that all earthly principalities and honors [*principatus et honores terrenos*] are connected exclusively with the keeping up of the present life [*vitae praesentis*] and consequently are a part of the world [*mundi*]. Hence it follows that they are temporary [*temporales*].” All political and social relationships are and will be transcended within the kingdom of Christ.

Hence as the world will have an end, so also will government and magistracy and laws and distinctions of ranks and different orders of dignities and everything of that nature [*politia, et magistratus, et leges, et distinctiones ordinum, et gradus dignitatum, et quidquid tale est*]. There will be no more any distinction between servant and master [*servus a domino*], between king and peasant [*rex a plebeio*], between magistrate and private citizen [*a privato magistratus*].

Indeed, even angelic principalities and “ministries and superiorities in the church [*ecclesia ... ministeria et praefecturae*]” will end, that “God may exercise his power and dominion [*potestatem ... principatumque*] by himself alone, and not by the hands of men or angels.”⁸³⁰

827Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:13 [1546]; CO 49:397.

828Commentary on Romans 14:17 [1556]; CO 49:265-266. Cf. Commentary on Psalm 85:10 [1557]; CO 31:789-790.

829Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 1:10 [1550]; CO 52:192. And “if we believe heaven is our country, it is better to transmit our possessions thither than to keep them here where upon our sudden migration they would be lost to us” (3.18.6).

830Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:24 [1546]; CO 49:546-547.

From the perspective of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, Calvin argues, the various relations associated with wealth, class, labor, gender, and government are entirely transcended. In Christ humans are free from every temporal power that might possibly lay a claim on them. Our “liberty,” he declares in his comments on Colossians 2:15, the classic *Christus victor* text, “is the spoil which Christ has rescued from the devil ... For there is no tribunal so magnificent, no throne so stately, no show of triumph so distinguished, no chariot so elevated, as is the gibbet on which Christ has subdued death and the devil, the prince of death, nay more, has utterly trodden them under his feet.”⁸³¹ Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28 should therefore be taken at face value: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The reformer concludes, “it is of no consequence to what nation [*gentis*] or condition [*conditionis*] any one may belong, nor is circumcision any more regarded than sex or civil rank [*civilem statum*].”⁸³² As he puts it earlier in the same commentary, “in the government of the world [*mundi politia*] distinctions of rank are admitted, but in the spiritual kingdom of Christ [*spirituali ... Christi regno*] they can have no place.”⁸³³

Stevenson plausibly identifies in Calvin’s concept of Christian liberty a “new appreciation of human individuality” that has the potential of enhancing the individual’s “moral and political status.”⁸³⁴ Indeed, “no particular human values or orders can stand

831Commentary on Colossians 2:15 [1548]; CO 52:109.

832Commentary on Galatians 3:28 [1548]; CO 50:222-223.

833Commentary on Galatians 2:6 [1548]; CO 50:186-187. This characterization of Calvin’s thought needs to be qualified, however. The reformer was unwilling to say that there will be absolute equality in the future kingdom of God. His point, rather, was that the inequalities and vocations of the present age would not endure into that kingdom. As he puts it in his commentary on Matthew 20:23, “It is also worthy of our notice, that these words do not imply that there will be equality among the children of God, after they have been admitted to the heavenly glory, but rather that to each is promised that degree of honor to which he has been set apart by the eternal purpose of God.” Commentary on Matthew 20:23 [1555]; CO 45:555. No doubt Calvin’s theology of rewards is relevant here. The reformer argued that God will graciously reward the good works of human beings in the age to come (3.18.1). But the significance of this qualification should not be exaggerated. Calvin believed that the varying degrees of honor that may be present in the coming kingdom will be rooted in God’s eternal purpose rather than in any rank or achievement of the present life.

834Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 11. The individual conscience becomes, as it were, the Archimedean

up to the explosive presence of a single redeemed human person.”⁸³⁵ But, Stevenson points out, for Calvin conscience “confirms the individual's place in a larger order of creation, judgment, and redemption,” establishing humility and self-denial as fundamental Christian virtues, and directing believers toward their neighbors in “mutual subjection and mutual service.”⁸³⁶ Christian liberty is therefore qualified by “communal responsibility.”⁸³⁷ In the final analysis, “The last thing Calvin wished to propose was an individual fully sufficient and fully independent. Individual *insufficiency* and individual *dependence* worked themselves out clearly in the world. Believers found their strength and progress *within* their membership in institutional society.”⁸³⁸

Thus while Calvin uses the two kingdoms distinction to demonstrate the liberty of Christians from all orders, ranks, and governments, he uses the same doctrine to insist that Christians are nevertheless bound to submit to such manifestations of God's providence as the context for service. Christ has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, but

this is not to be taken as meaning that worldly distinctions [*mundi ordines*] are abolished. For Paul speaks here of spiritual dominion [*spirituali dominio*], while the governments of the world are political [*dominia autem mundi sunt politica*] ... While, therefore, our religion acknowledges but one Lord, this is no hindrance in the way of civil governments [*politia*] having many lords, to whom honor and respect are due in that one Lord [*in illo unico Domino*].⁸³⁹

Likewise, while Christians are not to judge one another with regard to outward matters, “let us remember that the subject here is not civil government [*externa politia*], in which the edicts and laws of magistrates have place, but the spiritual government of the soul

fulcrum by which the triune God discloses his will in the midst of historical circumstance,” the “key operating component of each human being, and so the principal source of political maturity” (15). Conscience even trumps the teaching of the church, though not the word. There can be little doubt that Calvin's view of humanity contributes at a basic level to an “egalitarian impulse” (27). Such an emphasis on equality even “calls into question all institutional inequalities” (28).

835Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 19.

836Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 42.

837Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 55.

838Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 56.

839Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8:6 [1546]; CO 49:432. Cf. W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1971), 57-59.

[*spirituali animae regimine*], in which the word of God alone ought to bear rule.”⁸⁴⁰

How does Calvin justify such a practical limitation of Christian liberty in social and political affairs, while at the same time insisting on its radical implications with respect to the kingdom of God? Liberty characterizes the relation between a human being and God, he argues, but it does not always have to be exercised before others in order to be meaningful.⁸⁴¹ Calvin's rhetoric is sometimes reminiscent of Luther in this respect. First, Christians “are constituted lords of all things in such a way that we are not to bring ourselves under bondage to anything.” Christian liberty should not be used as a pretext for injustice and vice, in other words, because such yielding to lust actually places Christians in “subjection to outward [*externis*] things, which ought to be under subjection to us.”⁸⁴² Second, Christian liberty with respect to “outward things [*rebus externis*]” does not justify disobedience to God, for the Apostle Paul “shows that the body is subject to God no less than the soul” as both are temples of the Holy Spirit. God “has redeemed both,” and he rules by his word “even the outward actions of our life.”⁸⁴³

Third, “everyone has liberty inwardly [*intus*] in the sight of God on this condition, that all must restrict the use of their liberty with a view to mutual edification.”⁸⁴⁴ Liberty is always regulated by the obligation to love one's neighbor, and “it is contrary to love to occasion grief to anyone.”⁸⁴⁵ Not only should Christians be loath to see their liberty be the cause of opposition to the gospel of Christ, but they should serve their neighbors winsomely with the goal of winning them to Christ.⁸⁴⁶ Thus an important distinction must be maintained. “Liberty lies in the conscience and looks to God,” but “the use of it

840Commentary on James 4:12 [1551]; CO 55:420.

841Commentary on Romans 15:22 [1556]; CO 49:267-268.

842Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:12 [1546]; CO 49:396.

843Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:20 [1546]; CO 49:400.

844Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:12 [1546]; CO 49:396.

845Commentary on Romans 14:15 [1556]; CO 49:265. For an excellent discussion of Calvin on the “duties of love” see Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 71-72.

846They are “debtors to all, even strangers, that we may, if possible, gain them.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:32 [1546]; CO 49:471.

lies in outward matters and deals not with God only but with men.”⁸⁴⁷ Finally, Christian freedom is always to be exercised in obedience to what Calvin describes as “the law of Christian freedom,” the call to be content whatever one's outward state. “They say that these are things indifferent. I admit it, provided they are used indifferently. But when they are coveted too greedily, when they are proudly boasted of, when they are lavishly squandered, things that were of themselves otherwise lawful are certainly defiled by these vices” (3.19.9).⁸⁴⁸

Calvin explains this paradox by considering two dimensions to the human conscience, the seat of Christian liberty. On the one hand, he defines conscience proper as a human “awareness of divine judgment,” an internal “witness which does not let them hide their sins but arraigns them as guilty before the judgment seat” (4.10.3).⁸⁴⁹ The conscience judges the actions that a person exercises toward others, he recognizes, but it does so with respect to her relationship with God, who sees the heart, not other human beings, who only regard outward actions. This is what Calvin means when he says that “a law is said to bind the conscience when it simply binds man, without regard to other men, or without having any consideration for them” (4.10.4).⁸⁵⁰

On the other hand, Calvin explains that the conscience can be understood in a broader sense as well. In its strict sense it only binds a person before God, but in a broader sense it binds him to serve and submit to his fellow human beings. For instance, Romans 13:5 calls Christians to submit to the governing authorities for conscience'

847Commentary on Galatians 5:13 [1548]; CO 50:250.

848For example, clothing is indifferent, but that doesn't mean that when it comes to clothing people “are free to do as they please,” for “ambition, pride, affectation of display, and all things of this kind, are not indifferent things.” Christians should therefore dress in accord with principles of “usefulness and decency,” of “moderation and modesty.” Commentary on 1 Peter 3:3 [1551]; CO 55:254.

849It is the inner testimony of a person's mind, “imprinted on their hearts” by natural law, enabling a process of discrimination and judgment through which they “distinguish between what is just and unjust.” Commentary on Romans 2:15 [1556]; CO 49:38-39. Cf. Commentary on 1 Peter 3:21 [1551]; CO 55:269.

850“For there is a certain inward sense or feeling which has respect to God alone, and from that comes faithfulness and integrity which we use towards men.” Commentary on Acts 24:16 [1554]; CO 48:523-524.

sake.⁸⁵¹ While spiritual laws bind human consciences in and of themselves (or in each *species*), the laws of magistrates simply bind human consciences in general (or as a *genus*). “For even though individual laws may not apply to the conscience as it binds, we are still held by God's general command, which commends to us the authority of magistrates” (4.10.5). In other words, there is a distinction between the general command to obey the magistrate by virtue of her office, which binds the conscience, and the particular laws framed by the magistrate, which do not bind the conscience *per se*. Calvin suggests that it is in the same sense that believers are obligated to yield their liberty so as to serve their neighbors. “Is it not reasonable, too, that we should for the same reason accommodate ourselves to weak brethren – that is, because we are to this extent subject to them in the sight of God?” Thus on the one hand “the soul of a pious man looks exclusively to the tribunal of God, has no regard to men, is satisfied with the blessing of liberty procured for it by Christ, and is bound to no individuals, and to no circumstances of time or place.” In terms of practical conduct, however, matters are quite different.⁸⁵² For instance, a person is free regarding the “indifferent” matter of eating meat offered to idols, but if eating the meat would offend a sister it would be a sin to do so.⁸⁵³ This does not bind the Christian's conscience before God. She is still free to eat meat (the *species*), but she is not free to offend her fellow believer (the *genus*). One can be free before God, while being bound before human beings (4.10.4).⁸⁵⁴

851Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:29 [1546]; CO 49:470. “For there is a certain inward sense or feeling which has respect to God alone, and from this arises faithfulness and integrity which we exercise towards men.” Commentary on Acts 24:16 [1554]; CO 48:524.

852Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:29 [1546]; CO 49:470.

853Of course, Calvin distinguishes between genuinely weak Christians and pharisaical Christians, between offense received and offense taken. See, for instance, *Institutes* 3.19.11-13; Commentary on 1 Corinthians 8:9, 13; CO 49:434, 435-436; Commentary on Galatians 2:3-5, 11-14 [1548]; CO 50:184-185, 192-193.

854Hopfl complains that this distinction, with reference to the constitutions of the church, is a “hair-splitting distinction, an *argutia* of the sort he abominated in the scholastics” (38), a “distinction without a difference” (39). Calvin claims that matters of polity do not bind the conscience, Hopfl writes, “But on further inspection of Calvin's account, that seems to be precisely what they do.” Because it ends up being a moral duty to obey such laws “they do 'bind the conscience', even if they do so in a more circuitous and indirect manner than express commands of God” (39). Hopfl is nothing if not cynical in his reading of Calvin on this point. Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 38-39, 115. Yet if the

This obligation of conscience – to serve one's neighbors – underlies the whole range of human relationships, from the casual to the institutional. Calvin makes this point clear in his introduction to the household codes in the epistle to the Ephesians, observing that the Apostle Paul presents mutual submission as the foundation of the entire discourse. “God has bound us so strongly to each other that no man ought to endeavor to avoid subjection, and where love reigns, mutual services will be rendered. I do not except even kings and governors, whose very authority is held for the service of the community. It is highly proper that all should be exhorted to be subject to each other in their turn.”⁸⁵⁵ Vocation is thus the primary means through which human beings share the “sacred bond” of society.⁸⁵⁶ Specific vocations, the “various conditions of life [*gradus*],” are simply particularized expressions of the broader obligation of human service, “for besides the universal bond of subjection, some are more closely bound to each other according to their respective callings [*vocatio*].”⁸⁵⁷ Aristotle was therefore wrong to suggest that the good life is the life of contemplation, for “we know that men were created for the express purpose of being employed in labor of various kinds, and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when every man applies diligently to his own calling and endeavors to live in such a manner as to contribute to the general advantage.”⁸⁵⁸ Thus “Let every one serve his nearest neighbors as far as charity will allow

distinction makes sense with respect to political laws, matters of vocation, and the principle of charity, it is hard to see why it becomes so problematic with respect to the general order of ecclesiastical affairs.

855Commentary on Ephesians 5:21 [1548]; CO 51:221-222.

856Commentary on Genesis 37:25 [1554]; CO 23:488

857Commentary on Ephesians 5:22 [1548]; CO 51:222. The same is true of Calvin's comments on the household codes in Colossians, which Calvin views through the lens of vocation. Children, for instance, are not to obey their parents when commanded to disobey God, but they are otherwise to obey their parents in “things indifferent [*rebus mediis*],” giving “deference to the station which their parents occupy . . . it being always understood that conscience is not to be infringed upon.” Commentary on Colossians 3:20 [1548]; CO 52:126. “We are taught by the Spirit to reverence all the natural ties which bind us together in society. Besides the common and universal one of humanity, there are others of a more sacred kind, by which we should feel ourselves attached to men in proportion as they are more nearly connected with us than others by neighborhood, relationship, or professional calling.” Commentary on Psalm 55:12 [1557]; CO 31:540.

858Commentary on Luke 10:38 [1555]; CO 45:382. But the Greeks were right to say that the human person is a social animal (10:30; CO 45:613-614). There is no form of life more pleasing to God “than that which yields some advantage to human society.” Commentary on Matthew 25:24 [1555]; CO

and as custom demands.”⁸⁵⁹ God will surely bless a society, in both its public and private dimensions, in which each person submits himself to providence by following his vocation.⁸⁶⁰

Consistent with his belief that God's providence preserves order in a fallen world, Calvin believed a person's vocation is dictated by the circumstances of providence. Typical of his age of limited vocational mobility, he feared that those who became too anxious about their circumstances were likely to disrupt the social order. God “has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life,” in part in order that people will not “heedlessly wander about throughout life” (3.10.6).⁸⁶¹ Injustice most often takes place, he reminds his readers, when each person is “too tenacious of his own rights” without regard to the rights of others.⁸⁶² When it comes to outward matters, the Christian is called to love, service, and the edification of the neighbor before all private advantage.

In none of Calvin's writings does he place the obligations of service and vocation in closer counterpoint to Christian liberty than in his commentary on 1 Peter. Because the gospel proclaims that Christians are heirs of the world, he observes, many in the early church “thought the gospel was a proclamation of such liberty that everyone might deem himself as free from servitude.”⁸⁶³ Yet Peter shows that all Christian liberty is to be

45:570. “[W]here there are no assemblies for legitimate amusements, life becomes brutal, for we know that man is a sociable being.” Commentary on Lamentations 5:14 [1563]; CO 39:639. Cf. David Little, *Religion, Order, and Law* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 58-60.

859Commentary on Daniel 6:17 [1561]; CO 41:20.

860The world is “so troubled and confused as it actually is – justice put to flight in cities, the husband and the wife mutually accusing each other, fathers and mothers complaining of their children” – because so few people “in their vocation, turn to God.” “But were all men humbly to submit themselves to the providence of God, there is no doubt that this blessing which Solomon here commends would shed its lustre on all parts of our life, both public and private.” Commentary on Psalm 127:1 [1557]; CO 32:321-322.

861The best means of a tranquil life is when “everyone, intent upon the duties of his own calling, discharges those duties which are enjoined upon him by the Lord and devotes himself to these things.” Thus everyone “keeps within his own limits” rather than disrupting the public life of the community. Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:11 [1550]; CO 52:163-164. Miles puts it only a little too strongly when she writes that Calvin “uses the idea of ‘calling’ to absolutize the condition in which a person finds himself.” Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” 305.

862Commentary on Matthew 5:25 [1555]; CO 45:177.

863Commentary on 1 Peter 2:13 [1551]; CO 55:243 (Cf. 2:11; CO 55:242).

directed to the good of our neighbors. “In short, it is a free servitude and a serving freedom [*In summa, est libera servitus, et serva libertas*].” To be sure, “our consciences become free, but this does not prevent us from serving God, who requires us also to be subject to men.”⁸⁶⁴ Christians “ought to cultivate, as far as we can, peace and friendship with all.”⁸⁶⁵ This emphasis is the context for Peter’s discussion of the relations between masters and slaves, husbands and wives, magistrates and subjects. “In this expression he includes all the duties of humanity and kindness which we ought to perform towards our neighbors. And in these is included obedience to magistrates, without which concord among men cannot be cultivated.” Such service helps to ensure that unbelievers will allow Christians to live in peace,⁸⁶⁶ and it increases the likelihood that “the unbelieving, led by our good works, would become obedient to God.”⁸⁶⁷ Calvin anticipates the objection that Christians should be more concerned about the glory of God than the approval of human beings. But “lest anyone should further object and say that the unbelieving are by no means worthy of so much regard that God’s children should form their life to please them, Peter expressly reminds us that we are bound by God’s command to shut up their mouths.”⁸⁶⁸ *In summa, est libera servitus, et serva libertas.*

Calvin’s two kingdoms paradigm shaped his understanding of temporal institutions that he viewed as necessary evils, such as slavery. Slavery, unlike civil government, is a curse on the human race rather than a blessing. God desires human beings to be free, and when the kingdom of Christ is fully completed slavery will be abolished. This is why God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and forbade them to hold one another in perpetual slavery.⁸⁶⁹ It is also why the Apostle Paul urged

⁸⁶⁴Commentary on 1 Peter 2:16 [1551]; CO 55:246.

⁸⁶⁵Commentary on 1 Peter 2:17 [1551]; CO 55:247.

⁸⁶⁶Christians “will do more towards obtaining a quiet life by kindness than by violence and promptitude in taking revenge.” Commentary on 1 Peter 3:14 [1551]; CO 55:260-261. “God is not feared, nor their just right rendered to men, unless civil order prevails among us and magistrates retain their authority” (2:17; CO 55:247).

⁸⁶⁷Commentary on 1 Peter 2:12 [1551]; CO 55:243 (Cf. 2:13; CO 55:243).

⁸⁶⁸Commentary on 1 Peter 2:15 [1551]; CO 55:246.

⁸⁶⁹Commentary on Jeremiah 34:8-17 [1563]; CO 39:87-91. Cf. Commentary on Lamentations 5:8 [1563];

that slaves should seek their freedom if possible because “liberty is not merely good but also more advantageous than servitude.”⁸⁷⁰ Calvin utterly rejects any system of slavery characterized by absolute power, and he applauds the abolition of slavery in Christendom. It is “by no means to be wished that there should be slaves among us as there were formerly among all nations, and as there are now among barbarians.”⁸⁷¹ Calvin speculates that it was this sort of logic that led many within the early church to believe the gospel freed them from slavery. Christian slaves reasoned that if Christians are all brothers in Christ, “it was unreasonable that they should be the slaves of brethren.” For “The name of brother may be thought to constitute equality [*aequalitatem*], and consequently to take away dominion [*dominium*].”⁸⁷² Similarly, those who were slaves of unbelieving masters judged it “unreasonable that they who serve the devil should have dominion over the children of God.”⁸⁷³

On the other hand, sensitive to the witness of scripture, Calvin insists that in God's providence slavery sometimes “forms a part of civil or social subjection” within which Christians find themselves, whether as masters or as slaves.⁸⁷⁴ While slavery is alien to the kingdom of Christ, “it is owing to the providence of God that there are different ranks and stations [*gradus et ordines*] in the world.”⁸⁷⁵ Calvin therefore ponders, “Is perpetual servitude so displeasing to God that it ought not to be deemed lawful?” The answer, he writes, is obvious: the patriarchs and early church serve as decisive examples that slavery is sometimes lawful. “If, then, servitude were unlawful,

CO 39:635-636.

870Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:21 [1546]; CO 49:416 (Cf. 7:22; CO 49:416).

871Commentary on Jeremiah 34:8-17 [1563]; CO 39:87-91. Cf. Commentary on Genesis 16:8 [1554]; CO 23:227-228).

872Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:2 [1548]; CO 52:323.

873Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:1 [1548]; CO 52:322.

874Commentary on 1 Peter 2:18 [1551]; CO 55:247. “Hence we infer that the faith of the gospel does not overturn civil government [*politicum ordinem*] or set aside the power and authority which masters have over slaves.” Commentary on Philemon 1:20 [1550]; CO 52:448.

875Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:21 [1546]; CO 49:416. Slaves should “not suppose that by the judgment of men” they have been “thrown into slavery.” Commentary on Ephesians 6:5 [1548]; CO 51:230-231.

the apostles would have never tolerated it.”⁸⁷⁶ Although Christians possess “the liberty of the spirit [*libertas spiritus*],” they are not to reason from this that they will necessarily be blessed in this life with the “the liberty of the flesh [*carnis libertati*].” Christian teaching does not subvert the “political order [*politicum ordinem*]” but tends rather to confirm it.⁸⁷⁷

Calvin's two kingdoms perspective therefore leads him to critique slavery by emphasizing the liberty of the Christian and the equality of master and slave, while at the same time calling Christian masters to treat their slaves justly and Christian slaves freely to serve their masters. On the one hand, the logic of the gospel destroys any notion that slaves are inferior to their masters, the New Testament affirming a startling equality between master and slave. “It is no small honor that God has made them [slaves] equal [*aequavit*] to earthly [*terrenis*] lords in that which is of the highest importance, for they have the same adoption in common with them.”⁸⁷⁸ The Apostle Paul prescribes “mutual equity [*mutuamque aequabilitatem*]” between master and slave, that is, an “analogical or distributive right [*iure analogo, aut distributivo*].”⁸⁷⁹ For Aristotle, of course, the concept of analogical right implied a lesser form of justice that, strictly speaking, is not true justice. For Calvin, on the other hand, the concept is grounded in the spiritual equality of master and slave, which is regulated by love.⁸⁸⁰

On the other hand, Calvin argues that Christian slaves are called to serve their masters not in a “forced subjection,” as if their masters have any fundamental right to

876“Now as they commanded masters only to be humane towards their servants, and not to treat them violently and reproachfully, it follows that what was not denied was permitted, that is, to retain their own servants.” Commentary on Jeremiah 34:8-17 [1563]; CO 39:87-91.

877Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:22 [1546]; CO 49:416. Cf. Commentary on Ephesians 6:5 [1548]; CO 51:230.

878Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:2 [1548]; CO 52:323. Even when “slaves were scarcely reckoned among the number of men,” God “adopts them as his own sons.” Commentary on Genesis 17:12 [1554]; CO 23:242.

879Commentary on Colossians 4:1 [1548]; CO 52:127.

880“God allows to masters no power over them beyond what is consistent with the law of love.” Christian slaveholders are not to treat their slaves according to utilitarian calculation but according to a measure of equality, for “they too are debtors to their servants.” Commentary on Ephesians 6:9 [1548]; CO 51:231-232.

their service, but as a means of imitating Christ.⁸⁸¹ Obedience is a duty of conscience only in this broader sense.⁸⁸² Christian slaves serve their masters as a means of faithful service to and imitation of Christ, remembering that those who would serve God “must necessarily endeavor to overcome evil with good.”⁸⁸³ The Christian's “service is done to men in such a way that Christ at the same time holds supremacy of dominion and is the supreme master.” Thus “while they willingly serve their masters, their services are acceptable to Christ, as though they had been rendered to him.” At the same time, they look in hopeful expectation for the “judgment of God” that will make their freedom complete.⁸⁸⁴ They are only obligated to obey their masters in “external things [*rebus externis*],”⁸⁸⁵ and they are under no circumstances “to subject themselves to the wicked or depraved inclinations of their masters.”⁸⁸⁶

The two kingdoms framework also guided Calvin's analysis of institutions that he regarded as being rooted in creation, but also as being temporary and corrupted by the fall, such as gender. In the spiritual kingdom there is equality between men and women, an equality that is more basic than any other dimension of the gender relationship, while in the civil order men and women have distinct roles, women being in subjection to men.⁸⁸⁷ Calvin's clearest statement on gender from the perspective of his two kingdoms theology appears in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11. The reformer acknowledges that there is an apparent contradiction between Paul's declaration in Galatians 3:28 that

881Commentary on 1 Peter 2:18 [1551]; CO 55:247-248.

882While an unjust master “does not for the present lose his right,” that right is merely political. The Christian slave “performs his duty not from a regard to men but to God.” Commentary on 1 Peter 2:18 [1551]; CO 55:247-248.

883Commentary on 1 Peter 2:19 [1551]; CO 55:248-249. Cf. Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:1-2 [1548]; CO 52:322-323.

884Commentary on Colossians 3:22 [1548]; CO 52:126-127. Cf. Commentary on Philemon 1:16 [1550]; CO 52:447.

885Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:18 [1546]; CO 49:414. Cf. Commentary on Ephesians 6:5 [1548]; CO 51:230-231.

886Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:23 [1546]; CO 49:416-417.

887The subjection is not simply within marriage “but also in celibacy, for I do not speak of cohabitation merely, but also of civil offices [*civilibus officiis*].” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:11 [1546]; CO 49:477-478.

in Christ there is neither male nor female, and his statement in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that while a man's head is Christ, a woman's head is her husband.

When he says that there is no difference between the man and woman, he is treating of Christ's spiritual kingdom [*de spirituali Christi regno*], in which individual distinctions are not regarded or made any account of, for it has nothing to do with the body and has nothing to do with the outward relationships of mankind [*externam hominum societatem*], but has to do solely with the soul [*in spiritu situm est*] – on which account he declares that there is no difference, even between bond and free. In the meantime, however, he does not disturb civil order [*civilem ordinem*] or honorary distinctions, which cannot be dispensed with in ordinary life. Here, on the other hand, he reasons respecting outward propriety and decorum [*externa honestate atque decoro*] – which is a part of ecclesiastical polity [*politiae ecclesiasticae*]. Hence, as regards spiritual connection [*spiritualem coniunctionem*] in the sight of God, and inwardly in the conscience, Christ is the head of the man and of the woman without any distinction, because as to that there is no regard paid to male or female, but as regards external arrangement and political decorum [*externam compositionem et decorum politicum*], the man follows Christ and the woman the man, so that they are not upon the same footing [*gradus*], but on the contrary, this inequality [*inaequalitas*] exists.⁸⁸⁸

In his sermon on Galatians 3:28 Calvin puts the distinction in eschatological terms, noting of the various relationships of civil order, including that of man and woman, “when we come to the heavenly life, let us assure ourselves that all worldly things pass and vanish away, as the world and its fashion passes, says Saint Paul, but the kingdom of God endures forever.”⁸⁸⁹ Douglass is therefore correct when she writes that for Calvin, “In the kingdom of God, which begins now in the church, all differences of sex and social status will be destroyed and spiritual equality made manifest.”⁸⁹⁰

But of course, Calvin regards gender and patriarchy as being rooted in creation. The woman is a kind of “appendage to the man” and is joined to him on the condition that she obeys him. Since “God did not create two chiefs of equal power [*aequa potestate*] ... the Apostle justly reminds us of that order of creation in which the eternal

⁸⁸⁸Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:3 [1546]; CO 49:474. The Apostle Paul's reference to a distinction of 'glory' in 1 Corinthians 11:7, Calvin argued, is similar. It “relates to the order of marriage, and hence it belongs to the present life, and is not connected with conscience.” The issue is simply of “distinction”, “order [*gradu*] of dignity” and “superiority [*principatu*]” (11:7; CO 49:476). Cf. Sermon on 1 Corinthians 11:2-3; Commentary on Genesis 1:26 [1554]; CO 23:27).

⁸⁸⁹Sermon on Galatians 3:28 (23rd Sermon); CO 50:568.

⁸⁹⁰Douglass, “Christian Freedom,” 161.

and inviolable [*aeterna et inviolabilis*] appointment of God is strikingly displayed.⁸⁹¹ A woman “by nature (that is, by the ordinary law of God) is formed to obey, for *gunaikokratia* (the government of women) has always been regarded by all wise persons as a monstrous thing, and therefore, so to speak, it will be a mingling of heaven and earth if women usurp the right to teach.”⁸⁹² In contrast, the man “is to hold the first place in the government of the house [*oeconomia principatum*]. For the *paterfamilias* is like a king in his own house [*regis domi*].”⁸⁹³ As Calvin puts it in his sermon on Galatians 3:28, with references to the vocational relationships of the political kingdom, “We know then that this order is inviolable, and our Lord Jesus Christ is not come into the world to make such confusion as to abolish that which was established by God his father.”⁸⁹⁴

On the other hand, because marriage and gender are merely temporal and political institutions, matters of “external polity [*externa politia*],” Christians must remember “that the things of which he here treats are intermediate and indifferent [*medias et indifferentes*], in which there is nothing unlawful [*illicitum*], but what is at variance with propriety [*decoro*] and edification.”⁸⁹⁵ Gender is not only transcended in

891Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:13 [1548]; CO 52:277. Calvin seems to use the words 'eternal' and 'inviolable' loosely here, with reference to the permanence of the general temporal order rather than to its particular expressions or to the kingdom of Christ. For, as will be seen, he ordinarily insists that this order is neither eternal, nor are its particular expressions inviolable. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:7-8 [1546]; CO 49:476; The principle is as true of unmarried women as it is of wives. Paul has in view “God’s perpetual law [*perpetuam Dei legem*], which has made the female sex subject to the authority [*imperio*] of men. On this account all women are born, that they may acknowledge themselves inferior in consequence of the superiority [*praestantiae*] of the male sex” (11:10; CO 49:477). The Apostle “sets forth nature as the mistress of decorum, and what was at that time in common use by universal consent and custom – even among the Greeks – he speaks of as being natural” (11:12; CO 49:478). Thompson rightly observes, “What seems 'divinely instituted,' then, is not only woman’s spiritual equality, which is not a matter of *politia*; but also her this-worldly inferiority and submission to man – and this is a matter of *politia*.” Thompson, *Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah*, 256.

892Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:11 [1548]; CO 52:276. “Unquestionably, wherever even natural propriety has been maintained, women have in all ages been excluded from the public management of affairs [*publica administratione exclusae*]. It is the dictate of common sense that female government [*gynaecocratian*] is improper and unseemly.” It “becomes” a woman to be “under subjection.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:34 [1546]; CO 49:533.

893Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:4 [1546]; CO 49:475 (Cf. 11:12 [1546]; CO 49:478). Yet “There are few either of men or women that consider their calling [*vocationem*]. How rarely do you find a man who willingly bears the burden of governing [*regendae*] a wife? How reluctantly does a woman submit to that yoke?” Commentary on 1 Timothy 5:14 [1548]; CO 52:314.

894Sermon on Galatians 3:28 (23rd Sermon); CO 50:568.

895Commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:35 [1546]; CO 49:533.

the kingdom of Christ, but the natural order can occasionally be suspended without injustice. For instance, God gave Paul “wisdom that he might recommend this order in external things [*ordinem ... in rebus externis*] at Corinth and in other places, not that it might be an inviolable law [*lex inviolabilis*], like those that relate to the spiritual worship of God, but that it might be a useful directory [*forma utilis*] to all the sons of God, and not by any means to be ignored.”⁸⁹⁶ Similarly, “it was an extraordinary thing when God gave authority to a woman, as was the case with [the prophetess] Deborah, that no one may consider this singular precedent as a common rule.”⁸⁹⁷ Calvin points to the examples of Miriam and Huldah, conceding, “We know that the gift of prophecy is sometimes though rarely allowed to women.”⁸⁹⁸ Even more prestigious, women were given a commission as the first witnesses of the resurrection, “to announce the gospel to the apostles, so as to become their instructors.”⁸⁹⁹ Calvin defended the legitimacy of Queen Elizabeth's rule over England despite the fact that it was not in accord with the ordinary rule of nature.⁹⁰⁰ To be sure, Calvin was no feminist. Throughout his writings he betrayed numerous patriarchal stereotypes about women, and, especially on this point, his biases sometimes muddied his better exegetical judgments. He insists that cases of female leadership are exceptions that do not alter the general rule, speculating that God occasionally gives women authority over men to shame the latter. Still, he not only affirms that women should hold the ecclesiastical office of deacon, but, rare for his time, that in emergency situations they might teach and administer the sacraments. “Whatever may be the reason, women have sometimes enjoyed the prophetic gift.”⁹⁰¹

⁸⁹⁶Commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:37 [1546]; CO 49:534-535.

⁸⁹⁷Commentary on Micah 6:4 [1559]; CO 43:388.

⁸⁹⁸Commentary on Ezekiel 13:17-18 [1565]; CO 40:288. Cf. Commentary on Exodus 15:20 [1565]; CO 24:162.

⁸⁹⁹Commentary on Matthew 28:1-7 [1555]; CO 45:792-793. See also Calvin's interest in the fact that the woman Priscilla was involved in the corrective training of the pastor Apollos. Commentary on Acts 18:26 [1554]; CO 48:437-438.

⁹⁰⁰Letter to William Cecil, 1559; CO 17:490-491; Cf. Letter to Bullinger, April 28, 1554; CO 15:125.

⁹⁰¹Commentary on Ezekiel 13:17-18 [1565]; CO 40:288. Cf. Thompson, *Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah*, 260; Douglass, “Christian Freedom,” 169-172. Calvin insists, “Extraordinary acts done by God do not overturn the ordinary rules of government [*communem politiam*] by which he intended that we

Similarly, while in the order of creation “everyone equally and without exception” is called to marriage, in the New Testament this has changed.⁹⁰² Because “the anxieties and distresses in which married persons are involved arise from the affairs of the world [*terrenis provenire*],” or of the “outward man” that is passing away, marriage can distract a Christian woman from the kingdom of Christ.⁹⁰³ Women freed from such hindrances, on the other hand, are able to “devote ourselves wholly to meditation on heavenly things [*rerum coelestium*].”⁹⁰⁴ Married persons can also seek first the kingdom of God, but “marriage is like a burden, by which the mind of a pious man is weighed down so that he does not move God-ward with so much alacrity.”⁹⁰⁵ While most people will continue to be called into marriage, it remains the case that “celibacy is better than marriage because it has more liberty so that persons can serve God with greater freedom.”⁹⁰⁶

What complicated the matter further for Calvin was that marriage and gender relations are thoroughly corrupted by sin. Calvin agrees that the place of women is now “less voluntary and agreeable” than it was before the fall into sin. Because of sin women are “deprived of all liberty [*liberalis*] and placed under the yoke.”⁹⁰⁷ Their temporal subjection is in part, therefore, a punishment. It is as “if he had said that she should not be free and at her own command, but subject to the authority of her husband and dependent upon his will. She had, indeed, previously been subject to her husband, but

should be bound. Accordingly, if women at one time held the office of prophets and teachers, and that too when they were supernaturally called to it by the Spirit of God, he who is above all law might do this, but being a peculiar case, this is not opposed to the constant and ordinary system of government [*perpetua et usitata politia*].” Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:11 [1548]; CO 52:276. In one of his weaker exegetical moments Calvin insists that when the apostle condemns the practice of a woman prophesying 'with her head uncovered' in 1 Corinthians 11:6 he does not intend to commend the practice of a woman prophesying with her head covered. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:6 [1546]; CO 49:475-476. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 3:16-17 [1559]; CO 36:90-92; Commentary on Matthew 28:1-7 [1555]; CO 45:792-793 (Cf. 27:55; CO 45:785-786).

902Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:25 [1546]; CO 49:417-418.

903Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:28 [1546]; CO 49:419 (Cf. 7:32; CO 49:421; 7:1; CO 49:401).

904Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:1 [1546]; CO 49:401.

905Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:33 [1546]; CO 49:422.

906Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:38 [1546]; CO 49:426.

907Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:14 [1548]; CO 52:277.

that was a liberal and gentle subjection. Now, however, she is cast into servitude.”⁹⁰⁸ One consequence of the fall was what Calvin described as the widespread male attitude that women are a “necessary evil,” valuable only for sex, procreation, and the raising of children. On the contrary, Calvin insists, God gave Adam a wife that she might be the inseparable associate of his life.”⁹⁰⁹ To a certain extent, Calvin admits, women simply have to submit themselves to this “temporal punishment [*poenam temporalem*],” just as slaves must submit to their masters and subjects to unjust governments, for the sake of the political order.⁹¹⁰

On the other hand, as sacred as it is, marriage remains a temporary and political institution, distinct from the more fundamental equality of women and men in Christ and in the kingdom that is future. “For since the Lord is pleased to bestow in common on husbands and wives the same graces, he invites them to seek an equality in them.”⁹¹¹ Calvin therefore insists on a measure of equality between husband and wife, qualified by their respective vocations. For instance, “though in other matters the husband holds the superiority, as to the marriage bed the wife has an equal right,” and therefore like the husband has recourse to divorce in cases of adultery.⁹¹² Likewise with respect to sexual

908Commentary on Genesis 3:16 [1554]; CO 23:72. Cf. Commentary on Leviticus 12:4 [1563]; CO 24:314.

909Commentary on Genesis 2:18 [1554]; CO 23:46-48. Marriage is the “principal” and “most sacred” of “the offices pertaining to human society” (2:24 [1554]; CO 23:50); Cf. 1:27 [1554]; CO 23:28; Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:1, 11 [1546]; CO 49:401-402, 410; 11:11; CO 49:477-478; Commentary on 1 Timothy 5:14 [1548]; CO 52:313-314; Commentary on Ephesians 5:31 [1548]; CO 51:226.

910Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:15 [1548]; CO 52:278. For instance, although “it seems impossible that a believing husband should live with an ungodly wife, or the converse of this,” such a marriage serves important social purposes and “it is for these purposes approved by God, like other parts of political order [*ordinis politici*].” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:14 [1546]; CO 49:411-412. Cf. Commentary on Ephesians 5:23 [1548]; CO 51:222; Commentary on Titus 2:4 [1550]; CO 52:420; Commentary on Genesis 34:1, 5 [1554]; CO 23:456, 457.

911Commentary on 1 Peter 3:7 [1551]; CO 55:256. As Christ declared, “in comparison of spiritual relationship, no regard, or very little, is due to the relationship of the flesh.” Commentary on Matthew 12:48 [1555]; CO 45:350-351. Christian marriages, though always adhering to the “common [*communem*] law of marriage,” are to reflect the “spiritual union between Christ and his church.” Commentary on Ephesians 5:31 [1548]; CO 51:226.

912Commentary on Matthew 19:9 [1555]; CO 45:531. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:40 [1546]; CO 49:427.

intercourse the Apostle Paul “puts them on an equality [*pares*], instead of requiring from the wife obedience and subjection [*subiectionem*].” In this respect “the condition of both is alike [*aequalis*] as to the maintaining of conjugal fidelity.”⁹¹³ Both husbands and wives are to place the hope of the kingdom above their temporal union. “This will be effected if marriage is made use of by them, like other helps of this earthly life [*terrenae vitae*], having their hearts directed upwards to meditation on the heavenly life [*coelestis vitae*].” Marriage, like all blessings connected with the “enjoyment of the present life [*praesentis vitae*],” is a sacred gift of God. But it is not an end in itself.⁹¹⁴

Numerous writers correctly identify Calvin's emphasis on the authority of providence and scripture as underlying the reformer's fundamental conservatism with respect to political matters otherwise judged by Calvin to be indifferent.⁹¹⁵ Thompson concludes that Calvin stressed that female subordination is a matter of polity, “not to relativize these arrangements nor to accommodate them to local custom, but to mark off what God ordains for the future, spiritual, heavenly life – the life in Christ's kingdom –

913On the same basis polygamy is unjust, for it is only when he has one wife that a man “surrenders the power [*potestate*] of his own body and gives it to his wife.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:4 [1546]; CO 49:403. Sex is not the prerogative (liberty of choice – [*liberam deliberationem*]) of a husband over his wife but a matter of mutual consent and submission. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:5 [1546]; CO 49:403.

914Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:29 [1546]; CO 49:420.

915Stevenson writes, “there is in Calvin's teaching a stern warning that believers not casually assume that their present circumstances are offensive to God. Their call is as much to seek God's will *in* their present surroundings as to follow his call to renew and restore those surroundings. God seeks their attentiveness, their patience, and their perseverance as much as he seeks their hope, their zeal for progressive change.” Christians need humbly to submit to the training hand of providence. “There is thus stored up within Calvin's doctrine of God's providence a respect for established order and a strongly conservative bent” (107). An excellent analysis of the radical-conservative tension in Calvin's thought is Boer, *Political Grace*. For other references to Calvin's conservatism see Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. Olive Wyon; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992 [1912]), 2:620; Brandt B Boeke, “Calvin's Doctrine of Civil Government,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 11 (1981): 57-79; Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 71; Mark J. Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory*, *The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), xv; Little, *Religion, Order, and Law*, 56. But Miles exaggerates Calvin's position when she claims that “Calvin proposes no political or social solutions for the slippery condition of human life; in external things, he counsels only a status quo.” Thus “Calvin effectively blocks every impulse to social or political reform. The natural world, human events and conditions are to be accepted as given, assigned, or imposed by God. This reduction to 'duty' of all external activities has the effect of diverting the instinct to rectify, adjust, or reform to subjective activity.” Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,” 305.

from what he equally ordains with respect to this present, external, bodily life.”⁹¹⁶ The point in identifying a matter to be temporal or political is not necessarily to say that “such matters are at the discretion of the local church, much less the individual, but that these are matters which do not bind the conscience.”⁹¹⁷ Douglass gets it right when she observes that for Calvin, “Though in the kingdom of God all persons will be equal, and indeed already are in the spiritual kingdom of Christ, male and female, kings, shepherds, and mechanics, Frenchmen and Germans, pastors and laypeople, till this world passes away, the order of creation remains the pattern according to which governing in external things is organized.”⁹¹⁸

Stevenson brilliantly captures the dialectic of Calvin's concept of Christian freedom in indifferent matters. On the one hand, he notes, such freedom “emancipates believers from their particular historical setting, thereby opening their eyes to see God's transhistorical progress in ushering in his final kingdom.”⁹¹⁹ In that respect it is potentially Calvin's most “revolutionary” teaching.⁹²⁰ “If existing social order is ultimately temporary and superficial, then its destruction and reconstruction might very well be called for, especially if in some important way this order perverts and subverts the coming Kingdom of God.”⁹²¹ On the other hand, Calvin moderates the potentially radical implications by noting that God acts “*by means* of particular historical constraints.”⁹²² Indeed, “If believers are liberated from 'outward things,' they are, *for that reason*, instructed not to put any more emphasis on the *avoidance* of such things as on their attachment... Christian freedom binds one even tighter to cultural context,

⁹¹⁶Thompson, *Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah*, 265.

⁹¹⁷Thompson, *Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah*, 266. Douglass posits that Calvin believed ecclesiastical law could eventually become more egalitarian, but she wrongly assumes that because Calvin viewed matters relating to gender as indifferent, to be transcended in the future kingdom, he therefore viewed them as subject to change during the present age. Douglass, “Christian Freedom,” 155-173.

⁹¹⁸Jane Dempsey Douglass, “Calvin's Relation to Social and Economic Change,” *Church and Society* 74 (1984): 75.

⁹¹⁹Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 10.

⁹²⁰Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 105.

⁹²¹Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 106. Cf. 114.

⁹²²Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 10. Emphasis Original.

partly by desacralizing such context.”⁹²³ To be sure, providence can take unexpected turns. The church (and, of course, Calvin!) can interpret scripture incorrectly. But the authority of scripture, properly interpreted, remains inviolable, as does that of the powers providentially ordained by God. In that respect, as disappointing as it may be to those seeking the foundations of modern liberalism in Calvin, the reformer of Geneva was no revolutionary.

Civil and Spiritual Government

I offer a full analysis of Calvin's understanding of spiritual and civil government in the second half of this book, but for now it is important to show how Calvin understood the basic distinction. It is crucial to stress that Calvin considered civil government to be under the lordship of Christ. But as Gordon Keddie observes, for Calvin “the civil power, while deriving its authority from Christ and representing the morality of the Gospel in the public sector, is not to be understood as the earthly representative of the eternal kingdom, for that is the prerogative of the Church. Civil government is a temporal institution.”⁹²⁴

In his commentary on Jesus' classic statement, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar, and to God the things that are God's,” Calvin provides one of his fullest presentations of the two kingdoms doctrine. The Jewish leaders sought to trap Jesus, he observes, by forcing him to choose between speaking against Rome, and so winning the

923Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 106. Emphasis Original. “As much as Christian freedom emancipates believers from their cultural, historical contexts, it grounds them even more firmly in the workings of God *by means of* such contexts.” By freeing a person from the fear that she is “*problematically*, embedded in certain institutional structures,” it likewise separates her from the possibility that she must assert her “independence on grounds of principle” (131). Thus the fact that God's providence is as real in tyranny as it is in progress serves to “call into serious question any 'revolutionary' implications in Calvin's notion of freedom. Indeed, it seems clear that Calvin tries continually to distance his teaching from any revolutionary ends” (140). Emphasis Original.

924Gordon J. Keddie, “Calvin on Civil Government,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 32 (1981): 65-67; Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State* (ed. Richard C. Gamble; New York: Garland, 1992), 24.

people's approval, or affirming Rome's authority, and so forfeiting his popular influence.⁹²⁵ Yet,

Christ's reply ... lays down a clear distinction between spiritual and civil government [*spirituale et politicum regimen*], in order to inform us that outward subjection [*externam subiunctionem*] does not prevent us from having within us a conscience free in the sight of God. For Christ intended to refute the error of those who did not think that they would be the people of God, unless they were free from every yoke of human authority [*humani imperii*]... In short, Christ declares that it is no violation of the authority of God, or any injury done to his service, if, in respect of outward polity [*externam politiam*], the Jews obey the Romans.⁹²⁶

To be sure, political authority is itself under God, and there can be no final distinction between our duty toward God and our duty toward political authority. But that does not take away from the relevance of the distinction.

We might be apt to think, no doubt, that the distinction does not apply, for, strictly speaking, when we perform our duty towards men, we thereby render obedience to God. But Christ, accommodating his discourse to the common people, reckoned it enough to draw a distinction between the spiritual kingdom of God [*spirituale Dei regnum*], on the one hand, and political order and the condition of the present life [*ordine politico et praesentis vitae statu*], on the other. We must therefore attend to this distinction, that, while the Lord wishes to be the only lawgiver for governing souls, the rule for worshiping him must not be sought from any other source than from his own word, and that we ought to abide by the only and pure worship which is there enjoined; but that the power of the sword, the laws, and the decisions of tribunals, do not hinder the worship of God from remaining entire amongst us. But this doctrine extends still farther, that every man, according to his calling, ought to perform the duty which he owes to men; that children ought willingly to submit to their parents, and servants to their masters; that they ought to be courteous and obliging towards each other, according to the law of charity, provided that God always retain the highest authority, to which every thing that can be due to men is, as we say, subordinate. The amount of it therefore is, that those who destroy political order [*politicum ordinem*] are rebellious against God, and therefore, that obedience to princes and magistrates is always joined to the worship and fear of God; but that, on the other hand, if princes claim any part of the authority of God, we ought not to obey them any farther than can be done without offending God.⁹²⁷

925Calvin suggests that Jesus' intent is in part to demonstrate that the Jews themselves had recognized the legitimacy of the Roman authority by means of their general practice of using Caesar's coins in mutual exchange. By such "silent consent" they rendered, as a political rather than as a theological allegiance, their loyalty to Rome. Commentary on Matthew 21:21 [1555]; CO 45:601-602 (Cf. 21:15-21; CO 45:599-602).

926Commentary on Matthew 21:21 [1555]; CO 45:601-602.

927Commentary on Matthew 21:21 [1555]; CO 45:602. The Anabaptists, according to Calvin, argue that because Jesus declared that he was under no obligation to pay taxes to Rome, and yet agreed voluntarily

The primary contexts in which Calvin insists on the distinction of civil government from the spiritual kingdom of Christ is when he is engaging the positions he associates with the Anabaptists. By arguing that Christians cannot serve as civil magistrates, swear public oaths, or hold private property, as Calvin saw it, the Anabaptists were overthrowing the political order.⁹²⁸ To be sure, God “approves no other distribution of good things than one joined with love” (3.10.5), and “Love made that common to the poor and needy which was proper to every man,” but such a principle should not be used to undermine the political order providentially established by God.⁹²⁹ The church's communion is of such a nature that the “civil order [is not] disturbed,

to pay such taxes, Christians ought to do the same. Having been freed by Christ they are not bound by earthly kingdoms, but like Jesus, they nevertheless voluntarily cooperate with them. Calvin will have none of it. Yet how can Jesus' exemption be explained? His answer is to insist on Christ's unique lordship over the political kingdom. “For, though his kingdom be spiritual, still we must maintain, that as he is the only Son of God, he is also the heir of the whole world, so that all things ought to be subject to him, and to acknowledge his authority. The meaning, therefore, is that God has not appointed kings and established governments over mankind in such a manner as to place him who is the Son in the same rank indiscriminately with others, but yet that, of his own accord, he will be a servant along with others, till the glory of his kingdom be displayed.” For Jesus submission to the political order was voluntary, required by the process of redemption. But this side of Christ's return, believers must submit to magistrates as bearing the authority of God himself. Commentary on Matthew 17:24 [1555]; 45:522-523. Cf. 26:62-64; CO 45:738-739; 27:12; CO 45:752.

928For instance, in his commentary on Acts 2 Calvin describes the Anabaptists as “fanatical spirits, who feign a commonality or participation together of goods by which all policy or civil government is taken away.” Commentary on Acts 2:44 [1552]; CO 48:59-60. While “shepherds in the first place are called to Christ, then afterwards come philosophers; illiterate and despised fishermen hold the highest rank of honor, yet into their school there are received in process of time kings and their counselors, senators, and orators.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:26-27 [1546]; CO 49:330. Cf. Commentary on Luke 6:24 [1555]; CO 45:166; 16:25; CO 45:411; Commentary on Matthew 13:37 [1555]; CO 45:369. See Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (trans. Willem Heyner. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 34, 39-46, 62, 70. On the significance of oaths see pp. 253-260. In fact, most Anabaptists did not think all things should be held in common in the way that Calvin claimed (270-275). “Over against the Anabaptists' strict dualism between church and state, Calvin set his doctrine of the two kingdoms, *regnum spirituale* and *regnum politicum*” (283). The Anabaptists were always guilty of confusion. For Calvin, Balke writes, “They confuse everything, especially in regard to spiritual and worldly government” (331). For a thoughtful comparison of Calvin and the Anabaptists that places their political theologies in broader theological context, see Paul Munday, “John Calvin and Anabaptists on War,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 23 (1978): 239-247.

929Commentary on Acts 4:34 [1552]; CO 48:96. For Calvin the New Testament's criticisms of the rich were not aimed at the rich in general, but at those who “unjustly accumulate riches, or who foolishly abuse them,” refusing to “employ them for necessary purposes” for the good of their neighbors. Commentary on James 5:2 [1550]; CO 55:423. Property and honor, to Calvin, are necessary parts of the civil order, and “it is one of the duties of courtesy not to be neglected, to honor those who are elevated in the world” (2:1-5; CO 397-399).

which allows each individual to own his private possessions, since it is necessary to keep peace among men that the ownership of property should be distinct and personal among them” (4.1.3).⁹³⁰

The Anabaptists' fundamental mistake, Calvin argues, was to misapply what Christ taught about the spiritual kingdom to the political and social order. For example, the Anabaptists argued that just as Jesus refused to mediate in a property dispute (Luke 12:13), so Christians are to avoid involvement in the magistracy. Not so, Calvin retorts. Jesus refused to mediate the dispute for two reasons. First, he wanted to prevent against any misunderstanding that his kingdom would be earthly or carnal, or that “he was effecting a revolution in the state, and overturning the Roman Empire.” While the Jews expected a “carnal redemption,” Jesus was teaching that “the kingdom of Christ is spiritual.” Second, “our Lord intended to draw a distinction between the political kingdoms of this world and the government of his church.” The government of Christ's kingdom is not a magisterial government, despite the fact that the Roman clergy “have dared to usurp an earthly and secular jurisdiction.”⁹³¹

Calvin makes the same point in his interpretation of Jesus' warning to the disciples not to be like the rulers of this world. The Anabaptists mistakenly interpreted this passage as drawing a distinction between Christians and unbelievers, so prohibiting Christians from serving in political office. But they failed to take into consideration the distinction between the two kingdoms. “[T]he design of Christ was, as I have said, to distinguish between the spiritual government of his church and the empires of the world.” Whereas political government requires pomp, splendor, wealth, a crown, and a scepter, the spiritual government of the church is defined by self-sacrificial service,

⁹³⁰See Matthew J Tuininga, “Good News for the Poor: An analysis of Calvin's concept of poor relief and the diaconate in light of his two kingdoms paradigm,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, forthcoming.

⁹³¹Commentary on Luke 12:13 [1555]; CO 45:383-384. On Christ's refusal to mediate the property dispute: “Christ does not argue from the nature of the thing itself, but from his own calling. Having been appointed by the Father for a different purpose, he declares that he is not a judge because he has received no such command.”

humility, and the way of the cross. “Christ appoints pastors of his church, not to rule, but to serve.” Yes, kings and magistrates are also obligated to perform their vocations in service, but whereas the service of civil governments requires pomp and power, ministers of the church are to have none of that. “Christ allowed the pastors nothing more than to be ministers, and to abstain entirely from the exercise of authority.” Thus “it is the duty of the apostles always to consider what form of government the Lord has appointed for his church.”⁹³² That Christ did not take up a magisterial role was not because Christians are forbidden from doing so but “because he lays aside for a time the office of a judge and offers salvation to all without reserve, and stretches out his arms to embrace all, that all may be the more encouraged to repent.”⁹³³ As the inaugurator of the spiritual kingdom it was Christ's role to proclaim mercy, not judgment, and the same is true for his ministers, for whom political government is “unsuitable.”⁹³⁴

Calvin regards civil government as a gift of God's providence that is not only essential to human life, but “pleasant and agreeable” by virtue of its “public utility.”⁹³⁵ Whereas anarchy “would end in prey and plunder, and in the mere license of fraud and murder, and all the passions of mankind would have full and unbridled sway,” government provides the order and security that is essential for every order of life. Commenting on the imagery of one of Daniel's dreams Calvin writes, “God appointed the existence of governments in the world for this purpose—to be like trees on whose fruits all men feed, and under whose shadow they rest.” Indeed, “pasture and food and shelter signify the various forms of usefulness which political order provides for us.” In his providence God uses even corrupt and tyrannical regimes. “God's grace always shines forth in all governments. Tyrants endeavor to extinguish the whole light of equity and justice and to mingle all things, but the Lord meanwhile restrains them in a secret and

932Commentary on Matthew 20:25 [1555]; CO 45:556-558.

933Commentary on John 12:47 [1553]; CO 47:303.

934Commentary on Matthew 20:26 [1555]; CO 45:558. Cf. 20:28; CO 45:558.

935Commentary on Deuteronomy 16:18 [1563]; CO 24:610-611.

wonderful manner, and thus they are compelled to act usefully to the human race, whether they will or not.” Thus “men of every rank feel no small utility in the protection of princes.”⁹³⁶

It is therefore the Spirit of God, whose broader work is an extension of Christ's universal government, who uses civil government to preserve a modicum of justice and order in the world. For “there never was any portion whatever of righteousness in the world that did not proceed from the Spirit of God, and that was not maintained by his heavenly power; as none of the kings of the earth can frame or defend good order, except so far as he shall be assisted by the same Spirit.”⁹³⁷ Psalm 82 goes so far as to refer to magistrates as “gods” and the civil order as the “assembly of God” because in civil government “is afforded a peculiar manifestation of the majesty of God.”⁹³⁸ God has given civil authorities a “sacred character and title,” even as he continues to maintain his sovereignty.⁹³⁹

At the same time, such government should never be confused with the spiritual government or kingdom of Christ because the power of civil government is rooted in coercion. In contrast, Christ's kingdom is characterized by mercy and liberality,⁹⁴⁰ and the obedience of its subjects is voluntary.⁹⁴¹ Christ has been appointed “not to rule after the manner of princes, by the force of arms and by surrounding himself with other external defenses to make himself an object of terror to his people, but his whole authority consists in doctrine, in the preaching of which he wishes to be sought and

936Commentary on Daniel 4:10-16 [1561]; CO 40:657-658. “God’s blessing shines forth in princes, even if they materially neglect their duty, because God does not suffer all his grace in them to be extinguished; and hence they are compelled to bring forth some fruit” (659).

937Commentary on Matthew 12:18 [1555]; CO 45:332.

938Commentary on Psalm 82:1 [1557]; CO 31:768-769.

939Commentary on Psalm 82:6 [1557]; CO 31:771.

940Unlike most human kings, more focused on advancing their private interests than the welfare of their people, Christ will not only be the “guardian of justice and equity,” but he will also be “humane and merciful, as to be ready to afford succor to the most despised.” Commentary on Psalm 72:12 [1557]; CO 31:669 (Cf. 45:3; CO 31:450-451).

941Commentary on Hebrews 2:11 [1549]; CO 55:29.

acknowledged, for nowhere else will he be found.”⁹⁴² He is exalted as head over many nations who are “roused by hearing of him only, for they are not forced by arms to undertake his yoke, but being subdued by his doctrine, they spontaneously obey him.”⁹⁴³ Indeed, Christ's kingdom is marked by poverty and suffering. In contrast to the “manner of men,” who use “arms and forces,” and to “earthly princes,” who “fill their enemies with fear, who fortify their borders, prepare an army, and set up every defense to ward off assaults,” Christ protects his people through “divine” or “celestial power.”⁹⁴⁴ Christ's kingdom would instead “speak peace ...to the nations,” and “they will calmly hear, though not terrified nor threatened.”⁹⁴⁵

Calvin thus emphasizes that as a coercive force established by providence for the preservation of order, civil government has no power to restore true order, righteousness, or piety. It is temporal and will pass away.⁹⁴⁶ And while the prophets sometimes compare Christ to earthly kings, accommodating the weakness of their hearers, “yet there is no equality.”

Hence, the difference between the righteousness of Christ and the righteousness of kings ought to be here noticed. They who rule well can in no other way administer righteousness and judgment than by being careful to render to every one his own, and that by checking the audacity of the wicked, and by defending the good and the innocent. This only is what can be expected from earthly kings. But Christ is far different, for he is not only wise so as to know what is right and best, but he also endues his own people with wisdom and knowledge. He executes judgment and righteousness, not only because he defends the innocent, aids

⁹⁴²Commentary on Isaiah 49:2 [1559]; CO 37:191. Cf. 9:7; CO 36:200; 53:2; CO 37:256.

⁹⁴³Commentary on Hebrews 2:13 [1549]; CO 55:30.

⁹⁴⁴Commentary on Zechariah 9:9 [1559]; CO 44:271-272.

⁹⁴⁵As the prophets foretold, there would be “no horses, no chariots, no bows, no warlike instruments in Christ's kingdom... Christ and his people would not be kept safe and secure by human defenses, by means of many soldiers and of similar helps being at hand; but that God would restrain, and even compose and allay all warlike commotions, so that there would be no need of such aids.” Commentary on Zechariah 9:10 [1559]; CO 44:273-274. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 12:18 [1555]; CO 45:332.

⁹⁴⁶Temporal rulers accomplish a measure of justice, but “as the kingdom of Christ is not temporal or what passes away, we conclude that the righteousness he possesses is to be perpetual, together with the salvation which he brings.” Commentary on Zechariah 9:9 [1559]; CO 44:271-272. “When the kingdom of God is revealed, let the wisdom of this world retire, and what is transient give place to what is eternal; for the princes of this world have their distinction, but it is of such a nature as is in one moment extinguished. What is this in comparison with the heavenly and incorruptible kingdom of God?” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:6 [1546]; CO 49:337. Cf. Commentary on Psalm 72:17 [1557]; CO 31:671; Commentary on Isaiah 16:5 [1559]; CO 36:304-305.

them who are oppressed, gives help to the miserable, and restrains the wicked, but he does righteousness, because he regenerates us by his Spirit, and he also does judgment, because he bridles, as it were, the devil.⁹⁴⁷

For Calvin only Christ's kingdom accomplishes spiritual ends; it alone regenerates and sanctifies. Political leaders may sometimes be called “kings of righteousness,” but “though this honor is ascribed to kings who rule with moderation and in equity, yet this belongs really to Christ alone, who not only exercises authority justly as others do, but also communicates to us the righteousness of God.... He is then called the king of righteousness because of what he effects in diffusing righteousness on all his people.”⁹⁴⁸ Political authorities, in short, can maintain a degree of external or outward justice, but they have no spiritual or eschatological power. They cannot actually make women and men just.

At the center of Calvin's understanding of the difference between the two kingdoms lies the reformer's distinction between true righteousness and civil righteousness, which in turn gives rise to the distinction between the spiritual and civil uses of the law.⁹⁴⁹ Calvin distinguishes between “two righteousnesses of the law. The one is spiritual – perfect love to God and our neighbors. It is contained in doctrine and had never an existence in the life of any [sinful] man. The other is literal, such as appears in the view of men, while in the mean time hypocrisy reigns in the heart, and there is in the sight of God nothing but iniquity.”⁹⁵⁰ To be sure, in both cases God's natural moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, is the perfect rule of righteousness.⁹⁵¹ It is “only

947“We now then understand the design of what I said, that we ought to mark the transcendency of Christ over earthly kings, and also the analogy; for there is some likeness and some difference: the difference between Christ and other kings is very great, and yet there is a likeness in some things; and earthly kings are set forth to us as figures and types of him.” Commentary on Jeremiah 23:5-6 [1563]; CO 38:410.

948Commentary on Hebrews 7:1 [1549]; CO 55:82. In contrast to secular kingdoms, “righteousness in the kingdom of Christ has a wider meaning, for he by his gospel, which is his spiritual scepter, renews us after the righteousness of God” (1:8; CO 55:17-18). Cf. Commentary on Romans 8:5 [1556]; CO 49:141; Commentary on Isaiah 11:5 [1559]; CO 36:241.

949See Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 65-67.

950Commentary on Philippians 3:6 [1548]; CO 52:46.

951“The law has set the difference between right and wrong plainly and distinctly before our eyes, and to seek it in a deep labyrinth, what sottishness is it!” Commentary on Romans 8:7 [1556]; CO 49:142-143.

when we live according to the rule prescribed to us by God that this life is duly regulated. Let this order be set aside, and there is nothing but confusion in human life.”⁹⁵² Indeed, “whenever holiness is made to consist in any thing else than in observing the law of God, men are led to believe that the law may be violated without danger.”⁹⁵³ But God’s law functions in different ways that correspond directly to the fundamental difference between the two kingdoms.

Calvin explains the difference between the spiritual and civil uses of the law in his discussion of the threefold use of the law in the *Institutes*.⁹⁵⁴ The spiritual and “principal use” of the law constitutes the “proper purpose of the law” because it “finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns” (2.7.12). Because it presupposes the liberty from the law that comes through justification of by faith, it is entirely free of the law’s rigor and threats. “For the law is not now acting toward us as a rigorous enforcement officer who is not satisfied unless the requirements are met. But in this perfection to which it exhorts us, the law points out the goal toward

Calvin often repeated as a truism that “in the law of God there is absolute perfection, to which nothing whatever can be added.” Commentary on Titus 2:12 [1550]; CO 52:423. Interpreted with Christ as its focus, scripture “contains a perfect rule of a good and happy life.” Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:16 [1548]; CO 52:382-384. Calvin argued that Paul sometimes referred to the law as “the law of Christ” in order to wipe away the “groundless reproach” that the gospel did away with the moral substance of the law, “for he means that in the doctrine of Christ nothing is omitted that might serve to give us a perfect rule of upright living.” Commentary on Romans 9:21 [1556]; CO 49:447-448. Through the gospel Christians not only receive the forgiveness of sins but are led to “sanctification, by which our hearts are prepared to keep the law.” Commentary on Romans 3:31 [1556]; CO 49:67. Christian pastors should therefore preach the gospel in such a way that “the law may be confirmed, but let it be sustained by no other strength than that of faith in Christ.” Commentary on Romans 3:31 [1556]; CO 49:68. Used as such the law is, as the Apostle James called it, the “law of liberty.” Commentary on James 2:12 [1550]; CO 55:402.

952 Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 [1550]; CO 52:211.

953 Commentary on Matthew 15:3 [1555]; CO 45:449. See also Commentary on Psalm 19:8 [1557]; CO 31:200-201.

954 The first use of the moral law, which closely corresponds to the law in its narrow sense, is to show human beings their sin, leading them to despair of attaining to ultimate blessedness or to the knowledge of God. It pertains to the “natural man” who is entirely unable to attain to the purpose and end for which God created the world and human beings. As such, it achieves nothing but condemnation. “Yet, since our carnal and corrupted nature contends violently against God’s spiritual law and is in no way corrected by its discipline, it follows that the law which had been given for salvation, provided it met with suitable hearers, turns into an occasion for sin and death... The more surely it confirms the reward of life and salvation as dependent upon righteousness, the more certain it renders the destruction of the wicked” (2.7.7). See Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law*, 217-276.

which throughout life we are to strive” (2.7.13). As was seen in Chapter 3, for Calvin the law was always fundamentally spiritual in purpose. “First, let us agree that through the law man's life is molded not only to outward honesty but to inward and spiritual righteousness.” Quoting Paul's declaration in Romans 7:14 that the law is spiritual, Calvin comments, “By this he means that it not only demands obedience of soul, mind, and will, but requires an angelic purity which, cleansed of every pollution of the flesh, savors nothing but the spirit” (2.8.6). The law still has a role in believers' lives because it points to “renewed nature, which God forms anew after his own image.”⁹⁵⁵ People considering the prohibitions against killing, committing adultery, or stealing might assume that the law's demands are merely outward, but the Tenth Commandment, 'You shall not covet,' demonstrates that God demands the “sincere affection of the heart.”⁹⁵⁶ The Mosaic Law was never intended to be merely political or external.⁹⁵⁷

In essence, the spiritual use of the law consists in education and exhortation.⁹⁵⁸ As an educational instrument the law serves to teach those who want to love and know God how they can go about fulfilling their desire. This “daily instruction of the law” is necessary in addition to the guidance of the Spirit, if believers are to know God's will (2.7.12). As a means of exhortation, the law serves to arouse the regenerate to obey God's will, “for, however eagerly they may in accordance with the Spirit strive toward God's

955Commentary on Romans 7:14 [1556]; CO 49:128. Calvin argues that “perfect righteousness is prescribed in the law,” and that the inward virtues of “piety, justice, judgment and truth ... are the chief matters of the law.” Commentary on Romans 2:13, 27 [1556]; CO 49:37, 45. “The sum of the law is this, that we may worship God with true faith and a pure conscience, and that we may love one another.” Commentary on 1 Tim 1:5 [1548]; CO 52:252.

956Commentary on Exodus 20:17 [1563]; CO 24:719. The subjects of the law are not only commanded “not to will anything except what is right and pleasing to God, but also that no impure desire should affect our hearts” (720).

957Calvin charges the Pharisees with having politicized the spiritual law. The Pharisees “had changed the doctrine of the law into a political order, and had made obedience to it to consist entirely in the performance of outward duties... This was an intolerable profanation of the law: for it is certain, that Moses everywhere demands the spiritual worship of God... Christ charges them with turning into a political scheme the law of God, which had been given for the government of the heart.” Commentary on Matthew 5:21 [1555]; CO 45:174-175. Cf. Commentary on Exodus 20:13 [1563]; CO 24:611-613; Commentary on Leviticus 19:17-18 [1563]; CO 613-614.

958See Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 66.

righteousness, the listless flesh always so burdens them that they do not proceed with due readiness.” Ready with a vivid analogy, Calvin proposes, “The law is to the flesh like a whip to an idle and bulky ass, to arouse it to work. Even for a spiritual man not yet free of the weight of the flesh the law remains a constant sting that will not let him stand still” (2.7.12).

The civil use of the law applies to all human beings, not simply those who are sanctified by the Spirit.⁹⁵⁹ Its purpose is neither to sanctify nor to condemn human beings in any ultimate sense, but to give order to temporal society, through coercion if necessary. It is merely outward in scope, extending to human actions; it cannot touch the inward person nor can it drive her upward and forward to the spiritual kingdom of Christ. As Marc Chenevière observes, even though Calvin believed civil magistrates are to enforce both tables of the Ten Commandments, “In obliging men to respect the Decalogue the magistrate does not claim to effect an inward change, but merely to cause them to observe outwardly a relative morality sufficient to secure for them, in spite of themselves, or even contrary to themselves, an existence worthy of the name.”⁹⁶⁰ The “mortal lawgiver's jurisdiction extends only to the outward political order.” Insofar as it is concerned with purposes or intentions it is only concerned with them when they “come forth into the open” and it can do nothing unless “actual crimes are committed” (2.8.6).⁹⁶¹ The civil use of the law cannot create true righteousness but only civil righteousness. Still, Calvin insists, “this constrained and forced righteousness is necessary for the public community of men.” Even believers need this external enforcement of the law because their sanctification is incomplete (2.7.10).

959Cf. Commentary on 1 Timothy 1:9 [1548]; CO 52:255.

960Marc Chenevière, “Did Calvin Advocate Theocracy?” *Evangelical Quarterly* 9 (1937): 166.

961In a sermon on Deuteronomy 5:17 Calvin declared, “It is true that when magistrates create laws, their manner is different from God's. But then their purpose has to do only with the way we govern ourselves with respect to the external civil order to the end that no one might be violated, and that each might have his rights and have peace and concord among men. That is their intention when they create laws. And why? [Because] they are mortal men; they cannot reform inner and hidden affections. That belongs to God.” CO 26:328. Cited in Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 64.

Initially Calvin limited his discussion of the civil use of the law to a purely secular purpose, but in the 1543 *Institutes* he suggested that the civil law also plays a role as a “tutor unto Christ,” as described by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:24. It does so not by any sort of spiritual influence, but as a preservative, preventing those who might one day be subject to the Spirit's power from being destroyed by their own sin. Many people, Calvin writes,

have need of a bridle to restrain them from so slackening the reins on the lust of the flesh as to fall clean away from all pursuit of righteousness. 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. And such would happen if God did not oppose it with this remedy. Therefore, if he does not immediately regenerate those whom he has destined to inherit his Kingdom, until the time of his visitation, he keeps them safe through the works of the law under fear. This is not that chaste and pure fear such as ought to be in his sons, but a fear useful in teaching them true godliness according to their capacity.

In short, the coercive use of the law by civil government works to preserve unbelievers from the worst effects of sin in hope of future salvation. Calvin does not offer any scriptural support for this argument, but instead appeals to experience. “We have so many proofs of this matter that no example is needed. For all who have at any time groped about in ignorance of God will admit that it happened to them in such a way that the bridle of the law restrained them in some fear and reverence toward God until, regenerated by the Spirit, they began wholeheartedly to love him” (2.7.11).

As this last statement makes clear, Calvin is not arguing here that the civil law sanctifies believers or promotes spiritual righteousness. He is merely saying that it can preserve them for the later influence of the gospel. While civil government is rooted in the purpose and ordination of God, and is even an expression of the lordship of Christ, Calvin never leverages this point so as to collapse the fundamental distinction between the two kingdoms. It is true that Calvin gave civil government the responsibility to promote and defend the kingdom of Christ, and that he believed civil government should enforce both tables of the Ten Commandments, securing both outward piety and

outward justice. I consider these points at length in the second part of this book, but for now it is important to keep in mind two fundamental points. First, Calvin always distinguishes the spiritual use of the law, through which believers grow in sanctification and true righteousness, and the civil use of the law, through which people are coerced into performing outward acts of piety and righteousness. Second, as I show in Chapter 8, Calvin distinguishes between the *direct* establishment and protection of the kingdom of Christ, which takes place through the providence of God and the ministry of the gospel, and the *indirect* establishment and protection of the spiritual kingdom, in which civil government plays a role.

David Little writes,

As long as man exists in his present state, as one for whom the complete Kingdom of God has not yet come, God's political order of coercion must still prevail. The old order does not lose its provisional control, at least over the external conduct of man. But it is obvious from our study of Calvin that the realm of the free conscience – as a key to the whole question of order – is ultimate, and provides the guidelines for understanding God's plan and his work in the world. In terms of Calvin's pattern of order, nothing is surer than that the Kingdom of God, toward which all things move, includes overcoming the engines of coercion in favor of voluntary obedience to the will of God. Of course, the Christian lives in constant tension between two orders, but the tension will finally be set aside. There is absolutely no basis in Calvin's system for conceiving of the two orders as eternally coexistent, as part of some natural hierarchy of order.⁹⁶²

The church is the community in which obedience becomes voluntary. “Because Christ reigns in Word, sacrament, and Spirit in the Church, the old order is decisively broken there and the new is beginning. Therefore, the hallmark of the old order, coercion, is by

⁹⁶²Little, *Religion, Order, and Law*, 53. Little observes that for Calvin the disorder in the world caused by the fall of human beings into sin gives rise to two forms of earthly order established by God. The first arises from God's providential restraint of human beings who continue to reject God's rule. It takes expression in the provisional institution of coercive civil government. But while such coercion can promote outward obedience through the civil use of the law, it cannot restore human beings to true righteousness or the world to true order under God's rule. God's providence preserves remnants of the testimony of natural law and the conscience, but apart from regeneration these ultimately serve only to condemn (41-47). The second sort of order, on the other hand, amounts to genuine regeneration and restoration. It restores human beings to voluntary and inward obedience according to the spiritual use of the law, and its point of realization is the church. “The purpose of redemption is the same as that of creation: the bringing into proper order of all things. It is Christ who confronts and overcomes the source of social confusion and disorder, namely, the heart (or will) of man” (48).

definition excluded from it.”⁹⁶³ Civil government can only contribute indirectly to this process. As Torrance puts it, while civil government also serves the glory of God by promoting *humanitas*, it only does so indirectly, being “given authority to make room for the Church and to bring about *the conditions of humanity* on earth.”⁹⁶⁴

What is important to stress here is that although Calvin believed the righteousness of the kingdom of Christ is expressed in every area of life, he insisted that the affairs of the political kingdom remain temporal. Thus the righteousness of believers *expresses* the restoration of the world and *witnesses* to its future completion, but it does not serve as an *instrument* for the gradual transformation of the social and political order into the kingdom of Christ, a key distinction sometimes overlooked by scholars.⁹⁶⁵ Calvin never made the church or Christians an agency of progressive socio-political transformation.

Hopfl offers a helpful word of caution here:

There is no doubt ... that Calvin attributed a transformative power to the Gospel, and more particularly to its agents, and that he expected such transformation to bear visible fruit in the lives of men. What is in doubt is the propriety of calling this 'the regeneration of society' or 'the creation of a new order' and of seeing it as a cumulative process building up to a climax in the last days. For the latter implies an openness in the transformations and a progressive triumph of righteousness in the world, and this is not at all what Calvin imagined. There is nothing whatever in his works to suggest that the church would not always be a beleaguered and persecuted minority until a dramatic and sudden termination of

⁹⁶³Little, *Religion, Order, and Law*, 72.

⁹⁶⁴Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 158-159. Emphasis Original.

⁹⁶⁵For instance, Schreiner is right to stress that for Calvin the renewal of the world “included the renovation of society and the historical order” and that the charity, service, justice, and the imitation of Christ of Christians *is* a “social ordering of the world.” Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 107, 110. But she is imprecise and potentially misleading when she argues that this is “gradually accomplished,” that “the efforts and activity of the elect directly contribute to the restoration of the world’s order,” and that Christians’ “ordered life contributes to the gradual restoration of an ordered world” (109-110). Christians’ “ordered activity, Calvin assumed, contributes to the sanctifying or reordering of the world” (114). Schreiner asserts that “Calvin saw the church as the organ that led to the renewal of both the cosmos and society,” but she does not clarify in what sense this is the case (114). Cf. Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in the Theology of the Reformers*, 114. Calvin may not have been as apocalyptic in his thinking as was Luther, but Tonkin exaggerates when he characterizes the Genevan reformer’s understanding in terms of a progressive and gradual transformation of the world, the last day appearing “like the final chords of a grand symphony ... brought to a final and glorious resolution.” (114).

its sufferings in the last days. What is more, the most proximate and perhaps the only vocabulary available in the sixteenth century for anything akin to the later doctrine of progress was millennialism, which was so badly compromised by its Anabaptist associations that Calvin would have no truck with it whatever.⁹⁶⁶

Calvin, Hopfl goes on, “explicitly disassociated” the sanctification of Christians from “institutional changes in society.” Temporal vocations and institutions remain normative. “The changes in the relations between men that the Gospel brings about, therefore, are not principally new laws or new institutions, but an actual conformity to laws mostly already in existence, enforced by institutions of which only the ecclesiastical ones were at all clearly defined or specified as being other than what was in existence already.”⁹⁶⁷

Calvin identified the spiritual kingdom of Christ with the church, not with the socio-political order. It is to the church as Christ's spiritual kingdom that I turn in Chapter 5.

Appendix: Beating their Swords into Plowshares

Throughout Chapters 3 and 4 I have argued that Calvin's two kingdoms theology must be interpreted eschatologically. An excellent example of the paradigm at work appears in Calvin's commentaries on the well-known prophecy of Isaiah and Micah that in the kingdom of God the nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and that they shall not learn war anymore. It is worth considering this discussion in some detail because it shows how the various elements of Calvin's two kingdoms theology function in an exegetical context.

Calvin understands the prophecy as a clear indication that the kingdom of Christ will subdue the nations but not through coercion or the power of the sword. Rather, the

⁹⁶⁶Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 194. Niesel, likewise, explicitly rejects the notion that 4.20 of the *Institutes* is a discussion of how the “eternal kingdom, finds its realization in this world and in human society and culture.” Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Methuen, 1956), 229.

⁹⁶⁷Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 195.

nations will unite themselves voluntarily to Israel, having been reformed by the proclamation of the word. The whole prophecy, Calvin argues, is about “God's spiritual kingdom.” The means by which Christ rules, his scepter, is the gospel. “We hence see that an earthly empire is not what is here predicted, but what exists through the word and celestial doctrine.”⁹⁶⁸

That the kingdom is spiritual, however, does not mean that it holds no relevance for life in the present age. When the prophets declare that the nations will be reconciled to one another they mean that those who formerly lived in hatred and lust will devote themselves to kindness. This reconciliation, however, as a manifestation of God's kingdom, is distinct from God's broader government of the world.

God has indeed ever governed the world by his hidden providence, as he does still govern it ... But the scripture speaks of God's kingdom in two respects [*Sed bifariam loquitur scriptura de regno Dei*]. God does indeed govern the devil and all the wicked, but not by his word, nor by the sanctifying power of his Spirit: it is so done that they obey God, not willingly, but against their will. The peculiar government of God is that of his church only [*peculiare Dei imperium pertinet ad solam ecclesiam*], where, by his word and Spirit, he bends the hearts of men to obedience so that they follow him voluntarily and willingly [*sponte et libenter*], being taught inwardly and outwardly – inwardly by the influence of the Spirit – outwardly by the preaching of the word [*intus, spiritus instinctu: foris, verbi praedicatione*]... This, then, is the beginning of the kingdom of Christ [*exordia regni Christi*].⁹⁶⁹

What is unique here about the *peculiare Dei imperium*, or the *regni Christi*, is that it operates by the outward word and inward Spirit, it establishes obedience that is voluntary and inward, and the place where this happens is solely in the church. The definitive mark of the kingdom is that it empowers voluntary and genuine righteousness:

that strong men, when thus reprov'd, shall offer themselves, without any resistance, to be ruled by God. Correction is indeed necessary, but God employs no external force nor any armed power when he makes the church subject to himself, and yet he collects strong nations. Hence then is seen the power of truth, for where there is strength there is confidence and arrogance and also rebellious opposition. Since then the Lord without any other helps thus corrects the perverseness of men, we hence see with what inconceivable power God works,

968Commentary on Micah 4:1-2 [1559]; CO 43:341.

969Commentary on Micah 4:3 [1559]; CO 43:344-345.

when he gathers his own church.⁹⁷⁰

In the kingdom of Christ God subdues the nations by the power of the word and Spirit alone. The result of his reign is genuine peace and justice. While the world apart from the gospel is marked by tyranny, oppression, dissension, and fighting, therefore, the gospel is to the nations a “standard of peace,” restoring the world to the “cultivation of peace and concord.”⁹⁷¹

Calvin views Micah's prophecy as an indictment of Christians and Christendom. “Though the gospel is at this day purely preached among us, when yet we consider how little progress we make in brotherly love, we ought justly to be ashamed of our indolence.” Christians claim the reconciliation of Christ “but in the meantime we tear one another, we sharpen our teeth, our dispositions are cruel.” Indeed, “when the gospel was at first preached the whole world boiled with wars more than ever,” and even now “discords and contentions do not cease.” Calvin therefore concedes, “It seems that the prophet does not describe here the state of the church for a time, but shows what would be the kingdom of Christ to the end.”⁹⁷² In other words, how can the church, plagued as it is by sin, be the genuine fulfillment of this prophecy?

Calvin addresses the problem by appealing to the eschatological nature of the church's existence under the cross:

My answer to this is that as the kingdom of Christ was only begun in the world when God commanded the gospel to be everywhere proclaimed, and as at this day its course is not as yet completed, so that which the prophet says here has not hitherto taken place. But inasmuch as the number of the faithful is small, and the greater part despise and reject the gospel, so it happens that plunders and hostilities continue in the world. How so? Because the prophet speaks here only of the disciples of Christ. He shows the fruit of his doctrine, that wherever it strikes a living root it brings forth fruit, but the doctrine of the gospel strikes roots hardly in one out of a hundred.⁹⁷³

The kingdom of Christ is limited in extent, and even the faithful continue to struggle with

970Commentary on Micah 4:3 [1559]; CO 43:345.

971Commentary on Micah 4:3 [1559]; CO 43:346.

972Commentary on Micah 4:3 [1559]; CO 43:347.

973Commentary on Micah 4:3 [1559]; CO 43:348.

sin.

Calvin takes this point as an opportunity to emphasize the continuing importance of civil government as subject to the rule of Christ. “It is also easy hence to see how foolish is the conceit of those who seek to take away the use of the sword on account of the gospel. The Anabaptists, we know, have been turbulent, as though all political order [*ordo politicus*] were inconsistent with the kingdom of Christ [*Christi regno*], as though the kingdom of Christ [*regnum Christi*] was made up of doctrine only, and that doctrine without any influence.”⁹⁷⁴ This is an excellent example of a case in which Calvin uses the phrase 'kingdom of Christ' in a broader sense. In his commentary on the parallel passage Calvin uses the word 'church' to make the same point, charging that “madman torture this passage to promote anarchy, as if it took away from the church [*ecclesiae*] entirely the right to use the sword, and bring it forward for condemning with great severity every kind of wars.”⁹⁷⁵ The point is not that the sword is an expression of the kingdom of Christ, or of the spiritual government of the church, but that where the kingdom of Christ is established it calls forth obedience and righteousness that is compatible with and takes expression in political order.

But the distinction between the kingdoms remains. Indeed, the fundamental premise of Calvin's argument is that because the political kingdom is distinct from the spiritual kingdom of Christ, the prophecy of Micah and Isaiah must not be understood in terms of a literal end to the sword, which is essential to the functioning of the political kingdom, but in terms of the flourishing of the spiritual kingdom. “But this was not fulfilled, we are certain, at the coming of Christ, in a manner visible to men. We must therefore bear in mind what Micah has previously taught, that this kingdom is spiritual [*regnum hoc spirituale esse*], for he did not ascribe to Christ a golden scepter, but a

974Commentary on Micah 4:3 [1559]; CO 43:348.

975Commentary on Isaiah 2:4 [1559]; CO 36:66.

doctrine.”⁹⁷⁶ In the commentary on Isaiah Calvin stresses,

peace exists among us only as far as the kingdom of Christ flourishes [*floret Christi regnum*]... Would that Christ reigned [*regnaret Christus*] entirely in us! for then would peace also have its perfect influence. But since we are still widely distant from the perfection of that peaceful kingdom [*perfectione pacifici istius regni*], we must always think of making progress, and it is excessive folly not to consider that the kingdom of Christ [*regnum Christi*] here is only beginning.

The ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, therefore, could only take place after Jesus' return. “It is enough if we experience the beginning, and if, being reconciled to God through Christ, we cultivate mutual friendship and abstain from doing harm to any one.”⁹⁷⁷

⁹⁷⁶Commentary on Micah 4:8 [1559]; CO 43:356-357. Christians should expect no political dominion or temporal abundance, nor should they “appropriate everything to themselves and also abuse their power.” Their victory over the nations, the consecration of the “wealth of the nations,” consists only in the triumph of the word in bringing the nations in worship to the glory of God (4:11-13; CO 43:362-363).

⁹⁷⁷Commentary on Isaiah 2:4 [1559]; CO 36:66. Until then, believers are not “separate from others, but the good are always mixed with the bad.” What is more, the good themselves are not truly good. “[T]he good have not yet reached the goal, and are widely distant from that perfection which is required from them.” There could still be Christian princes, Calvin insisted, because “the prophet speaks metaphorically about the kingdom of Christ, which leads men, through mutual kindness, to become reconciled to each other” (65-66).

CHAPTER 5

CHRIST'S SPIRITUAL GOVERNMENT

One of Calvin's most emphatic claims throughout his works is that the church is Christ's kingdom. Calvin does not entirely equate the two concepts, for the scope of Christ's kingdom will ultimately be the restoration of the entire creation. Likewise the progress of the kingdom in the rule of the Holy Spirit necessarily expresses itself in the outward conduct of believers.⁹⁷⁸ Still, during the present age the kingdom is established only where the gospel is proclaimed and humans respond in faith and obedience, which is to say, in the true visible church.⁹⁷⁹ Calvin writes, “When we speak of the kingdom of

⁹⁷⁸“Calvin thinks of the kingdom of Christ as the church, but not simply so, for it is the manifest intention of God 'to reduce the whole world to order and subject it to his government,' and to this end he has conferred on Christ 'the sovereignty of the whole world.’” Benjamin Milner, Jr., *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 169-170. Witte is thus correct when he notes that “Calvin stressed that Christians must take their faith and conscience directly into the political, public, and external life of the earthly kingdom.” John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 61. Cf. Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 107-110. Calvin “made it a point of prime importance to teach the combination of the *meditatio vitae futurae* with the unceasing activity of the Church on earth in the growth and extension of the Kingdom of Christ.” Thomas F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956), 91. The kingdom “is spiritual and interior but it works from within out, insisting on manifestation in the daily life of man in the world, and pressing toward the full manifestation when Christ comes again, when we shall see Him and be like Him” (156-157). Thus Calvin sometimes explicitly refers to the kingdom in distinction from the church. For instance, in his commentary on Ephesians 1:14 he argues that the possession destined for believers “is not the kingdom of heaven, or a blessed immortality, but the church itself.” Commentary on Ephesians 1:14 [1548]; CO 51:154. Sometimes Calvin so equates the church with Christ's kingdom that he can even say that there are false teachers in Christ's kingdom. Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:1 [1563]; CO 24:275. Torrance writes that for Calvin “the Church and the Kingdom are essentially correlative,” but he adds that this correlativity has to be interpreted in light of the two ages of the church, “for here and now the Church is not so correlative to the Kingdom that it transcribes the perfect form of the Kingdom in earthly existence.” Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 134. Like Augustine, Calvin could describe the church as a city, though it was not his favored way of speaking. See Commentary on Colossians 4:5 [1548]; CO 52:129.

⁹⁷⁹Calvin often uses the terms kingdom and church interchangeably. “The reason why believers now wait for the hope of righteousness through the Spirit is that in Christ, that is, in the kingdom of Christ, or in the Christian church, circumcision with its appendages is abolished.” Commentary on Galatians 5:6 [1548]; CO 50:246. “The world is fading and corruptible, but the church, that is, the kingdom of Christ, shall be eternal, and therefore it is reasonable to believe that the promises which relate to the Church shall undoubtedly be more stable and permanent than all the rest.” Commentary on Isaiah 45:18 [1559]; CO 37:143. In a myriad of other places he identifies the kingdom with the preaching of the gospel. The kingdom ultimately denotes “the renovation [of the world] promised through Christ,” but this “perfection of order ... cannot exist unless God assembles under his government those men who had gone astray.” Thus the ministry is the form his government takes until he returns “to complete his reign which he has commenced.” Commentary on Mark 15:43 [1555]; CO 45:788-789. “Matthew calls it the Gospel of the kingdom, by which the kingdom of God is established among men for their salvation.”

Christ [*Christi regno*] we must respect two things: the doctrine of the gospel, by which Christ gathers to himself a church, and by which he governs [*gubernat*] it ... and secondly, the society of the godly, who being coupled together by the sincere faith of the gospel, are truly accounted the people of God.”⁹⁸⁰ Each individual church is an outpost of the universal spiritual kingdom, for “Christ, by his ministers, has subdued to his dominion the whole world, and has erected as many principalities under his authority as there have been churches gathered to him in divers nations by their preaching.”⁹⁸¹ This means that the history of the church, as Milner observes, is “the history of restoration of order in the world.”⁹⁸² Calvin describes the church as Christ's kingdom because he defines the two according to the same foundational mark, the preaching of Christ's word (4.1.5).⁹⁸³ “To sum up, since the church is Christ's Kingdom, and he reigns by his word

-
- Commentary on Matthew 4:23 [1555]; CO 45:151. The preaching of the gospel is the kingdom of God for “by the preaching of the Gospel the kingdom of God is set up and established among men, and ... in no other way does God reign among men.” Commentary on Mark 1:14 [1555]; CO 45:139. The basic theme of the book of Acts is to describe “the beginning of Christ's kingdom, and as it were the renewing of the world” through the apostles' preaching of the gospel. Commentary on Acts, Argument [1552]; CO 48:vii. Paul likewise “calls the gospel the kingdom of God, for it is the scepter by which God reigns over us, and by means of it we are singled out to life eternal.” Commentary on Colossians 4:11 [1548]; CO 52:131. Cf. Commentary on 2 Corinthians 6:2 [1548]; CO 50:75-76; Commentary on Mark 1:14 [1555]; CO 45:138-139; Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:9 [1550]; CO 52:202; Commentary on 1 John 1:2 [1551]; CO 55:301; Commentary on Isaiah 2:4 [1559]; CO 36:64; 11:9; 36:243-244; 52:7; CO 37:247; 54:2; CO 37:270; Commentary on Romans 5:2 [1556]; CO 49:89; 15:21; CO 49:279; 16:21-27; 49:292; Commentary on a Harmony of the Gospels, Argument [1555]; CO 45:2; Commentary on Matthew 5:19 [1555]; CO 45:172; 9:35; CO 45:262; 11:11; CO 45:303; 17:11; CO 45:491; 25:1; CO 45:682; 28:18; CO 45:820-821; Commentary on Acts 19:9 [1554]; CO 48:444; Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:10 [1550]; CO 52:170-171; Commentary on Genesis 28:17 [1554]; CO 23:394.
- 980Commentary on Acts, Dedication to Second Edition [1560]; CO 18:157. Cf. Commentary on Acts 20:1 [1554]; CO 48:455.
- 981Commentary on Psalm 45:16 [1557]; CO 31:458-459. Calvin “equated the extension of the Kingdom with the establishment of churches.” Peter Wilcox, “The Progress of the Kingdom of Christ' in Calvin's Exposition of the Prophets,” in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex* (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1997), 321. Cf. Frederik A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody: The Church, A History of Divine Protection: A Study of John Calvin's Ecclesiology Based on his Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 109, 112-114, 118, 130-131.
- 982Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 194. Cf. Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Methuen, 1956), 183-185; Willem Van't Spijker, “The Kingdom of Christ According to Bucer and Calvin,” *Calvin and the State* (ed. Peter De Klerk; Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1993), 120.
- 983“Isaiah had long before distinguished Christ's Kingdom by this mark: 'My spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall never depart out of your mouth'” (4.1.5). It is the same mark, along with the administration of Christ's sacraments, that make the true church “visible to our eyes” (4.1.9). Cf. Commentary on John 10:16 [1553]; CO 47:244-245; Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 1:1 [1550]; CO 52:139. Commentary on Isaiah 33:22 [1559]; CO 36:576. Commentary on Obadiah 1:21

alone, will it not be clear to any man that those are lying words by which the Kingdom of Christ is imagined to exist apart from his scepter (that is, his most holy word)?" (4.2.4)

In this chapter I show that Calvin's identification of the church as Christ's spiritual kingdom, identifiable by the mark of the word, is the foundation for the reformer's whole ecclesiology. Despite the tendency of other reformers, such as Zwingli, Bullinger, and later Hooker, to identify the visible church with the political kingdom, Calvin clearly does just the opposite, identifying the ministry of the church, including discipline, with Christ's spiritual kingdom. But I also demonstrate that Calvin vigorously rejected the tendency of the medieval church to claim magisterial authority over spiritual matters and spiritual authority over political matters. He decisively limits pastors' authority in preaching, teaching, and discipline to the ministerial authority of the word. Only where various regulations are necessary for order and decorum in church affairs does he permit a sort of political rule in the church, whether on the part of magistrates or pastors.

The Church as Christ's Spiritual Kingdom

A few scholars have alleged that, like the Zurich reformers and Hooker, Calvin situates the visible church in the political kingdom, limiting the spiritual kingdom to the invisible church. Edward A. Dowey categorically rejects the idea that Calvin identifies church and state with the two kingdoms. Instead, he claims, Calvin used the two kingdoms doctrine as a lens through which to view the church from a double perspective, one kingdom encompassing the invisible church, the realm of faith, election, and grace, and the other kingdom encompassing the visible church, the realm of sanctification and

[1559]; CO 43:200. Torrance observes that it is in the context of the inseparability between the word and Spirit that Calvin "came to work out so fully, in the fourth book of the *Institutes* particularly, the relation between the historical Church as the Body of Christ and the Kingdom of Christ." Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 98. On the correspondence of the church and kingdom in Torrance See also pp 123.

church polity.

The Church, '*invisible*' in this sense, is what Calvin means above by the 'spiritual kingdom', where men have 'Christian liberty' and peace of conscience before the tribunal of God: this is the historical-eschatological kingdom of elect man – justified, faithful and free... But! Calvin's massive fourth book in his *Institutes* is not about the Church as 'invisible' but as 'visible'... The 'External Means' of book four (Church, Sacraments, and State) are not themselves the eschaton, but specially accommodated *instruments* or *means* for supporting the faith by which believers now participate in Christ's Kingdom.⁹⁸⁴

Such means include “the helpful roles of biblical interpretation and of providing for decorum and order,” as well as church discipline; “the actual function of this discipline concerns holiness, modesty, honour, and the offices of humanity and citizenship: all those things that were above assigned to the 'political', 'temporal', and 'external' realm.”⁹⁸⁵ Dowey insists that for Calvin excommunication “does not mean one is excluded from Christ's Kingdom.” He concludes that “church discipline, in so far as it relates to external conduct, would seem to fall under the category of 'temporal' jurisdiction.”⁹⁸⁶

More recently Torrance Kirby has revived this argument, in part to demonstrate that the Anglican theologian Richard Hooker's defense of the royal supremacy over the church was more faithful to Calvin than were Calvin's Presbyterian heirs, who insisted on the church's autonomy.⁹⁸⁷ He argues that Calvin and the other reformers derived the “twofold government [*duplex gubernatio*]” from the corresponding “double grace

984Edward A. Dowey, “Calvin on Church and State,” *Reformed and Presbyterian World* 24 (1957): 247-248. “Thus, if one pole of Calvin's doctrine of the Church concerns faith and election, the realm where all is done freely by God's grace, the other pole is expressed in sanctification with visible churchly judicatories as guides, goads, and admonishers to holiness of life” (249). Hancock considers the view that Calvin identified the spiritual kingdom with the invisible church, but rejects it. “By spiritual kingdom, Calvin therefore means much more than the free and invisible community of the elect. In fact, he announces plainly that his subject is the visible church.” Ralph C. Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 45; Cf. 50.

985Dowey, “Calvin on Church and State,” 248.

986Dowey, “Calvin on Church and State,” 249. Dowey concedes that Calvin insists church discipline “is 'wholly distinct from civil polity,’” but he claims that the reformer “is hard put to it to expound this difference, except to say that the two are administered by a different officialdom and that the State alone can use force.”

987W. J. Torrance Kirby, *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

[*duplex gratia*]” of justification and sanctification.⁹⁸⁸ Just as inward justification and outward sanctification are to be distinguished but never separated, so this “leads Calvin to assert simultaneously the most radical distinction between the temporal and spiritual orders, *and* their intimate union.”⁹⁸⁹ Kirby concludes that Calvin's presentation of the two kingdoms doctrine as an expression of the classic theological distinction between the spiritual and temporal jurisdictions is disingenuous.⁹⁹⁰ Why? Because Calvin shoved church government and the means of grace out of the forum of conscience and into the political forum, so clearing the way for the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

In this fashion, Calvin transposes the customary institutional sense of the distinction between 'spiritual' and 'temporal' jurisdiction to the moral ontological plain... Conversely, both the spiritual and the temporal jurisdictions are construed as 'the external means or aids by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein,' that is to say through the government of the visible church and the commonwealth which together constitute the *forum*

988Torrance Kirby, “A Reformed Culture of Persuasion: John Calvin’s 'Two Kingdoms' and the Theological Origins of the Public Sphere,” *Calvin@500: Theology, History, and Practice* (ed. Richard R. Topping and John A. Vissers; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, forthcoming), 62. “Calvin's dialectical treatment of the twofold government is thus very carefully constructed on the foundation of the principal modes of the 'double grace’” (63). Kirby in turn links the reformers' distinction between the individual soul in relation to God and the human body in relation to others to the Chalcedonian doctrine of Christ's two natures.

989Kirby, “A Reformed Culture of Persuasion,” 62. Here he simply invokes Ralph Hancock's *Calvin and the foundations of Modern Politics*, a work Hancock himself admits is a “violent” reading of Calvin. Kirby places considerable stock in the fact that Calvin introduces his two kingdoms doctrine in the context of his discussion of justification and Christian liberty. “According to the systematic structure of the argument of Calvin's *Institutes*, the precise character and full significance of the vast gap which distinguishes the two ontological realms associated with the *duplex gubernatio* only becomes fully apparent through a reflection upon the reformer's pivotal soteriological claim concerning 'justification by faith alone' in the series of chapters immediately preceding the discussion of liberty, namely in Book III, chapters 1 through 18” (55).

990Kirby oddly reduces the spiritual/temporal distinction to the canon law distinction between “the outward forum of an external jurisdiction exercised in the ecclesiastical courts and the internal forum of spiritual jurisdiction in the practice of penance,” rather than relating it to the broader medieval two swords distinction. See Chapter 1 above. Kirby, “A Reformed Culture of Persuasion,” 55.

politicum.

Kirby thus claims that Calvin's two kingdoms correspond not to the chapters in Book 4 on church (1-19) and civil government (20) respectively, but to the distinction between the inward work of the Spirit (Book 3) and the outward means of grace (Book 4). Preaching, the sacraments, and discipline, along with civil government, make up the outward or political kingdom. Calvin, he argues, engaged in the “profanizing disenchantment of ecclesiastical functions.”⁹⁹¹

These arguments miss the fact that for Calvin the fundamental difference between the two kingdoms is not that one is inward and the other is outward, but that one is spiritual and the other is temporal and political.⁹⁹² The visible church, in this scheme, truly administers the spiritual government of Christ. As Peter Wilcox observes,

Calvin identifies the Kingdom of Christ with the Church... Furthermore, this identification is of the Kingdom of Christ not with 'the elect' (the invisible Church), but with the institutional (or visible) Church... When Calvin speaks of the Church as Christ's Kingdom in this way, he means that it is not only the realm over which Christ reigns (which exists by hearing the Word), but the agency through which he exercises his reign (which exists to proclaim the Word). The function of the Church corresponds to its form... Christ's scepter is not simply held over the Church, to exact its obedience; it is also held by the Church. Or rather, this scepter is entrusted to the Church, in the form of the Gospel, but continues to be held by Christ.⁹⁹³

It is of decisive significance that Calvin repeatedly and explicitly identifies the core elements of church government with Christ's spiritual government of the church, which is to say, Christ's spiritual kingdom. “As the Lord governs [*gubernat*] the church by his word, as with a scepter, the administration of the gospel [*evangelii administratio*] is

⁹⁹¹Kirby, “A Reformed Culture of Persuasion,” 61. Kirby's assignment of the outward means of grace to the political kingdom blatantly contradicts Calvin's emphatic insistence to the contrary (see Chapter 5). His insistence that concerns of soteriology and moral ontology drive Calvin's articulation of the two kingdoms doctrine blissfully ignore Calvin's own stated reasons for introducing it in 3.19.14-15 (see Chapter 4).

⁹⁹²On Calvin's identification of the visible church as the true church see Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 191-193. Tonkin suggests that the distinction between the visible and invisible church should be understood eschatologically rather than ontologically, such that it corresponds to the two conditions of the church. The visible church is thus the church in history, while the invisible church is the church from the perspective of the consummated kingdom of Christ. John Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 129-130.

⁹⁹³Wilcox, “‘The Progress of the Kingdom of Christ' in Calvin's Exposition of the Prophets,” 320.

often called the kingdom of God [*regnum Dei*].⁹⁹⁴ Calvin writes of those ecclesiastical ministers who preside in the Lord,

This seems to be added to denote spiritual government [*spirituale regimen*]. For although kings and magistrates also preside by the appointment of God, yet as the Lord would have the government of the church [*ecclesiae gubernationem*] to be specially recognized as his, those that govern the church [*ecclesiam gubernant*] in the name and by the commandment of Christ are for this reason spoken of particularly as presiding [*praesesse*] in the Lord.⁹⁹⁵

To be sure, with the specter of the Roman Church constantly in his mind, Calvin agreed that not every element of ecclesiastical government is an expression of Christ's spiritual government. But Calvin clearly identifies the core elements of faithful ecclesiastical government, including preaching and discipline, with the spiritual kingdom.⁹⁹⁶

In fact, it is Calvin's emphasis on the visible expression of the kingdom of Christ in the outward ministry of the church that most practically distinguishes his two kingdoms theology from that of Luther.⁹⁹⁷ As T. F. Torrance puts it, "In contrast to

994Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:20 [1546]; CO 49:376.

995Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:12 [1550]; CO 52:172. In his commentary on John Calvin describes the role of pastors within the "spiritual government of the church [*spirituali ecclesiae gubernatione*]," writing, "Those men, therefore, are reckoned to be pastors in the sight of God who govern [*praesunt*] the church by the ministry of the word under Christ, who is their head." Commentary on John 21:15 [1553]; CO 47:452. In his commentary on Acts he compares Christians' obligations toward "civil government [*policitis imperiis*]" to their higher obligations toward "the spiritual government of the church [*spirituali ecclesiae regimine*]." Commentary on Acts 4:19 [1552]; CO 48:88. Forms of honor may be entirely appropriate for a secular king, falling "within the bounds of earthly and civil honor," but this does not make them appropriate for ministers, whose office is spiritual. "For we must put a difference between civil worship, which men use among themselves in respect of civil order, and that under which is contained religion, or which respects directly the honor of God, as also between laws which are made for temporal government [*temporale regimen*], or which bind the conscience" (10:25; CO 48:237).

996Niesel observes that for Calvin church government is not first and foremost a reflection of the fact that the church is a political society but of the fact that it is the spiritual body of Christ. Its government is "not built up from powers inherent in its common life, but from the functions which devolve upon it. The life of the church is ordered from above, from Christ, who acts through His Spirit and His gifts." Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 200 (Cf. 199, 206-208). Cf. François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, (trans. Philip Mairet; London: Collins, 1963 [1950]), 302-303, 307.

997Tonkin observes, "The institutional Church is the place where that restoration of order in creation, initiated by Christ and destined to be completed at the last day, is realized in the present." Tonkin, *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought*, 122. Indeed, it is this that explains Calvin's emphasis, in contrast to Luther, on discipline. "The purpose of discipline is identical with the purpose of the ministry – namely, that the Christian be properly subject, not to the ministry or even to the Church, but to the royal and priestly imperium of Christ. Discipline is the way in which God's work of bringing order is effected and guaranteed within the Church. The Church's task is to make visible 'the order approved by the Lord,' thereby reflecting in its life the restoration of God's image" (124). It is only from

Luther, Calvin laid greater emphasis upon the *ecclesia externa sive visibilis*. The Kingdom of Christ consists not only in the Gospel, not only in a hidden community of believers, but in the historical communication of the Gospel, and the building up of the Church on earth by human agency (*humanitus*).⁹⁹⁸

The key, once again, is the Genevan reformer's eschatology. Torrance identifies three fundamental points of connection between Calvin's eschatology and his ecclesiology. First, the heavenly kingdom has already begun in believers on earth, being actualized in the life of the church. Second, through the word and sacraments the visible church enjoys ontological union with Christ. Word and sacrament are not merely outward masks (*externa larva*) of inward realities, but genuine means (*vera facies*) by which the kingdom is established. "The new creation has ontological reality here and now in the Church."⁹⁹⁹ Third, for Calvin the order of the church initiates the restoration of the world that will fully take place when Christ returns.

The order of the Church is therefore the *rectitude* or *spiritual jurisdiction* of the *Regnum Christi* in actual operation... That is why the establishment of *order* in the Church was for Calvin a promotion of the Kingdom of Christ. That is possible because the ascended Christ has sent through His Spirit such help to the Church that through it He promotes His own Kingdom, and will always reign on earth through the Church, which as His Body already bears the new order of the Kingdom of God. Therefore the Church can be spoken of as the Kingdom, or the

this perspective of the ministry and discipline that Tonkin is correct to say that for Calvin the church is "God's instrument for transforming man and the world according to his purposes" (119; Cf. 128). Wendel observes of ecclesiastical organization that Calvin "deduced it directly from the lordship of Christ over the Church and the gifts of the Holy Spirit." Wendel, *Calvin*, 302. "It was because he was the founder of a powerfully organized Church, and at the same time the author of a body of doctrine which was able to rally around it an intellectual elite as well as the mass of the faithful, that Calvin made such a mark upon his age and, even beyond it" (360). Cf. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 91, 150.

998Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 148. "Calvin taught a doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ continuously actualised within history" (147). "[T]he Church already begins to actualise its [the kingdom's] new life and being" (149). "It is because of this participation in the Kingdom of Christ, in the heavenly peace, that the Church can engage in its arduous task of extending that Kingdom on earth. And so throughout all his works Calvin made it a point of prime importance to teach the combination of the *meditatio vitae futurae* with the unceasing activity of the Church on earth in the growth and extension of the Kingdom of Christ" (91). "The Regnum Christi presses through the Church ... to bring all mankind under its sway in the Gospel" (161). Thus "the Church is the movement of the Kingdom of God 'whose limits are wider than the whole world'" (163).

999Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 150.

Kingdom as the renovation of the Church.¹⁰⁰⁰

The order of the Spirit is expressed in doctrine and discipline, both of which necessarily derive their function and authority (*potestas*) from the word of God, such that the church “exercises not *dominium* or *imperium* but *ministerium*.”¹⁰⁰¹

Benjamin Milner likewise presents Calvin's identification of church and kingdom in its eschatological context, explaining that it is through the ministry of the church that the kingdom is established throughout the world.¹⁰⁰² Milner agrees that there is an element in ecclesiastical government that the church shares in common with any other social institution, and that therefore lies within the political forum.¹⁰⁰³ But the spiritual order of the church, including its discipline, is different, because its effect is the restoration of the world.¹⁰⁰⁴ Not only is ecclesiastical discipline not a politicization of the church, but it represents the central concerns of Calvin's kingdom theology:

In the conception of discipline, then, we have the heart of Calvin's doctrine of the

1000Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 153.

1001Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 154. Christ governs the church through his “subministration” (133).

1002“Calvin thinks of the kingdom of Christ as the church, but not simply so, for it is the manifest intention of God 'to reduce the whole world to order and subject it to his government,' and to this end he has conferred on Christ 'the sovereignty of the whole world.’” Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 169-170. Milner argues that it is “the absolute correlation of the Spirit and the Word” that is the foundational core of Calvin's theology (4). Yet Milner is guilty of serious oversimplification when he claims that this correlation underlies all of the dualisms and distinctions that Calvin explains by the formula *distinctio, sed non separatio*, including law and gospel, sign and substance, visible and invisible, outward means and spiritual power, civil and spiritual government (191).

1003Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 173-174.

1004Where the latter is lacking, of course, ecclesiastical power is nothing more than tyranny, the mere “external form of the church”, or to put it another way, the false church (178).

kingdom of Christ (and thus of his doctrine of sanctification). In the correlation of discipline (law enforcement) and the effectual work of the Spirit, the restoration of the image of God takes place. Just this daily discipline, however, reveals that the goal has not been reached, and points once again to the need of forgiveness. As discipline is the heart of Calvin's doctrine of the Kingdom of Christ, so it drives us to see even more deeply that the last word belongs to justification, that the church conceived as the kingdom of Christ must also be understood as the body of Christ.¹⁰⁰⁵

It is true that Calvin believed the ministry of the word and sacraments will pass away at Christ's return, and are in that sense temporary.¹⁰⁰⁶ The present "order in the Kingdom of Christ [*Christi regno ordinem*]" is appropriate for "our present weakness" but "in that perfect glory the administration of the Kingdom [*regni administrationem*] will not be as it now is" (2.15.5).¹⁰⁰⁷ But what makes the government of the church spiritual is not that its functions or offices are eternal but that the *power it administers* is spiritual. The faithful government of the church is a ministry of the Spirit and word of Christ, both of which *are* eternal.¹⁰⁰⁸

Papal Church Government.

Calvin's primary foil for his understanding of the church was Rome, and understanding the reformer's criticism of Rome helps to explain the sense in which he identified the church with Christ's spiritual kingdom and the sense in which he did not.¹⁰⁰⁹ Like Luther, Calvin saw Rome as a false church¹⁰¹⁰ that confused its own

1005Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 178-179.

1006Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), 162-165; Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 134-137.

1007In the kingdom of God Christians "will have no more need of the outward ministry [*externo ministerio*] or other inferior helps." Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:12 [1546]; CO 49:514-515.

1008It is with respect to the present condition of the kingdom, Torrance observes, that the ministry can be identified as Christ's kingdom. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 126.

1009Klaas Runia recognizes that the reformers did not identify the church with Christ's kingdom in the sense that Rome did but he underestimates the extent to which the reformers identified the church with Christ's kingdom in a different sense. He is therefore mistaken when he writes that "All Reformers broke with these ideas and rejected the identification of church and kingdom" (40). Runia entirely misses Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine and the important role it plays in the reformer's thought, claiming that for Calvin the two kingdoms are the kingdoms of Christ and Satan. See Klaas Runia, "The Kingdom of God in the Bible, in History, and Today," *European Journal of Theology* 1:1 (1992): 37-47.

1010To be sure, Calvin conceded that Rome still possessed some of the forms of true religion. God had preserved certain outward means such as baptism, which ensured the survival of the gospel and of a true

magisterial political claims with the ministry of Christ's spiritual government. Although critics of Calvinist ecclesiology accused him of reestablishing the same sort of tyranny that characterized the papal church, Calvin presented his understanding of church government in stark contrast to papal claims to the plenipotentiality of power.¹⁰¹¹ Calvin claims Rome made essentially the same mistake as the “fanatics” and “libertines” when it claimed that “the church is ruled by the Holy Spirit immediately, and therefore that it cannot err.”¹⁰¹² While Christ promises his Spirit to the church, Calvin admits, what is received is “only the first fruits and some taste of his Spirit” (4.8.11). Thus “the riches of the church are always far from that supreme perfection of which our adversaries boast.” Ecclesiastical authority must necessarily be tested by the word (4.8.12).

Calvin devotes two entire chapters of the *Institutes* to a critique of the papacy, that “capstone of the whole structure” of Roman government. The pope claimed to be the vicar of Christ, Calvin writes, and that he “presides over the whole church in Christ's place; and the church cannot otherwise be well constituted unless that see hold primacy over all others” (4.6.1). What is more, by virtue of the two swords doctrine the papacy claimed that this primacy included “earthly dominion” and “civil power,” as well as “supreme jurisdiction” in all ecclesiastical matters, including “adjudicating and defining doctrines, or in laying down laws, or in establishing discipline, or in rendering judgments” (4.7.19).¹⁰¹³ Yet it was sheer “madness” for the canon lawyers to imagine that

church within Rome, however obscure that survival might be. Thus “when we categorically deny to the papists the title of *the* church, we do not for this reason impugn the existence of churches among them” (4.2.4). Yet in the churches under the papacy, “Christ lies hidden, half buried, the gospel overthrown, piety scattered, the worship of God nearly wiped out.” That a remnant of God's people remains, “however woefully dispersed and scattered,” is due to the faithfulness of God alone (4.2.12). With what effrontery, therefore, do the Papists dare to boast that they are the Church of God, seeing that they reject that lawful government of it which was enjoined by Moses, and the Prophets, and Christ, and substitute in the room of it inventions and base traffic?” Commentary on Isaiah 33:22 [1559]; CO 37:576.

1011Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 186-187; Wendel, *Calvin*, 305-306.

1012Commentary on Ezekiel 3:16-17 [1565]; CO 40:90-91.

1013By claiming the plenitude of power in both spiritual and temporal affairs, “they leave no jurisdiction on earth to control or restrain their lust if they abuse such boundless power.” The pope can be judged “neither by emperor, nor by kings, nor by all the clergy, nor by the people,” even if “he scatter and lay waste Christ's Kingdom” (4.7.19).

Jesus gave the disciples, and through them bishops, a “double jurisdiction [*duplici iurisdictione*]” of spiritual and political power.¹⁰¹⁴

Calvin argues that although Bernard of Clairveaux was the source for the two swords analogy, he had clearly distinguished the “earthly things” governed by political rulers from the “keys to the Kingdom of Heaven,” and “lordship” from “ministry.” The popes, however, claimed “the supreme right to both swords ... by divine right” (4.11.11).

From this came

the tyranny of the pope, whom they wish to possess supreme power over kings and princes. They speak impudent falsehood when they say that he is Christ’s deputy, for Christ’s kingdom is not of this world. The pope rules barbarously and tyrannically and claims the power of changing and disposing of kingdoms. But kings submit to Christ in such a manner that they do not cease to be kings, but exercise all their power for preserving the worship of God and administering righteous government.¹⁰¹⁵

The Roman church was infatuated with power. “For if they are generally willing to resign all the secular power they have, no danger will befall the glory of God, sound doctrine, or the safety of the church. But they are carried away, blind and headlong, by one lust for dominion” (4.11.14).

Rome confused the two kingdoms by conflating spiritual glory with temporal glory and by identifying the church as a *political* institution with Christ’s spiritual kingdom. “They say that the dignity of the church is decently sustained by this magnificence. And they have certain ones of their sect so shameless as to dare openly to boast that only thus are those prophecies fulfilled with which the ancient prophets describe the splendor of Christ’s Kingdom, when that kingly magnificence is beheld in

1014In his discussion of Luke 22:38, the origin of the 'two swords' analogy, Calvin insists that when Jesus exhorted the disciples to prepare for military conflict he was speaking of spiritual warfare. Commentary on Luke 22:38 [1555]; CO 45:717. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 26:51 [1555]; CO 45:732.

1015Commentary on Isaiah 60:10 [1559]; CO 37:361-362. Cf. 60:11-14; CO 37:362-364. “[H]e intends to speak of that obedience which kings and nobles and the common people render to the Church when they promote, as far as they are able, pure doctrine” (363) “Kings and nations are said, as we have already seen, to 'serve the Church;' not that she exercises any dominion over them, but because God has committed to her the scepter of his word by which he rules” (363). “Now we say that Christ is worshiped in the Church, not as the Papists do, who think that the honor which they bestow on that Roman idol is rendered to Christ... for Christ is honored by those who obey his doctrine” (364).

the priestly order” (4.5.17). Under such pretenses those who “ought to have been a singular example of frugality, modesty, continence, and humility” came to “rival the magnificence of princes in number of retainers, splendor of buildings, elegance of apparel, and banquets.” They “lay hands on villages and castles,” and “carry off vast provinces, ... seize whole kingdoms!” (4.5.19)

The prelates of the church, imagining that catholicity and orthodoxy flowed from the episcopal succession, showed themselves to be more interested in exercising magisterial power than in fulfilling their spiritual functions as ministers of Christ (4.2.10). “Here there is no preaching, no care for discipline, no zeal toward the churches, no spiritual activity – in short, nothing but the world” (4.7.22). “As if a horned mitre, a ring richly set in jewels, or a silver cross and other trifles, accompanied by idle display, constituted the spiritual government of a church [*spirituale ecclesiae regimen*], which can no more be separated from doctrine than any one of us can be separated from his own soul.”¹⁰¹⁶ The pope deceived the masses by mere “masks [*larvae*]” (4.5.5),¹⁰¹⁷ establishing “unbounded dominion [*dominationem*].”¹⁰¹⁸

The problem had filtered down throughout the entire clergy. When the papists chose a bishop “they choose a lawyer who knows how to plead in a court rather than how to preach in a church” (4.5.1), and the bishops simply immersed themselves in the political interests of their benefices (4.5.6).¹⁰¹⁹ Whereas the task of a presbyter is “to feed the church, and administer the spiritual Kingdom of Christ” (4.5.9), the Roman clergy “have cast off as burdens too troublesome the preaching of the word, the care of

¹⁰¹⁶Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:2 [1548]; CO 52:283. The cardinals and popes were so different from what a bishop should be that they had become “the cousins of kings and emperors” (4.7.30). Cf. Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7:15 [1548]; CO 50:94.

¹⁰¹⁷Cf. Commentary on 1 John 4:1 [1551]; CO 55:347-348; Commentary on 2 Corinthians 11:14 [1548]; CO 50:129.

¹⁰¹⁸Commentary on 2 Corinthians 13:8 [1548]; CO 50:152.

¹⁰¹⁹“Today the courts resound with more lawsuits over priestly offices than almost anything else ... Is it tolerable even to hear the name 'pastor' applied to those who have rushed into possession of a church as upon enemy booty, who have obtained it by lawsuits, who have bought it for a price, who have earned it by sordid currying of a favor, who as children scarcely able to babble have received it as an inheritance from their uncles and relatives, and even sometimes illegitimate sons from their fathers?” (4.5.6)

discipline, and the administering of the sacraments.” Instead, they were consumed with a myriad of titles and innovations that had nothing to do with the “spiritual government [*regiminis spiritualis*]” appointed by Christ (4.5.10).¹⁰²⁰ As for the deacons, “There is nothing of alms, nothing of the care of the poor, nothing of that whole function which they once performed” (4.5.15).¹⁰²¹ Calvin rejected wholesale the distinction between monks and secular clergy, arguing that there should be no clergy who do not fulfill an office of ministry as appointed by Christ (4.5.8).¹⁰²²

The problem was not simply the politicization of ecclesiastical authority, but the exercise of magisterial power *over* religion, as if Christ had placed his authority at the discretion of the church.¹⁰²³ The greatest sin was the tyrannizing of consciences. While the church refused to hold its clergy accountable to justice and piety, it enforced human laws ruthlessly, such as the law requiring clerical celibacy (4.12.23) or the “cruel tyranny” of burdensome vows (4.13.1).¹⁰²⁴ As for the laity, “ecclesiastical constitutions” were “thrust upon men as true and necessary worship of God” (4.10.6). A prime example was the practice of auricular confession. The papal clergy acted as if they had some sort of “magical power” over the absolution of sins.¹⁰²⁵ They piled up requirements regarding

1020Cf. *Institutes*, 4.5.4; Commentary on Acts 20:28 [1554]; CO 48:469.

1021“Therefore, they mock the church with a false diaconate” (4.5.15; Cf. 4.5.4). Calvin appealed to the canon laws that suggested that “at least one half” of the church's wealth should be devoted to the poor (4.5.16).

1022On top of it all, the papacy gave the clergy so many privileges that it had no accountability whatsoever. Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:20 [1548]; CO 52:317. “And yet they cloak such abominable foulness with the name of church” (4.5.7).

1023Thus the pope “does not hesitate to change the whole of religion at his own pleasure.” Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:4 [1550]; CO 52:198-199. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:15 [1546]; CO 49:372.

1024“God has made us lords of all things and has so subjected them to us that we may use them all for our own benefit” (4.13.3). Calvin rejected the whole concept of monasticism, as well as the idea that Christ provided evangelical counsels that are optional for Christian observance (4.13.12). Monks, he argues, separate themselves from and violate the unity of the church (4.13.14). “God prefers devoted care in ruling a household, where the devout householder, clear and free of all greed, ambition, and other lusts of the flesh, keeps before him the purpose of serving God in a definite calling.” To withdraw and philosophize is a “beautiful thing” but it is also a rejection of the duties of society to which God has called all human beings (4.13.16).

1025Commentary on Matthew 23:13 [1555]; CO 45:627-628. Commentary on John 20:23 [1553]; CO 47:440-442. Cf. Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:19 [1548]; CO 50:72.

honor to images, specific prayers, and pilgrimages. There were the prohibitions of meat on Fridays, work on holy days, and marriage by priests. In all of this “they punish even the slightest infraction of their decree with no lighter penalty than prison, exile, fire, or sword” (4.10.10). All of this amounted to a reversion to Judaism warned against by the Apostle Paul (4.10.11). “For they have partly taken their pattern from the ravings of the Gentiles, partly, like apes, have rashly imitated the ancient rites of the Mosaic law, which apply to us no more than do animal sacrifices and other like things” (4.10.12).

Often lodging his charges against the scholars at the Sorbonne in Paris, Calvin accused them of claiming a “magisterial [*magistralis*] freedom” to force doctrinal speculations and practical contrivances on Christians.¹⁰²⁶ Devoting their energies to endless speculation, developing “vast labyrinths about the hierarchies of heaven, relationships, and similar contrivances,” they then imposed their conclusions on consciences in “authoritative decisions” that found no support in the word.¹⁰²⁷ As a result, papal theology was no better than the carnal philosophy of the pagans.¹⁰²⁸ They failed to grasp that “the spiritual kingdom of Christ [*regnum Christi spirituale*]” does not consist in outward exercises, but in “yield[ing] obedience simply to his commands.”¹⁰²⁹

Calvin concedes that the bishops claimed to be exercising Christ's government in imposing such laws. “Our false bishops, therefore, burden our consciences with new laws on the pretext that they have been appointed by the Lord spiritual lawgivers [*spirituales legislatores*], as a consequence of which the government of the church [*ecclesiae*

1026Commentary on Colossians 2:18 [1548]; CO 52:112.

1027Commentary on 1 Timothy 1:7 [1548]; CO 52:254. Cf. Commentary on Titus 1:10 [1550]; CO 52:413; Commentary on Mark 1:22 [1555]; CO 45:153.

1028“We see what sort of theology there is under the Papacy, what is contained in the books of philosophers, and what wisdom profane men hold in estimation.” Commentary on Colossians 1:9 [1548]; CO 52:81. Yet all such inventions of the “kingdom of the Pope” arise from a fleshly mind and have nothing to do with spiritual wisdom (2:19; CO 52:113-114). Cf. Commentary on Acts 20:21, 27 [1554]; CO 48:463, 466-467; 28:23; CO 48:569.

1029Commentary on Colossians 2:23 [1548]. CO 52:115-116. The papists “make religion consist in things outward and frail, which have no connection with the spiritual kingdom of God [*spirituale Dei regnum*]” (2:22; CO 52:114-115). Rome bound Christians to “the mask of outward observances.” Commentary on 1 Timothy 4:2 [1548]; CO 52:294. Cf. *Institutes*, 3.4.1.

gubernatio] has been entrusted to them. Accordingly, they contend that whatever they command and prescribe must of necessity be observed by Christian people” (4.10.6). But the clergy falsely imagined that the authority of God was attached to their very office, as if bound to their control.¹⁰³⁰ Calvin counters that the papal clergy occupied positions much like those of the elders and priests that had persecuted the prophet Jeremiah. It was “as though they had said, 'We possess an ordinary jurisdiction [*iurisdictio ordinaria*], for God has set us over his church: whatever then proceeds from us ought to be deemed inviolable.’” Yet while the clergy technically held legitimate office within the church, “it does not yet hence follow that they are true ministers of God.”¹⁰³¹

What made such misuses of power so destructive was Rome's effort to enforce them by means of excommunication as well as civil coercion. Calvin complains of the “barbarous tyranny which the pretended bishops have exercised in enslaving the people, ... and now we see with what cruelty they throw this dart of excommunication against all who worship God.”¹⁰³² The church then enforced its decrees ruthlessly “by fire and sword.”¹⁰³³ To be sure, the church has the right to expel those who do not keep its

1030 Calvin accuses the papacy of exercising tyranny over the church by usurping the authority of God in roughly the three areas into which he divides church government in the *Institutes*, 4.8-12. He writes, “Hence it has been that they have dared to bind consciences by their own laws, to change the whole truth, and to corrupt the whole worship of God, and hence also followed the scandalous sale of justice.” Commentary on Malachi 2:4 [1559]; CO 44:431-433. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:2 [1546]; CO 49:362; Commentary on Matthew 3:9 [1555]; CO 45:118.

1031 Commentary on Jeremiah 18:18 [1563]; CO 38:310. Elsewhere Calvin writes, “truly we are compelled to confess that the ordinary ministry is with them.” But such means nothing without the spiritual government of Christ. Commentary on Ezekiel 13:9 [1565]; CO 40:280-281. Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 29:24-27 [1563]; CO 38:608; Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:1 [1546]; CO 49:305-306. In his commentary on the synoptic gospels he writes, “even though they might justly claim ordinary jurisdiction, yet, if they overturn the sacred house of God, it is only in name that they must be reckoned builders.” Commentary on Matthew 21:42 [1555]; CO 45:596. Cf. Commentary on 1 Peter 2:7 [1551]; CO 55:238; Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:20 [1548]; CO 50:72-73; *Institutes*, 4.9.4.

1032 Commentary on John 9:22 [1553]; CO 47:227-228. By such “tyranny” the pope not only “falsely pretends to a right of excommunicating ... the godly, but endeavors to cast down Christ from his heavenly throne” (12:42; CO 47:300).

1033 Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:25 [1546]; CO 49:490; Cf. 14:17; CO 49:523. Whereas Christ “rejected the office of judging,” the bishops appropriated it, accumulating power and wealth while boasting that their power represented “the glory of Christ's Kingdom” (4.11.9). Calvin admits that initially Christians turned to bishops for “voluntary arbitration” because there was no one whom they respected more. But eventually this voluntary arbitration turned into “ordinary jurisdiction.” The bishops should have rejected this with the words of Paul, “The weapons of our warfare are not physical, but spiritual” (4.11.10).

teachings, but the whole premise of this point is that the church only teaches the word. “Men must listen to the church, they say. Who denies this? The reason is that the church makes no pronouncement except from the Lord's word. If they require anything more, let them know that these words of Christ afford them no support” (4.8.15).

Calvin meticulously draws evidence from church history and scripture that the papacy's claims were unwarranted.¹⁰³⁴ Rome argued that the papacy fulfilled a role in continuity with that of the Old Testament high priest, with its associated powers and privileges.¹⁰³⁵ In response, Calvin appeals to the New Testament's identification of Christ as the true high priest, who alone possesses all priestly functions (4.6.2). “Since now one sole priest, who is also our master, even Christ, is set over us, woe to us if we do not simply submit ourselves to his word.”¹⁰³⁶ Calvin is equally dismissive of papal appeals to passages like Matthew 16:18-19 and John 21:15.¹⁰³⁷ These passages say nothing, he

1034Invoking Cyprian and Pope Gregory I, Calvin argues that the Roman bishopric gradually came to prominence in the wake of the collapse of the Roman Empire. Yet he maintains that the popes often claimed far greater power than others acceded to them, and he criticizes Gratian for patching these claims together in his 11th Century *Decretum* “without discrimination.” As Calvin wryly notes with reference to the claims of Pope Leo I, “the question is whether the churches then believed his testimony when he thus exalted” (4.7.11). Calvin observes that Gregory I “repeatedly complains that under the guise of the bishop's office he was drawn back into the world . . . pressed by the bustle of secular affairs.” Yet at least Gregory filled the office of pastor, “abstained from civil administration, and confessed himself subject to the emperor as others were” (4.7.13). His point is not that the church should be under the magistracy, but that the church had lost sight of the nature of Christ's spiritual government and had become politicized. The watershed moment came in the days of Pepin the Short of Gaul (4.7.17), but things gradually grew worse until the “dissolution of the whole church order in Bernard [of Clairveaux's day]” (4.7.18). Cf. Commentary on Philippians 1:1-2 [1548]; CO 52:7. Calvin also describes how bishops gradually came to be distinguished from presbyters (4.4.2). Early on, he argues, this practice was not hierarchical. “Some called the government thus constituted a 'hierarchy,' an improper term (it seems to me), certainly one unused in Scripture. For the Holy Spirit willed men to beware of dreaming of a principality or lordship as far as the government of the church is concerned” (4.4.4).

1035Thus episcopal hierarchy could not be justified on the basis of Old Testament rules concerning the priesthood, nor could the clergy's authority to judge civil affairs. To be sure, even within the church “the political distinction of ranks is not to be repudiated, for natural reason itself dictates this in order to take away confusion,” but such is entirely distinct from the spiritual government of the church. Commentary on Numbers 3:5 [1563]; CO 24:444-445. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 7:12 [1549]; CO 55:89-90.

1036In any case, Calvin maintains, Israelite priests were never given the authority indiscriminately to judge “civil causes and earthly affairs.” Rather, the priests were to rule only on “matters of the Lord,” those things revealed in the law, speaking nothing but what they received “as from the mouth of God,” and so serving as the teachers of the church. Commentary on Deuteronomy 17:8 [1563]; CO 24:470-471. Cf. Commentary on Zechariah 3:6-7 [1559]; CO 44:172-176; Commentary on Malachi 2:9 [1559]; CO 44:440-442.

1037In the former Jesus declares to the Apostle Peter “You are Peter, and upon this rock I shall build my

argues, about possessing “power over all churches” or the right to “rule the whole world” (4.6.3). Even if Peter was raised to a prominence above the other apostles, “Rank is a different thing from power, and to be elevated to the highest place of honor among a few persons is a different thing from embracing the whole world under his dominion.” The apostles were indeed given the keys to the kingdom, but “power to bind and to loose can no more be separated from the office of teaching and the apostleship than light or heat can be separated from the sun.”¹⁰³⁸ Only Christ has “lordship [*dominium; dominatione*]” in the church¹⁰³⁹ and he does not bestow the spiritual government of his church [*spirituali ecclesiae gubernatione*] on any man such that he might exercise it “according to his own pleasure.”¹⁰⁴⁰

For Calvin the doctrine of Christ's spiritual government by the word was the decisive difference between the Reformed churches and the papacy. “This, then, is the difference. Our opponents locate the authority of the church outside God's word; but we insist that it be attached to the word, and do not allow it to be separated from it” (4.8.13).¹⁰⁴¹ Rome was a false church because it lacked the fundamental mark of Christ's kingdom, the ministry of the word:

Where in their church is there a ministry such as Christ's institution requires? ... I should like to know what one episcopal quality the pontiff himself has. The first task of the bishop's office is to teach the people from God's word. The second and next is to administer the sacraments. The third is to admonish and exhort, also to correct those who sin and to keep the people under holy discipline. What of these offices does he perform?

church ... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” In the latter, he simply exhorts a chastised and forgiven Peter to “Feed my sheep.”

1038Commentary on Matthew 16:18 [1555]; CO 45:473-474. Peter may have had preeminence in the church, but “it is one thing to have preeminence in one church, and quite another to claim for one's self a kingdom or dominion [*regnum ... principatum*] over the whole world [*totum orbem*].” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9:5 [1546]; CO 49:440.

1039Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9:5 [1546]; CO 49:440.

1040Commentary on John 21:15. Elsewhere he writes that Christ “is the only shepherd.” “For though he employs their ministry, still he does not cease to fulfill and discharge the office of a *shepherd* by his own power; and they are masters and teachers in such a manner as not to interfere with his authority as a Master.” Commentary on John 10:10 [1553]; CO 47:240.

1041For “the Spirit wills to be conjoined with God's word by an indissoluble bond, and Christ professes this concerning him when he promises the Spirit to his church” (4.8.13).

Indeed, what does he even pretend to do? Let them say, therefore, in what way they would have him regarded a bishop, who does not even in pretense touch any part of this office with his little finger (4.7.23).¹⁰⁴²

The Spiritual Government of the Church

The grounding assumption of Calvin's doctrine of the spiritual government of the church is that Jesus Christ is the *sole* head of the church, despite competing papal and magisterial claims to that title. As its only “lord and master [*dominus ac magister*],” “Christ alone must reign [*regnare*] in the church,” he has “exclusive authority [*magisterium*] in the church,” and he has sole “dominion [*dominium*].” Thus it is intolerable “to rob Christ of the honor of being the sole head of the church, the sole teacher, the sole master [*solus sit caput ecclesiae, solus doctor, solus magister*], or to draw away from him any part of that honor, with the view of transferring it to men.” To be sure, “There is, it is true, a certain degree of honor that is due to Christ's ministers [*Christi ministris*], and they are also themselves masters [*magistri*] in their own place, but this exception must always be kept in view, that Christ must have without any infringement what belongs to him – that he shall nevertheless be the sole Master [*magister*], and looked upon as such.” All faithful ministers “claim for him exclusively power, authority, and glory [*imperium, auctoritatem, gloriam*], fight under his banner, obey him alone, and bring others in subjection to his sway [*imperio*].”¹⁰⁴³ While Calvin

¹⁰⁴²By setting themselves up in the place of Christ yet refusing to preach the gospel, by tyrannizing over consciences while claiming universal power and infallibility, and by persecuting the faithful of Christ's kingdom with fire and sword, the popes demonstrated not only that they were not the heads of the church, but that they were the Antichrist itself (4.7.26). Calvin identified the antichrist with a movement rather than a particular person, and while he identifies the papacy with this movement, he also views Nero, Islam, and “all the sects by which the church has been lessened from the beginning” as expressions of it. Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:3 [1550]; CO 52:196-197. Calvin argues that the popes claim for themselves exactly those things that Paul says the Antichrist will claim when he “opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped.” Antichrist “places his kingdom in direct opposition to the kingdom of Christ. Hence, as the kingdom of Christ is spiritual, so this tyranny must be upon souls, that it may rival the kingdom of Christ” (2:4; CO 52:198-199). The kingdom of Antichrist consists in false doctrine, errors, and pretended miracles because it is a foil to the kingdom of Christ, which “consists of the doctrine of truth and the power of the Spirit.” Thus Satan “with the view of opposing Christ in the person of his vicar, puts on Christ's mask” (2:9; CO 52:202).

¹⁰⁴³Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:12 [1546]; CO 49:316-317. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 23:6-11 [1555]; CO 45:624-626; Commentary on Acts 1:13 [1552]; CO 48:15; 15:16; CO 48:357; *Institutes*,

was willing to tolerate the analogous application of terms like 'lord' and 'father' to human beings, and even to pastors, he would not accept the title of head [*caput*] of the church for anyone but Christ. “I am also well aware of the cavil by which they attempt to escape – that the pope is a ministerial [*ministeriale*] head. The name, however, of head is too august to be rightfully transferred to any mortal man, under any pretext, especially without the command of Christ.” For “it is Christ that alone has authority to govern the church [*potestatem habeat regendae ecclesiae*].”¹⁰⁴⁴ Any “supremacy of man [*primatum hominis*] ... involves sacrilege [*sacrilegum*].”¹⁰⁴⁵

On the other hand, Christ does not govern his church without means. Having risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and taken his place at God's right hand, he now establishes, governs, and grows his kingdom through the ministry of human beings. Calvin's *locus classicus* for this argument, the passage he repeatedly invokes in its defense – is Ephesians 4.¹⁰⁴⁶ The text reads, “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:3-6). It then paraphrases Psalm 68's celebration of the messianic king's victory over his

4.6.9. Hopfl writes, “The word usually translated as 'power' was *potestas*, meaning a right or rights vested in an institution or office. This he distinguished carefully from *imperium*, the comprehensive set of rights enjoyed by a Roman emperor and claimed by current absolutizing princes, and thus connoting might and even sovereignty (*maiestas*). *Imperium* and *maiestas* in the ecclesiastical sphere belong to God alone... Ecclesiastical *potestas* is distinguished by Calvin from force (*ius gladii, vis*), coercion (*coactio, coercitio*) and domination (*dominatio, dominium*, the power of a *dominus* or lord: there could be only one Lord in the Christian church). The *potestas* of the church is that of a *gubernatio, regimen* or *politia*.” But “the *potestas* of the church cannot include the power to make laws at its discretion, whatever else it may include.” Harro Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 113.

1044Commentary on Colossians 1:18 [1548]; CO 52:86-87. Cf. Commentary on Ephesians 4:15 [1548]; CO 51:202; Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:15 [1546]; CO 49:373; Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 1:2 [1550]; CO 52:250; Commentary on Titus 1:4 [1550]; CO 52:407. Duns Scotus, for example, claimed that the pope's authority was merely ministerial. See Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 146.

1045Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:21 [1546]; CO 49:360.

1046For just a few examples, see Commentary on John 20:21 [1553]; CO 47:438; Commentary on 1 Timothy 4:15 [1548]; CO 52:303; Commentary on Acts 1:2 [1552]; CO 48:3. See Wilcox, “The Progress of the Kingdom of Christ' in Calvin's Exposition of the Prophets,” 318.

enemies, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8). The writer declares this psalm to have been fulfilled in Christ. Having ascended to heaven, Christ now gives the church a multitude of gifts, the most important of which are “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesian 4:11-13).

Calvin interprets Ephesians 4 as a description of the way in which God “governs [*gubernat*] and protects his church, which is by the gospel preached by men,”¹⁰⁴⁷ and he argues that its description of the “government of the church [*ecclesiae regimine*]” was written for the express purpose of “maintaining unity among Christians.”¹⁰⁴⁸

Significantly, in his commentary on Ephesians Calvin commences his discussion of Christ's spiritual government of the church only after first distinguishing the “universal government [*universali gubernatione*]” of God, by which he “upholds, and maintains, and rules, all things,” from that “spiritual one, which belongs to the church [*spirituali tantum, quae ad ecclesiam pertinet*],” by which God graciously draws human beings to himself. Calvin admits that when Ephesians declares the one God to be over all and through all and in all it is true “in a general sense, not only of all men but of all creatures,” but he stresses that in context Paul is clearly “illustrating the mutual relation of believers, which has nothing in common either with wicked men or with inferior animals.”¹⁰⁴⁹ He returns to this distinction when he considers the effect of Christ's

1047Commentary on Ephesians, Introduction [1548]; CO 51:143.

1048Commentary on Ephesians 4:1 [1548]; CO 51:189. The Apostle Paul calls the Ephesian church to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” a bond that Calvin insists refers to “the whole man.” “We ought to be united, not in part only, but in body and soul” (4:4; CO 51:190-191).

1049“To this relation we must limit what is said about God's government [*imperio*] and presence.” Commentary on Ephesians 4:6 [1548]; CO 51:192. Elsewhere he writes, “though all things are regulated by the will and power of Christ, yet the subject of which Paul particularly speaks is the spiritual government of the Church [*spirituali ecclesiae gubernatione*]. There is nothing, indeed, to hinder us from viewing it as referring to the universal government of the world [*universali mundi gubernatione*]; but to limit it to the case in hand is the more probable interpretation” (1:23; CO 51:160).

ascension to God's right hand. He explains, "by his ascension into heaven, Christ entered into the possession of the authority given to him by the Father, that he might rule and govern [*regat ... moderetur*] all things." Indeed, he now "fills all thing by the power of his Spirit."¹⁰⁵⁰ Still, Christ has not yet brought that rule over all things to the sort of fulfillment that would turn his enemies into voluntary subjects. He therefore rules in two distinct ways. Where his kingdom has not been fully established he binds his enemies with "chains of iron" and restrains them from "exerting their fury beyond the limits which he shall assign."¹⁰⁵¹ Where voluntary obedience has been rendered, on the other hand, Christ has established his "glorious reign over the church [*glorioso imperio ecclesiam*]." It is this government that is administered through the gifts described in Ephesians 4. This "government of the church [*regimen ecclesiae*], by the ministry of the word, is not a contrivance of men, but an appointment made by the Son of God."¹⁰⁵²

In contrast to Rome, which insisted that Christ is present in the church through the Mass, and in contrast to Luther, who claimed that Christ is physically omnipresent, Calvin argued that by virtue of his ascension Christ is physically absent from believers. How then could he promise to be with his church until the end of the age? Calvin answers that Christ is present with believers by his word and Spirit, that is, through the ministry of the church.

Christ, he says, is present with us. How? By the ministry of men, whom he has set over the governing of the church. Why not, rather, through the ministerial head, to whom he has entrusted his functions? Paul mentions unity, but in God and in faith in Christ. To men he assigns nothing but the common ministry, and a

¹⁰⁵⁰Commentary on Ephesians 4:10 [1548]; CO 51:195-196. True, in his divinity he always filled all things even before, "but the power of his Spirit was not so exerted, nor his presence so manifested, as after he had entered into the possession of his kingdom." Torrance writes, the "supreme purpose of the ascension" is "to fill all creation with the Regnum Christi." Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 162.

¹⁰⁵¹Commentary on Ephesians 4:8 [1548]; CO 51:193-194. Elsewhere Calvin attributes the same result to Christ's resurrection. "The resurrection of Christ is the commencement of his reign [*regni Christi initium*]." Thus "as Christ was glorified by his resurrection, so he has actually exercised his authority in the government of his church [*potentiam ... regenda ecclesia*]." Commentary on Galatians 1:1 [1548]; CO 50:169.

¹⁰⁵²The office of the apostles "was to spread the doctrine of the gospel throughout the whole world, to plant churches, and to erect the kingdom of Christ." Commentary on Ephesians 4:11 [1548]; CO 51:196-197.

particular mode to each. Why did he, in that commendation of unity, after he had mentioned 'one body, one Spirit, ... one hope of calling, one God, one faith, one baptism', not immediately also add, one supreme pontiff, to keep the church in unity? For nothing more appropriate could have been said, if indeed it had been an actual fact. Let that passage be diligently pondered. No doubt Paul deeply meant to represent here the sacred and spiritual government of the church [*sacrum et spirituale ecclesiae regimen*], which his successors have called 'hierarchy.' He not only lays down no monarchy among the ministers but also points out that there is none. No doubt Paul meant to express the manner of connection, by which believers cleave to Christ, the Head. There he not only mentions no ministerial head, but assigns particular functions to each member, according to the measure of grace bestowed upon each (4.6.10).¹⁰⁵³

Although Christ has ascended to heaven in order that he might fill all things, this process is only fulfilled when “through the ministers to whom he has entrusted this office and has conferred the grace to carry it out, he dispenses and distributes his gifts to the church; and he shows himself as though present by manifesting the power of his Spirit in this his institution, that it be not vain or idle” (4.3.2). The ministry, then, is not only the “mode of governing and keeping the church.” It is nothing less than “the administration of the Spirit and of righteousness and of eternal life” (4.3.3). When Jesus said that the Spirit would come to judge the world, “he notes no other kind of authority than that which he exercises by the ministry of the church.”¹⁰⁵⁴ The word has been committed to the church “like a scepter,” and it can be said that “by the word the pastors of the church exercise the jurisdiction of the Holy Spirit [*iurisdictionem spiritus*].”¹⁰⁵⁵

In his discussion of the five offices mentioned in Ephesians 4 Calvin makes two crucial points. First, he argues that the offices of apostle, prophet, and evangelist were

1053 Christ is present wherever believers gather in unity to “yield obedience to his word and allow themselves to be governed by his Spirit.” Commentary on Matthew 18:20 [1555]; CO 45:517. Cf. Commentary on Acts 1:2 [1552]; CO 48:3. Cyprian rightly claimed the bishopric for Christ alone, while “leaving the administration [*administrando*] of it to individuals.” Calvin sarcastically declares that the papists “have some reason to complain that their primacy, of which they boast so much,” is ignored in the preeminent scriptural text devoted to the unity and “government of the church [*ecclesiae regimen*].” Commentary on Ephesians 4:11 [1548]; CO 51:198. “Thus by the ministry of men the church is regulated and governed [*gubernari ecclesiam et ordinari*]” (4:13; CO 51:199-200).

1054 Commentary on Acts 5:9 [1552]; CO 48:102. Cf. Commentary on John 12:48 [1553]; CO 47:303-304.

1055 Commentary on Psalm 47:3 [1557]; CO 31:467-468. Cf. Commentary on Micah 2:7 [1559]; CO 43:307-308. Calvin writes, “how Christ designs to rule in his Church, we know, for the scepter of his kingdom is the gospel.” For “when we believe the gospel we choose Christ for our king, as it were, by a voluntary consent.” Commentary on Hosea 1:11 [1557]; CO 42:221. The gospel is the scepter by which Christ subdues all people to himself. Commentary on Ezekiel 17:24 [1565]; CO 40:420-421.

temporary offices designed for the unique circumstances of the “beginning of his Kingdom.” (4.3.4) The offices of pastor and teacher, on the other hand, are permanent. Second, he argues that “pastors ... have the same charge as the apostles.” (4.3.5) That charge is to “raise up” and “establish his Kingdom everywhere by the preaching of the gospel,” or to put it another way, “as the first builders of the church, to lay its foundations in all the world” (4.3.4).¹⁰⁵⁶ At first glance it is hard to see what substantive exegetical basis might justify these concrete conclusions. But as McKee observes, Calvin's method is not to determine the specific offices that Christ has appointed for the church, and then to determine from scripture the nature and function of those offices.¹⁰⁵⁷ Rather, his method is to identify specific functions that Christ has appointed, by virtue of the gifts he has given, and then to identify offices to which they correspond. What the five offices have in common is that they pertain to the “external ministry [*externum verbi ministerium*] of the word.” “This is the arrangement by which the Lord is pleased to govern his church [*ecclesiam ... gubernare*], to maintain its existence, and ultimately to secure its highest perfection.”¹⁰⁵⁸ The point is not that Christ governs his church through particular offices, but that Christ governs his church through the proclamation of his word, which is carried out by pastors.

The work of pastors, therefore, is nothing less than “the edification of the church, the everlasting salvation of souls, the restoration [*reparatio*] of the world, and, in fine, the kingdom of God and Christ.”¹⁰⁵⁹ Women should take no offense that they are prohibited from occupying the pastoral office because most men are prohibited as well.

1056Cf. Commentary on Ephesians 4:11 [1548]; CO 51:197.

1057Elsie Anne McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin's Theology* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988), 155-165. McKee offers an excellent analysis of Calvin's interpretation of Ephesians 4 in the context of the historical exegesis of the passage. See also Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 201-203; Wendel, *Calvin*, 305.

1058Commentary on Ephesians 4:11 [1548]; CO 51:196.

1059Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:12 [1550]; CO 52:172 (Cf. 2:19; CO 52:155). Calvin writes, “there are good grounds for saying that godly teachers renovate the world, as if God formed heaven and earth anew by their hand.” Commentary on Isaiah 51:16 [1559]; CO 37:237. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:8 [1546]; CO 49:368; 3:8; CO 49:351-352; 4:3, 15; CO 49:363, 373.

“It is no light matter to be a representative of the Son of God [*administracione sustinere personam filii Dei*], in discharging an office of such magnitude, the object of which is to erect and extend the kingdom of God, to procure the salvation of souls ... and to govern the church [*regenda ecclesia*], which is God's inheritance.”¹⁰⁶⁰

Christ could govern his kingdom *immediately* through the Holy Spirit, of course; in this case, only the “invisible church,” the body of the elect (4.1.2-3), could truly be identified with Christ's spiritual kingdom. But Christ has determined to govern through the “instrumentality” of men, by “the external ministry of the word [*externo verbi ministerio*],” through “outward preaching [*externam praedicationem*].” As a result, “We must allow ourselves to be ruled [*regi*] and taught by men.”¹⁰⁶¹ Calvin's emphasis on the importance of the visible church is striking. He can sound quite Catholic to some Protestant ears when he approvingly affirms the fathers' tendency to refer to the visible church as our “mother.” “The church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and brings up children to God, kings and peasants alike, and this is done by the ministry.”¹⁰⁶² In the *Institutes* he adds, “For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels... [A]way from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation” (4.1.4).¹⁰⁶³ Only in the visible church do those people gather who have voluntarily subjected themselves to Christ's lordship. “For the Lord esteems the communion of his church so highly that he counts as a traitor and apostate from

1060Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:1 [1548]; CO 52:280.

1061Commentary on Ephesians 4:12 [1548]; CO 51:199. Despite the fascination of some scholars with Calvin's doctrine of predestination, Calvin's discussion of the invisible church is remarkably brief, and he quickly calls his readers to focus their attention on the visible church (4.1.1-3).

1062Commentary on Ephesians 4:12 [1548]; CO 51:199.

1063Calvin declares explicitly that he intends these statements with reference to the visible church. Elsewhere he writes, with reference to Paul's statement that the church is the pillar of the truth, “is not the Church the mother of all believers? Does she not regenerate them by the word of God, educate and nourish them through their whole life, strengthen, and bring them at length to absolute perfection?” Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:15 [1548]; CO 52:288-289.

Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of word and sacraments” (4.1.10).¹⁰⁶⁴

It is important to note that for Calvin the ministry of the word does not consist in preaching alone. The ministry of the word involves three major tasks: “to instruct the people to true godliness, to administer the sacred mysteries and to keep and exercise upright discipline.” Calvin identifies only the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments as the marks of a true church, but he views discipline as an extension of the ministry of the word, essential to the church's health, if not its existence (4.3.6).¹⁰⁶⁵

Nor are the offices of pastor and teacher the only permanent ecclesiastical offices. In Book 4, Chapter 3 Calvin introduces the office of elder, with the function of church discipline, and the office of deacon, with the function of care for the poor, and when he refers to the ministers of the church he often has these offices in mind as well.¹⁰⁶⁶ In his discussion of ordination he points out that the early church used the rite of the laying on of hands “whenever they called anyone to the ministry of the church. In this way they

¹⁰⁶⁴Calvin lambasts the “apostates who have a passion for splitting churches” and submits that “the church is built up solely by outward preaching, and that the saints are held together by one bond only: that with common accord, through learning and advancement, they keep the church order established by God.” (4.1.5).

¹⁰⁶⁵The pastoral office includes “discipline, or administering the sacraments, or warnings and exhortations” (4.3.4). In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:1, in which Paul declares the apostles to be “ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God,” Calvin argues that “the sacraments are connected with these mysteries as appendages.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:1 [1546]; CO 49:68. The Apostle Paul instructed Titus not only to establish correct teaching in the churches under his care, but to appoint a “fixed kind of government [*politiae*] accompanied by discipline.” Indeed, “In the spiritual building this nearly comes next to doctrine, that pastors be ordained to take charge of governing the church [*ecclesiae gubernandae*].” Commentary on Titus 1:5 [1550]; CO 52:408. In a sermon on Deuteronomy 17:14-18 Calvin declared, “And what is the kingdom of Jesus Christ? I have already said that it does not consist of visible things or that it belongs to this present age. But it is this: that we are gathered by his Holy Spirit in the hope of the heavenly life. This means that the Gospel is preached to us, to be a rule for us to which we hold through obedience to God. And although the sacraments by themselves are visible they do not lose their spiritual nature, as far as it is intended.” CO 27:466. Cited in Van't Spijker, “The Kingdom of Christ According to Bucer and Calvin,” 120.

¹⁰⁶⁶Introducing this section of the chapter he refers to “government” and “public office” in addition to those who “teach” and those who “rule” (4.3.10). When noting the qualifications for bishops in Titus 1:7 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7 he notes that “the very same requirements apply to deacons and presbyters” (4.3.12).

consecrated the pastors and teachers, and the deacons” (4.3.16).¹⁰⁶⁷ In Chapter 4 Calvin describes the elders and deacons (including an order of women) as ministers of the church according to the “order of church government” established by Christ in his word. “We have stated that Scripture sets before us three kinds of ministers... For from the order of presbyters (1) part were chosen pastors and teachers; (2) the remaining part were charged with the censure and correction of morals; (3) the care of the poor and the distribution of alms were committed to the deacons” (4.4.1).¹⁰⁶⁸

In Chapter 8, furthermore, Calvin describes teaching as only one of the three main parts of the “power of the church [*ecclesiae potestate*],” the other two being the church's powers of discipline and of making laws. In introducing these other types of power he makes it clear that he is still discussing Christ's spiritual government of his church: “I speak only of the spiritual power [*spirituali ... potestate*], which is proper to the church [*propria est ecclesiae*].” Calvin then divides this power, as he did in Chapter 1, into the three parts of “doctrine,” “jurisdiction [*iurisdictione*]” (discipline), and “making laws [*legibus ferendis*]” (concerning worship). He divides the church's power over doctrine into two parts, “authority [*autoritatem*] to lay down articles of faith, and authority to explain them” (4.8.1). I will discuss each of these three types of spiritual power in turn, addressing the offices of elder and deacon under the categories of discipline and making laws respectively.¹⁰⁶⁹

Doctrine

In the *Institutes* Calvin describes the nature of the ministry of the word as follows:

¹⁰⁶⁷Calvin seems to have thought that the appointment of elders does not require the laying on of hands.

See McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 29.

¹⁰⁶⁸All four offices “have the one purpose of proclaiming Christ and His reign.” Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 200.

¹⁰⁶⁹Calvin did not place the diaconate in this category, but since the diaconate raises many of the same questions as arise under the power to make laws, it makes sense to discuss it in the same context.

Now we must speak of the order by which the Lord willed his church to be governed. He alone should rule and reign in the church as well as have authority or pre-eminence in it, and this authority should be exercised and administered by his word alone. Nevertheless, because he does not dwell among us in visible presence, we have said that he uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honor, but only that through their mouths he may do his own work – just as a workman uses a tool to do his work (4.3.1).¹⁰⁷⁰

Calvin drives the point home throughout his commentary on Isaiah. Of faithful ministers he writes, “Christ acts by them in such a manner that he wishes their mouth to be reckoned as his mouth, and their lips as his lips; that is, when they speak from his mouth, and faithfully declare his word.” The preaching of the gospel is Christ's scepter.

Here we must again call to remembrance what is the nature of Christ's kingdom. As he does not wear a golden crown or employ earthly armor, so he does not rule over the world by the power of arms, or gain authority by gaudy and ostentatious display, or constrain his people by terror and dread; but the doctrine of the gospel is his royal banner, which assembles believers under his dominion. Wherever, therefore, the doctrine of the Gospel is preached in purity, there we are certain that Christ reigns; and where it is rejected, his government is also set aside.¹⁰⁷¹

The implications for the doctrine of church government are significant.

In this sense also government is ascribed to the church, not so as to obscure by haughty rule the glory of her Head, or even to claim the authority which belongs to him ... but because the preaching of the gospel, which is committed to her, is the spiritual scepter of Christ, by which he displays his power. In this respect no man can bow down submissively before Christ without also obeying the church, so far as the obedience of faith is joined to the ministry of doctrine, yet so that Christ their Head alone reigns, and alone exercises his authority.¹⁰⁷²

1070On Calvin's concept of the pastorate see Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536-1609* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Cf. Elsie Anne McKee, “Calvin and His Colleagues as Pastors: Some New Insights into the Collegial Ministry of Word and Sacraments,” *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research, Princeton, August 20-24, 2002* (ed. Herman J. Selderhuis; Geneva: Droz, 2004), 9-42, as well as the essays in *Calvin and the Company of Pastors: Papers Presented at the 14th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society May 22-24, 2003* (ed. David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2004).

1071Commentary on Isaiah 11:4 [1559]; CO 36:240. Elsewhere in the commentary he writes, “Hence we see that wherever doctrine is rejected, God's government [*principatum*] is not found, that is, is not recognized by men.” Commentary on Isaiah 51:4 [1559]; CO 37:229. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:18 [1546]; CO 49:321; Commentary on John 7:48 [1553]; CO 47:185-186.

1072Commentary on Isaiah 45:14 [1559]; CO 37:140-141. In his commentary on Obadiah he writes that God rules his people through the “kingdom of Christ [*regnum Christi*],” and that “it is the legitimate mode of ruling the church [*legitimus ordo regendae ecclesiae*], that God alone should preside, and hold alone the chief power... Now God is not called a king by way of an empty distinction: but then only is

Calvin's insistence that the church may not teach anything beyond what is found in the word of God is the lynchpin of his view of the spiritual government of the church because it is only if pastors restrain themselves to teaching Christ's word that their government can be said to be that of Christ. Thus

teachers are his ministers in such a manner that he ought to be heard in them, and that they are masters under him so far as they represent his person. The general meaning is that his authority must remain entire, and that no mortal man ought to claim the smallest portion of it. Thus he is the only Pastor; but yet he admits many pastors under him, provided that he hold the preeminence over them all, and that by them he alone govern the Church.¹⁰⁷³

One of Calvin's favorite analogies for the function of a pastor is that of 'ambassador.' The ministry of the gospel, he argues, is portrayed in scripture as an "embassy [*legatio*] for reconciling men to God." When a minister proclaims the gospel "he is to be listened to just as an ambassador of God [*Dei legatus*]." Such a minister sustains "a public [*publicam*] character," and is furnished with "rightful authority [*autoritate*]."¹⁰⁷⁴ But his task is simply to "enforce by arguments what he brings forward in the name of his prince."¹⁰⁷⁵ Christ is "the church's sole master [*unicus ecclesiae magister*]," and "he alone is endowed with authority [*autoritate*] to rule [*regendos*] us by his word." Ministers are appointed with the sole mission of communicating that word, and "not that they should exercise dominion [*dominationem*] over our consciences."¹⁰⁷⁶ Ministers may not rule in

he regarded a king in reality, when all submit themselves to him, when they are ruled by his word ... To God then belongs the kingdom. We hence see that the Church has no existence, where the word of God does not so prevail in its authority." Commentary on Obadiah 1:21 [1559]; CO 43:200. On Calvin's ecclesiology in his commentaries on the minor prophets see Harms, *In God's Custody*, 130-142.

1073Commentary on Matthew 23:6 [1555]; CO 45:624.

1074Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:18 [1548]; CO 50:70-71.

1075Commentary on 2 Corinthians 6:1 [1548]; CO 50:75. Elsewhere he notes that Paul "calls himself a herald, whose duty it is to publish the commands of princes and magistrates." Commentary on 2 Timothy 1:11 [1548]; CO 52:354. When Christ called the disciples as his ambassadors "to establish the kingdom in the world," he did not give them the sort of authority that he alone possesses. Christ continues to be "the only Teacher of the Church; but there is only this difference, that he spoke with his mouth so long as he dwelt on earth, but now speaks by the Apostles." Christ "alone keeps possession of the whole power, while they claim nothing for themselves but the ministry." Commentary on John 20:21 [1553]; CO 47:438. Because pastors are ambassadors of Christ, when their proclamation of the gospel is faithful, their message is "ratified before God." Commentary on Matthew 16:19 [1555]; CO 45:476.

1076Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:22 [1546]; CO 49:361.

an “authoritative manner in the church [*imperio ecclesiae regimini*], but are subject to Christ's authority [*Christi imperio subesse*].” They are “servants, not masters [*ministros, non dominos*].”¹⁰⁷⁷

Like Rome, Calvin took seriously the passages in which Christ promises his disciples the keys of the kingdom, identifying pastors as “porters, so to speak, of the kingdom of heaven, because they carry its keys.” He writes, “We know that there is no other way in which the gate of life is opened to us than by the word of God, and hence it follows that the key is placed, as it were, in the hands of the ministers of the word.”¹⁰⁷⁸ When the people hear the pastor proclaim the forgiveness of sins, they “may not less highly value the reconciliation which is offered by the voice of men than if God himself stretched out his hand from heaven.”¹⁰⁷⁹ Calvin emphasizes constantly that pastors are to be received and heard as speaking with the voice and authority of Christ himself. “Though he speaks here of ministers, yet, instead of wishing that they should be heard, he wishes that God should be heard speaking by them.”¹⁰⁸⁰ Even if a pastor has come from the “lowest dregs of the people,” nevertheless Christians must “hear him speaking by human lips ... in the same manner as if he were descending from heaven or making known his will to us by angels.”¹⁰⁸¹

1077Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:1 [1546]; CO 49:362. Pastors may not exercise “dominion [*dominari*],” nor is faith subject to “human control [*imperio*].” On the contrary, “there is no spiritual dominion [*dominium spirituale*] except that of God only. This always remains a settled point – pastors have no peculiar dominion [*imperium*; French: *jurisdiction*] over men's consciences inasmuch as they are ministers, not lords.” Those are false teachers, “resembling tyrants, that rule with rigor and authority [*rigore dominatur et potentia*].” Commentary on 2 Corinthians 1:24 [1548]; CO 50:25-26. Christ has all the “glory of empire [*imperii gloriam*]” while pastors are merely the instruments of his spiritual government (2:14; CO 50:33). Cf. 4:5; CO 50:52; Commentary on 1 Peter 5:1-4 [1551]; CO 55:284.

1078Commentary on Matthew 16:19 [1555]; CO 45:474-475. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 23:13 [1555]; CO 45:627-628.

1079Commentary on John 20:23 [1553]; CO 47:440-442. Cf. Commentary on Exodus 14:31 [1563]; CO 24:156.

1080Commentary on John 10:4 [1553]; CO 47:237. When ministers faithfully preach the gospel “it is not so much they who speak, as Christ who speaks by them.” Commentary on Psalm 2:7 [1557]; CO 31:46. “[T]he church is not to be ruled by the outward preaching of the word as though God had substituted men in his own place, and thus divested himself of his own office, but that he only speaks by their mouth.” Commentary on Haggai 1:12 [1559]; CO 44:93-95.

1081Commentary on Luke 10:16 [1555]; CO 45:314.

At the same time, it must be remembered that the church's authority is *ministerial* rather than *magisterial*, spiritual, rather than political. Pastors “have no external power, and exercise no civil government.”¹⁰⁸² They do not possess a “worldly stewardship [*profana villicatione*],” but are “faithfully to deliver to others, as from hand to hand, the doctrine received from God.”¹⁰⁸³ Indeed, they have no personal authority at all, nor does their office, in and of itself. Power is given “not to the men personally, but to the ministry to which they have been appointed; or (to speak more briefly) to the word” (4.8.2). “The power of the church, therefore, is not infinite but subject to the Lord's word and, as it were, enclosed within it” (4.8.4).¹⁰⁸⁴

One of the crucial implications of this point, for Calvin is that pastors have no right to use the pulpit or pastoral office to promulgate their own agenda. “The power of the church is ... to be kept within definite limits, that it may not be drawn hither and thither according to men's whim” (4.8.1).¹⁰⁸⁵ Ministers “may not mix any of their own fictions with his pure doctrine.”¹⁰⁸⁶ The upshot is that the church is constantly called to

1082Commentary on Isaiah 11:6 [1559]; CO 36:242. Torrance writes that for Calvin “the Church must learn that all its *potestas* is 'subject to and included in the Word of God' so that it exercises not *dominium* or *imperium* but *ministerium*.” Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 154.

1083Commentary on 1 Peter 4:11 [1551]; CO 55:276-277. Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 14:14 [1563]; CO 38:193.

1084As he puts it in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, “the whole power [*potestas*] of ministers is included in the word – but in such a way, nevertheless, that Christ may always remain lord and master [*dominus ... magister*].” This is the church's “lawful authority [*potestate*].” Commentary on 2 Corinthians 10:8 [1548]; CO 50:118. A bishop is “elected principally for the sake of teaching, for the church cannot be governed [*regi non potest*] in any other way than by the word.” Commentary on Titus 1:9 [1550]; CO 52:412. A person who would claim the honor and deference of a pastor must “show that he presides in the Lord and has nothing apart from him.” Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:12 [1550]; CO 52:172. “For they who arrogate to themselves the first place of authority in the church are Christ's most inveterate enemies.” Commentary on 1 Peter 2:7 [1551]; CO 55:238. It is a profanation when “men intrude themselves, so as to bear rule in the church [*in ecclesia dominantur*] in the place of God.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:17 [1546]; CO 49:358.

1085They may “not bring anything of themselves,” and “are to speak nothing but his word” (4.8.2).

Prophets and apostles are to deliver what they have received “from hand to hand,” and “[i]f ... a prophet mingles anything of his own, he is proved to be false and is not worthy of any credit,” for “God allows men no power of their own to rule in his church.” Commentary on Jeremiah 14:14 [1563]; CO 38:193. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 28:20 [1555]; CO 45:825-826; Commentary on Ezekiel 3:16-17 [1565]; CO 40:90; Commentary on John 3:29 [1553]; CO 47:71.

1086Those only should be considered true pastors “who invent nothing themselves, who teach not according to their own fancies, but faithfully deliver what God has committed to them.” Commentary on Jeremiah 1:9 [1563]; CO 37:479-483.

make judgments regarding whether or not what a pastor teaches comes from the word. Christians “are at liberty to withhold our assent to their doctrine until they show that it is from Christ.”¹⁰⁸⁷ No teacher is beyond scrutiny. Calvin was aware this caveat might threaten to undermine the teaching authority of pastors. “If everyone has the right and the liberty to judge, nothing can be settled as certain, but on the contrary the whole of religion will be uncertain.” He therefore identifies two levels at which such judgment must take place, the first at the level of the individual hearer, a “private trial,” the second at the level of the church as a whole, a “public trial.” Both an individual and a church council might err, but the Spirit will not abandon the church as long as it genuinely seeks to submit to the teaching of the word. In the final analysis, however, authority is grounded neither in the office of the minister, nor in the individual conscience, nor in the church. It is grounded in the word of Christ.¹⁰⁸⁸

In addition to the distinction between the pastor and the word of God, Calvin insists on an equally important distinction between the word and Spirit. For, as the Genevan reformer recognized, to say that the human proclamation of the word is *always*

1087Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:22 [1546]; CO 49:361. Pastors are therefore to be judged by the church in word and doctrine (Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:3 [1546]; CO 49:363).

1088Commentary on 1 John 4:1 [1551]; CO 55:347-348. Calvin chronicles example after example from scripture of cases in which church councils erred (4.9.8). “We indeed willingly concede, if any discussion arises over doctrine, that the best and surest remedy is for a synod of true bishops to be convened, where the doctrine at issue may be examined” (4.9.13). But even such a council has no authority beyond the word. In fact, Calvin went so far as to question the very distinction between the clergy and the laity because it potentially implied that the ministry has been given to an order of individuals. “It was, indeed, an ancient way of speaking to call the whole order of ministers clergy, but I wish that it had never occurred to the fathers to speak thus, for what Scripture ascribes in common to the whole church, it was by no means right to confine to a few men.” Christ claims sole “dominion [*dominium*]” over the church and “never delivers to pastors the government [*regnum*], but only the care [*curam*], so that his own right remains still complete.” Commentary on 1 Peter 5:3 [1551]; CO 55:286. Cf. Institutes, 4.10.7. See Wendel, *Calvin*, 304. This clearly undermines Hopfl’s assertion that during the early 1540s Calvin’s thought “hardened in a clericalist direction” such that he began “distinguishing sharply, and terminologically as well as in terms of duties, between ministers and laymen.” Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 97-98. In fact, Calvin agreed, at least in principle, that the liberty of the Spirit is not limited to those ordained to the pastoral office, for “the one Spirit [must] be listened to, by whatever mouth he speaks.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:30 [1546]; CO 49:529-530. What matters is that “God alone may preside [*praesideat*] in this judgment, and that men may be merely his heralds” (14:32; CO 49:531). Of course, in practice Calvin insisted that pastors must be called and ordained by the church. He criticized the Anabaptists for their lack of order on this point. Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (trans. Willem Heyner. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 160-165.

effective through the work of the Holy Spirit is to place the Spirit under human control. In 1559 Calvin added a section to the *Institutes* acknowledging that “there has been great controversy over the efficacy of the ministry. Some exaggerate its dignity beyond measure. Others contend that what belongs to the Holy Spirit is wrongly transferred to mortal men – if we suppose that ministers and teachers penetrate into minds and hearts and so correct both blindness of mind and hardness of heart” (4.1.6).

To address these extremes, Calvin suggests that scripture describes the phenomena in two different ways that reflect the opposite sides of the same coin. “God sometimes connects himself with his servants and sometimes separates himself from them. When he connects himself with them he transfers to them what never ceases to dwell in him, for he never resigns to them his own office, but makes them partakers of it only... But when God separates himself from his ministers nothing remains in them.”¹⁰⁸⁹ In the first set of passages scripture “furnishes him ... with the efficacy of the Holy Spirit” for “raising up the kingdom of Christ.”¹⁰⁹⁰ In such passages God is described as working through pastors as “organs of the Holy Spirit [*spiritus sancti organa*].”¹⁰⁹¹ In another set of passages God is described as accomplishing this work as if the means of preaching was entirely irrelevant. Here the pastor is described as “a servant, not a master – an instrument, not the hand, and in short as man, not God. Viewed in that aspect he leaves him nothing but his labor, and that too, dead and powerless, if the Lord does not make it

1089Commentary on Malachi 4:6 [1559]; CO 44:497.

1090Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:7 [1546]; CO 49:350-351. For example, commenting on 1 Corinthians 3:5 Calvin writes, “the efficacy of external doctrine [*externae doctrinae*] receives here extraordinary commendation, when it is spoken of as the instrument [*organum*] of the Holy Spirit.” He went on to note that God makes use of the ministry, not as if it had its own intrinsic power, “but insofar as they are guided by his hand, as instruments [*instrumenta*].” CO 49:349. Pastors “are rightly called the vicars of God who purely and faithfully teach from his mouth.” They do not “exercise their own power,” but in such a way that “God himself may always rule through the instrumentality of men.” Commentary on Zechariah 3:6-7 [1559]; CO 44:172-176. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9:1 [1546]; CO 49:437-438; Commentary on 2 Corinthians 4:6 [1548]; CO 50:53; Commentary on Joel 1:1-4 [1559]; CO 42:517-518.

1091Commentary on Micah 2:7 [1559]; CO 43:307-308. Because the Lord displays his glory through the agency of human beings “he is wont to transfer to them even that which belongs peculiarly to himself.” Commentary on John 15:16 [1553]; CO 47:348. Cf. Commentary on 1 John 4:1 [1551]; CO 55:347-348; Commentary on Deuteronomy 18:17 [1563]; CO 24:274.

efficacious by the Spirit.”¹⁰⁹²

Both perspectives, Calvin maintains, are important. It is by the word and Spirit joined together that the kingdom is established.¹⁰⁹³ “God has therefore two ways of teaching: for first, he sounds in our ears by the mouth of men, and secondly, he addresses us inwardly by his Spirit, and he does this either at the same moment or at different times, as he thinks fit.”¹⁰⁹⁴ Human and divine agency, the “inward calling” of the Spirit and the “outward voice” of men, are two parts of one act.¹⁰⁹⁵ God is the “efficient cause” while human preaching is the “instrument.”¹⁰⁹⁶ The preaching of the word can therefore be compared to the sacraments. God promises to work through them but the power that operates in them must be distinguished from the outward means.¹⁰⁹⁷ Calvin summarizes the spiritual nature of the ministry in a comment on 2 Corinthians 3:6.

When Paul ... calls himself a minister of the Spirit, he does not mean by this that the grace of the Holy Spirit and his influence were tied to his preaching, so that he could, whenever he pleased, breath forth the Spirit along with the utterance of the voice. He simply means that Christ blessed his ministry and thus accomplished what was predicted respecting the gospel. It is one thing for Christ

-
- 1092Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:7 [1546]; CO 49:350-351. Apart from the power of the Spirit prophets and teachers are simply “dead instruments.” Commentary on Hebrews 3:3 [1549]; CO 52:37. “[T]o govern the Church of God, to carry the embassy of eternal salvation, to erect the kingdom of God on earth, and to raise men to heaven, is a task far beyond human capacity.” Commentary on John 20:22 [1553]; CO 47:438. Cf. Commentary on Romans 10:17 [1556]; CO 49:206; Commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:5 [1546]; CO 49:335-336; Commentary on Acts 20:28 [1554]; CO 48:468.
- 1093“‘This is done partly by the preaching of the word, and partly by the secret power of the Spirit. It is his will to govern men by his word: but as the bare voice, if the inward power of the Spirit be not added, does not pierce the hearts of men, both must be joined together, in order that the kingdom of God may be established.’” Commentary on Matthew 6:10 [1555]; CO 45:197-198. Cf. *Institutes*, 3.20.42.
- 1094Commentary on John 14:26 [1553]; CO 47:334-335. God chooses to operate according to the outward means of preaching but it is nevertheless God alone who illuminates the minds and renews the hearts of human beings (4.1.6).
- 1095Commentary on Romans 10:16 [1556]; CO 49:206. When God “bestows so great praise on the outward doctrine, he does not separate it from the secret influence of his Spirit.” Outward preaching “can do nothing separately or by itself,” but it is nevertheless “through the grace of the spirit an efficacious instrument.” Commentary on Luke 1:16 [1555]; CO 45:16. While God “makes use of men for advancing or maintaining the kingdom of Christ, still every thing is begun and completed, through their agency, by God alone through the power of his Spirit.” Commentary on John 12:13 [1553]; 47:282-284.
- 1096Commentary on 1 Corinthians 9:1 [1546]; CO 49:437-438. God communicates “spiritual power [*spirituali potentia*]” through the “instrumentality” of ministers (2:5; CO 49:335-336). Cf. 1:17; CO 49:319-322.
- 1097Commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:7 [1546]; CO 49:350-351. God works so closely with ministers as to consider them his “deputies [*adiutores*],” his “instruments [*organis*],” and his “fellow-laborers [*in societatem laboris*]” 3:9; CO 49:352. See Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 190.

to connect his influence with a man's doctrine and quite another for the man's doctrine to have such efficacy of itself. We are, then, ministers of the Spirit, not as if we held him enclosed within us, or as it were captive – not as if we could at our pleasure confer his grace upon all or upon whom we pleased – but because Christ, through our instrumentality, illuminates the minds of men, renews their hearts, and in short, regenerates them wholly. It is in consequence of their being such a connection and bond of union between Christ's grace and man's effort that in many cases that is ascribed to the minister which belongs exclusively to the Lord.¹⁰⁹⁸

The presence of the Spirit in the faithful ministry of the word means that the ministry is itself spiritual. Calvin does not view the word and sacraments as mere masks (“*larva dei*”) of *inward* means of grace, but as effective means of grace (“*vera facies*”).¹⁰⁹⁹ Calvin makes this point explicitly in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:20. Contrasting outward tools of eloquence and rhetoric, which he compares to a “body,” and the inward power of faithful preaching, which is like a “soul,” he points out that God “would not have us rest in outward masks [*externis larvis*], but depend solely on the internal power of the Holy Spirit [*internae ... spiritus sancti virtuti*].” The contrast intended here is not between the outward means of preaching and the inward work of the Spirit, but between the inefficacy of mere rhetoric and the spiritual power of faithful preaching. On the contrary, “We have already seen that *the preaching of the gospel* is of such a nature, that it *is inwardly replete with a kind of solid majesty*. This majesty shows itself when *a minister strives by means of power rather than of speech*, that is, when he does not place confidence in his own intellect or eloquence, but, furnished with spiritual armor ... he applies himself diligently to the Lord’s work.”¹¹⁰⁰ Calvin warns against those “fanatics,” “libertines, and other furies of that stamp,” who dismiss preaching as merely an outward work. From Paul we should learn to “conjoin the Spirit with the voice of men, which is nothing else than his organ [*organum*].”¹¹⁰¹

1098Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:6 [1548]; CO 50:40.

1099Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 149-150.

1100Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4:20 [1546]; CO 49:376. Emphasis added.

1101Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20 [1550]; CO 52:176. Without the work of the Spirit “the preaching of the gospel would avail nothing,” but it is equally true that the Spirit does not ordinarily reveal himself apart from the word, as the “fanatics imagine.” Commentary on Isaiah 59:21 [1559]; CO

[D]elirious and even dangerous are those notions that though the internal word is efficacious, yet that which proceeds from the mouth of man is lifeless and destitute of all power. I indeed admit that the power does not proceed from the tongue of man, nor exists in mere sound, but that the whole power is to be ascribed altogether to the Holy Spirit. There is, however, nothing in this to hinder the Spirit from putting forth his power in the word preached.¹¹⁰²

When Paul describes the power of God at work in the gospel, Calvin insists, “he speaks not here of any secret revelation, but of vocal preaching.”¹¹⁰³

Understood in these terms, the faithful preaching of the word possesses authority superior to that of any political government.

Here, then, is the sovereign power with which the pastors of the church, by whatever name they be called, ought to be endowed. That is that they may dare boldly to do all things by God's word; may compel all worldly power, glory, wisdom, and exaltation to yield to and obey his majesty; supported by his power, may command all from the highest even to the last ... but do all things [only] in God's word (4.8.9).

Pastors are in the same position as the prophets of old, whom God set “over nations and kingdoms, to pluck up and to root out, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:9-10) (4.8.3). Their task is to “reduce the world to order,” and from submission to that order “even kings are not excepted.”¹¹⁰⁴ When Jeremiah “had to exercise his spiritual jurisdiction [*spiritualis jurisdictio*] in God's name, he spared not the king nor his counselors, for he knew that his doctrine was above all kings. The prophetic office, then, is eminent above all the elevations of kings.”¹¹⁰⁵ The temptation for most teachers, Calvin believed, is to flatter kings and princes.¹¹⁰⁶ Yet God's commission to

37:352.

1102Commentary on Hebrews 4:12 [1549]; CO 55:51.

1103Commentary on Romans 1:16 [1556]; CO 49:19-20. On the Apostle Paul's comment that “faith comes by hearing,” Calvin observes that although “the voice of man can by no means penetrate into the soul” God nevertheless effectually works through “human means” to regenerate human beings (10:17; CO 49:206).

1104Commentary on Jeremiah 1:9 [1563]; CO 37:479-483. Stevenson's claim is thus fully justified that with respect to civil government “the church must, and will, ever exert the embodiment of prophetic voice.” William R. Stevenson, Jr., *Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 91-92.

1105Commentary on Jeremiah 27:12 [1563]; CO 38:552. The pastoral office is “superior to any principality [*principatu*].” Commentary on 2 Corinthians 4:5 [1548]; CO 50:52. Cf. Commentary on Micah 3:9-10 [1559]; 43:332. Cf. Commentary on Haggai 1:1 [1559]; CO 44:83; Haggai 1:13-14 [1559]; CO 44:96; Commentary on Isaiah 39:5 [1559]; CO 36:668-669.

1106Some preachers were simply content to leave politics alone “provided such liberality towards their

Jeremiah should give them courage. “Whatever ... is precious and excellent in the world must come to nothing, if it derogates even in the least degree from the glory of God or from the authority of his truth.”¹¹⁰⁷ Thus “all who are chosen to the office of teaching, cannot faithfully discharge their duty except they boldly, and with intrepid spirit, dare to reprove both kings and queens; for the word of God is not to be restricted to the common people or men in humble life, but it subjects to itself all, from the least to the greatest”¹¹⁰⁸

Although Calvin thus gives pastors authority over magistrates, he is quick to remind his readers that the authority of teachers is spiritual, not political, and therefore does not diminish in the slightest the political authority of magistrates. Every single proclamation, warning, and exhortation must be derived from the word.¹¹⁰⁹ Jeremiah held a public office as God's prophet “but as to the government of the city he was a private individual, one of the people.”¹¹¹⁰ Where pastors claim authority over civil magistrates or exemption from civil courts, as did the papacy, princes need not take them seriously.

[W]hosoever claims such a power must necessarily bring forth the word of God, and really prove that he is a prophet and that he introduces no fictions of his own. And hence we see how fatuitous is the boasting of the Pope and of his filthy clergy, when they wickedly dare to appropriate to themselves what is here said. 'We are,' they say, 'above both kings and nations.' ... Now let the Pope show that he is furnished with the word of God, that he claims for himself nothing that is his own, or apart from God, in a word, that he introduces nothing of his own devices, and we shall

order be ever continued.” Commentary on Micah 3:5 [1559]; CO 43:324. Others pandered to those in power by tolerating their vices or nourishing their corruptions with flattery. Such pastors “pervert vices and virtues as to say that light is darkness and that darkness is light.” Commentary on Jeremiah 15:19 [1563]; CO 38:234-235. But preachers are “not to wink at the faults of princes, so as to purchase their favor at this price, however advantageous that favor might appear to be to the public interests.” Commentary on Matthew 14:5 [1555]; CO 45:432. Commentary on Jeremiah 36:16, 20-21 [1563]; CO 39:125-126, 127.

1107Commentary on Jeremiah 13:12-14 [1563]; CO 38:160-161.

1108Commentary on Jeremiah 13:18; CO 38:167. Cf. 34:21; CO 39:98.

1109Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 36:29-30 [1563]; CO 39:134. Balke thus claims that Calvin was “not primarily interested in the power of Christendom.” Rather, he was concerned about “the mandate of the *verbi divinum ministerium*, which, in the freedom of the Word and in strict obedience to the Word, was directed to all, including the government.” Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 259. This is true as far as it goes, but Balke goes too far when he claims that Calvin did not advocate a “Magisterial Reformation” (Cf. 269).

1110Commentary on Jeremiah 38:1-4 [1563]; CO 39:156-160.

willingly allow that he is preeminent above the whole world. For God is not to be separated from his word.¹¹¹¹

No heed need be paid to pastors whose preaching reflects their own private or political agenda rather than the clear teaching of scripture.¹¹¹² The credibility of pastors requires that their office be free of politicization.

[I]f they quarrel with this or that man about worldly things, then it cannot be but that the word of God will be evil spoken of through their fault. Hence great care ought to be taken that those who sustain the office of public teaching should not engage in worldly business, and be thus exposed to the necessity of contending about worldly things. They have enough to do, and more than enough, in the warfare in which the Lord has engaged them.¹¹¹³

Thus pastors should avoid using their authority to address specific details of policy. For instance, although magistrates are to be called to collect and use revenues justly, and in accord with the welfare of the whole people (4.20.13), “it does not belong to us [ministers or subjects] either to prescribe to princes how much they ought to expend in every affair or to call them to account.”¹¹¹⁴ Chenevière rightly extends the point to the church's political engagement. For Calvin, “The Church should not even occupy itself actively with accessory questions, social or otherwise, which belong to the domain of the State, and which can only hinder the accomplishment of its Divine mission.”¹¹¹⁵ As Calvin

1111 Commentary on Jeremiah 1:9 [1563]; CO 37:479-483. Thus Jeremiah “did not exempt himself from the authority of the king, nor did he pretend that he was released from the laws ... as the Papal clergy do” (27:12; CO 38:552).

1112 “No other word is to be held as the word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles; and the only authorized way of teaching in the church is by the prescription and standard of his word” (4.8.8).

1113 Commentary on Jeremiah 15:10 [1563]; CO 38:219.

1114 Commentary on Romans 13:6 [1556]; CO 49:252. Pastors should not get involved in specifying rules as the practical application of scriptural teaching on matters such as modesty with respect to spending and dress, matters appropriately left to magistrates. “Magistrates may indeed make laws, by means of which a rage for superfluous expenditures shall be in some measure restrained. But godly teachers, whose business it is to guide the consciences, ought always to keep in view the end of lawful use.” Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:9 [1549]; CO 52:275.

1115 Marc Chenevière, “Did Calvin Advocate Theocracy?” *Evangelical Quarterly* 9 (1937): 163. Chenevière puts it a little too narrowly when he claims, “The Church's sole opportunity of intervening directly in temporal affairs is afforded in the execution of her duty of exhortation and reprimand in regard to the magistrate who openly disobeys the Word of God” (167). This is in sharp contrast to the view of Biéler, who claims that Calvin called the church “to receive constantly afresh the enduring teaching of the Word of God, to examine repeatedly afresh the real nature of economic, political and social institutions in which it exists, and to invent freshly produced responses in order to adapt the teaching to that reality and so to display its moral faithfulness and its obedience through practical activities.” André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought* (ed. Edward Dommen; trans. James

put it in a sermon on 1 Samuel, “The gospel is not to change the administration [*polices*] of the world, and to make laws which pertain to the temporal state. It is very true that kings, princes, and magistrates ought always to consult the mouth of God and to conform themselves to his word; but our Lord has given them liberty to make the laws which they know to be proper and useful by the rule which is committed to them.”¹¹¹⁶

To be sure, in practice it has always been notoriously difficult for Christians to distinguish between the teaching of the word and its implications for civil policy. Graham observes that in Geneva “the pastors did not try to make laws. But they tried to influence the making and enforcing of good laws.” The problem is acute from a historical perspective because issues that modern Christians might judge to be political or economic, distinct from the principles of piety or justice revealed in scripture, were often deemed by Calvin and his contemporaries to be clearly addressed in scripture.¹¹¹⁷

Yet Calvin believed that not only must what pastors preach come from scripture, but it must be faithful to scripture properly interpreted in light of the work of Christ and the analogy of faith. What was appropriate for Jeremiah to say to the leaders of his time may not be what is appropriate for pastors to say in another time, for “the present order

Greig; Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2005 [1961]), 456. “Too many believers . . . condemn what they call the faith's or the church's meddling in political, social or occupational matters. Having lost the fundamentally biblical vision of the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, they take refuge in sentimental pietism that allows only a rudimentary part of the individual to be governed by the faith” (459).

1116Sermon on 1 Samuel 42; CO 51:797. Cited in W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1971), 158-159.

1117Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 161. Graham summarizes the problem in a pithy paragraph: “[Calvin's] ability to distinguish the spiritual and the temporal was uncommon for his day; his refusal to allow the spiritual be subject to the temporal was uncommon to Protestantism in his day; his ability to suffuse the temporal with the values of the spiritual without robbing the former of its identity is instructive for our day” (158). “Nothing seems to have been beneath his notice, and no duty too trivial for the Council to ask his advice” (157). Yet Graham tends to present Calvin as if the reformer thought that the church and its pastors should involve itself politically whenever a particular policy issue has a spiritual dimension. This is correct in a sense, but of course, every area of life, for Calvin, has a spiritual dimension. The real issue for the reformer is whether or not a particular proclamation comes from the word, because it is to the word that the church's spiritual authority is bound. Thus Calvin agreed that the church must proclaim what the word teaches with respect to politics, but this quite different from what Graham is talking about when he writes that Calvin's stance is “responsible for forcing Presbyterian churches in this country to make public statements of policy in the political and social arena, not just for the sake of its members, but also for the eyes and ears of the world” (177).

differs very much from what existed in former times” (4.8.5). For instance, Calvin observes that when Daniel addresses the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar he “treats the profane king more indulgently than if he had addressed his own nation.” Daniel speaks prophetically, but “because he knew the king did not hold the first rudiments of piety, he here undertakes only the office of a counselor, since he was not an ordinary teacher.” Daniel tempered his words with the awareness that the king was being gracious to him simply by giving him an opportunity to speak.¹¹¹⁸ As I show in Chapters 6 and 9 Calvin rejected the notion that the Old Testament civil law is normative for modern nations, and he likewise rejected the claim that civil government should enforce the full rigor of the moral law. Such limitations on the way in which scripture can be applied to politics must necessarily limit what pastors should proclaim as the authoritative will of God. Teachers are responsible to interpret scripture with sensitivity to its context and to apply it with sensitivity to the contexts of their hearers, taking seriously the distinction between the two kingdoms and the complexities of politics.

Discipline

It is often pointed out that in contrast to much of the Reformed tradition, Calvin did not make church discipline a mark of the church.¹¹¹⁹ Calvin argued that where the word is faithfully preached and the sacraments administered, there a true church exists, “even if it otherwise swarms with many faults.” Even doctrine and the sacraments may

¹¹¹⁸Commentary on Daniel 4:27 [1561]; CO 40:672-675. Interestingly, Calvin notes that in his exhortation Daniel emphasized matters of justice rather than piety. “True justice on the part of kings is not in outward piety but in pity towards the poor.” Despite the potential significance of the point, Calvin simply notes that the prophets often emphasize the second table of the law as a synecdoche for the whole.

¹¹¹⁹But, as virtually all of these scholars recognize, Calvin nevertheless identified discipline as crucial to the health of the church. For instance, see Glenn S. Sunshine, “Discipline as a Third Mark of the Church: Three Views,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 33:2 (1998): 469-480; R. N. Caswell, “Calvin’s View of Ecclesiastical Discipline,” *John Calvin: A Collection of Essays* (ed. G. E. Duffield; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 210-226; Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 175; Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 198-199; Wendel, *Calvin*, 301; Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 86-88. Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 161, erroneously claims that Calvin did identify discipline as the third mark of the church.

be somewhat corrupted, but as long as what is essential is maintained, there is no justification for schism over “nonessential matters [*rebus istis non ita necessariis*]” (4.1.12). As for inadequate church discipline, “even if the church be slack in its duty, still each and every individual has not the right at once to take upon himself the decision to separate” (4.1.15). Calvin identified the refusal to see a true church where discipline is lacking with the Anabaptists, whom he in turn associated with the Donatists, the Catharists and the Novatians. “When they do not see a quality of life corresponding to the doctrine of the gospel among those to whom it is announced, they immediately judge that no church exists in that place” (4.1.13).¹¹²⁰ Calvin approvingly quotes Augustine's invocation of Ephesians 4 to emphasize that unity must be an objective of church discipline. “All pious method and measure of ecclesiastical discipline ought ever to look to “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” which the apostle orders us to keep by “forbearing [with] one another,” and when it is not kept, the medicine of punishment begins to be not only superfluous but also harmful, and so ceases to be medicine” (4.12.11).

The Anabaptists were guilty of forgetting that there is only one kingdom of Christ, embodied in one true church, and that is the visible church. To separate from the visible church as a means of addressing its moral problems is to destroy its unity and is “on that account no remedy at all.” Christians must practice mercy and patience,

lest, while they seem strenuous and courageous vindicators of righteousness, they depart from the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the only kingdom of righteousness. For because God willed that the communion of his church be maintained in this outward society, he who out of hatred of the wicked breaks the token of that society treads a path that slopes to a fall from the communion of saints (4.1.16).

The kingdom of Christ cannot be played off against the true church. “For the man that is prepossessed with this notion must necessarily in the end withdraw from all others and

¹¹²⁰When the Anabaptists “recognize no assembly of Christ to exist except one conspicuous in every respect for its angelic perfection, under the pretense of their zeal they subvert whatever edification there is” (4.12.12). On the Catharist and Novatian comparison see Commentary on Psalm 15:1 [1557]; CO 31:143.

look upon himself as the only saint in the world, or set up a peculiar sect in company with a few hypocrites.”¹¹²¹

The problem was that the Anabaptists confused the present state of the church with its perfection in the consummated kingdom of Christ.¹¹²² Although the church is the kingdom of righteousness, for Calvin, in the present age it labors under the cross. Calvin points his readers to Jesus' parables of the net (Matthew 13:47-58), of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), and of the threshing floor (Matthew 3:12) to defend his claim that on this side of Christ's return the church will always be a mixture of believers and hypocrites, marked by blemishes (4.1.13). The church must resign itself to a “mixture of the good and the bad” until “the end of the world; because, till that time, a true and perfect restoration of the Church will not take place.” Caught in the tension between the two ages, the faithful must avoid both slackness and overzealousness. “[T]he present state of the Church is confused. Our God is the God of order, and not of confusion, and therefore recommends to us discipline, but he permits hypocrites to remain for a time among believers, till the last day, when he will bring his kingdom to a state of perfection.”¹¹²³ Nothing is more painful to faithful ministers than the need to endure such imperfection, and pastors must “labor strenuously to purify the church.” Still, “when all shall have devoted their united exertions to the general advantage they will not succeed in such a manner as to purify the church entirely from every defilement.”¹¹²⁴

In the present age, therefore, the kingdom is manifested primarily through the

1121Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2 [1546]; CO 49:307.

1122This is what Torrance describes as “the present condition of the Kingdom and its future glory.” Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, 122 (Cf. 150). Cf. Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:1-2 [1548]; CO 52:376-377.

1123Commentary on Matthew 13:47 [1555]; CO 45:376. While Christ has sanctified his church, during the “pilgrimage of the Church in this world” he “suffers it to be polluted by many stains” (13:24-43; CO 45:367-368).

1124Commentary on Matthew 13:39 [1555]; CO 45:369-370. Calvin writes, “there is nothing that distresses more the faithful ministers of the church than to see no way of correcting evils, and to be compelled to endure hypocrites, of whose wickedness they are aware, and to be unable to banish from the church many who are destructive plagues, or even to hinder them from spreading their venom by secret arts.” Commentary on 1 Timothy 5:24 [1548]; CO 52:320.

church's ministry of the forgiveness of sins. Even the fruit of sanctification takes place in a context of confession and mercy. "Not only does the Lord through forgiveness of sins receive and adopt us once for all into the church, but through the same means he preserves and protects us there" (4.1.21). This is why Christians are instructed daily to pray "Forgive us our debts," and it is why Jesus commanded believers to forgive their repentant brothers and sisters without limit (4.1.23). It also explains why the heart of church government, from which the Anabaptists wrongly separated themselves, is the church's use of the keys of the kingdom in the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. "Therefore, in the communion of saints, our sins are continually forgiven us by the ministry of the church itself when the presbyters or bishops to whom this office has been committed strengthen godly consciences by the gospel promises in the hope of pardon and forgiveness." Apart from participation in the visible church this ministry of the keys cannot be received: "Accordingly, let each one of us count it his own duty to seek forgiveness of sins only where the Lord has placed it" (4.1.22). The credal statement regarding the forgiveness of sins follows immediately after that regarding the church because God has "promised his mercy solely in the communion of saints." To separate from that communion in the name of purity, therefore, is to gut the church of its chief mark, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins.¹¹²⁵

All that said, Calvin agreed with the Anabaptists that discipline is essential to the church's health and survival. Troeltsch was correct to claim that Calvin synthesized the idea of the (state) church with that of the sect.¹¹²⁶ As Calvin puts it in *Institutes* 4.12,

¹¹²⁵"Forgiveness of sins, then, is for us the first entry into the church and Kingdom of God" (4.1.20).

"[N]one but the citizens of the church enjoy this privilege, for apart from the body of Christ and the fellowship of the godly there can be no hope of reconciliation with God. Hence in the creed we profess to believe in 'the Catholic Church and the forgiveness of sins.'" To depart from this church in the name of purity is an "open renouncement of eternal salvation." Commentary on Isaiah 33:24 [1559]; CO 36:578. Cf. *Institutes* 4.1.3.

¹¹²⁶Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. Olive Wyon; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992 [1912]), 2:579, 593-598, 602, 623, 627. Balke likewise writes, "Calvin blended the ecclesiology of Luther with that of the Anabaptists. He united the ideal of the state church with the concept of the body of true believers." Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 76-77. Cf. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 194; David Little, *Religion, Order, and Law* (New

“Accordingly, as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own place.” To eliminate discipline is therefore to bring about the “dissolution of the church” (4.12.1). A few sections later he warns, “Those who trust that without this bond of discipline the church can long stand are, I say, mistaken; unless, perhaps, we can with impunity go without that aid which the Lord foresaw would be necessary for us” (4.12.4). Calvin thought a church might exist for a time without church discipline, but he didn't think it would last very long. Discipline is necessary “like a bridle to restrain and tame those who rage against the doctrine of Christ; or like a spur to arouse those of little inclination; and also sometimes like a father's rod to chastise mildly and with the gentleness of Christ's Spirit those who have more seriously lapsed” (4.12.1).

Calvin suggests that discipline has three chief purposes, all of them spiritual. First, the honor of God and of the Lord's Supper must be preserved. Second, the other Christians in the body must not be corrupted by those who do evil. Third, that “those overcome by shame for their baseness [might] begin to repent” (4.12.5).¹¹²⁷ Underlying all of these purposes is the fact that it is in the visible society of the church that God has begun to restore the order of piety, love, and justice among human beings. The Lord's Supper is not simply individual believers' celebration of their union with Christ, but of their communion with one another, in “love, peace, and concord.” Thus

none of the brethren can be injured, despised, rejected, abused, or in any way offended by us, without at the same time, injuring, despising, and abusing Christ by the wrongs we do; that we cannot disagree with our brethren without at the same time disagreeing with Christ; that we cannot love Christ without loving him in the brethren; that we ought to take the same care of our brethren's bodies as we take of our own; for they are members of our body; and that, as no part of our body is touched by any feeling of pain which is not spread among all the rest, so we ought not to allow a brother to be affected by any evil, without being touched

York: Harper and Row, 1969), 76.

¹¹²⁷Elsewhere he lists as various reasons: “that contagion may spread no farther, that the personal wickedness of one individual may not tend to the common disgrace of the church, and that the example of severity may induce others to fear,” but he observes that Paul's primary focus is on encouraging repentance through shame. Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3:14 [1550]; CO 52:215-216.

with compassion for him. Accordingly, Augustine with good reason frequently calls this Sacrament 'the bond of love' (4.17.38).

Where discipline does not ensure that this is a reality to some meaningful extent, the Lord's Supper is a mere exercise in hypocrisy.¹¹²⁸

Calvin begins his discussion of “ecclesiastical jurisdiction [*ecclesiae iurisdictio*],” or the “discipline of morals,” in *Institutes* 4.11, identifying it as “the most important [part of ecclesiastical power] in a well-ordered state [*statu bene composito*].” Significantly, Calvin introduces this discussion by comparing the church to a city, but he immediately clarifies that the two are in fact quite different. “For as no city or township can function without magistrate and polity [*magistratu et politia*], so the church of God (as I have already taught, but am now compelled to repeat) needs a spiritual polity [*spirituali politia*]. This is, however, quite distinct from the civil polity, yet does not hinder or threaten it but rather greatly helps and furthers it.” (4.11.1).¹¹²⁹

Despite the view of some scholars that Genevan church discipline was a political enterprise, Calvin makes it eminently clear that this power is an expression of the spiritual government of Christ's church, not of civil government. First, he identifies the jurisdiction of which he is speaking with “the exercise of the office of the keys,” that is, the keys of the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Second, he invokes 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8 as evidence for the office of elder, declaring explicitly that the Apostle Paul, “is not addressing the magistrates (not any of whom were then Christians), but those who were joined with the pastors in the spiritual government of the church [*spirituale ecclesiae regimen*].” He adds a reference to 1 Timothy 5:17 as evidence that some presbyters were responsible not for preaching but “to supervise morals and to use the

1128“Discipline is thus that which allows the church to be the church, by bringing its teaching and its sacramental life under the rule of Christ.” Robert White, “Oil and Vinegar: Calvin on Church Discipline,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985): 26 (Cf. 25-40). Cf. Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 54-55; Mark Valeri, “Religion, Discipline, and the Economy in Calvin's Geneva,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 141-142.

1129Calvin makes a similar analogy at the beginning of Chapter 12 (4.12.1). See John Lee Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of John Calvin, His Predecessors and His Contemporaries* (Geneva: Droz, 1992), 251-252.

whole power of the keys” (4.11.1). Finally, at the beginning of Chapter 12 Calvin writes, “Discipline depends for the most part upon the power of the keys and upon spiritual jurisdiction [*spirituali iurisdictione*]” (4.12.1).

Calvin was aware that his teaching on church discipline placed him in opposition to the assumption of virtually all Protestant magistrates in the early sixteenth century that the discipline of morals was a magisterial prerogative. The Swiss reformers Zwingli and Bullinger, whose opinions prevailed in every Reformed city until Calvin established ecclesiastical discipline in Geneva, argued that the elders or governors mentioned in the New Testament constituted a temporary office now better served by Christian magistrates.¹¹³⁰ Because they made no substantive distinction between the city and the church, they viewed the magisterial office as an office of the church. “Christ, they say, entrusted these functions to the church, since there was no magistrate to carry them out.” Calvin responds by explaining why the task of church discipline cannot be performed by civil government.

Some imagine that all those things were temporary, lasting while the magistrates were still strangers to the profession of our religion. In this they are mistaken, because they do not notice how great a difference and unlikeness there is between ecclesiastical and civil power [*ecclesiasticae et civilis potestatis*]. For the church does not have the right of the sword to punish or compel, not the authority to force; not imprisonment, nor the other punishments which the magistrate commonly inflicts. Then [in the church], it is not a question of punishing the sinner against his will, but of the sinner professing his repentance in a voluntary chastisement. The two conceptions are very different. The church does not assume what is proper to the magistrate; nor can the magistrate execute what is carried out by the church (4.11.3).

Calvin is quite clear here that government by the sword cannot be an office of the church because it relies on coercion. To eliminate church discipline because of the existence of magistrates is to confuse the two kingdoms, conflating civil righteousness with spiritual righteousness, and the civil use of the law with its spiritual use.¹¹³¹ As White puts it, for

¹¹³⁰See Chapter 1. Cf. J. Wayne Baker, “Christian Discipline and the Early Reformed Tradition: Bullinger and Calvin,” *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin* (ed. Robert V. Schnucker; Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1988), 107-119.

¹¹³¹Wendel writes that for Calvin church discipline was always sharply distinguished from civil

Calvin discipline is not ultimately a tool for social coercion. “Discipline is, in the final analysis, a means of grace which, along with the Word, sacraments and prayer, Christ has given to his church, and which his Spirit uses for the sanctification and edification of the whole body.”¹¹³²

Reducing his opponents position to the absurd, Calvin points out that the assumption that the function of church discipline is taken up by Christian magistrates, taken to its logical conclusion, could be made about “the whole ministry of the word.”

Today, then, according to our opponents, let pastors stop rebuking manifest misdeeds; let them cease to chide, to accuse, to rebuke. For there are Christian magistrates who ought to correct these things by laws and sword. And as the magistrate ought by punishment and physical restraint to cleanse the church of offenses, so the minister of the word ought to help the magistrate in order that not so many may sin. Their functions ought so to be joined that each serves to help, not hinder, the other (4.11.3).

Calvin clearly finds this conclusion to be absurd. Confusing church discipline with the work of civil government confuses the function of ministers with that of the civil magistrate. In Matthew 18 Christ, it is patently obvious, established a “set and permanent order of the church, not a temporary one” (4.11.4). As Calvin puts it later in the chapter, “If we seek the authority of Christ in this matter, there is no doubt that he wished to bar the ministers of his word from civil rule and earthly authority when he said, 'The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, ... but you do not do so'. He means not only that the office of pastor is distinct from that of prince but also that the things are so

punishment in that it did not have “what is properly called a juridical character.” Wendel, *Calvin*, 300. In ecclesiastical jurisdiction we are concerned with the order of Christ (308-309). Hancock also recognizes that the distinction is that of the two kingdoms. “This distinction between ecclesiastical and political jurisdiction represents an elaboration of the distinction Calvin insists on in his chapter on Christian freedom (III.xix) – the very distinction of which he reminds us in introducing his chapter on civil government.” Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*, 55.

1132White, “Oil and Vinegar,” 40. Wendel rightly concludes, “The theory of the relations between Church and State that Calvin elaborated is therefore as remote from the teaching of Zwingli, which led to confusion between Church and State, as it is incompatible with that submission of the Churches to the State to which things had come in Germany.” Wendel, *Calvin*, 310. Little writes, “Calvin never allowed the Church to become organizationally co-terminous or identical with the magistracy. To a degree unknown in Zwingli's Zurich, Luther's Germany, or Hooker's England, Calvin maintained the independence of the Church over against the civil society, however much he blurred and jumbled the lines of demarcation.” Little, *Religion, Order, and Law*, 78.

different that they cannot come together in one man” (4.11.8).¹¹³³

Calvin bolsters these arguments with several others. He points out that if civil government is to take the role of administering discipline as assigned to the 'church' in Matthew 18, Christians must do precisely what Paul criticized the Corinthians for doing: accuse one another before magistrates. He further notes that when magistrates began to convert to Christianity in the early church they did not abolish the “spiritual jurisdiction [*spiritualis iurisdictio*]” or confuse it with the “civil” jurisdiction. On the contrary, “the magistrate, if he is godly, will not want to exempt himself from the common subjection of God's children. It is by no means the least significant part of this for him to subject himself to the church, which judges according to God's word – so far ought he to be from setting that judgment aside!” As Calvin quotes Ambrose, “a good emperor is within the church, not over the church” (4.11.4).¹¹³⁴ What is more, the bishops of the early church recognized that “this spiritual power [*spiritualis potestas*]” must be “completely separated from the right of the sword.” They “did not exercise their power through fines or prisons or other civil penalties but used the Lord's word alone.” Thus “the jurisdiction of the ancient church [*veteris ecclesiae iurisdictio*]” amounted to nothing more than what the Apostle Paul taught concerning the “spiritual power of pastors [*spirituali pastorum potestate*]” (4.11.5). Finally, Calvin argues in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 that unlike political laws excommunication is part of the “jurisdiction [*iurisdictione*] that belongs peculiarly to the church.” This means that its scope is “confined to the church [*intra ecclesiam continetur*] and does not extend to

1133McKee notes that Calvin's argument here assumes that “the church is a distinct, though (ideally) not separate society from the earthly community. Civil and ecclesiastical societies are in a sense parallel . . . The insistence that church and state are distinct societies implicitly explains why this situation [the need for elders exercising church discipline] has not changed in a Christian nation.” McKee, *Plural Ministry*, 43.

1134The gospel demands that “all royal scepters and crowns submit” to the church's spiritual jurisdiction when exercised properly on behalf of Christ. “For great kings ought not to count it any dishonor to prostrate themselves as suppliants before Christ, the King of Kings; nor ought they to be displeased that they are judged by the church” (4.12.7).

strangers.”¹¹³⁵ However much the body of believers and the citizenry of Geneva might have been coterminous in practice, in principle they were to be sharply distinguished.

The lynchpin of Calvin's argument is his insistence that church discipline is an exercise of the keys of the kingdom and an extension of the ministry of the word.¹¹³⁶ To be sure, Calvin does not conflate preaching and discipline. He argues that while in Matthew 16:19 and John 20:23 Jesus' reference to the binding and loosing of the keys refers to the church's “doctrinal authority,” or to the “ministry of the word,” Matthew 18:15-18 uses the same language to describe discipline. In the former passages “the power of the keys is simply the preaching of the gospel.” Because it is contained entirely in the word “it is not so much power [*potestatem*] as ministry” (4.11.1). Matthew 18 is different from these, but not “so different as not to possess considerable connection between them.” The passages describe the “same power [*potestas*] of binding and loosing (that is, through God's word), the same command, the same promise.” The only difference is that “the first passage is particularly concerned with the preaching which the ministers of the word execute; the latter applies to the discipline of excommunication which is entrusted to the [whole] church” (4.11.2).

The similarity between discipline and the teaching of the word owes to the fact that faithful discipline is nothing less than an extension of the word. Calvin is emphatic on this point:

Therefore, that no one may stubbornly despise the judgment of the church, or think it immaterial that he has been condemned by the vote of the believers, the Lord testifies that such judgment by believers is nothing but the proclamation of his own sentence, and that whatever they have done on earth is ratified in heaven. For they have the word of God with which to condemn the perverse; they have the word with which to receive the repentant into grace. They cannot err or

1135Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:12 [1546]; CO 49:386. Calvin rejects Chrysostom's attempt to find political implications from this passage. “For Paul is not here addressing judges that are armed with the sword [*iudices gladio armatos*], but an unarmed multitude [*inermem turmam ... fraterna correctio permissa erat*] that was allowed merely to make use of brotherly correction.” In the French he declares the church to be “destitute of external power [*desnuée de puissance externe*].” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:13 [1546]; CO 49:387.

1136“Rightly understood, excommunication is part and parcel of the church's stewardship of the Word.” White, “Oil and Vinegar,” 27.

disagree with God's judgment, for they judge solely according to God's law, which is no uncertain or earthly opinion but God's holy will and heavenly oracle (4.11.2).

Calvin repeats this assertion about ecclesiastical discipline throughout his commentaries. Discipline is an appendage to doctrine, an exercise of the keys of the kingdom. This is true especially of the church's proclamation of forgiveness to a repentant sinner, but it is also true of excommunication. In either case, the voice of the church is ratified in heaven by the one who has "the whole claim to the government of the church, so that he approves and ratifies the decisions of which he is himself the author."¹¹³⁷ As Calvin puts it elsewhere, "For although God does not thunder forth immediately on the minister's pronouncing the sentence, yet the decision is ratified [*ratum*] and will be accomplished in its own time."¹¹³⁸

Like the preaching of the gospel, therefore, ecclesiastical jurisdiction actually opens and closes the kingdom of Christ to human beings. Paul describes excommunication in terms of handing a person over to Satan in 1 Corinthians 5:5, Calvin points out, because the church is Christ's kingdom: "as Christ reigns in the church, so Satan reigns out of the church [*in ecclesia regnat Christus, ita Satan extra ecclesiam*]." Thus the one who is "cast out of the church [*eiicitur extra ecclesiam*] is in a manner delivered over to the power of Satan [*Satanae ... potestatem*], for he becomes an alien and is cast out of Christ's kingdom [*extraneus fit et alienatur a Christi regno*]."¹¹³⁹ Calvin makes the same point in several other places as well, in each case referring his readers back to 1 Corinthians 5:5. "[I]t explains very well the force of excommunication, for since in the church Christ holds the seat of his kingdom [*in ecclesia sedem regni*], outside there is nothing but the dominion of Satan [*Satanae dominium*]. Accordingly, he who is

¹¹³⁷Commentary on Matthew 18:19 [1555]; CO 45:516-517. "For whenever believers meet in one place, under the auspices of Christ, there is already in their assembly [*consessu*] a sort of image of the future judgment, which will be perfectly brought to light on the last day." The world is judged in the church because "there Christ's tribunal is erected, from which he exercises his jurisdiction [*iurisdictionem*]."

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:2 [1546]; CO 49:389.

¹¹³⁸Commentary on 2 Corinthians 10:6 [1548]; CO 50:116.

¹¹³⁹Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:5 [1546]; CO 49:381.

cast out of the church must be placed for a time under the tyranny of Satan until, being reconciled to the church, he returns to Christ.”¹¹⁴⁰

But is not such a power on the part of the church precisely what made Rome so tyrannical? Calvin offers several responses to this objection. The first is the same response that he offers to those who challenged the authority of the ministry of the word.

If it be objected, that in this way God is made a sort of petty judge, who concurs in the sentence of mortal men, the reply is at hand. For when Christ maintains the authority of his church, he does not diminish his own power or that of his Father, but, on the contrary, supports the majesty of his word. As in the former case he did not intend to confirm indiscriminately every kind of doctrine, but only that which had proceeded out of his mouth, so neither does he say in this place that every kind of decision will be approved and ratified, but only that in which he presides, and that too not only by his Spirit, but by his word... For, though Christ alone is the Judge of the world, yet he chooses to have ministers to proclaim his word. Besides, he wishes that his own decision should be pronounced by the church; and thus he takes nothing from his own authority by employing the ministry of men, but it is himself alone that looses and binds.¹¹⁴¹

In other words, like the ministry of the word, the power of church discipline is neither magisterial nor discretionary, but is bound up entirely with the word. There is no spiritual power of excommunication attached to the church itself, or to any ecclesiastical office. “For it is certain that the power [*potentiam*] of Christ is not tied to the inclination or opinions of mankind [*hominum arbitrio aut opinionibus alligatum*], but is associated with his eternal truth.” Only when the church's actions are those of the word and Spirit (*spiritu gubernentur*) is it the case that “excommunication is an ordinance of God and not of men.”¹¹⁴²

Calvin's second response is to refuse the power of discipline to the pastors alone.

It was because the power of discipline was given to only a few officers of the church, he argues, that it had fallen into tyrannical misuse. “For it was a very wicked misdeed that

¹¹⁴⁰Commentary on 1 Timothy 1:20 [1548]; CO 52:264-265. “For what is more to be dreaded than being cut off from the body of Christ, expelled from the kingdom of God, and delivered over to Satan for destruction unless you repent?” Commentary on 2 Corinthians 13:2 [1548]; CO 50:148. “If we are cast out from that assembly in which Christ reigns, it is a dreadful judgment which is executed against us, that we are delivered to Satan, because we are banished from the kingdom of the Son of God.”

Commentary on John 9:35 [1553]; CO 47:232.

¹¹⁴¹Commentary on Matthew 18:18 [1555]; CO 45:515-516.

¹¹⁴²Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:4 [1546]; CO 49:380.

one man, transferring the common power to himself, both opened the way to tyrannous license and seized from the church what had belonged to it, and suppressed and dissolved the assembly ordained by Christ's Spirit" (4.11.6). Things had regressed so much to the point that the bishops didn't even exercise church discipline anymore, being obsessed with more "earthly matters," but delegated it to lesser officials who "do not differ from secular judges" (4.11.7). In contrast, Christ gave the power of discipline to the church as a whole, the people being appropriately represented by elders appointed with the specific function of exercising church discipline (4.11.5). Thus the early church made use of an "assembly of the elders, which was to the church what the Senate is to the city" (4.11.6).¹¹⁴³

Not even the Apostle Paul had the authority to excommunicate a person on his own because it is to be carried out by "common authority [*communi auctoritate*]." The elders, unlike the pastors, act as representatives of the people, the body of Christ.

[T]his authority [*potestatem*] does not belong to any one individual. As, however, a multitude never accomplishes anything with moderation or seriousness if not governed by a counsel [*consilio regatur*], there was appointed in the ancient church a presbytery [*ordinatum presbyterium*], that is, an assembly of elders [*collegium seniorum*] who, by the consent of all, had the first judgment in the case.

The matter was then to be brought to the people for ratification. Excommunication was thus to be "exercised by the common counsel of the elders [*communi seniorum consilio*] and with the consent of the people."¹¹⁴⁴ Calvin stipulates that in cases of public sins the

1143 "That the right of excommunication is granted to the church is certain ... but does it follow that any individual, even though not called by the church, but elected by a mitred and disguised beast, shall at his own caprice throw out the useless squibs of excommunications? On the contrary, it is evident that the lawful government of the church is committed to elders, and not only to the ministers of the word, but to those also who, taken from among the people, have been added to them for the superintendence of morals." Commentary on Matthew 18:18 [1555]; CO 45:515-516.

1144 Calvin insists, "it is quite contrary to the appointment of Christ and his Apostles, to the order of the church, and even to equity itself, that this right [*iuris*] should be put into the hands of any one man, of excommunicating at his pleasure any that he may choose." Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:4 [1546]; CO 49:379-380. Excommunication is to be exercised by the "whole body [*universo corpori*]." Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:11 [1546]; CO 49:386. Of course, Calvin did not expect the people to play any more than a ratifying role. That the elders must act with the consent of the "knowledge and approval of the church" such that the people do not decide the action "but observe as witness and guardian so that nothing may be done according to the whim of a few" functions to prevent tyranny and

assembly of elders is to provide an immediate public rebuke (4.12.3), but in the case of private sins the procedure outlined in Matthew 18 is to be followed. Individual Christians must first admonish one another. If this fails, witnesses should be enlisted, and only if that fails does the matter properly come before the “public authority” of the church (4.12.2). Properly ordered, the whole process “ought to have that gravity which bespeaks the presence of Christ in order that there may be no doubt that he himself presides at his own tribunal” (4.12.7).

Unlike in many Reformed churches since the Reformation, therefore, Calvin did not identify elders as those responsible for church government in general, but as those responsible for the function of church discipline in particular. His theology of ecclesiastical office is function-oriented rather than office-oriented. With respect to elders, as with pastors and deacons, he identifies in scripture a function, then locates the office responsible for that function. “Governors were, I believe, elders chosen from the people, who were charged with the censure of morals and the exercise of discipline along with the bishops... Each church, therefore, had from its beginning a senate, chosen from godly, grave, and holy men, which had jurisdiction over the correcting of faults” (4.3.8). In his commentary on 1 Timothy 5:17 Calvin writes, “We may learn from this that there were at that time two kinds of elders, for all were not ordained to teach. The words plainly mean that there were some who 'ruled well' and honorably but who did not hold the office of teachers.” These, “united with the pastors in a common council and authority, administered the discipline of the church and were a kind of censors for the correction of morals.”¹¹⁴⁵

ensure that it is Christ himself who rules (4.12.7). See White, “Oil and Vinegar,” 31, 35-36.

1145Commentary on 1 Timothy 5:17 [1548]; CO 52:315. In addition to 1 Timothy 5:17 Calvin draws on two other texts as his primary evidence for an office of elder responsible for church discipline. In Romans 12:8 he identifies Paul's reference to those who lead as “presidents, to whom was committed the government of the church [*ecclesiae gubernatio*],” or as “elders [*seniores*], who presided over and ruled others and exercised discipline [*aliis praeibant ac moderabantur, vitaeque censuram exercebant*].” He admits that the reference “may be extended universally to all kinds of governors [*praefecturas*],” but suggests that Paul had something more specific to the church in mind. “Yet the state of things at that time proves that Paul does not speak of all kinds of rulers [*praefectis*], for there were then no pious

Third, Calvin emphasizes that the purpose of excommunication is not vengeance but salvation (4.12.5). Its sentence is not permanent but conditional. Christians are not “to erase from the number of the elect those who have been expelled from the church, or to despair as if they were already lost. It is lawful to regard them as estranged from the church, and thus from Christ – but only for such time as they remain separated.” The church’s discipline is the verdict of Christ, but it is not his final verdict. Ultimate and final judgment is left to God alone, and the excommunicant is handed over to “the Lord’s judgment” in hope for better things to come.

[L]et us not condemn to death the very person who is in the hand and judgment of God alone; rather, let us only judge of the character of each man’s works by the law of the Lord. While we follow this rule, we rather take our stand upon the divine judgment than put forward our own. Let us not claim for ourselves more license in judgment, unless we wish to limit God’s power and confine his mercy by law (4.12.9).

The process of church discipline is akin to the work of a physician. Although loving care in this case takes the form of admonition, “the use of discipline ought to be in such a way as to consult the welfare of those on whom the Church inflicts punishment... In short, excommunication does not tend to drive men from the Lord’s flock, but rather to bring them back when wandering and going astray.”¹¹⁴⁶ Excommunication is indeed a punishment, but it is a punishment designed to restore rather than to condemn.¹¹⁴⁷

Calvin adamantly distinguished the provisional judgment that is

magistrates [*magistratus*]; but of the elders [*senioribus*] who were the correctors [*censores*] of morals.” Commentary on Romans 12:8 [1556]; CO 49:239-240. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:28 he argues that when Paul writes of “governments [*gubernationes*]” he is referring to “elders [*seniores*], who had the charge of discipline. For the primitive church had its senate for the purpose of keeping the people in propriety of deportment [*morum honestate*] ... Hence government [*gubernatio*] consisted of those presbyters who excelled others in gravity, experience, and authority [*autoritate*].” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:28 [1546]; CO 49:507. Cf. Commentary on James 5:15 [1551]; CO 55:431; Commentary on Acts 14:23 [1554]; CO 48:332.

1146Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3:15 [1550]; CO 52:216. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 42:3 [1559]; CO 37:61.

1147Although excommunication expels a person from the kingdom, its purpose is not that they be ruined eternally [*perpetuam*] but that they might be condemned temporarily [*temporariam*]. “We will condemn him in this world for a time, that the Lord may preserve him in his kingdom [*tempus damnabimus in mundo ut in regno suo eum Dominus servet*].” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:5 [1546]; CO 49:381. (Cf. 5:2; CO 49:379; 7:11; CO 50:91; Commentary on Galatians 2:14 [1548]; CO 50:193.

excommunication from the papal practice of declaring a person anathema: “the latter, taking away all pardon, condemns and consigns a man to eternal destruction; the former, rather, avenges and chastens his moral conduct” (4.12.10). The person anathematized by Rome was “utterly cast away, as if they were cut off from all hope of salvation,” but salvation is always held out to the excommunicant.¹¹⁴⁸ To be sure, if a person is excommunicated “no believer ought to receive him into terms of intimacy [*familiaritatem*] with him. Otherwise the authority of the church [*ecclesiae autoritas*] would be brought into contempt, if each individual were at liberty to admit to his table those who have been excluded from the table of the Lord.” Calvin maintains that “insofar as it is in our power [*liberum*] we are to shun [*fugiendam*] the society [*consuetudinem*] of those whom the church has cast off [*resecuit*] from her communion.” But he distinguishes intimacy in the form of “living together or familiar association in means,” which is to be avoided with excommunicants, from association in the form of eating at inns or public places, from which we do not have “authority [*potestas*] to exclude them.” Calvin utterly rejected the papal interdicts, “prohibiting anyone from helping one that has been excommunicated to food or fuel or drink, or any other of the supports of life,” declaring it a “tyrannical and barbarous cruelty” utterly alien to scripture. The apostle means “not that he [the excommunicant] should be counted as an enemy but as a brother,” and the “public mark of disgrace [*publica ignominiae nota*]” is not a civil penalty but a call to repentance. While civil punishment might be appropriate in some cases it is always distinct from spiritual government, for “this kind of interdict is altogether unsuitable to an ecclesiastical court [*foro ecclesiastico*].”¹¹⁴⁹

Calvin also rejected the early church practice of penance that was defended by

1148Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3:15 [1550]; CO 52:216.

1149Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:11 [1546]; CO 49:386. Christians are to avoid “intimate acquaintance” with an excommunicated person, but they are not to “keep altogether aloof from his society,” keeping from him the things necessary for life. Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3:14 [1550]; CO 52:215-216. As Hopfl points out, the Institutes are generally silent about the civil implications of excommunication. Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 119.

reformers such as Martin Bucer. Indeed, he shows a marked reluctance to use the word punishment to refer to any part of discipline except the ultimate step of excommunication. If the sinner repents, there is no need for further action. “Therefore, when a sinner gives testimony of his repentance to the church, and by this testimony wipes out the offense as far as he can, he is not to be urged any further” (4.12.8). The Apostle Paul provided the church with an example of mildness, kindness, and even indulgence, demonstrating “with what equity and clemency the discipline of the church ought to be regulated” in order to present a disciplined person from becoming “dispirited” and so tempting that person to leave the church or become a hypocrite.¹¹⁵⁰ Calvin warns that “zeal for discipline” frequently gives rise to “pharisaical rigor” that “hurries on the miserable offender to ruin, instead of curing him.”¹¹⁵¹ Discipline motivated by malevolence has nothing in common with Christ's spiritual government.¹¹⁵²

Finally, Calvin insists that excommunication should be exercised only in cases of intentional, unrepentant, and blatant violations of God's law, and only as a last resort. “For such great severity is not to be used in lighter sins, but verbal chastisement is enough – and that mild and fatherly – which should not harden or confuse the sinner, but bring him back to himself, that he may rejoice rather than be sad that he has been corrected” (4.12.6). The only one who should be punished with excommunication was one “whose sin has become a matter of notoriety.” Discipline could not extend to “inward impiety, and anything that is secret,” for these do not fall “within the judgment of the church [*ecclesia noniudicantur*].”¹¹⁵³ The point here is not to undermine the inward nature of Christ's spiritual government but to ensure – by focusing on actions specifically

1150Commentary on 2 Corinthians 2:6 [1548]; CO 50:29. When a person repents, he is in need of “consolation,” and to place any further burden on such a person is not discipline but “cruel domineering [*crudelis ... insultatio*]” (2:7; CO 50:29). Cf. 7:12; CO 50:92-93.

1151Commentary on 2 Corinthians 2:11 [1548]; CO 50:30.

1152Commentary on Matthew 18:21 [1555]; CO 45:519-520.

1153Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:11. In fact, Calvin even argued that excommunication should not be exercised against “those who, while at this day dispersed under the tyranny of the Pope, pollute themselves with many corrupt rites.” Calvin agreed that such persons should be “sharply dealt with, and diligently urged,” but not excommunicated.

prohibited in scripture and readily identified – that the church's judgment is explicitly that of God's word.¹¹⁵⁴

For, properly speaking, we do not assume anything to ourselves when we recite what has proceeded from the mouth of God. God condemns adulterers, thieves, drunkards, murderers, enviers, slanderers, oppressors: if one inveigh against an adulterer, another a thief, a third a drunkard, shall we say that they take upon themselves more than they ought? By no means, because they do not pronounce of themselves as we have said, but God has said it, and they are but witnesses and messengers of his sentence.¹¹⁵⁵

Only when the church condemns “crimes or shameful acts” that are clearly contrary to Christ's will is its discipline the “spiritual jurisdiction of the church [*spiritualis ecclesiae iurisdictio*].” Because the persons's guilt is beyond a shadow of a doubt, “the Lord has testified that this is nothing but the publication of his own sentence, and what they have done on earth is ratified in heaven” (4.12.4).

When excommunication is exercised tyrannically and beyond the authority of the word, Calvin concedes, believers need not take it seriously.

But we ought to believe that excommunication, when it is violently applied to a different purpose by the passions of men, may safely be treated with contempt. For when God committed to his Church the power of excommunicating he did not arm tyrants or executioners to strangle souls, but laid down a rule for governing his people; and that on the condition that he should hold the supreme government, and that he should have men for his ministers.¹¹⁵⁶

Discipline, like teaching, is only Christ's spiritual government insofar as it is the ministry of the word.

Laws

The third part of the spiritual power represented in the government of the church is the power of the church to make laws, specifically laws concerning worship. Here

1154Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 176-178.

1155Commentary on Ezekiel 3:18 [1565]; CO 40:92.

1156Commentary on John 9:22 [1553]; CO 47:227-228. Calvin points to the man who was excommunicated by the Pharisees in John 9 and declares, “By this example, we are taught how trivial and how little to be dreaded are the excommunications of the enemies of Christ.” Commentary on John 9:35 [1553]; CO 47:232. Cf. Commentary on John 16:2 [1553]; CO 47:356.

again, Calvin specifies that he is concerned with the spiritual kingdom, not with the political kingdom. “This is the power now to be discussed, whether the church may lawfully bind consciences by its laws. In this discussion we are not dealing with the political order [*ordo politicus*], but are only concerned with how God is to be duly worshiped according to the rule laid down by him, and how the spiritual freedom [*spiritualis libertas*] which looks to God may remain unimpaired for us” (4.10.1).

In fact, a cursory glance through Chapter 10 demonstrates that Calvin actually does discuss ecclesiastical laws that fall outside of the spiritual order. Indeed, the major burden of the chapter is *to distinguish between* the spiritual laws a church may enact, binding consciences, and the ecclesiastical laws necessary to preserve order and decorum in the church's worship. Calvin believed that many of the laws of the papal church represented a third category that confused this distinction, imposing unnecessary measures – or, at best, matters necessary only to order and decorum – as spiritual laws binding Christian consciences. He distinguishes between “holy and useful church institutions which provide for the preservation of discipline or honesty or peace” and “decrees concerning the worship of God put forward by men apart from his word,” that is, “human traditions.” He affirms the importance of the former but declares that the latter sort of decrees amount to an invasion of Christ's kingdom. When the clergy invent laws and declare them to be “spiritual [*spirituales*]” laws, binding on the soul and necessary for eternal life, “the Kingdom of Christ ... is invaded; thus the freedom given by him to the consciences of believers is utterly oppressed and cast down.” Where Christ has given believers liberty, Calvin insists, picking up from his discussion of Christian Liberty in Book 3, no one has the right to bind them. Believers “should acknowledge one King, their deliverer Christ, and should be governed by one law of freedom, the holy word of the gospel, if they would retain the grace which they once obtained in Christ. They must be held in no bondage, and bound by no bonds” (4.10.1). Yet the Lord is “deprived of his

Kingdom ... whenever he is worshiped by laws of human devising, inasmuch as he wills to be accounted the sole lawgiver of his own worship” (4.10.23).¹¹⁵⁷

Calvin therefore explicitly places the problem of ecclesiastical laws in the context of his two kingdoms distinction. He admits that the problem “embarrasses most men,” but he suggests that it does so only because “they do not distinguish subtly enough between the outward forum (as they call it) and the forum of conscience [*externum ... et conscientiae forum*].”¹¹⁵⁸ They are, in part, confused by the fact that in Romans 13 Paul commands believers to submit to magistrates' political laws “because of conscience” (4.10.3), and “it seems to follow from this that the rulers' laws also have dominion over the conscience. Now if this is true, the same also will have to be said of church laws” (4.10.4). In fact, if this is true, Calvin admits, all that he said in Book 3, Chapter 19, “and what I am now going to say about spiritual government [*spirituali regimine*] would fall” (4.10.3). For, as Calvin writes in his commentary on Romans 13:5, God has given civil government wide ranging discretionary power over those placed under it, including Christians, but such civil government may not “exercise dominion over consciences [*dominatum in conscientias*].”¹¹⁵⁹ If civil government does exercise dominion over consciences, what is left of Christian liberty? At stake, in other words, is the fundamental distinction between “civil government, in which the edicts and laws of magistrates have place,” and “the spiritual government of the soul [*spirituali animae regimine*], in which the word of God alone ought to bear rule.”¹¹⁶⁰

In Chapter 4 I explored Calvin's explanation of the difference between spiritual

1157Human constitutions or traditions are contrary to the word when they “pretend to relate to the true worship of God” and when they are promulgated as if “consciences are bound to keep [them], as if their observance were compulsory” (4.10.8). Bishops were not appointed as “spiritual lawgivers [*spirituales legislatores*]” who can “prescribe a rule of life, or ... force their ordinances upon the people committed to them.” They “have no right to command the church to observe as obligatory what they have themselves conceived apart from God's word” (4.10.6). Cf. Commentary on Matthew 15:2 [1555]; CO 45:447-448.

1158Later he refers to it as the “earthly forum [*terrenum ... forum*]” (4.10.5).

1159Commentary on Romans 13:5 [1556]. CO 49:251-252.

1160Commentary on James 4:11-12 [1551]; CO 55:420.

laws, which inherently bind the conscience (in each *species*), and political laws, which only indirectly bind the conscience (or as a *genus*) by way of the law of charity. To quote Calvin once again, “even though individual [political] laws may not apply to the conscience as it binds, we are still held by God's general command, which commends to us the authority of magistrates” (4.10.5). For instance, the magistrate can require me to attend church on Sunday. I am bound by conscience to obey in the sense that I must attend church on Sunday, but my conscience is not bound in the matter, as if Sunday is a holy day in God's eyes, because it is simply a matter of “polity [*politae*]” and “external order [*ordinis externi*].”¹¹⁶¹ Should the magistrate change the law to require me to attend church on Tuesday, I would then be bound to attend church on Tuesday. I obey the magistrate because of her office, not because Sunday worship is essential to worship or to the believer's relationship with God. As Calvin puts it, the laws of the magistrate do not “apply to the inward governing of the soul” (4.10.5).¹¹⁶²

In the last section of Chapter 10 Calvin observes that some Christians reject all laws regulating the “order of the church [*ecclesiae ordo*]” on the pretext of Christian liberty. Calvin's response is to point out that in *all* societies some sort of political organization is necessary, if for no other reason than to preserve peace and concord.

1161 “[I]t is of importance for the common harmony that a certain day should be appointed for holding sacred assemblies, as they cannot be held every day.” That Paul forbids Christians to distinguish between days “must be understood to be with a view to religion [*religionis*] and not with a view to polity or external order.” Commentary on Romans 16:2 [1556]; CO 49:566-567. “No condemnation is here given to the observance of dates in the arrangements of civil [*civilem*] society. The order of nature [*naturae ordine*] out of which this arises is fixed and constant... The civil observation [*observatio civilis*] of days contributes not only to agriculture and to matters of politics and ordinary life [*politiae, oeconomiae*], but is even extended to the government of the church [*ecclesiae ... regimen*].” Paul has in view “that which would bind the conscience, by religious considerations, as if it were necessary to the worship of God.” When days are considered to be holy in themselves they lay a snare for the conscience. Christians may observe days “merely [to] attend to the preservation of order and harmony [*ordini, concordiae*].” Commentary on Galatians 4:10 [1548]; CO 50:230. Christians don't observe days as if there were any “sacredness in holidays [*in feriis aliqua sit religio*] ... but that respect is paid to government and order [*politiae et ordinis*], not to days.” Commentary on Colossians 2:16 [1548]; CO 52:110.

1162 “When we speak of human traditions [i.e., that third category of laws that improperly seek to bind the conscience], this question has no reference to political laws [*leges politicas*], the use and object of which are widely different from enjoining the manner in which we ought to worship God.” Commentary on Matthew 15:2 [1555]; CO 45:447.

We see that “some form of organization [*politiam*] is necessary in all human society to foster the common peace and maintain concord. We further see that in human transactions some procedure is always in effect, which is to be respected in the interests of public decency, and even of humanity itself. This ought especially to be observed in churches, which are best sustained when all things are under a well-ordered constitution, and which without concord become no churches at all (4.10.27).

Insofar as it is similar to all political societies, in other words, the institutional church possesses a political or sociological dimension.¹¹⁶³ Ecclesiastical laws pertaining to this dimension are similar to political laws that help Christians accommodate and serve their neighbors in indifferent matters. In this sense the institutional church straddles the distinction between the two kingdoms, which is why it can be ordered to a certain extent by civil government.

To repeat, unlike the later Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, and despite what some Presbyterians have claimed, Calvin did not give the task of general ecclesiastical oversight to the Consistory or to the elders, whose sole function was church discipline.¹¹⁶⁴ On the contrary, in Geneva the political regulation of church life was shared between the civil government and the Company of Pastors. Calvin clearly wanted to minimize the role of civil government in this regard, but in the *Institutes* he takes both authorities into account. Thus “human laws, whether made by magistrate or by church, even though they have to be observed (I speak of good and just laws), still do not of themselves bind the conscience. For all obligation to observe laws looks to the general purpose, but does not

¹¹⁶³Wendel, *Calvin*, 307; Cf. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 173-174.

¹¹⁶⁴Mark J. Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory, The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 12-13; Mark J. Larson, “John Calvin and Genevan Presbyterianism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 60 (1998): 43-69. Larson's essay argues that Calvin is the father of presbyterianism on the basis that all the essential elements of presbyterianism are already there in Geneva. But while Larson concedes, briefly, that Calvin never developed the synodical system, he fails to acknowledge that Calvin's elders *only* conducted church discipline. They were not the church's governors *in general*. These fundamental elements of presbyterian church government were developed by the French Reformed, not by Calvin. As Torrance puts it, “Calvin himself, however, never advanced biblical evidence for what *we* call 'elders', but only, and then very tentatively, for what *he* called 'elders'. He was definitely not a *Presbyterian!*” Thomas F. Torrance, “The Eldership in the Reformed Church,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984): 509. Cf. Robert M. Kingdon, “Calvin and 'Presbytery': the Geneva Company of Pastors,” *Pacific Theological Review* 18 (1985): 43-55.

consist in the things enjoined.” Calvin thus agreed that bishops have some legislative authority, “as much as is required duly to maintain the government of the church” (4.10.6). When churches entirely lack such legislation “their very sinews disintegrate and they are wholly deformed and scattered.” The key is to emphasize that such civil laws do not bind the conscience and are not part of (or “associated with”) the worship of God or the spiritual government of Christ's church (4.10.27).¹¹⁶⁵

Calvin was confident that he had articulated a “most excellent and dependable mark” to distinguish “impious constitutions” from “legitimate church observances” (although many of his critics have felt otherwise). The church needs some ceremonies, of course, but “the means used ought to show Christ, not to hide him” (4.10.14). Legitimate laws are those that ensure that all things are done “decently and with becoming dignity” and that “humanity and moderation” are maintained. They ensure that “love be fostered among us by common effort” and they promote “reverence,” “piety,” “modesty,” and “gravity” (4.10.28).¹¹⁶⁶ They fall into two general types. First there are those which provide “appropriate adornment” for acts of worship, such as Paul's requirements that believers practice moderation in drinking at the Lord's Supper, that women wear head coverings, and that men keep their heads bare and kneel in prayer. Second are those that ensure an “arrangement which takes away all confusion, barbarity, obstinacy, turbulence, and dissension.” This requires the setting of times for worship, moments of silence within a liturgy, the selection of times for the observance of the Lord's Supper, and the prohibition of women teachers. This second type also regulates “those things

¹¹⁶⁵“We must then distinguish between civil laws, such as are introduced to preserve order, or for some other end, and spiritual laws, such as are introduced into God's worship, and by which religion is enjoined, and necessity is laid on consciences.” Commentary on Jeremiah 35:1-7 [1563]; CO 39:105. Cf. *Institutes* 4.10.5, 16, 20. Chenevière observes, “In the organization of these various ministries Calvin is careful to reduce State supervision to a minimum. In particular he is anxious that the Church shall have full liberty of preaching, and complete independence in regard to the interpretation of the Scriptures, and ecclesiastical organization and internal discipline... [H]e is careful above all things to ensure their independence of the State.” Chenevière, “Did Calvin Advocate Theocracy?,” 163.

¹¹⁶⁶Such are not to be confused with “theatrical props” that involve “useless elegance and fruitless extravagance” (4.10.29).

which maintain discipline, such as catechizing, church censures, excommunication, fasting, and whatever can be referred to the same list” (4.10.29).¹¹⁶⁷

Calvin seeks to define in what sense and to what degree scripture regulates ecclesiastical laws. There will always be those who use ecclesiastical laws as a means of tyranny, he observes, while on the other hand others will be “overscrupulous and ... leave no place whatever for church laws.” So Calvin adds a third principle: “I approve only those human constitutions which are founded upon God's authority, drawn from Scripture, and, therefore, wholly divine” (4.10.30). That seems to put the point quite strongly, and Calvin does believe some particulars of polity are “divinely established [*divinitus institutis*].”¹¹⁶⁸ For instance, much of what the Apostle Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians are matters of “decorum [*decorum*],” “public order [*publicum ordinem*],” or “polity [*politiam*].”¹¹⁶⁹ But Calvin goes on to indicate that ordinarily things are not so cut and dry. Because God “did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages), here we must take refuge in those general rules which he has given, that whatever the necessity of the church will require for order and decorum should be tested against these.”¹¹⁷⁰ What is useful “for the upbuilding of the church” should be “variously accommodated to the customs of each

1167It is evident that Calvin is referring to the proper ordering of things like excommunication here, because in Chapters 11-12 he presents the discipline of morals and excommunication as part of the church's spiritual government, or the exercise of the keys. Calvin discusses some of the legitimate exercises and ceremonies in Chapter 12, including, for example, the occasional need for pastors to exhort their members to “fasting or to solemn supplications, ... of which the time, the manner, and the form are not prescribed by God's word, but left to the judgment of the church” (4.12.14). Such exercises can serve as “an excellent aid for believers ... and a profitable admonition to arouse them” (4.12.17). But the church must take care not to observe them “too strictly and rigidly” or turn them into “a form of divine worship,” because “fasting is in itself a thing indifferent,” and should not be confused with “works commanded by God and necessary of themselves” (4.12.19).

1168Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:3 [1546]; CO 49:474. For an excellent discussion of Calvin's perspective on the way scripture relates to indifferent matters see Thompson, *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah*, 244-264.

1169Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:2 [1546]; CO 472-473.

1170In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:40 he writes that God “has not allowed us a rambling and unbridled liberty, but has inclosed it (so to speak) with railings” (CO 49:535-536).

nation and age,” and may therefore be altered where profitable. What matters is that such changes be consistent with the rule of love and edification (4.10.30).¹¹⁷¹

But there can be no legalism or dogmatism in matters of polity (4.10.32). In some cases, such as head coverings, it is sufficient if biblical prescriptions are observed symbolically,¹¹⁷² while in other cases, such as the prohibition against women speaking in church, they are to be observed as general rules that might sometimes be suspended.¹¹⁷³ As matters of “external polity [*externam politiam*]” they do not bind consciences “as if they were in themselves necessary,” but are simply important for “propriety and peace [*decoro pacique*].” This is the purpose to which “ecclesiastical polity [*ecclesiae politia*]” must always be directed, for the Lord has left such “external rites [*externos ritus*]” within the liberty of the church.¹¹⁷⁴ “Although not all of us need them, we all use them, for we are mutually bound, one to another, to nourish mutual love.” Circumstances may vary and emergencies may arise, but “the established custom of the region, or humanity itself and the rule of modesty, dictate what is to be done or avoided in these matters” (4.10.31).¹¹⁷⁵ Such wise regulations, like those specifically laid down in scripture, “have a manifest approval, as it were, from the mouth of Christ itself.”¹¹⁷⁶

1171 The early church, including the apostles, established certain traditions that are no longer important for the church because they are not spiritual laws that pertain to the conscience. “They were connected with order and polity [*ordinem et politiam*]. For we know that every church has liberty [*liberum*] to frame for itself a form of polity [*politiae formam*] that is suitable and profitable for it, because the Lord has not prescribed anything definite.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:2 [1546]; CO 49:473-474. With respect to matters indifferent, as various scholars have pointed out, Calvin was not always so far from Luther. See Wendel, *Calvin*, 302-303.

1172 Calvin argues in his commentary on 1 Corinthians that some of these matters can be observed symbolically rather than rigidly. For instance, it is not a criminal thing for a teacher to have a cap on his head when addressing the people from the pulpit.” It is simply important that he briefly uncover his head as a symbol “that the man has authority, and that the woman is under subjection.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:4 [1546]; CO 49:475.

1173 “... for a necessity may occur of such a nature as to require that a woman should speak in public, but Paul has merely in view what is becoming in a duly regulated assembly.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:34 [1546]; CO 49:532-533.

1174 Commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:40 [1546]; CO 49:535. This is the difference between the “tyrannical edicts of the pope, which oppress men’s consciences with a dreadful bondage, and the godly regulations of the church, by which discipline and order [*disciplina et ordo*] are maintained” (49:536).

1175 Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:16 [1546]; CO 49:478-479. Practices should not be altered unnecessarily nor should ecclesiastical regulations be piled up beyond usefulness. Churches should err on the side of simplicity (4.10.32).

1176 Commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:40 [1546]; CO 49:536.

Calvin repeatedly invokes Isaiah 29:13, used by Jesus to condemn the legalism of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:7-9, to argue that God hates all worship based on human law.

We may easily conclude from this what value ought to be set on that worship which Papists think that they render to God, when they worship God by useless ringing of bells, mumbling, wax candles, incense, splendid dresses, and a thousand trifles of the same sort; for we see that God not only rejects them, but even holds them in abhorrence.... [F]or he means, that to make 'the commandments of men,' and not the word of God, the rule of worshipping him, is a subversion of all order.¹¹⁷⁷

Not only does God care more about obedience than sacrifice, he also wants human beings to realize that God is the “sole ruler of souls [*animarum regem*].” This is why it is so crucial that the ministers of the church only proclaim and rule according to Christ's word. “If we duly weigh this, that it is unlawful to transfer to man what God reserves for himself, we shall understand that the whole power of those who wish to advance themselves to command anything in the church apart from God's word is thus cut off” (4.10.7).

Calvin was aware of the argument that since many Christians were illiterate or untutored they needed the assistance of an “elementary discipline” similar to that of the Jews in the Old Testament. But he argues that an excess of ceremonies actually obscures the simplicity and clarity of the gospel, one of the primary characteristics that distinguishes the kingdom of Christ from Old Testament Israel. “It was not in vain that God set this difference between us and the ancient folk, that he willed to teach them as children by signs and figures, but to teach us more simply, without such outward trappings.” Christ buried the Jewish symbols on which so much of the Roman worship was based, and he had freed Christians from their tutelage under the law as Paul argued in Galatians 4. “Paul does not merely say that the yoke which had been laid upon the Jews is removed from us, but expressly lays down a distinction in the government

¹¹⁷⁷Commentary on Isaiah 29:13 [1559]; CO 36:493-494.

[*regiminis*] which God has commanded to be observed. I acknowledge that we are now at liberty as to all outward matters, but only on the condition that the church shall not be burdened with a multitude of ceremonies, nor Christianity confounded with Judaism.”¹¹⁷⁸

Although Calvin's focus with respect to ecclesiastical laws is on matters pertaining to worship, it is important to note that he extends the principle of distinguishing between spiritual laws and laws pertaining to polity to matters of church government in general. The church is to be characterized by a “just and orderly arrangement” similar to “that sense in which a commonwealth, or kingdom, or province, is said to be settled, when confusion gives place to the regular administration of law.”¹¹⁷⁹ Like ecclesiastical laws, this broader task of governance is not to be confused with the spiritual government of Christ's church, but it is nevertheless to be carried out consistent with principles of love, edification, peace, and unity. For this reason no individual or group of individuals, whether clergy or magistrates, can be permitted to dominate the affairs of the church to the prejudice of the common good. Calvin looks to the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15 as the perfect example of a church council in which the apostles and pastors of the church, working with the participation of the people and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, developed helpful precepts for the edification of the church. These precepts pertained to “indifferent” matters rather than to matters of conscience, and they merely bound the church as a matter of “brotherly concord.”¹¹⁸⁰ The apostles claimed no binding authority for their judgments apart from what was revealed by the Spirit, for “if the apostles decreed any thing apart from the Spirit, that principal maxim shall fall to ground, that councils decree nothing but which is indited by the

1178Commentary on Galatians 4:2 [1548]; CO 50:226. Cf. Commentary on John 4:23 [1553]; CO 47:88-90.

1179Commentary on Ephesians 4:12 [1548]; CO 198-199.

1180Commentary on Acts 15:19 [1554]; CO 48:358. The people demonstrated a willingness to submit to the judgment of their leaders while for their part, the leaders “set down nothing concerning the common cause of all the godly without admitting the people” 15:22; CO 48:360). The elders came together for consultation first, and then “the people were likewise admitted in their order” (21:18; CO 48:481).

Spirit.” Their precepts therefore only touched on what was necessary for the maintenance of unity, and even that necessity was “accidental or external,” as appears from the fact that the decrees were later abolished. “[T]he last thing they meant was to set down a perpetual law, whereby they might bind the faithful.” They merely established a “political [*politicam*] law which could not ensnare the conscience.” Here again the guiding principle is that “the external use of those things which are of themselves free be bent unto the rule of charity.”¹¹⁸¹

Calvin sees the same principles of government at work in the election of ministers. On the one hand, “no government is to be set up in the church by the will of men,” but Christ is to govern by his Holy Spirit. On the other hand, as with matters of polity, scripture does not reveal which leaders should be chosen or how, but merely provides general principles. Such principles include the fact that the individuals being chosen must be called by God and they must be appointed to a function prescribed by God.¹¹⁸² The ministers should not be chosen and appointed by one person but by the whole church under the guidance of its leaders (4.4.10).¹¹⁸³ The early church followed the customary mode of elections among the Greeks according to which “the leaders [*praeibant*] took the precedence by authority and counsel [*autoritate et consilio*], and regulated [*gubernabant*] the whole proceeding, while the common people intimated

1181Commentary on Acts 15:28-29 [1554]; CO 48:362-363. “[T]he apostles do not pass the bounds of the word of God when they set down an external law, as time requires, by which they may reconcile the Churches among themselves” (364).

1182Commentary on Hebrews 5:4 [1549]; CO 55:59. While God has commanded the church to choose its pastors and bishops, “he has not therefore granted men so much liberty but that he will bear the chief sway as the chief governor.” Commentary on Acts 13:2 [1554]; CO 48:279. Thus it must be “God who orders the same at his pleasure, who sets teachers over it, who governs the proceedings and order” (CO 48:281).

1183Calvin insists that when Paul told Titus to appoint teachers in the church he cannot have meant that Titus would do so on his own for this would be “almost royal [*regia*] power.” “Besides, this method takes away from each church the right of choosing, and from the college of pastors the right of judging [*pastorum collegio iudicium tollitur*]; and thus the sacred administration of the church [*sacram ecclesiae administrationem*] would be almost wholly profaned.” Calvin suggests that Titus simply served as the president or moderator at elections, just as did Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:23. Commentary on 1 Titus 1:5 [1550]; CO 52:409. Cf. Commentary on 2 Timothy 1:6 [1548]; CO 52:349-350.

their approval.”¹¹⁸⁴ Because the people will err without “heavenly government [*coelestis gubernatio*],” they must seek God in prayer, that his Spirit “may govern their counsels” in all matters pertaining to the “government of the church [*ecclesiae gubernatione*].”¹¹⁸⁵

In fact, because the procedures of church elections were matters of polity rather than of the spiritual government, Calvin was willing to accept a certain amount of magisterial involvement, as long as that involvement did not usurp the right of the church to choose its own ministers. “For it is one thing to deprive the church of its own right, so that the whole is transferred to one man's whim; it is another to yield this honor to a king or emperor, that he may confirm a lawful election by his own authority” (4.4.13). When it came to Rome's claim over the appointment of bishops, however, Calvin was much more harsh. He argues that by removing the power to elect bishops from the people and by giving it to the canons, the papists “despoiled the church of its right.” He admits that there is some legitimacy to the defense offered by the papists, that the people and magistrates had abandoned “right and sound judgment” and turned to “hatred and party spirit,” but retorts that with Rome “the medicine has seemed more deadly than the disease itself” (4.5.2). Indeed, clerical abuses “gave the princes occasion to appropriate to themselves the presentation of bishops. For they preferred it to be their own gift, rather than to belong to persons who had no more right to it than they, and who abused it just as wickedly” (4.5.3). Magisterial intervention was justified if it helped restore the rights of the church.

The key point is that Calvin's willingness to allow magisterial involvement in the selection of the ministers of the church arose from his view that such procedural matters

¹¹⁸⁴Commentary on 2 Corinthians 8:18 [1548]; CO 50:103-104. Calvin seems to approve of the the procedure decreed by the Council of Laodicea. “First the clergy alone made their choice; they then offered the one they had chosen to the magistrates or senate and leading citizens. The latter, after deliberation, ratified the election if it seemed just; if not, they chose another whom they preferred. Then they brought the matter before the people, who, although not bound by the previous decisions, nevertheless could not raise a tumult... After the people's desires were heard, the clergy then made their choice. Thus, neither were the clergy allowed to appoint whom they wished, nor was it necessary for them to follow the foolish desires of the people” (4.4.12).

¹¹⁸⁵Commentary on Acts 14:23 [1554]; CO 48:333.

are matters of polity rather than of spiritual governance. He believed that pastors must be subject to “common courts and laws” for the same reason. When a spiritual matter was at stake it should be tried in an ecclesiastical court, and Calvin praises Ambrose for contending “that a spiritual case, that is, one of religion, ought not to be taken to a civil court, where profane quarrels are aired” (4.11.15). But Calvin points out that Ambrose refused to resist princes when they regulated the indifferent matters of the church, or even when they sought to ensure the proper ordering of its spiritual affairs. In the latter case, the key principle is that magistrates are not to assume a spiritual role but only to ensure the church's proper functioning. Indeed, by 1543 Calvin was arguing that the church needs such care from civil government because it does not have the authority or power to enforce its own laws.

They did not ... disapprove of princes interposing their authority in ecclesiastical matters, provided it was done to preserve the order of the church, not to disrupt it; and to establish discipline, not to dissolve it. For since the church does not have the power to coerce, and ought not to seek it (I am speaking of civil coercion), it is the duty of godly kings and princes to sustain religion by laws, edicts, and judgments (4.11.16).¹¹⁸⁶

This argument about coercion and the duty of civil government to sustain religion takes Calvin well beyond simply recognizing the need for laws governing the polity of the church, and even beyond a willingness to permit that role to magistrates. I turn to Calvin's understanding of civil government's responsibilities toward religion in Chapters 6 and 8. For now it is sufficient to note that Calvin sharply distinguished a magisterial role in the governance of the church from the spiritual government of the church. Civil government could sustain religion outwardly, but it could not usurp its spiritual functions.

Appendix: The Diaconate

The diaconate is somewhat of an ambiguous element in Calvin's view of church

¹¹⁸⁶See Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 123-124.

government.¹¹⁸⁷ On the one hand, the ordinary work of the deacons – “the care of the poor” – seems quite different from that of teaching and discipline in that it cannot be identified in any obvious sense with the ministry of the word. On the other hand, Calvin is explicit and adamant that the diaconate is part of Christ's spiritual government of his church, and that in contrast to civil government it is spiritual, not secular. Calvin introduces the diaconate in connection with several key texts. From Acts 6 he draws that the focus of the diaconate is to be poor relief, the work of the deacons enabling the pastors to focus on teaching and prayer. In Romans 12:8 he identifies two types of deacons, those who “distribute the alms,” and those who “devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick.” The latter group, he argues from 1 Timothy 5:9-10, includes an order of widows who, like the other deacons, occupy an office and ministry of the church (4.3.9).¹¹⁸⁸

As with the offices of presbyter and bishop, Calvin argues that over the centuries the church gradually lost sight of the true purpose of the diaconate.¹¹⁸⁹ Originally the deacons “received the daily offerings of believers and the yearly income of the church.

1187For a fuller analysis of the relationship between Calvin's view of the diaconate and the two kingdoms doctrine see Matthew J Tuininga, “Good News for the Poor: An analysis of Calvin's concept of poor relief and the diaconate in light of his two kingdoms paradigm,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, forthcoming.

1188In 4.13.18-19 Calvin describes the widows as women above 60 years of age who served as “deaconesses” involved in the “public ministry of the church toward the poor.” Elsewhere Calvin describes the order of widows as an “office [*officiis*]” and “ministry of the church [*ministerium ecclesiae*].” Commentary on 1 Timothy 5:9-10 [1548]; CO 52:310 (Cf. 5:3; CO 52:305). Elsewhere he notes Paul's reference to the woman Phoebe, declaring that Phoebe performed “a most honorable and a most holy ministry [*sanctissimo ministerio*] in the church.” He refers to it as an “office [*officio*],” and Phoebe as a “minister [*ministra*],” one of those worthy of special honor because they “perform a public function in the church [*publicam in ecclesia functionem*].” the deaconesses could occupy such “public offices [*publico officio*]” if they were unencumbered by children and related domestic concerns. Commentary on Romans 16:1 [1556]; CO 284-285. Calvin identified the deacons as ministers of the church, who, like the pastors, are to be ordained with the laying on of hands. Commentary on Acts 6:3-6 [1552]; CO 48:120-122. The best studies of Calvin's theology of the diaconate are Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984); Jeannine E. Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse francaise* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989). For Calvin's theology of poverty see Bonnie L. Pattison, *Poverty in the Theology of John Calvin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006).

1189In order to clarify that the office of deacon is a spiritual office, the deacons were increasingly entrusted with tasks such as the reading of Scripture, exhortation, and the extending of the cup in the Lord's Supper. “[B]y such signs they were admonished that it was not secular management that they were undertaking, but a spiritual function dedicated to God” (4.4.5).

These they were to devote to proper uses, that is, to distribute some to feed the ministers, some to feed the poor, but according to the decision of the bishop, to whom they rendered an account annually of their distribution.” It was the specific task of the deacons to serve as the “stewards of the poor,” but significantly, they conducted their work “under the bishop” and in that sense as an extension of the pastoral office (4.4.5).¹¹⁹⁰ The diaconate, for Calvin, reflects the ancient principle that “all that the church possesses, either in lands or in money, is the patrimony of the poor.” Thus bishops and deacons “are not handling their own goods but those appointed for the need of the poor; and if in bad faith they suppress or waste them, they shall be guilty of blood” (4.4.6).¹¹⁹¹

Although in Geneva the diaconate functioned in many respects like a civil institution, Calvin worked hard to dispel potential confusion when the diaconate came up in the course of his exegetical preaching through the book of Acts in 1549-1550. He acknowledged that some people assume that the diaconate is an office of little importance, but insisted that the diaconate is “not a profane or mundane office, but a spiritual charge.”¹¹⁹² Poor relief, likewise, is not simply something that Christians should do. It is a *sine qua non*, part of the fundamental order of the church itself. “God declares what kind of government, what kind of order and regulations he wants to prescribe for our use. If we wish to be respected and esteemed as his church, we must practice what he declares to us here.” If Christ is “to rule and have order in the church”, then “[t]he poor must be cared for. And for that, we need deacons.”¹¹⁹³ That the apostles gave up this function in order to focus on the word and prayer should not be taken as a diminishment

1190Cf. Commentary on Acts 11:30 [1552]; CO 48:265-266.

1191The ministers of the church are to be supported consistent with “frugality” and with their “needs,” and not to the point of “luxury and indulgence” (4.4.5). Calvin endorses the canon law provisions that divided the possessions of the church into four parts, for the clergy, the poor, church buildings, and the bishop, though he argues that the purpose of the fourth part was that bishops might show hospitality to travelers, prisoners, and to the poor (4.4.7).

1192Sermon on Acts 6:1-3; SC 8:200.

1193Sermon on Acts 6:1-3; SC 8:202.

of its significance. Rather, the point of Acts 6 is that although the preaching of the gospel is of the utmost importance, the cause of the poor is sufficiently important that it requires a perpetual office in Christ's spiritual government.¹¹⁹⁴

Preaching on 1 Timothy 3:8-13 a few years later, Calvin carefully distinguished the civil magistrate from the deacon and identified the latter with Christ's spiritual government. "It is true that those who are in the office of justice also do God service ... But these deacons appertain to the spiritual government which God has established."¹¹⁹⁵ In that sense preachers and deacons hold parallel offices, which is why God "wills that they who are ordained, whether to preach the gospel or to care for the poor, be of unblameable life."¹¹⁹⁶ Calvin then turned to a striking criticism of the Reformed churches for their attitude toward the diaconate.

Well then shall we show that there is a reformation among us? We must begin at the end, that is to say, there must be ministers to preach the doctrine of salvation purely, there must be deacons to have care of the poor. *Truth it is that we have some: but it is taken as a profane office. Those that men call hospitalliers, and procureurs of hospitals, do we think that they have an ecclesiastical office? Nay, do they themselves know it?* For if they thought, see, God has called us to an office, and to a holy state, it is joined with the office of the ministers and preachers, and those that have charge to govern the church of God: it is certain that men would walk otherwise in it than they do, with a great deal more reverence than we see.¹¹⁹⁷

In his next sermon on the same text Calvin went so far as to say that if the church did not have a well-run diaconate "it is certain that we cannot brag that we have a church well-ordered and after the doctrine of the gospel."¹¹⁹⁸ Clearly Calvin was not satisfied to see civil government administer poor relief. He wanted it to be administered by the church as well, and he wanted it to be recognized as a spiritual work. The diaconate is "not only an earthly office, but a spiritual charge, which serves the church of God," and therefore

1194Cf. Commentary on Acts 6:2 [1552]; CO 48:119-120.

1195Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:6-7; CO 53:291. Or as he put it earlier in the sermon, "the public government of the church" (CO 53:289).

1196Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:6-7; CO 53:289.

1197Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:6-7; CO 53: 290. Emphasis added.

1198Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:8-10; CO 53:293.

the deacons “must be near the ministers of the word.”¹¹⁹⁹ Where such a diaconate does not exist we “have no regard, either to God's honor, or to the necessity of the poor, or to the government that God will have among us.”¹²⁰⁰

Calvin viewed the diaconate as a part of the spiritual government of the church because he interpreted the communion among believers as an expression of the kingdom of Christ that will restore all things, including both body and soul. Christians are called to render “every kind of assistance to each other,” Calvin argues in his commentary on Ephesians 4. The same unity that is grounded in the ministry of the word is reflected in the diaconate. Both are expression of the spiritual government of Christ's kingdom.¹²⁰¹

Conclusion

Calvin identified the church as Christ's kingdom because it is the church that administers Christ's spiritual government through the ministry of the word. In contrast to the Zurich reformers, Calvin insisted that the ministry of the visible church, including its discipline, is Christ's spiritual government. Against Rome he denied that the church has magisterial power in spiritual matters or spiritual authority over political matters. The entire spiritual authority of the church, he insisted, is contained within the word. When the church teaches and disciplines faithfully according to the word, its authority is that of Christ himself. Where, on the other hand, it is necessary for the church to regulate matters of polity or decorum – or to become involved in political affairs – the church must take care not to claim authority over consciences. Through the church Christ has begun to establish his kingdom and restore the world, but the presence of the kingdom in the church is eschatological and spiritual. It should never be confused with the political

¹¹⁹⁹Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:6-7; CO 53:291. Calvin stated decisively that care for the poor is not one of the “profane uses [*usages prophanes*]” to which material possessions might be put (CO 53:292).

¹²⁰⁰Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:8-10; CO 53:295, 301.

¹²⁰¹Commentary on Ephesians 4:4 [1548]; CO 51:190-191.

kingdom over which Christ also rules.

CHAPTER 6

CHRIST'S POLITICAL GOVERNMENT: EARLY FORMULATIONS

Unlike the chapters on Christ's spiritual government, the chapter of the *Institutes* on civil government changed relatively little between 1536 and 1559. From the first to the last edition of the *Institutes* Calvin described the role and nature of civil government in the same basic terms and with the same general arguments, always against the backdrop of the two kingdoms doctrine. He doggedly defended coercive political authority as having been established by God to preserve order and civil righteousness in a world corrupted by sin. He maintained that civil government has a responsibility to protect the true religion against public offenses, enforcing outward obedience to the moral law as summarized in both tables of the Ten Commandments. He rejected the claim that Old Testament civil law binds contemporary political societies, insisting instead on the governing authority of natural law, equity, and the rule of love. He distinguished biblical teaching from the practical questions of political philosophy, calling Christians to be open to a wide range of types of political institutions. And he insisted that although Christians must submit to civil magistrates in all political matters, they may never submit to commands to act impiously or unjustly, and those with public authority must resist tyranny and oppression. Although in commentaries, sermons, and other writings over the years Calvin increasingly emphasized civil government's responsibility to care for and protect religion, he never abandoned these early principles of his political theology.

But Calvin's emphases did change over the years. In his 1536 *Institutes* and in his 1540 commentary on Romans Calvin's emphasis was on the secular purposes of government and the limited relevance of Old Testament law. In 1539 Calvin had begun to work out a sophisticated biblical covenant theology, one that would profoundly shape his understanding of the relevance of Israel and its law for the politics of Christendom. But

only after his return to Geneva in 1541, and after his increasing interaction with Anabaptists, did he begin to emphasize the religious obligations of magistrates and the enduring political relevance of the Old Testament. His letters to foreign dignitaries and kings show that by 1548 he had worked out his mature theory of the responsibilities of magistrates relative to piety, worship, and doctrine. In this chapter I trace these early developments in the 1536 *Institutes*, the 1540 commentary on Romans, the 1544 treatise against the Anabaptists, and various letters that Calvin wrote to magistrates through 1552. This sets the stage for a consideration of Calvin's interpretation of the Old Testament in Chapter 7, followed by an examination of his mature political theology in Chapters 8 and 9.

It is important to note that Calvin's focus was almost always on the politics of a *Christian* commonwealth.¹²⁰² Most of what he said about government presupposes the context of Christendom. Calvin believed such a state of affairs is ideal, of course, but he maintained that a pagan government is no less ordained by God, and no less legitimate, than are the governments of Christendom. His respect for pagan philosophy and Roman law is evident in his first published book, his commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* (1532), which Calvin wrote before his conversion to the Reformation.¹²⁰³ Here the young humanist displayed the thorough knowledge of classical philosophy and Roman law, as well as of the general problems and questions associated with political theory, that would inform his political reflection throughout his career. Although a comparison between the commentary on Seneca and Calvin's theological writings is beyond the scope of this

¹²⁰²“Yet he is addressing Christian rulers and subjects of professedly Christian states, and is of course primarily concerned with politics in a Christian setting.” John T. McNeill, “Calvin and Civil Government,” *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (ed. Donald McKim; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 265. Cf. John T. McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought,” *Church History* 18 (September 1949): 157. W. Robert Godfrey writes, “Calvin is not presenting an abstract discussion of government. Rather, he is focusing on the character of 'a Christian state' as he experienced it in his day.” W. Robert Godfrey, “Calvin and Theonomy,” *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (ed. William S. Barker, et. al.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 300.

¹²⁰³See Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's 'De Clementia'* (Leiden: Brill, 1969); CO 5:1-162.

dissertation, it is worth pointing out that the work testifies to the thoroughly humanist education that underlay Calvin's claim, discussed in Chapter 3, that by virtue of natural law even pagans are capable of impressive political achievements, including substantive civil morality.¹²⁰⁴ In Schreiner's words, even in a pagan commonwealth that does not promote true religion Calvin believed that natural law “functions as an internal bridle which fosters society.”¹²⁰⁵

Calvin wrote the prefatory address to the *Institutes* to Francis I, “Most Christian King of the French, His Sovereign,” in 1535. In it, he declares that although he initially wrote the *Institutes* as a theological guide for Christians, he now also intends it as a “confession” and “defense” against the false accusations that had led to the persecution of Protestants by “sword and fire.” The evangelical faith had been subject to lying and slander, “as if this doctrine looked to no other end than to subvert all orders and civil governments, to disrupt the peace, to abolish all laws, to scatter all lordships and possessions – in short, to turn everything upside down!” If this was actually true, Calvin admits, “the whole world would rightly judge this doctrine and its authors worthy of a thousand fires and crosses.” Calvin's problem is not with the persecution of false and seditious doctrines but with the fact that there has not been a fair trial. With what right has the new faith been condemned, if its adherents have not been permitted a

1204The commentary on Seneca is, after all, a *commentary* rather than a constructive work. Citing scripture only twice, and then only in passing, Calvin focuses on Seneca's discussion of political virtue as a work of rhetoric and persuasion. While it is true that traces of Calvin's later views on the nature and forms of civil government can be found in this early writing, it is equally true that in it Calvin avoids constructive engagement with such matters. Scholars debate the significance of *De Clementia* and its place within Calvin's broader thought. For a good analysis see Harro Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 5-18.

1205Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 87. “According to Calvin, the human conscience still retains insight into the natural principles of equity and justice and is thereby able to order society rightly” (90). McNeill writes, “In areas where Christ's kingship is not thought of by ruler or people he sees the civic order as a valid organ of the divine purpose functioning through natural law.” John T. McNeill, “John Calvin on Civil Government,” *Calvinism and the Political Order* (ed. George L. Hunt; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 35. Cf. McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought,” 158.

defense?¹²⁰⁶

Calvin affirms the right and responsibility of King Francis “to undertake a full inquiry into this case” with the “judicial gravity” befitting a subject of Christ, who is the true King of kings.

Worthy indeed is this matter of your hearing, worthy of your cognizance, worthy of your royal throne! Indeed, this consideration makes a true king: to recognize himself a minister of God in governing his kingdom. Now, that king who in ruling over his realm does not serve God's glory exercises not kingly rule but brigandage. Furthermore, he is deceived who looks for enduring prosperity in his kingdom when it is not ruled by God's scepter, that is, his Holy Word.¹²⁰⁷

The key is that the Protestant faith must be judged not based on the judgment of the church (i.e., the pope or bishops) nor on the opinions of the easily manipulated masses (“the affairs of men have scarcely ever been so well regulated that the better things pleased the majority”),¹²⁰⁸ but based on its fidelity to the Christian scripture (the “analogy of faith”) that is attested by all as truth.¹²⁰⁹ For the reformers are not teaching something that is “doubtful and uncertain,” nor are they “forging some new gospel.”¹²¹⁰ Calvin insists that from faithful evangelicals “not one seditious word was ever heard.” Indeed, “we ... do not cease to pray for the full prosperity of yourself and your kingdom.” He whole-heartedly agrees that if any person uses the gospel as a pretext for rebellion, “there are laws and legal penalties by which they may be severely restrained according to their deserts.”¹²¹¹

A) *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536)

When Calvin introduces his discussion of civil government in the last part of the *Institutes*, he announces that having discussed Christ's spiritual kingdom, he is now

1206 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [1536] (trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), Preface, 1.

1207 *Institutes* [1536], Preface, 2.

1208 *Institutes* [1536], Preface, 5.

1209 *Institutes* [1536], Preface, 2.

1210 *Institutes* [1536], Preface, 3.

1211 *Institutes* [1536], Preface, 8.

turning to the political kingdom. “Now, since we have established above that man is under a twofold government, and since we have discussed already at sufficient length the kind that resides in the soul or inner man and pertains to eternal life, this is the place to say something also about the other kind, which pertains only to the establishment of civil justice and outward morality.”¹²¹² In this first edition of the *Institutes* civil and ecclesiastical government are both discussed in the same chapter on Christian Freedom in which Calvin introduces the two kingdoms concept. Calvin presents these governments as the institutional expressions of the two kingdoms.

In fact, Calvin stresses up front that as with the spiritual government of the church, so with civil government the distinction between the two kingdoms must be kept constantly in mind. “But whoever knows how to distinguish between body and soul, between this present fleeting life and that future eternal life, will without difficulty know that Christ's spiritual Kingdom [*spirituale Christi regnum*] and the civil jurisdiction [*civilem ordinationem*] are things completely distinct.”¹²¹³ Civil government is necessary because of the eschatological nature of the kingdom of Christ.

But as we have just now pointed out that this kind of government is distinct from that spiritual and inward Kingdom of Christ [*spirituali ... et interno Christi regno*], so we must know that they are not at variance. For spiritual government, indeed, is already initiating in us upon earth certain beginnings of the Heavenly Kingdom [*coelestis regni*], and in this mortal and fleeting life affords a certain forecast of an immortal and incorruptible blessedness. Yet civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote and foster general peace and tranquility. All of this I admit to be superfluous, if God's Kingdom, such as it is now among us, wipes out the present life. But if it is the Lord's will that we go as pilgrims upon the earth while we aspire to the true fatherland, and if the pilgrimage requires such helps, those who take these from man deprive him of his very humanity.

37. Our adversaries claim that there ought to be such great perfection in the church of God that its government should suffice for law. But they stupidly imagine such a perfection as can never be found in a community of men. For since the insolence of evil men is so great, their wickedness so stubborn, that it can scarcely be restrained by extremely severe laws, what do we expect them to do if they see that their depravity can go scot-free – when no power can force

¹²¹²*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.35.

¹²¹³*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.35.

them to cease from doing evil?¹²¹⁴

It is important to pay attention to the sorts of words Calvin uses to describe the task of civil government. Its purposes relate to the 'society of men' and 'civil righteousness,' to the present life and and its pilgrimage. Civil government would not be necessary if the kingdom of Christ was fully established and human beings were perfect, but during the present age its coercion is needed to restrain the worst expressions of human depravity. In that sense, Chenevière is correct to observe, for Calvin “Human society is natural; the State in itself is not.”¹²¹⁵

Clearly Calvin wrote with the Anabaptists and their perfectionism at the forefront of his mind,¹²¹⁶ but he also had an even more radical group in view – probably the Libertines. He accuses “certain men” of teaching that Christian freedom “acknowledges no king and no magistrate among men, but looks to Christ alone.” Such men “think that nothing will be safe unless the whole world is reshaped to a new form, where there are neither courts, nor laws, nor magistrates, nor anything similar which in their opinion restricts their freedom.”¹²¹⁷ The Anabaptists did not argue that civil government should be abolished, but to Calvin their claim that Christians could not participate in it amounted to the same thing. They argued that once believers have entered Christ's kingdom “it is a thing unworthy of us and set far beneath our excellence to be occupied with those vile and worldly cares which have to do with business foreign to a Christian man.”¹²¹⁸

The problem, for Calvin, is that the Libertines and Anabaptists' over-realized

1214 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.36-37. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 3:5 [1559]; CO 36:83-84.

1215 Marc Chenevière, “Did Calvin Advocate Theocracy?” *Evangelical Quarterly* 9 (1937): 164. Cf. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 82-83; McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought,” 156.

1216 Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (trans. Willem Heyner. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 60-63; Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 46-48.

1217 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.35. On Calvin's interaction with the Libertines see John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 159-326, especially Farley's commentary on pp 161-186.

1218 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.36. Cf. Commentary on Jude 9 [1551]; CO 55:494.

eschatology led them to confuse the two kingdoms. Falling prey to “Jewish vanity” insofar as they “seek and enclose Christ's Kingdom within the elements of this world,” they confused Christian freedom with political freedom. “For why is it that the same apostle who bids us stand and not submit to the 'yoke of bondage' elsewhere forbids slaves to be anxious about their state, unless it be that spiritual freedom can perfectly well exist along with civil bondage?” It is true that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free,” but temporal distinctions remain as a fundamental part of the political order. “[I]t makes no difference what your condition among men may be or under what nation's laws you live, since the Kingdom of Christ does not at all consist in these things.”¹²¹⁹

As long as the world remains plagued by sin and disorder, the restraining role of civil government remains “no less than that of bread, water, sun, and air.” For not only does government seek to ensure that people “breathe, eat, drink, and are kept warm,” which it does when it “provides for their living together,” but it ensures that the moral law is publicly obeyed.¹²²⁰ Like the other magisterial reformers, Calvin could see no reason why civil government should punish crimes against justice but not crimes against the truth or against God. Nicholas Wolterstorff is correct that “what he takes for granted is that it is the business of the state to encourage and coerce external conformity to God's laws *in general*... Wrongdoing should have no civil rights.”¹²²¹ Relative to the first table,

1219 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.35. Cf. Commentary on Galatians 3:28 [1548]; CO 50:222-223; Commentary on Colossians 3:11 [1548]; CO 52:121-122.

1220 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.37. Graham reads too much into this statement when he takes it as evidence that Calvin saw civil government as having a responsibility for social welfare. Calvin did assign government such a role, but the point here is simply to stress that government is as essential for life as are these other necessities. See W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1971), 73. Niesel provides a helpful corrective when he writes, “Although the civil authorities have a secular duty, yet it is not their proper task to care for the physical well-being of men – nevertheless they must be to some extent concerned about it; rather their main concern must be 'that in a Christian society religion receives public and official recognition and that humanity prevails among men.’” Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Methuen, 1956), 232.

1221 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 144. Emphasis added. Hopfl notes that Calvin already equated sin and crime in *De Clementia*, describing the business of civil government in terms of the punishment of

or what Calvin calls “a public manifestation of religion ... among Christians,” government “prevents idolatry, sacrilege against God's name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offenses against religion from arising and spreading among the people.” Relative to the second table, which Calvin refers to as “humanity ... among men,” it “prevents the public peace from being disturbed; it provides that each man may keep his property safe and intact; that men may carry on blameless intercourse among themselves.”¹²²²

From the very beginning Calvin realizes that readers who have tracked with him on the two kingdoms distinction may be “disturbed that I now commit to civil government the duty of rightly establishing religion, which I seem above to have put outside of human decision.” But Calvin argues that there is a difference between the government's responsibility to ensure that the true religion is not “openly and with public sacrilege violated and defiled with impunity,” and allowing that same government “to make laws according to their own decision concerning religion and the worship of God.”¹²²³ In other words, government is obligated to protect religion by preserving civil piety and defending the truth, but that does not mean it has a role in Christ's spiritual government. Contrary to what some commentators assume, the emphasis here is on prohibiting *outward* and *public* offenses against religion rather than on promoting inward piety. Government's role is with respect to the *civil* use of the law rather than its spiritual use. And even with respect to that limited role Calvin's comments in the 1536 edition are brief and passing. The rest of the chapter focuses entirely on matters

vice and the promotion of virtue. Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 18.

1222 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.37. Calvin divides the Ten Commandments into two tables, the first pertaining “to those duties of religion which particularly concern the worship of his [God's] majesty; the second, to the duties of love that have to do with men,” or with “human society.” The first table is the foundation for the second. “Not only is religion the chief part but the very soul, whereby the whole breathes and thrives. And apart from the fear of God men do not preserve equity and love among themselves. Therefore we call the worship of God the beginning and foundation of righteousness” (2.8.11). The only reason scripture often emphasizes the second table more than the first is that “the works of love are such that through them we witness real righteousness” (2.8.52). Virtue is the best evidence of piety. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 23:23-28 [1555]; CO 45:631-633.

1223 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.37.

pertaining to justice and the second table of the law. His only other substantive reference to the matter in the 1536 *Institutes* is an insistence that “Turks and Saracens, and other enemies of religion” should not be persecuted by the sword of the civil magistrate. “Far be it from us to approve those methods by which many until now have tried to force [*adigere*] them to our faith, when they forbid them the use of fire and water and the common elements, when they deny to them all offices of humanity, when they pursue [*persequuntur*] them with sword and arms.”¹²²⁴

Calvin's substantive discussion of the responsibilities of government in the 1536 *Institutes* focuses entirely on matters of justice and peace. Invoking Jeremiah 22:3, he argues that government is to “do justice and righteousness,' to 'deliver him who has been oppressed by force from the hand of the malicious prosecutor,' not to 'grieve or wrong the alien, the widow, and the fatherless' or 'shed innocent blood.’” He cites several passages from Deuteronomy to demonstrate that magistrates are to judge impartially and not to take bribes, and he cites the 'law of the king' in Deuteronomy 17, but he says not a word about government's responsibility toward religion. He summarizes the basic task of magistrates in essentially secular terms: “We see, therefore, that they are ordained protectors and vindicators of public innocence, modesty, decency, and tranquility, and that their sole endeavor should be to provide for the common safety and peace of all.” The primary way that government provides for such safety and peace is by promoting respect for virtue and restraining acts of injustice. “For the care of equity and justice grows cold in the minds of many, unless due honor has been prepared for virtue;

¹²²⁴*Institutes* [1536], II.28; CO 1:77. Calvin omitted this comment from subsequent editions, but as R.

White demonstrates, the omission is best explained by literary and pastoral considerations rather than a change in views, or as Castellio charged, in Calvin's opportunism. In his tract against Servetus and his commentary on the Torah Calvin clearly maintained the view that only heretics and apostates from the true religion should be punished by the sword. See R. White, “Castellio Against Calvin: The Turk in the Toleration Controversy of the Sixteenth Century,” *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 46.3 (1984): 573-586. This undermines Strohm's claim that Calvin's removal of the similar passage from the first edition of the *Institutes* was “emblematic” of a broader change in position. Christoph Strohm, “Calvin and Religious Tolerance,” *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society* (ed. Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Smallmann; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 183-184.

and the lust of wicked men cannot be restrained except by severity and the infliction of penalties.” Governments are both to execute justice – “to receive into safekeeping, to embrace, to protect, vindicate, and free the innocent,” – and judgment – “to withstand the boldness of the impious, to repress their violence, to punish their misdeeds.” In stark contrast to the emphases of his later career, Calvin says nothing here about any responsibilities of government relative to worship, piety, doctrine, or ecclesiastical discipline.¹²²⁵

Nevertheless, the magistrate, like the officers of the church, is a minister of God and governs with divine authority. As “God's representatives” and “vicegerents,” magistrates are even referred to in Psalm 82 and John 10:35 as “gods.”¹²²⁶ From Deuteronomy 1 and Proverbs 8 Calvin insists that magistrates exercise judgment on God's behalf, not on behalf of human beings. “[I]t has not come about by human perversity that the authority over all things on earth is in the hands of kings and other rulers, but by divine providence and holy ordinance.”¹²²⁷ Calvin relies most decisively on

¹²²⁵*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.43.

¹²²⁶In his commentary on Psalm 82 Calvin later described civil order as “the assembly of God” because where there is lawful government the divine glory is reflected “with preeminent luster” (Commentary on Psalm 82:1 [1557]; CO 31:768-769). Although the dignity of magistrates is “only temporary and will pass away with the fashion of the world” God has nevertheless “invested judges with a sacred character and title” (82:6; CO 31:771). Cf. Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:15 [1548]; CO 52:331. It is possible to make too much of the word ‘minister’ as applied to magistrates. Calvin writes that “Satan himself ... is so far his [God's] minister that he acts not but by his command.” Commentary on Romans 9:18 [1556]; CO 49:184. Cf. 1:24; 27; Commentary on Ephesians 2:2 [1548]; CO 51:161. Calvin also refers to the Assyrians as the ministers of God's wrath. Commentary on Isaiah 10:5 [1559]; CO 36:213-215.

¹²²⁷God rules the affairs of men, Calvin added in 1539, “inasmuch as he is present with them and also presides over the making of laws and the exercising of equity in courts of justice.” Elsewhere he writes, “When philosophers argue concerning the political affairs of a state they ingeniously gather together whatever seems to them to answer their purpose – they acutely point out the means of erecting a commonwealth, and on the other hand the vices by which a well-regulated state is commonly corrupted; in short, they discourse with consummate skill upon everything that is necessary to be known on this subject, except that they omit the principal point – which is, that men, however much they may excel in wisdom and virtue, and whatever may be the undertakings in which they may engage, can effect nothing, unless in so far as God stretches forth his hand to them, or rather makes use of them as his instruments. Which of the philosophers ever acknowledged that a politician is nothing else but an instrument guided by the hand of God? Yea, rather they held that good management on the part of man constituted the chief cause of the happiness of the social body.” Commentary on Psalm 127:1 [1557]; CO 32:321-322. In the first edition of the *Institutes* Calvin listed Romans 12:8, which refers to the gift of ruling, as evidence that magistrates rule on behalf of God. In 1539, however, as he developed his understanding of church government and integrated it into the *Institutes* he added a qualification that although the gift of governance can be extended to “every kind of just rule,” including civil

Romans 13, noting Paul's description of government as “an ordinance of God,” and princes as “ministers of God, for those doing good unto praise; for those doing evil, avengers unto wrath.” But he also notes the examples of numerous Old Testament leaders such as David, Josiah, Hezekiah, Joseph, Daniel, Moses, Joshua, and the judges. In light of God's approval of these men, Calvin writes, it is evident not only that civil government is a “holy and lawful” vocation, but that it is “the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men.”¹²²⁸ It extends not to “profane affairs or those alien to a servant of God,” but is “a most holy office, since they are serving as God's deputies.”¹²²⁹ It is not enough to view government as a “necessary evil,” or even to recognize that it is conducive of the public welfare. Rather, magistrates are to be honored with “full veneration and dignity,” and they are to be obeyed as a matter of conscience rather than out of fear of coercion.¹²³⁰ Although such statements are often cited as evidence that Calvin viewed magistrates as even more important than ministers of the church, given Calvin's reference to “callings” and to the life of “mortal men” it is more likely that Calvin is simply comparing the magistracy to other secular callings.¹²³¹ But the statement is no less provocative for that. For all of his emphasis on the importance of the spiritual kingdom, Calvin viewed civil government as absolutely crucial to human life.

Does such a lofty view of magistrates encourage arrogance, or even tyranny?

government, it primarily denotes elders who are to preside over church discipline. See Elsie Anne McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin's Theology* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988), 40-41.

1228 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.39. He makes a similar statement in his commentary on 2 Peter: “though there is no lawful station in life which is not worthy of respect, yet we know that the magisterial office excels every other, because in governing mankind God himself is represented.” Commentary on 2 Peter 2:10 [1551]; CO 55:465.

1229 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.40.

1230 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.52.

1231 Gordon J. Keddie, “Calvin on Civil Government,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 32 (1981): 65-67; Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State* (ed. Richard C. Gamble; New York: Garland, 1992), 27. Calvin writes, “there is nothing in which we can better serve God than when we help his servants who labor for the truth of the gospel.” Commentary on Philippians 2:30 [1548]; CO 52:42.

Calvin thinks, on the contrary, that a doctrine of mere human accountability encourages the proclivity to tyranny, while accountability to God inspires princes to “great zeal for uprightness, for prudence, gentleness, self-control, and for innocence.” As vicars of God, princes are called “to present in themselves to men some image of divine providence, protection, goodness, benevolence, and justice.” Their judgments are to be those of God, and must therefore be in accord with the law of God.

How will they have the brazenness to admit injustice to their judgment seat which they are told is the throne of the living God? How will they have the boldness to pronounce an unjust sentence by the mouth they know has been appointed an instrument of divine truth? With what conscience will they sign wicked decrees by their hand which they know has been appointed to record the acts of God?

As deputies of God, magistrates know that they “will have to render account of the administration of their charge.”¹²³²

The primary purpose of Calvin's emphasis on the dignity of magistrates is to serve as an apologetic against the Anabaptists, those who think “this holy ministry” is incompatible with “Christian religion and piety.”¹²³³ Subjects owe not only obedience but are responsible for “undertaking public offices and burdens which pertain to the common defense.” They are to support their governments, as Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 2, with “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings.”¹²³⁴

The Anabaptists liked to quote Luke 22:25-26, in which Jesus told his disciples that they were not to lord it over one another like the nations. Calvin's response is to invoke the two kingdoms distinction. “To silence this vain ambition [of the disciples who aspired to lordship], the Lord taught them that their ministry is not like kingdoms, in which one is pre-eminent above the rest.” What was Christ saying, “except that the kingly

1232 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.40. Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 48:10 [1563]; CO 39:320-321; Commentary on Isaiah 3:14-15 [1559]; CO 36:89-90; Commentary on John 19:11 [1553]; CO 47:411.

1233 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.41. This goes a long way to explaining Calvin's overwhelming emphasis on obedience. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 278-282, 289-295.

1234 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.52.

office is not the ministry of an apostle?”¹²³⁵ The distinction between the two kingdoms underlies Calvin's arguments throughout the next few sections. In response to the Anabaptist argument that killing is incompatible with the life of a Christian Calvin appeals to the distinction between a person and that person's political office, between personal violence and the just public use of the sword. A Christian magistrate “does nothing by himself, but carries out the very judgments of God.” Vengeance on the part of the ministers of God against those who do harm “is not to hurt or to afflict” in the sense forbidden by scripture because it is done on the authority of God and in defense of the innocent. “Unless perhaps restraint is laid upon God's justice, that it may not punish misdeeds. But if it is not right to impose any law upon him, why should we level false accusation against his ministers?” Given the purpose of civil government as God's means of restraining injustice, Christian magistrates who refuse to take up the sword due to private scruples are complicit in injustice if they stand by “while abandoned men wickedly range about with slaughter and massacre.”¹²³⁶

The same logic drives Calvin's version of just war theory.¹²³⁷ War is just when the appropriate authority leads an act of corporate judgment or “public vengeance” against unjust violence. “For it makes no difference whether it be a king or the lowest of the common folk who invades a foreign country in which he has no right, and harries it as an

¹²³⁵*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.41.

¹²³⁶*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.44. To be sure, Christian magistrates should rule with “clemency, that best counselor of kings and surest keeper of the kingly throne,” according to Proverbs 20:28 and echoed in the ancient writer Seneca. But magistrates should avoid both “excessive severity” and “superstitious affectation of clemency” (4.20.10). “But without the sword laws are dead, and legal judgments have no forth or authority. Magistrates require not only an executioner but other attendants, among whom are the military, without whose assistance and agency it is impossible to maintain peace.” Commentary on Luke 3:12 [1555]; CO 45:120-121.

¹²³⁷On Calvin's just war theory see Mark J. Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory, The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009); William K. Smith, *Calvin's Ethics of War: A Documentary Study* (Annapolis: Academic Fellowship, 1972). Larson argues that Calvin held to the most conservative version of just war theory among the magisterial reformers, in that not only did he reject the right of the church to authorize holy war, but he also insisted that war always be fought with humanitarian restraint (41-43, 48, 69). On the other hand, Calvin defended the use of war in defense of the true religion and the honor of God (70).

enemy. All such must, equally, be considered as robbers and punished accordingly.”¹²³⁸

As an act of just punishment, war is therefore limited by the same principles of love and clemency that are to characterize all acts of public justice. Thus “if they have to punish, let them not be carried away with headlong anger, or be seized with hatred, or burn with implacable severity.” Soldiers and princes are to recognize their enemies as human beings made in the image of God, having pity, as Augustine argues, “on the common nature in the one whose special fault they are punishing.”¹²³⁹

The distinction between the two kingdoms also characterizes Calvin's discussion of Christian involvement in courts and lawsuits. Citing Romans 13, he observes that the magistrate has been appointed for the very purpose that Christians, among others, might be protected from injustice, therefore living “a quiet and serene life.”¹²⁴⁰ How could it be that the magistrate would be appointed for their protection and defense, and yet Christians are not “allowed to enjoy such benefit” by appealing to it for protection? On the other hand, Calvin recognizes that the Anabaptists had a point when they argued from scripture that Christians are not to have a vengeful or quarrelsome spirit. Many people “carry on their lawsuits with bitter and deadly hatred, and an insane passion to revenge and hurt” on the “pretense of legal procedure.”¹²⁴¹

Calvin therefore articulates a theory of just litigation analogous to his theory of just war. Litigation must be pursued in a spirit of love, compassion, and a desire to do good to the one at fault. Litigation could be of benefit to both the accuser and the accused “if the defendant ... defends himself without bitterness, but only with this intent, to

1238In the 1539 edition he adds, “both natural equity and the nature of the office dictate that princes must be armed not only to restrain the misdeeds of private individuals by judicial punishment, but also to defend by war the dominions entrusted to their safekeeping, if at any time they are under enemy attack” (4.20.12).

1239*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.45. Calvin even implicitly argues that Christians are called to a higher standard here than the pagan philosopher Cicero argued when he said that war should always be waged for the sake of peace. As Calvin puts it, “surely everything else ought to be tried before recourse is had to arms.” War should never be a means of private ambition but should be waged for the welfare of the people alone, otherwise those who are waging it are guilty of tyranny (4.20.12).

1240*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.50.

1241*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.51.

defend what is his by right,” and if the plaintiff “undeservedly oppressed either in his person or in his property, puts himself in the care of the magistrate, makes his complaint, and seeks what is fair and good.” But each side should be “prepared to yield his own and suffer anything” rather than yield to hatred or the desire to harm. Indeed, where “love is somewhat impaired” in judicial procedures “the whole court action of even the most just cause cannot but be impious.” No matter how just the claim, the lawsuit is immoral “unless he treat his adversary with the same love and good will as if the business under controversy were already amicably settled and composed.” To be sure, this requires little short of a “miracle,” and Calvin agrees that “an example of an upright litigant is rare.”¹²⁴² As with war, therefore, Calvin agrees that Christians should go to court only as a last resort.

Christians ought indeed so to conduct themselves that they always prefer to yield their own right rather than go into a court, from which they can scarcely get away without a heart stirred and kindled to hatred of their brother. But when any man sees that without loss of love he can defend his own property, the loss of which would be a heavy expense to him, he does not offend against this statement of Paul [in 2 Corinthians 6:5-8], if he has recourse to law. To sum up ... love will give every man the best counsel. Everything undertaken apart from love and all disputes that go beyond it, we regard as incontrovertibly unjust and impious.¹²⁴³

1242 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.51. “If it is objected that it very rarely happens that anyone carries on a lawsuit entirely free and exempt from every corrupt affection, I acknowledge that it is so, and I say farther that it is rare to find a single instance of an upright litigant.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:7 [1546]; CO 49:392. In his discussion of Paul’s exhortation to Christians to avoid suing one another in pagan courts, Calvin poses the question, “why should not even unbelievers, who are in the office of magistrate [*magistratu*], have this authority [*autoritatem*], and if they have it, why are we prevented from maintaining our rights [*ius*] before their tribunals?” (6:1; 387-388). His answer is that it dishonors the insofar as it suggests that Christians lack the wisdom to solve their own disputes. But of course, a person might have all the spiritual wisdom in the world, but that does not give her the legal expertise so crucial in human disputes. For “piety and spiritual doctrine do not confer a knowledge of human arts.” Calvin reasons that the arbitration of disputes depends uniquely on Christians’ refined sense of “equity and conscientiousness” (6:2; 388; Cf. 6:4; 389). On the other hand, where legal expertise is necessary, it is appropriate for Christians to turn to civil judges, regardless of their lack of faith. Indeed, it is far preferable that they be handled by secular authorities than that the pastors of the church claim “jurisdiction [*iurisdictio*] ... in money matters” (6:4; 390). Cf. Commentary on 1 Peter 2:21-23 [1551]; CO 55:249-251; Commentary on Matthew 5:40 [1555]; CO 45:185.

1243 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.51. In his commentary Calvin insists that it is not enough simply to distinguish between private vengeance and public vengeance: “we must go a step farther, for if it be not allowable even to desire vengeance from God then on the same principle it were not allowable to have recourse to the magistrate for vengeance.” A Christian may not exercise revenge “either by himself, or by means of the magistrate, nor even desire it.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:7 [1546]; CO 49:391. Later Calvin wrote that the goal of appealing to a judge is simply “to learn from the mouth of the magistrate what is right and just.” Commentary on Exodus 18:15 [1563]; CO 24:187.

The relevant distinction is between the actions and thoughts of a Christian with respect to spiritual righteousness, and the obligations of civil government with respect to civil righteousness. Calvin observes that the apostle's prohibition of revenge in Romans 12 is accompanied by the command to wait on the Lord as the one who will avenge injustice, and the teaching of Romans 13:4 that “the magistrate's revenge is not man's but God's.” Thus to insist on a rigorous standard for litigation is one thing. To condemn it and so to “repudiate God's holy ordinance” is another thing entirely. The Apostle Paul himself used his Roman citizenship to appeal to Caesar for protection against the Jews, as is recorded in the book of Acts.¹²⁴⁴

Calvin makes the same distinction with respect to Christ's command in the Sermon on the Mount not to resist evil but to turn the other cheek. Jesus “indeed wills that the hearts of his people so utterly recoil from any desire to retaliate that they should rather allow double injury to be done them than to increase their intention to pay it back.” Christians should get used to bearing slander, injury, hatred, deception, and mockery, “promising themselves throughout life nothing but the bearing of a perpetual cross,” even as they continue to “do good to those who do them harm, and bless those who curse them.” Thus “they will so suffer their body to be maimed, and their possessions to be maliciously seized, that they will forgive and voluntarily pardon those wrongs as soon as they have been inflicted upon them.” But “this equity and moderateness of their minds will not prevent them from using the help of the magistrate in preserving their own possessions, while maintaining friendliness toward their enemies; or zealous for public welfare, from demanding the punishment of a guilty and pestilent man, who, they know, can be changed only by death.” A Christian can legitimately seek “to prevent the efforts of a destructive man from doing harm to

¹²⁴⁴*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.51.

society.”¹²⁴⁵ Christians are to be conformed to the image of Christ in submission to his spiritual kingdom, but that does not detract from the necessity and justice of the political kingdom in a world that is still plagued by sin. Christians should continue to serve their neighbors in political matters, always ensuring that their actions conform to love and justice.¹²⁴⁶

Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine further informs the reformer's flexible approach toward the laws and form of government appropriate for a “common society of Christians.”¹²⁴⁷ He reminds his readers that it is not his task a theologian “to instruct the magistrates themselves.” Rather, his purpose is “to teach others what magistrates are and to what end God has appointed them.”¹²⁴⁸ Similarly, although laws form the soul and sinews of a commonwealth, “without which the magistracy cannot stand,” it is not within his purpose to craft a philosophical treatise on “the best kind of laws.” There is a need for that sort of work, but despite Calvin's training as a lawyer, and to the chagrin of scholars since, Calvin indicates his willingness to defer to others on such points. His task, at least in his theological writings, is simply to communicate the clear teaching of scripture.¹²⁴⁹

In fact, Calvin declares, he would have preferred not to discuss civil government at all. The only reason why he addresses the question of “with what laws a Christian state ought to be governed”¹²⁵⁰ is to refute the argument of those “who deny that a commonwealth is duly framed which neglects the political system of Moses, and is ruled [instead] by the common laws of nations.” For Calvin this position is arguably “perilous

1245 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.51.

1246 Although he made this argument already in the 1536 edition, in 1543 Calvin invoked Augustine directly, approving Augustine's argument that Christ's commandments pertained more to “the preparation of the heart which is within than to the work which is done in the open” (4.20.20). In his commentary on Matthew 5:39-40 Calvin indicates some discomfort with Augustine's interpretation but indicates that it is correct if rightly understood. Commentary on Matthew 5:39 [1555]; CO 45:184. Calvin argues that Jesus and Paul, when pressed with legal charges, did not simply turn the other cheek, but followed appropriate procedures in defending themselves. Commentary on John 18:23 [1553]; 47:399; Commentary on Acts 23:5 [1554]; CO 48:505.

1247 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.50.

1248 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.43.

1249 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.47.

1250 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.47.

and seditious,” and his goal is to prove it to be “false and foolish.”¹²⁵¹ In short, his primary concern in discussing political laws is not to call the magistrate to enforce the laws of scripture or promote Christian virtue, but to nullify dogmatic attempts to impose biblical laws on Christian governments. To be sure, Calvin identified the Old Testament as a legitimate source of insight regarding the will of God for politics and civil government. But he viewed it as one source among others – albeit the best – from which to infer the nature of natural law. For a particular claim of jurisprudence or political theory derived from the Old Testament to be normative, one had to demonstrate that it was a precept of natural law, consistent with reason and experience, and appropriate to one's particular circumstances.

Calvin begins his argument by reminding his readers of the classic Christian division of the law of Moses into moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws. As he points out, the basic purpose of this distinction is to separate the timeless principles of morality from the particular laws that can be changed or abrogated in various times and places. Calvin defines the moral law, which he divides into commandments regulating worship and those regulating interaction among human beings, as “the true and eternal rule of righteousness, prescribed for men of all nations and times, who wish to conform their lives to God's will.” He defines the ceremonial law as “the tutelage of the Jews, with which it seemed good to the Lord to train this people, as it were, in their childhood, until the fullness of time [i.e., Christ] should come.” The judicial law is the law of civil government that “imparted definite formulas of equity and justice, by which they [the Jews] might live together blamelessly and peaceably.”¹²⁵²

Calvin admits that in a sense the ceremonial and judicial laws “pertain also to morals.” But while the ceremonial laws pertain to piety and worship, they “yet could be

1251 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.48. See Godfrey, “Calvin and Theonomy,” 298-312.

1252 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.48. This threefold distinction is carefully articulated by Aquinas, but its origins appear already in the church fathers. See C. Douais, “Saint Augustin et la Bible,” *Révue Biblique* 3 (1894):420ff, cited in Battles, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 333.

distinguished from piety itself,” which is regulated by the moral law. Similarly the judicial law, “although it had no other intent than how best to preserve that very love which is enjoined by God's eternal law, had something distinct from that precept of love.” Thus the ceremonial and judicial laws can be abrogated without violating the eternal laws of piety and love.¹²⁵³ This leads to a fundamental political theological principle: “if this is true, surely every nation is left free to make such laws, as it foresees to be profitable for itself. Yet these must be in conformity to that perpetual rule of love, so that they indeed vary in form but have the same purpose.” Like Aquinas, Calvin argues that although there is wide latitude in terms of the laws that nations can make for their own welfare, laws that *contradict* the moral law are not to be regarded as laws at all.¹²⁵⁴

Calvin describes the distinction between the rule of love, or natural law, and the Mosaic judicial law in terms of the distinction between equity and the particulars of a constitution. While the former is binding in all times and places, constitutions may legitimately vary, “provided all equally press toward the same goal of equity.”

It should be clear that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon men's hearts. Consequently, the entire scheme of this equity of which we are now speaking has been recorded in it. Hence, this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws. Whatever laws shall be framed to that rule, directed to that goal, bound by that limit, there is no reason why we should disapprove of them, howsoever they may differ from the Jewish law or among themselves.¹²⁵⁵

1253 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.48.

1254 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.49. “For I do not think that those barbarous and savage laws such as gave honor to thieves, permitted promiscuous intercourse, and others both more filthy and more absurd, are to be regarded as laws. For they are abhorrent not only to all justice, but also to all humanity and gentleness” (4.20.15). See McNeill, *The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought*, 159.

1255 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.49. Throughout his works Calvin evaluates various laws and legal practices from the perspective of equity, or “reason and equity.” See Commentary on 2 Corinthians 11:31 [1548]: CO 50:135. Elsewhere he invokes Cicero with respect to the same principle. See Commentary on Acts 9:25 [1552]; CO 48:212. Calvin describes equity as the golden rule, but it also represents the whole content of the second table of the law. The best study on Calvin's understanding of equity is Guenther Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997). Haas emphasizes that equity for Calvin “provides the guideline for the implementation of love in our dealings with others” (50). Haas writes that equity “is an interpretive, not a corrective, principle of law. To be properly called law, human law must conform to the equity of natural law. Equity establishes what is just in the concrete legal order, and it provides guidance in interpreting and applying the law to specific cases. It does so by appealing to the intention of the law and to the motives of the people

As an example Calvin offers the law forbidding stealing. The Torah prescribes certain penalties for theft that differ from the laws of other nations. Such laws are similar in what they forbid, but vary in the nature or rigor of enforcement. Due to varying circumstances and varying times, some countries have to prescribe much stricter penalties than others. But “we see how, with such diversity, all laws tend to the same end. For, together with one voice, they pronounce punishment against those crimes which God's eternal law has condemned, namely, murder, theft, adultery, and false witness.” To oppose such variety in the laws of nations is to be “malicious and hateful toward public welfare.” The law of Moses “had never been enacted for us” and it is not dishonored when set aside or abrogated in favor of another law. “For the Lord through the hand of Moses did not give that law to be proclaimed among all nations.” Rather, it was designed for the particular defense and protection of the distinctive Jewish nation with whom God had established a special relationship.¹²⁵⁶ Hopfl rightly concludes, “the penalties for sins/crimes in the Old Testament are classed by Calvin under 'political supplements', that is to say, provisions expressly intended for God's Chosen People, and in principle abrogated. What is more, natural law in the form of *aequitas* regards the end which law is to aim at, and not the level of punishment, which Calvin had expressly left to the discretion of governors in the *Institution* (4.20.15).”¹²⁵⁷ Calvin maintained this position through all subsequent editions of the *Institutes*, and in his commentary on the Torah.

Calvin's flexible attitude toward civil laws is mirrored in his discussion of forms of government. Here again he stresses that it is not his task to philosophize about the best form of government, nor should ordinary Christians concern themselves with the

involved” (71). Haas also rightly concludes that Calvin “gives equity a central role in providing a unifying understanding of the moral teachings of Scripture” (81), that is, he makes equity “a principle that harmonizes Old Testament law and the rule of love revealed in Christ” (83). Cf. 108-110.
¹²⁵⁶*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.49.
¹²⁵⁷Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 183.

question. “Obviously, it is an idle pastime for men in private life, who are disqualified from deliberating on the organization of any commonwealth, to dispute over what would be the best kind of government.” As a lawyer and humanist Calvin was familiar with the classic philosophical discussions. Following Aristotle, he argues that at the level of abstract theory it is virtually impossible to say that one form is superior to another. “The fall from kingdom to tyranny is easy; but it is not much more difficult to fall from the rule of the best men to the faction of a few; yet it is easiest of all to fall from popular rule to sedition.” Political judgments about the best form of government depend “especially upon the circumstances.” Each community consists of different elements and in different proportions and is “best held together according to their own particular inequality.” Those for whom “the will of the Lord is enough” can therefore resign themselves to the fact that “divine providence has wisely arranged that various countries should be administered by various kinds of government.” As far as Christians are concerned, “it is our duty to show ourselves compliant and obedient to whomever he sets over the places where we live.”¹²⁵⁸ Government is ordained by God to preserve human society and restrain injustice. That it fulfills this function justly is more important than its form or the particular means by which it does so.

Calvin admits that most magistrates do not deserve this sort of honor and obedience. A good magistrate is “a father of his country ... shepherd of his people, guardian of peace, protector of righteousness, and avenger of innocence – he who does not approve of such government must rightly be regarded as insane.” But many princes are careless, lazy, corrupt, immoral, and tyrannical, some even “exercis[ing] sheer robbery, plundering houses, raping virgins and matrons, and slaughtering the guiltless.” Are even such tyrants as these, who do not act as God's ministers, to be honored and obeyed? Calvin maintains that scripture calls Christians to be subject even to tyrants that

¹²⁵⁸*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.42.

“perform not a whit of the princes' office.” Even when they do not fulfill their purpose or serve the welfare of their people, the magisterial office maintains its authority and dignity. Even tyrants possess “that noble and divine power” that God has given “the ministers of his justice and judgment,” and they are to be held in the same honor as is “the best of kings.” Christians must obey even a king who “does not show himself a king to us.”¹²⁵⁹ The office is ordained by God and, as such, bears an “inviolable majesty.”¹²⁶⁰

At the foundation of Calvin's insistence that Christians owe obedience even to tyrannical regimes is his conviction that whatever governments exist have been ordained through the providence of God. Indeed, in many cases, “they who rule unjustly and incompetently have been raised by him to punish the wickedness of the people.” Calvin provides a litany of scriptural evidence to prove this conclusion, devoting more exegetical energy to this argument than to any other in Chapter 20. He offers repeated declarations from the book of Daniel that God rules over kings and that he uses empires and rulers for his own purposes. He quotes extensively from 1 Samuel 8:11-17, in which the prophet Samuel described all of the authoritarian abuses to which a king would subject the Israelites. To be sure, God's providence is not to be confused with his moral will. The tyrant prophesied by Samuel would “not do this by ... right [*iure*], since the law trained them to all restraint.” Nevertheless, from the perspective of the people the king's actions should be viewed as within his “right [*ius*]” because “they had to obey it and were not allowed to resist.”¹²⁶¹

1259 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.54. As Calvin added in the 1559 edition, such reverence is not due to “the men themselves, as if a mask of dignity covered foolishness, or sloth, or cruelty, as well as wicked morals full of infamous deeds, and thus acquired for vices the praise of virtues” (4.20.22).

1260 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.55. Calvin asks in his commentary on 1 Peter 2:14, What about the fact that magistrates “often abuse their power and exercise tyrannical cruelty rather than justice[?]” Such were almost all the magistrates when this epistle was written.” Honor is owed even to rulers who become “savage wild beasts” because there has never been a tyranny “in which some portion of equity has not appeared, and further, some kind of government, however deformed and corrupt it may be, is still better and more beneficial than anarchy.” Commentary on 1 Peter 2:14 [1551]; CO 55:245.

1261 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.54. Calvin's explanation of 1 Samuel 8 illustrates that he understood the difference between a legal right and a moral right, or that a person can have a *legal* right, without necessarily *being* right.

Calvin makes equally significant use of Jeremiah 27:5-8, a passage describing God's gift of power and territory to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. "We see how much obedience the Lord willed to be paid to that abominable and cruel tyrant for no other reason than that he possessed the kingship." It was the heavenly decree itself that stood behind Nebuchadnezzar's authority, Calvin argues, for "even the most worthless kings are appointed by the same decree by which the authority of all kings is established." Calvin, like Augustine before him, invokes Jeremiah's instructions to the Babylonian exiles to seek the peace of Babylon. Christians are not to pray for their magistrate as they would pray for an enemy, but to the end "that his kingdom may be preserved safe and peaceful, that under him they too may prosper."¹²⁶²

In the last four sections of the *Institutes*, however, Calvin shifts gears to consider what options are available to people who seek redress from tyranny. Here again the two kingdoms distinction controls the reformer's thought, as he struggles to balance Christians' spiritual obligations of piety and justice with their political obligations of obedience, the duties of Christians as private persons with the duties of those who hold political office. For Christians as individuals, conformity to Christ and his spiritual kingdom is determinative. "For, if the correction of unbridled despotism is the Lord's to avenge, let us not at once think that it is entrusted to us, to whom no command has been given except to obey and suffer."¹²⁶³ Ordinarily "private citizens" should exercise public restraint, "that they may not deliberately intrude in public affairs, or pointlessly invade the magistrate's office, or undertake anything at all politically." They should not "raise a tumult" or seek by themselves to change public ordinances but should "commit the matter to the judgment of the magistrate."¹²⁶⁴ Calvin acknowledges the objection that "rulers owe responsibilities in turn to their subjects," but he denies that a ruler's failure

¹²⁶²*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.54.

¹²⁶³*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.55.

¹²⁶⁴*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.53.

to keep his side of the bargain relieves his subjects from their obligation of obedience. Each person should focus on his own duties rather than on the duties of those who have been set over him. Even in the case of an impious and unjust ruler, “let us first be mindful of our own misdeeds, which without doubt are chastised by such whips of the Lord.” The fact is, it is not for subjects to restrain their kings. Rather, they should “implore the Lord's help,” trusting that he by his providence will judge all tyrannical rulers, as he has promised he will do.¹²⁶⁵

Calvin observes that “sometimes he [God] raises up open avengers from among his servants, and arms them with his command to punish the wicked government and deliver his people, oppressed in unjust ways, from miserable calamity.” In such rare cases of divine intervention – Calvin only identifies examples of men who had a “lawful calling to carry out such acts” from the Old Testament – the avengers act on behalf of God himself, so upholding the majesty of kings by “subdu[ing] the lesser power with the greater.” On other occasions, however, God “directs to this end the rage of men who intend one thing and undertake another.” In such cases the actions of the avengers are unjust, but they are used in the providence of God to overthrow unjust governments. Here, Calvin thinks, is a sober warning for magistrates. “Let the princes hear and be afraid.”¹²⁶⁶

In addition to divine or providential intervention, however, Calvin describes two sorts of resistance to tyranny, one appropriate to individual Christians by virtue of their spiritual duties, the other appropriate to lower civil magistrates by virtue of their political duties. In the case of the former, Calvin argues, a Christian may never violate her conscience by submitting to a law that forces her to commit impiety or injustice.

1265 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.55.

1266 *Institutes* [1536], VI.C.55. Invoking Psalm 2 and Isaiah 10 Calvin declares that God will judge all political rulers who “have not kissed his anointed” or who have “written unjust laws to oppress the poor in judgment and to do violence to the cause of the lowly, to prey upon widows and rob the fatherless.” Humility, he added in 1559, should “restrain our impatience” (4.20.29).

Obedience to God is always preeminent. “If they command anything against him, let it go unesteemed.” A magistrate's dignity is not undermined in such circumstances because that dignity itself is derivative of God's authority. Under no circumstances may Christians give up their allegiance to the spiritual kingdom, and as soon as political authorities attempt to invade that spiritual kingdom – the realm of conscience – Christians should “suffer anything rather than turn aside from piety.” Calvin invokes Paul's warning about the sanctity of Christian liberty in 1 Corinthians 7:23: “That we have been redeemed by Christ at so great a price as our redemption cost him, so that we should not enslave ourselves to the wicked desires of men – much less to their impiety.”¹²⁶⁷

The second form of resistance is appropriate to those who hold public office in the political kingdom. All of the preceding comments about submission, Calvin observes, are to be understood as referring to “private individuals.” As for the “magistrates of the people,” not only may they resist tyranny against the people; they *must*.

For if there are now any magistrates of the people [*populares magistratus*], appointed to restrain [*oppositi*] the willfulness of kings (as in ancient times the ephors were set against the Spartan kings, or the tribunes of the people against the Roman consuls, or the demarchs against the senate of the Athenians; and perhaps, as things now are, such power as the three estates exercise in every realm when they hold their chief assemblies), I am so far from forbidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty [*pro officio intercedere*], the fierce licentiousness of kings, that, if they wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly common folk, I declare that their dissimulation involves nefarious perfidy, for by it they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people [*populi libertatem*], of which they know that they have been appointed protectors [*tutores*] by God's ordinance.¹²⁶⁸

Here the place for justified resistance is not simply at the point at which the tyrant has commanded impiety or injustice. It extends to the tyrant's oppression and violation of the people's liberty, of which the popular magistrates are appointed as protectors.

Calvin's argument here is pregnant with ambiguity and possibility, as suggestive as it is

¹²⁶⁷*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.56.

¹²⁶⁸*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.55.

definitive. He does not specify just who might qualify as popular magistrates, or whether the term might include various degrees of nobility. The three estates had some form of power in virtually every kingdom of Europe, but they had not met for thirty years when Calvin first published the *Institutes*. Still, Calvin's principle is clear. There is a place for resistance to tyranny on the part of those who occupy public office. Such officials can even legally empower citizens to take up the sword. "For when the ruler gives his command, private citizens receive public authority."¹²⁶⁹

The two kingdoms doctrine enabled Calvin to distinguish the mode of resistance appropriate to private persons subject to Christ's spiritual kingdom from the political obligations of magistrates within the political kingdom. Ordinarily Christians must be subject to magistrates in all areas not inconsistent with God's will, but within the political kingdom there is public authority to resist tyranny.

Commentary on Romans (1540)

Calvin's commentary on Romans 13, the classic Christian text regarding civil government, bears some of the same characteristics as his discussion of civil government in the 1536 *Institutes*. Most striking is its overwhelmingly secular emphasis. Calvin's discussion of Romans 13 does not contain a single statement, indeed, not even a hint, that magistrates should be concerned at all about piety or religion. The role of the magistrate is presented entirely in terms of justice towards human beings and the obligations of Christian love.¹²⁷⁰

Calvin's opening remarks indicate that he remained concerned with the problems that informed the *Institutes*. Some "tumultuous spirits" insisted that the establishment

¹²⁶⁹*Institutes* [1536], VI.C.53.

¹²⁷⁰See David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 197-206; Richard A. Muller, "Calvin, Beza, and the Exegetical History of Romans 13:1-7," *The Identity of Geneva: The Christian Commonwealth, 1564-1864* (ed. John B. Roney and Martin I. Klauber; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 39-56.

of the kingdom of Christ frees Christians from every form of human subjection, including civil government. In doing so they committed the same mistake as the Jews, who rejected the Messiah because they assumed that the kingdom of Christ would be like that of King David. For the early church the temptation was somewhat different. Early Christians found it difficult to imagine that political authorities openly hostile to Jesus' kingdom could hold any claim to their allegiance. But the temptation to question by what right (*quo iure*) governments derive their power is one that Christians must resist. It is enough that they exist, and have therefore been established by God. “For since it pleases God thus to govern [*gubernare*] the world, he who attempts to invert the order of God [*Dei ordinem*] and thus to resist God himself, despises his power [*potestatem*], since to despise his providence is to carry on war with him.”¹²⁷¹

Magistrates are not ordained by God in the same sense as are historical events such as a natural disaster or war. The foundation of civil power is not the use of force but the representative authority that has been delegated by God. Even if a legitimate government were to be reduced to such weakness that its subjects might violate its commands with impunity, they would still be obligated by conscience voluntarily to submit to its just laws. Though a product of the fall, coercive government is *good* in its essence, a blessing of God in which Christians should participate. On the other hand, this does not mean that whatever magistrates do is ordained by God. Tyranny is indeed an evil on the same level as is sickness or a natural disaster, powerful, but without moral legitimacy.¹²⁷²

1271Commentary on Romans 13:1 [1540]; T. H. L. Parker's *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (Leiden: Brill: 1981), 282. Cf. CO 49:248-249. “From many passages it is evident that the apostles had great difficulty in keeping the common people subject to the authority of magistrates and princes.” Nevertheless, though civil governments are firmly opposed to the cause of Christ, believers are not only to render them all honor, but “to observe peaceably the order of civil government, to submit to the laws, to obey magistrates.” Those who oppose such are “an enemy of equity and justice, and is therefore devoid of all humanity.” Commentary on Titus 3:1 [1550]: CO 52:425-426.

1272Commentary on Romans 13:1 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 282; Cf. CO 49:248-249.. In the later editions of the commentary on Romans he added, “For though tyrannies and unjust exercise of power [*tyrannides ac dominationes iniustae*], as they are full of

Calvin's discussion is guided by his emphasis on human wellbeing. Government is established because of its usefulness [*utilitate*] in preventing the confusion and destruction that threatens human life. Those who oppose it are “public enemies [*publicos ... hostes*] of the human race.” Even tyrannical regimes, sometimes providentially ordained by God as just judgment on human sin, preserve at least a modicum of society and order. Anarchy is far worse than tyranny.¹²⁷³ But magistrates are accountable for their use of power, both to God and to their subjects.

Magistrates ... are not to rule for their own interest, but for the public good [*publico bono*]. Nor are they endowed with unbridled power [*effraeni potentia*], but what is restricted to the wellbeing of their subjects [*subditorum saluti*]. In short, they are responsible to God and to men in the exercise of their power. For as they are deputed [*legati*] by God and do his business, they must give an account to him. And then the ministration [*ministerium*] which God has committed to them has a regard to the subjects [*subditos*], so they are therefore debtors [*debitores*] also to them.

The punishment carried out by magistrates is just when it reflects God's vengeance on the unjust, and they are “to inflict such punishment on their offenses as God's judgment requires [*et poenas sumere de eorum flagitiis, quas Dei iudicium requirit*].”¹²⁷⁴

Yet while Calvin emphasizes that it is God's judgment that magistrates exercise when they punish offenders, he also stresses that the form of this judgment is temporal and limited to matters of temporal concern. The whole discussion, he reminds his readers, pertains to *civil* government, not to a sacrilegious tyranny over *consciences*. The operative virtue in Romans 13, the normative virtue for both the exercise of, and obedience to, political power is *love*, not *piety*.¹²⁷⁵ The passage presents love for one's neighbor (Romans 13:8-10), the fulfillment of the law, as the foundation for submission

disorder, are not an ordained government [*ordinata gubernatione*], yet the right of government [*ius imperii*] is ordained [*ordinatem*] by God for the wellbeing of mankind [*generis salutem*].” Calvin, *Iohannis Calvinii Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 282.

¹²⁷³Commentary on Romans 13:3 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvinii Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 283; Cf. CO 49:250.

¹²⁷⁴Commentary on Romans 13:4 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvinii Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 284; Cf. CO 49:251.

¹²⁷⁵Commentary on Romans 13:5 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvinii Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 284-285; Cf. CO 49:251-252.

to civil government (Romans 13:1-7), and Calvin explicitly connects the two, observing that love is the basis for the civil order. “[F]or if you wish well to the good (and not to wish this is inhuman), you ought to strive that the laws and judgments may prevail, and that the administrators of the laws may have an obedient people, so that through them peace may be secured to all. He then who introduces anarchy violates love, for what immediately follows anarchy is the confusion of all things.”¹²⁷⁶ Love demands not only that a person refrain from harming his neighbor, but also that he secure his neighbor's rights.¹²⁷⁷

To be sure, the first table of the law is not entirely absent. Genuine love for one's neighbor, Calvin argues, is possible only when one has genuine love for God. But Calvin says nothing about a magistrate's responsibilities concerning piety, worship, or doctrine. His only explicit reference to the first table of the law is to declare that “the first table of the law, which contains what we owe to God, is not here referred to at all.”¹²⁷⁸ That doesn't mean Calvin didn't believe government had any responsibilities regarding religion in 1540. Clearly he did. But the omission of even a mention of such responsibilities in a lengthy discussion of this classic text of Protestant political theology, alongside his apologetic reference to and general disinterest in the topic in the 1536 *Institutes*, is telling. Like Luther, Calvin's early attitude toward civil government was

¹²⁷⁶Commentary on Romans 13:8 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 286; Cf. CO 49:252-253. In the preface to the commentary he observes that “there were then some unruly persons, who thought Christian liberty [*libertatem christianam*] could not exist without overturning the civil power [*civili potestate*]. But that Paul might not appear to impose on the Church any duties but those of love, he declares that this obedience is included in what love requires.” The apostle “prescribes the best way of exercising Christian liberty [*libertatis christianae*], by keeping within the boundaries of love and edification” (Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 9-10; Cf. CO 49:6).

¹²⁷⁷Commentary on Romans 13:10 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 287; Cf. CO 49:254. In the 1551 edition he added, “since magistrates are the guardians of peace and justice [*pacis et aequitatis sint praesides*], he who desires that his own right [*ius*] should be secured to everyone, and that all may live free from wrong [*iniuria*], ought to defend, as far as he can, the power of magistrates [*ordinem magistraruum*].” Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 287.

¹²⁷⁸Commentary on Romans 13:10 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 287; Cf. CO 49:254.

thoroughly secular in emphasis.

In sharp contrast to this characterization of civil government, however, is the definition Calvin offers of the kingdom of Christ. “Wherever then there is righteousness and peace and spiritual joy [*iustitia et pax et gaudium spirituale*], there the kingdom of God is complete in all its parts [*regnum Dei suis omnibus numeris est absolutum*]. It does not then consist of material things [*rebus ... corporeis*].”¹²⁷⁹ Jesus has been raised to authority over all earthly powers, but his kingdom is spiritual. “God does not now rule [*regnat*] otherwise in the world than by his gospel.”¹²⁸⁰ Christ prohibits Christians from desiring revenge even through legal procedures, calling them to leave such vengeance to God.¹²⁸¹ Christians are to pray earnestly for their enemies and to overcome evil with good. Magistrates are also subjects of this kingdom, but their service is a political vocation distinct from that of Christ's spiritual government.¹²⁸² Christian magistrates must carefully distinguish their judicial functions from any personal desires or claims. Christian virtue should shape their conduct, but their work of judgment is sharply distinguished from that of Christ's kingdom.

The Treatise Against the Anabaptists (1544)

In part due to a continued desire to distinguish evangelical theology from that of the Anabaptists, during the years after 1536 Calvin began to develop a sophisticated

¹²⁷⁹Commentary on Romans 14:18 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 301; Cf. CO 49:266.

¹²⁸⁰Commentary on Romans 14:11 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 298; Cf. CO 49:263.

¹²⁸¹“It is therefore superfluous to make a distinction here between public and private revenge [*publicam et privatam vindictam*], for he who, with a malevolent mind and desirous of revenge, seeks the help of a magistrate [*magistratus*], has no more excuse than when he devises means for self-revenge.”

Commentary on Romans 12:19 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 279; Cf. CO 49:247.

¹²⁸²Calvin observes that while Paul did not have had civil governors in view when he described 'governments' as one of the gifts that Christ has given to his church, his teaching bears implications for such Christian magistrates: “for no small solicitude is required from those who provide for the safety [*securitati*] of all, and no small diligence is needed for them who ought to watch day and night for the wellbeing of all [*salute omnium*].” Commentary on Romans 12:8 [1540]; Calvin, *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, 272; Cf. CO 49:239-240.

biblical theology, paying careful attention to the nature and significance of the relation between the old and new covenants. This work began to bear fruit in 1539, when two new chapters comparing the Old and New Testaments appeared in the second edition of the *Institutes*.¹²⁸³ It took years of commentaries, sermons, lectures, and successive editions of the *Institutes* to work out the implications of this biblical theology, but over time, I tprofoundly shaped the reformer's political theology. Some of the developments made their way into successive editions of the *Institutes*. Others did not.

That Calvin recognized the insufficiency of his refutation of the Anabaptists in the 1536 *Institutes* is evident from slight changes he made to the chapter on civil government in 1543.¹²⁸⁴ Most significantly, in a new paragraph Calvin addresses the objection that while war may have been lawful for Old Testament Israel, the New Testament provides no evidence that it is lawful for *Christians*. Calvin offers three arguments in response. First, he notes that nothing in the situation of the world has changed. The need for magistrates to protect the innocent and punish the unjust, sometimes by waging just war, remains. Nowhere in scripture is this magisterial task abrogated. The third argument he offers is drawn from Augustine, and simply notes that when approached by soldiers desiring to repent, John the Baptist did not tell them to give up their vocation.¹²⁸⁵

1283Balke argues that Calvin's controversies with the Anabaptists “occasioned much of the overall expansion of the *Institutes*” in 1539. In addition to the section on the covenant there was more on the Trinity, baptism, the visible church, scripture, oaths, sanctification, and the millennium. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 121.

1284Balke observes that while Calvin understood the difference between the Anabaptists and the Libertines, and between various stripes of Anabaptists, he tended to lump the latter together without paying much attention to the diversity within the movement. He also believed the Anabaptists were ignorant of theology and accused them of having subversive intentions. Calvin rarely engaged specific Anabaptists or specific Anabaptist writings. He operated within the polemical rules of his day, which allowed him to attribute anything one Anabaptist said to the group as a whole. See Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 9-12, 20, 30-34, 64-65, 330-331.

1285See the Commentary on Luke 3:12 [1555]; CO45:120-121. There Calvin insists, “without the sword, laws are dead, and legal judgments have no force or authority. Magistrates require not only an executioner, but other attendants, among whom are the military, without whose assistance and agency it is impossible to maintain peace. Still, the object must be considered. Princes must not allow themselves to sport with human blood, nor must soldiers give themselves up to cruelty, from a desire of gain, as if slaughter were their chief business: but both must be drawn to it by necessity, and by a regard to public advantage.”

But the second is most important because it lays down what for Calvin became a fundamental biblical theological principle. “Secondly, I say that an express declaration of this matter is not to be sought in the writings of the apostles, for their purpose is not to fashion a civil government, but to establish the spiritual kingdom of Christ” (4.20.12). For the Anabaptists the shift from Old Testament to New Testament signified a radical change in the form of life God demands of his people. For Calvin the discontinuity simply implies fulfillment; the need for civil government remains fundamentally the same.

These changes presaged Calvin's 1544 treatise against the Anabaptists, the *Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists*, which he wrote at the urging of Farel and others as a response to the Schleithem Confession.¹²⁸⁶ This treatise is broadly consistent with Calvin's earlier work, but its defense of traditional Christian views of civil government is articulated in terms of Calvin's developing biblical theology. The new sensitivity to biblical theology appears in the *Brief Instruction* in four ways. First, Calvin produces a whole new set of texts designed to show that scripture explicitly teaches the ordination of civil magistrates, not only under the old covenant, but even within the kingdom of Christ. The texts he introduces here, which eventually made their way into the *Institutes* in 1559, became the foundational texts invoked by Calvin over and over throughout his career to prove the sanctity of specifically Christian magistrates. Second, Calvin displays an increasingly biblical theological perspective as he engages a myriad of Anabaptist proof-texts with a growing awareness of his opponents' nuance and sophistication. Third, although in the 1536 *Institutes* Calvin offered a powerful polemical argument against the position that the Mosaic Law should be the law for all Christian governments, beginning in 1544 it is

¹²⁸⁶John Calvin, “Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists,” in Farley, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*; CO 7:45-142. Cf. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 177; Akira Demura, “From Zwingli to Calvin: A Comparative Study of Zwingli's *Elenchus* and Calvin's *Briève Instruction*,” *Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte* (ed. Alfred Schindler and Hans Stickelberger; Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 87-99.

evident that he is far more concerned with those who deny the *relevance* of the Torah for contemporary political government. Calvin never retracted his early arguments, but his shift of emphasis presaged a growing tendency to insist on the continued relevance of Mosaic proscriptions and penalties. Finally, whereas in the 1536 *Institutes*, as well as in the 1540 commentary on Romans, Calvin primarily describes the role of government in terms of the maintenance of peace and order for the public good, the 1544 *Brief Instruction* suggests a more distinctly Christian priority for civil government: the maintenance of the glory and honor of God.

The shift in attitude toward the Mosaic Law is more a matter of emphasis than of principle. Calvin always insisted that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus did not introduce a new law for Christians but merely clarified and restored the “true meaning of the law” once given by Moses. With regard to “true spiritual justice [*la vraye iustice spirituelle*]” and righteousness “before God,” in other words, “there exists a plain and complete guideline for it in the law of Moses, to which we need simply cling if we want to follow the right path.”¹²⁸⁷ This means that if the vocation of civil magistrate was sacred in the time of Moses, it could not have become immoral after the coming of Christ.

But Calvin was aware that there was an obvious rejoinder to this claim. “They will reply, possibly, that the civil government [*gouvernement civil*] of the people of Israel was a figure of the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ [*regne spirituel de Iesus Christ*] and lasted only until his coming.”¹²⁸⁸ Calvin's response is central to the way in which he approaches the Old Testament. He affirms that the Israelite nation was a figure of Christ's spiritual kingdom but denies that it can be reduced to that. The New Testament clearly teaches that the Levitical priesthood has come to an end, he agrees, but nowhere does it say that this is true of Israel's “external order [*police externe*],” that is to say, of “political government [*gouvernement politique*], which is a requirement among all

¹²⁸⁷Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 78; CO 7:81.

¹²⁸⁸Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 78; CO 7:81-82.

people.”¹²⁸⁹

Calvin's point here is not to advocate the particularities of Israel's government, but the fact of it.¹²⁹⁰ He marshals a set of passages from the prophetic writings to prove conclusively that civil government is a permanent order established by God, one that did not expire with the abrogation of the law. “For when the prophets speak of the kingdom of Jesus Christ [*regne de Iesus Christ*], it is written that kings will come to worship and pay homage to him. It is not said that they will abdicate their positions in order to become Christians, but rather, being appointed with royal dignity, they will be subject to Jesus Christ [*subiectz à Iesus Christ*] as to their sovereign Lord [*leur Seigneur souverain*].” The first key text is Psalm 2, in which David calls the kings of the earth to cease their rebellion and to “kiss the Son.” It is certain, Calvin argues, that David speaks here of “the kingdom of our Lord Jesus [*regne de nostre Seigneur Iesus*].”¹²⁹¹

In the second foundational text, Isaiah 49:23, the prophet predicts that “kings will become the foster fathers of the Christian church and that queens will nurse it with their breasts.” Calvin points out that not only does this text indicate the legitimacy and honor of magistrates in the kingdom, but it ordains them “protectors of his church [*protecteurs de son Eglise*].”¹²⁹² Later in the *Brief Instruction* he builds on this argument, explicitly rejecting the claim that “all the anxieties of princes are those of this world,” invoking Isaiah's “promising that earthly kings will serve in the heavenly and spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ [*les Roys terriens serviront à maintenir le Royaume celeste et spirituel de Iesus Christ*].”¹²⁹³

The third foundational text, 1 Timothy 2:2, is perhaps most important, because it

1289Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 78-79; CO 7:82.

1290Nevertheless, over the years Calvin would expand this argument to defend not simply the sanctity of civil government, but the obligation of government to punish crimes against true religion. See Chapter 8.

1291Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 79; CO 7:82.

1292Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 79; CO 7:82.

1293Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 91; CO 7:92.

is found in the New Testament. Here Paul urges Christians to pray for all people, including kings and others in positions of authority, “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” The reason for Paul’s command to Christians to pray for kings and magistrates, Calvin argues, is that it was so tempting for the early church to reject the legitimacy of rulers so openly hostile to the gospel. In his first reference to this text in his *Brief Instruction* Calvin emphasizes Paul’s reference to the universality of the gospel call, and to the lack of any indication that its universality is subject to the condition that magistrates resign their political office.¹²⁹⁴ Later in the *Brief Instruction* he returns to the same text, introducing the argument that Paul’s intent is not to describe “the principal end [*la principale fin*]” of magistrates as being to “maintain the peace of their subjects according to the flesh [*paix selon la chair*],” granting them the freedom to live a peaceful, quiet, and godly life, but that they might “ensure that God is served and honored in their countries and that each person leads a good and honest life.” Thus not only are political rulers legitimate authorities, but they are called “to take pain to see that the name of God is exalted [*le Nom de Dieu soit exalté*]” and to demonstrate “that they rule on his behalf [*qu’il regne par dessus eux*].”¹²⁹⁵ Over the years Calvin gave this text increasing weight as the one New Testament text that, in his view, affirmed the continuing responsibility of magistrates to defend and promote piety, worship, and doctrine.

In addition to his new set of texts, in the *Brief Instruction* Calvin also displays a new sensitivity to the nuances in the Anabaptist claims that magistrates are alien to the new covenant. Here again Calvin introduces arguments while only hinting at the the direction in which he would take them in the future. Most important is his argument concerning John 8, the story of the woman caught in adultery. Calvin breaks with the

¹²⁹⁴Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 81-82; CO 7:84-85.

¹²⁹⁵“*mais plustost de procurer que Dieu soit servy et honoré en leurs pais, et que chacun, mene bonne et honeste vie.*” Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 91; CO 7:92.

influential interpretation of Augustine, who argued that in freeing the woman from judgment Jesus proclaimed the supersession of the Torah's law of capital punishment by the grace of the new covenant.¹²⁹⁶ The reason why Jesus did not call for the woman to be put to death in accordance with the Mosaic Law was not that this law no longer binds Christians, Calvin argues, but that it was not Jesus' vocation to execute the sentence.

Now it is certain that our Lord did not want to change anything about the government or the civil order [*la police, ou de l'ordre civil*], but without reviling it in any way, he made his office, for which he came into the world, that of forgiving sins. For he was not sent by God his father in order to perform the office of an earthly judge [*iuge terrien*], but to ransom the world by his death and to testify, by the preaching of the gospel, to the grace of this redemption and similarly to all the benefits which we receive through him.¹²⁹⁷

Jesus' office was to proclaim the gospel, not to dispense corporal punishments, but this does not mean civil magistrates should do the same.

Calvin explains Jesus' refusal to arbitrate in a property dispute in Luke 12:14, and his avoidance of the people's attempt to make him king in John 6:15, similarly. Jesus refused to arbitrate because it was not in line with his vocation, but the world continues to need arbitration “in order to settle quarrels regarding possessions, inheritance, and other matters.” Rejecting such judicial processes, like overthrowing the “commonwealth of property,” would lead to chaos and injustice.¹²⁹⁸ The Jews wanted Jesus to assume a magisterial office because they looked for a temporal kingdom, but Jesus refused because “his kingdom is not carnal, nor of this world, but spiritual [*son Royaume n'est pas charnel, ny de ce monde: mais spirituel*], and consists in things that do not belong to the earth.”¹²⁹⁹ Jesus is lord of all kings, but his rule is expressed in terms of two kingdoms. “Jesus Christ himself is not a king, but he is the protector of all kingdoms, as

1296Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 193; CO 7:85. The Anabaptists claimed that in the church Christ had replaced the sword with excommunication, an argument Calvin dismissed on the basis that Jesus did not excommunicate this woman. Balke notes that Calvin entirely ignores the Anabaptist argument that the text, as well as Jesus' words “Go and sin no more,” implies the woman's repentance. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 193.

1297Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 83; CO 7:85-86. In contrast, Calvin notes that though Jesus also pardoned the thief on the cross he did not free him from his capital punishment.

1298Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 85; CO 7:87.

1299Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 86; CO 7:88.

he has founded and instituted them.”¹³⁰⁰ When Jesus forbade the disciples to lord it over one another, therefore, he did not mean that Christians may not become magistrates. Rather, distinguishing between political ministers and spiritual ministers, he taught that because “his kingdom is spiritual and ... does not consist in worldly pride, pomp, or lordly power, ... all the preeminence that his [spiritual] ministers and officers have is to serve.”¹³⁰¹

The 1544 *Brief Instruction* represents a new level of sophistication in Calvin's political theology. It illustrates Calvin's determination to be sensitive to the differences between the Old and New Testaments, even as he sought substantive guidance for contemporary politics in the laws and history of the Old Testament. Calvin decisively rejected the Anabaptist tendency to conflate the two kingdoms doctrine with the distinction between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. Yet like the 1536 *Institutes*, the *Brief Instruction* leaves undeveloped the precise relation between temporal Christian magistrates and Old Testament Israelite kings. It affirms that magistrates should be concerned about piety as well as justice, and about the honor of God as well as about secular affairs, but it leaves considerable ambiguity as to what this means in practice.

Exhortations to Civil Magistrates (1541-1552)

Other writings by Calvin from the 1540s confirm his expanding vision about the sort of care that magistrates are to provide for true religion. In a letter to the Geneva Council in February, 1541 Calvin urged the governing body to use all its means to ensure that the church was constituted and ruled according to the “order of our Lord [*l'ordre de nostre seigneur*].”¹³⁰² Calvin's attempt to have a confession of faith imposed by oath on

¹³⁰⁰Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 87; CO 7:88-89.

¹³⁰¹Calvin, “Brief Instruction,” 87; CO 7:89.

¹³⁰²See Letter to the Geneva Seignury, February 19, 1541; CO 11:158-159. Cf. Letter to the Geneva Seignury, July 18, 1543, where Calvin calls the council to keep the church “in good condition and

all Genevans, discussed in Chapter 2, indicates that he conceived of the well-ordered Christian city as *ideally* being co-terminous with the church. Hopfl observes, “No more complete fusion of civic and religious allegiance could be imagined; even residence at Geneva was to be impossible for all but professing evangelicals.”¹³⁰³ It is clear from a letter Calvin wrote to Farel concerning Servetus that by 1546 he supported the death penalty for individuals guilty of notorious heresy.¹³⁰⁴

By the late 1540s Calvin had a nuanced theory of just how magistrates are to care for the true religion, and he was enthusiastically exhorting foreign magistrates to carry it out. Throughout these years Calvin repeatedly exhorted foreign authorities to use their power to protect the church and advance the Reformed cause. Some of the most prominent examples of such exhortation are the various letters and dedications Calvin wrote to the Duke of Somerset, who was the Protector of England during the childhood of the boy king Edward VI, and to the king himself.¹³⁰⁵ On July 25, 1548, Calvin dedicated his commentary on Paul's epistles to Timothy to Somerset, presenting Somerset as a model of virtue, piety, and governance. He praised Somerset for

good order [*en bon estat et en bon ordre*].” CO 11:587-589. Later Calvin told the Geneva Council that it was its task to restrain slander against him “by the exercise of that sacred authority with which you are invested.” Dedication of the Commentary on John to the Council of Geneva [1553]; CO 47:vi. In a 1538 letter to Farel Calvin observes that certain Protestant cities put some Anabaptists to death. He does so without critique, referring to Anabaptism as a “plague” and a “pestilential doctrine.” Letter to Farel, September, 1538; CO 10:247. Cited in Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 129.

1303 Apart from any substantive theological argument, he adds, Calvin was guided by “inherited, medieval assumptions about the necessary identity of civic and religious allegiance.” Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 66.

1304 Letter to Farel, February 13, 1546; CO 12:282-284. In the same letter Calvin told Farel that he had testified to the judge that a man named Cartelier, who had been imprisoned because, at a dinner at his house he “raged against me with such insolence as to make it clear that he was not then in his right senses,” should be “proceeded against with the utmost rigor of the law.” Yet Calvin proclaimed his willingness to forgive Cartelier, and his frustration with those who “accuse me of cruelty, forsooth, because I so pertinaciously revenge my injuries.” A year and a half later Calvin wrote to Viret about writings in the possession of a man named Gruet, discovered by the Council of Geneva, which argued that civil government should only punish offenses against the state, and which mocked Jesus and of the Christian religion. Calvin did not offer his opinion about the argument, probably because it was obvious that he regarded it as deeply flawed. Letter to Viret, July 2, 1547; CO 12:545-548. In May 1550, he wholeheartedly supported the Council when it condemned and executed Gruet for blasphemy and for conspiracy against the city. Letter to the Seigneurie of Geneva, May, 1550; CO 13:568-570.

1305 On Calvin's letters to the various English rulers see Brandt B. Boeke, Boeke, Brandt B. “Calvin's Doctrine of Civil Government.” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 11 (1981): 61-67.

making the restoration of religion your principal object [*instaurandae religionis curam in primis susciperes*] ... for then do kingdoms enjoy solid prosperity and faithful guardianship, when he on whom they were founded and by whom they are preserved [*si is in quo fundata sunt et per quem servantur*] – the Son of God himself – rules over them [*praesideat*]. Thus you could not have established more firmly that of England than by banishing idols and setting up there the pure worship of God [*cultum erigendo*].¹³⁰⁶

Calvin tried to persuade Somerset that the health of an earthly kingdom is quite inseparable from the cause of Christ's spiritual kingdom within its bounds, a theme to which he would return over and over in his exhortations to the English leaders. By establishing the true religion within England's bounds, they would turn away the chastising hand of God. The result, “were all the nobility and those who administer justice to submit themselves in uprightness and all humility to this great king Jesus Christ [*la subiection de ce grand Roy Jesus Christ*],” would be the blessing of the whole kingdom.¹³⁰⁷ By restoring the church King Edward would “unquestionably” receive the blessing of God. “From this happy result England will derive inestimable advantage; and we, too, will congratulate you on your prosperity, and that of your whole kingdom.”¹³⁰⁸

Such encouragement marked a shift in emphasis from his earlier years, but in Calvin's mind it did not involve a change in principle with respect to the two kingdoms. An important function – and what Calvin increasingly saw as *the* most important function – of civil government was to establish, protect, and promote Christ's spiritual kingdom. True doctrine had to be restored, “and what is that but to place Christ on his throne? And this act, which in itself is excellent, is so much the more praiseworthy on account of the small number of rulers in the present day who own the subjection of their high rank to the spiritual scepter of Christ [*reperiuntur qui principatus sui insignia spirituali Christi sceptro submittant*].”¹³⁰⁹ On October 22, 1548 Calvin urged Somerset to

¹³⁰⁶Dedication of the Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy to Edward, Duke of Somerset, July 25, 1548; CO 13:16-18 (16-17).

¹³⁰⁷Letter to the Protector Somerset, October 22, 1548; CO 13:64-77 (69).

¹³⁰⁸Dedication of the first commentary on Isaiah to Edward VI, December 25, 1550; CO 13:669-674 (673).

¹³⁰⁹Dedication of the Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy; CO 13:17. This function explains why Calvin

advance God's cause “until you have established his kingdom [*estably son regne*] in as great perfection as is to be looked for in the world.” This involved “setting up the purity and right order [*la pureté et droicte reigle*] of his worship” and “establishing the doctrine of salvation [*faire que la doctrine de salut*], that it may there be faithfully proclaimed to all those who shall consent to hear it.” The government should oversee the enactment of a confession binding on the clergy, the drafting of a catechism for the instruction of the young, and the establishment of public liturgy.¹³¹⁰

To be sure, Calvin made it quite clear that neither Somerset nor the king could do the spiritual work of building Christ's kingdom. Christ only governs his kingdom and he does so through the ministry of the gospel, Calvin explains, and “herein you may also perceive why the gospel is called the kingdom of God [*Et voyla pourquoy aussi l'Evangile est appelle le Regne de Dieu*].” Although “the edicts and statutes of princes are good helps for advancing and upholding the state of Christianity [*bonnes aydes pour avancer et maintenir lestat de la chrestienté*], yet God is pleased to declare his sovereign power by this spiritual sword of his word, when it is made known by the pastors [*sa vertu souveraine en ce glayve spirituel de sa parolle, quand elle est annoncee par les pasteurs*].”¹³¹¹ “Thus ought earthly princes to rule and govern, serving Jesus Christ, and taking order that he may have his own sovereign authority over all [*son autorite souveraine sur tous*], both small and great.”¹³¹² The king was to display for his people an example of submission to the “spiritual scepter” of Christ's gospel, “to be a

could say that Paul's letters to Timothy, which say virtually nothing about civil government but much about the governance of the church, perfectly described what were to be Somerset's goals in restoring the church to its proper place and form.

1310 Letter to the Protector Somerset, October 22, 1548; CO 13:65.

1311 Letter to the Protector Somerset, October 22, 1548; CO 13:72 (*Et voyla pourquoy aussi l'Evangile est appelle le Regne de Dieu. Ainsi combien que les edictz et statutz des princes soient bonnes aydes pour avancer et maintenir lestat de la chrestienté, si est ce toutesfois que Dieu veult declairer sa vertu souveraine en ce glayve spirituel de sa parolle, quand elle est annoncee par les pasteurs*).

1312 Letter to the Protector Somerset, October 22, 1548; CO 13:69 (*Voyla comment les Princes terriens doivent regner servant a Jesus Christ et faisant quil ayt son autorite souveraine sur tous, tant petitz que grandz*). On July 25, 1551 Calvin wrote Somerset, chiding him for neglecting to ensure that the revenues of universities and cures were reaching men worthy of being trained as faithful pastors. Letter 281, July 25, 1551; CO 14:155-157.

Christian king, to serve as his lieutenant in ordering and maintaining the kingdom of Jesus Christ in England [*soyez Roy Chrestien, voyre que serviez de lieutenant, pour maintenir le Royaume de Iesus Christ en Angleterre*].”¹³¹³

While the kingdom of Christ consists in doctrine rather than in the power of the temporal sword, the sword had its role in defending the gospel against assailants like Rome and the Anabaptists. Both groups had to be “repressed by the sword [*reprimez par le glayve*] which is committed to you, since they not only attack the king, but strive with God, who has placed him upon a royal throne, and has committed to you the protection as well of his person as of his majesty.”¹³¹⁴ In a dedication to Edward VI, written on January 24, 1551, Calvin reminded the young king, “you must bear in mind that it is a duty which belongs to your majesty to vindicate from unworthy calumnies the true and genuine interpretation of Scripture, so that pure religion may flourish.”¹³¹⁵

At the same time, the people were to be called to obedience and social responsibility, so as to give no pretext for those who associated the Reformed teaching with immorality, social unrest, or disobedience to authority. Calvin accordingly urged Somerset to punish crimes – or sins – some people thought were of little significance: “whoredom and adultery, drunkenness, and blaspheming of the name of God.” Scripture teaches that blasphemy defiles a whole country, he argued, and even the pagans exercised more rigor in punishing adultery than did most Christian nations. “Be it remembered also, that whoremongers and drunkards are banished from the kingdom of God [*banniz du royaume de Dieu*] on such terms that we are forbidden to converse with them, whence it clearly follows that they ought not to be endured in the church.” To be sure, civil government is not to usurp the place of the bishops and curates responsible for exercising spiritual discipline in the church. “But in the authority where God has set you,

1313Letter to Edward VI, July 4, 1552; CO 14:342.

1314Letter to the Protector Somerset, October 22, 1548; CO 13:68-69.

1315Dedication of Commentary on James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude; January 24, 1551; CO 14:30-37 (37).

the chief responsibility [*la principale charge*] returns upon you, who have a special charge given you to set the others in motion, on purpose that every one discharge himself of duty, and diligently to look to it, that the order which shall have been established may be duly observed.”¹³¹⁶

Already in these early years, before he had begun his series of commentaries and lectures on the Old Testament, Calvin consistently presented faithful Israelite kings of old as the model for contemporary Christian magistrates. In his letter to Somerset of October 1548 he acknowledged that the social upheaval that accompanied the religious changes in England caused significant difficulty for Somerset and the king, but he urged him to continue the struggle in accord with the example of “good King Hezekiah,” who was constantly opposed in his heroic efforts to reform the church according to God’s law. No doubt God provided the example of Hezekiah to warn all princes and governors that “however earnest they may be in banishing idolatry and in promoting the true worship of God,” the road to peace and public tranquility would not be smooth.¹³¹⁷ There would always be those who fear too much change is impossible or will disrupt the social order. But there could be no compromise with regard to establishing “the spiritual governance of the church [*regime spirituel de l’Eglise*], which ought to be according to the ordinance of the word of God [*ordonne selon la parole de Dieu*].” Here there could be no turning aside, whether to “modify or curtail, advance or retreat, otherwise than he would have us.” Scripture does not praise those Old Testament kings who stopped short of removing all idols and places of such false worship.¹³¹⁸

In his dedication to King Edward VI in the first commentary on Isaiah, which he

1316Letter to the Protector Somerset, October 22, 1548; CO 13:76. Similar rigor was to be applied with respect to prayers for the dead or extreme unction.

1317Letter to the Protector Somerset, October 22, 1548; CO 13:66.

1318Letter to the Protector Somerset, October 22, 1548; CO 13:74-75. In a further dedication to Edward VI Calvin highlighted the example of King Josiah, urging Edward not to be satisfied with an incomplete reformation, but to continue purging England of impiety, superstition, and whatever liturgical trappings might distract from the simplicity of the gospel. Letter to the King of England, January, 1551; CO 14:38-41.

wrote in December 1550, Calvin set before Edward the example of the five Israelite kings under whom Isaiah had ministered, declaring that it was unnecessary for him to specify which of these kings he should imitate. Hezekiah “not only treated the holy man [Isaiah] with reverence, but modestly submitted to his doctrine like one of the common people, and, what is still more, endured patiently severe reproof when it was found necessary.” The relationship between Isaiah and Hezekiah was a model for the interaction of pastors and magistrates in Christendom. Kings were to assist pastors and protect them from assailants while at the same time submitting to the word faithfully proclaimed.¹³¹⁹ Calvin invoked Isaiah 49:23, one of those passages first set forward in his *Brief Instruction*, arguing that God calls kings to be “nursing-fathers of the church.” Indeed, the ruler in view in Isaiah 49:23 was none other than the pagan ruler Cyrus, emperor of Persia, yet “the prophet pronounces a woe on all kings and nations who refuse to give her [the church] their support.” The prophecy obligates all magistrates “to restore her to her former condition.”¹³²⁰ Moses commanded kings to keep and study their own copy of the law because, much more than private individuals, “kings have themselves need of this remarkable doctrine and are especially enjoined to defend and maintain it.”¹³²¹

Although I focus here on Calvin's interest in England, Calvin had similar interactions with other magistrates who he viewed as potential supporters of reformation. In his dedication to his commentary on Hebrews he praised King Sigismund Augustus of Poland for being “already engaged in the work of restoring the kingdom of Christ [*instaurandum Christi regnum*].” The happiness of the Polish kingdom, he urged, would “only be solid, when it adopts Christ as its chief ruler and governor [*praesidem summumque gubernatorem*], so that it may be defended by his safeguard and protection, for to submit your scepter to him [*sceptrum tuum submittere*]

1319Dedication of the first commentary on Isaiah to Edward VI, December 25, 1550; CO 13:669-670.

1320Dedication of the first commentary on Isaiah to Edward VI, December 25, 1550; CO 13:672-673.

1321Thus “the Lord has assigned to his law a sacred habitation in their palaces.” Dedication of the Commentary on James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude; January 24, 1551; CO 14:37.

is not inconsistent with that elevation in which you are placed, but it would be far more glorious than all the triumphs of the world.” It is by Christ that kings are raised to their high position, and it is only appropriate that kings help to establish his throne such that “his celestial voice becomes the only rule for living and dying both to the highest and to the lowest.”¹³²² Like Kings Hezekiah and Josiah, the Polish king was to ensure that “the whole of religion be formed according to the infallible rule of his holy truth” in order that “Christ may take an entire possession of his own kingdom.”¹³²³

Conclusion

In his early writings Calvin worked out the implications of the two kingdoms doctrine for civil government, articulating principles that always remained definitive for his political theology. He argued that God has granted civil government the sword for the purpose of restraining evil during this temporal age. He defended Christian participation in civil government against the Anabaptists, while resisting at the same time the argument that the Mosaic law is normative for Christian politics. He consistently used two kingdoms logic when discussing an array of practical matters central to civil government, such as war, lawsuits, forms of government, obedience to authority, and resistance to tyranny. At the same time, Calvin's emphases shifted over the years. In the 1536 *Institutes* and the 1540 commentary on Romans he emphasized government's secular responsibilities. Over the years, however, he began to emphasize government's obligation to promote and defend the true religion. At the same time, he increasingly turned to the Old Testament as a source for his political theology. In the years to come, his two kingdoms theology would shape the ways in which he continued to develop both of these lines of thought.

¹³²²Dedication of the Commentary on Hebrews [1549] to , May 23, 1549, CO 13:281-286 (282). The king could do this knowing that the true work of “restoring and establishing the church” is accomplished by God, and that his efforts would therefore be sure to meet with success (286).

¹³²³Dedication to the Commentary on Hebrews; CO 13:283.

CHAPTER 7

COVENANT AND LAW

In 1539 Calvin introduced into the *Institutes* a lengthy discussion of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments (or covenants), or between the law and the gospel (2.11). This covenant theology forms a crucial part of the foundation of Calvin's political theology because it dictates his theological understanding of the relationship between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament kingdom of Christ, including the church. That understanding, in turn, informs Calvin's view of the relevance of the nation of Israel and the Mosaic law for the politics of Christendom. For Calvin the Mosaic law, including the Ten Commandments, was first and foremost a covenantal document. Its commands, promises, and threats, and the sense in which they do or do not bind Christians, could not be understood apart from the nature of the covenant(s) of which it was an expression. To properly understand Calvin's view of the relevance of Old Testament law for politics, therefore, it is essential to understand his covenant theology.

Like Zwingli and Bullinger, Calvin approached covenant theology as a means of refuting the Anabaptist tendency to reject the direct relevance of the Old Testament for Christians. Like Bullinger, Calvin insisted that all of the major covenants of scripture, including the Mosaic (i.e., the law), ultimately represent one eternal gracious covenant between God and human beings, a covenant rooted in God's promises to Adam and Even after the fall, formally established with Abraham, and fulfilled in Christ. This continuity within the one eternal covenant extends to the law's authoritative revelation of the moral law that is also taught in nature. But Calvin agreed with the Anabaptists that there are important differences between the Old and New Testaments, and he explained many of these differences by appealing to the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accidents. The substance of the covenant always remains the same, he argued, but it varies throughout salvation history in its administration and forms. As he put it in his

commentary on Galatians, “the difference between us and the ancient fathers lies in accidents [*accidentibus*], not in substance [*substantia*]. In all the leading characters of the testament or covenant we agree: the ceremonies and form of government [*regimen*], in which we differ, are mere additions.”¹³²⁴

The differences Calvin identified between the covenants, or between the law and the gospel, are highly significant for his political theology and they correspond to a certain extent to his two kingdoms distinction. Most fundamentally, Israelite worship and polity was outward and typological, while in the new covenant era the church's worship and government are inward and spiritual. In addition, the Mosaic Covenant contained a narrowly legal dimension of judgment that is distinct from the eternal gracious covenant and contrary in principle to the gracious character of the gospel. With respect to this peculiar dimension, Calvin argued, the Mosaic covenant was abolished. Both of these differences led him to reject, at least in principle, the claim that Israel and its civil law could be embraced as inviolable norms for Christian politics. Insofar as Israel's government and law reflected the timeless principles of natural law (i.e., insofar as it was an institution of the *political* kingdom), it could serve as an example for temporal Christian polities, but insofar as Israel was a type of the spiritual kingdom of Christ (i.e., insofar as it reflected Christ's *spiritual* kingdom), it could not serve as such a model.¹³²⁵

Calvin's covenant theology is complex, with rich implications for his soteriology and his doctrine of God, but these implications are outside of the scope of this dissertation.¹³²⁶ In this chapter I focus narrowly on Calvin's covenant theology as it

¹³²⁴Commentary on Galatians 4:1 [1548]; CO 50:224-225.

¹³²⁵In this respect Calvin's view of law and gospel lies in close continuity with that of Luther, who also insisted that the Mosaic law only binds Christians insofar as it testifies to natural law. For a typology of Luther's view of law see Johannes Heckel, *Lex Charitatis: A Juristic Disquisition on Law in the Theology of Martin Luther* (trans. Gottfried G. Krodel; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010 [1973]).

¹³²⁶Much of the work on Calvin's covenant theology focuses on its similarities and differences to that of Zwingli and Bullinger, its relation to later Reformed covenant theology, and its relation to the doctrine of predestination. For a clear demonstration that Calvin's covenant theology is not significantly different from that of Zwingli and Bullinger see Lyle D. Bierma, “Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century:

informs his account of the law. I begin by outlining Calvin's understanding of the substantive unity among the covenants. I then turn to the differences as Calvin understood them, both those that can be described as differences of *form* within the one covenant of grace, and the fundamental difference of *substance* between the narrow legal covenant and the one eternal covenant. I conclude with a brief discussion of the sense in which Calvin believed the politics of Israel continues to serve as a model for Christian polities.

The Covenant: One in Substance

Calvin's teaching on the unity of the covenant was targeted at “certain madmen of the Anabaptist sect, who regard the Israelites as nothing but a herd of swine.” Calvin charged Servetus in particular with believing that the Israelites had no “hope of heavenly immortality” (2.10.1).¹³²⁷ Such views flew in the face of Calvin's understanding of God's eternal purpose for human beings: fellowship with God in his eternal kingdom. Calvin stresses three fundamental points in this regard. First, “carnal prosperity and happiness did not constitute the goal set before the Jews to which they were to aspire. Rather, they were adopted into the hope of immortality.” Second, the Jews were saved by the mercy of God alone, not by works. Third, the Israelites “knew Christ as Mediator, through whom they were joined to God and were to share in his promises” (2.10.2). The first point is particularly important here. All that is 'external' in the Old Testament, Calvin argues, whether pertaining to worship or to Israel's civil affairs, must be distinguished from the

Two Traditions?,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 304-321. Cf. Peter Alan Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). On the relation to predestination see Anthony Hoekema, “The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 2 (1967): 133-161; M. Eugene Osterhaven, “Calvin on the Covenant,” *Readings in Calvin's Theology* (ed. Donald McKim; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 89-106.

1327In his commentary on Romans 15:8 Calvin complains about “some fanatical heads” who seek to “regard the promises of the Old Testament as temporal [*carne*] and to confine them to the present world [*praesentem mundum*].” He maintains that “the old covenant was in reality spiritual, though it was annexed [*annexum*] to earthly types [*terrenis figuris*].” Commentary on Romans 15:8 [1556]; CO 49:273.

kingdom itself. “Surely the gospel does not confine men's hearts to delight in the present life, but lifts them to the hope of immortality. It does not fasten them to earthly pleasures, but by announcing a hope that rests in heaven it, so to speak, transports them thither.” Old Testament saints, like Christians, looked upward and forward to humanity's spiritual purpose. “But if the doctrine of the gospel is spiritual, and gives us access to the possession of incorruptible life, let us not think that those to whom it had been promised and announced omitted and neglected the care of the soul, and sought after fleshly pleasures like stupid beasts.” The goal of the kingdom of Israel, like that of creation, was always its consummation in the “future life” (2.10.3).¹³²⁸

In fact, Calvin argues, faithful Israelites “entered into God's immortal kingdom,” for “theirs was a real participation in God, which cannot be without the blessing of eternal life” (2.10.7). The heart of the covenant is God's promise, “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (2.10.8). God promised not simply that he would be the God to his people for a time, but that he would be their God forever, a promise which extends “beyond the limits of earthly life” and to a “future life.” That is why God describes himself in the Old Testament as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even after those patriarchs had died, as Jesus himself explained. “Why? Was this not an absurd title if they had perished? Then it would have been as if he had said: 'I am the God of those who do not exist'” (2.10.9). What is more, the patriarchs would have been the “most miserable of all men if they were happy in this life only.” Unless they had “a better life elsewhere” such that they looked beyond the “earthly life, to meditate upon the heavenly,” there was

¹³²⁸This reasoning guides Calvin's arguments on the second and third points as well. If it is eternal life to which the Old Testament always pointed, then salvation must be found through the mercy of Christ alone (2.10.4). In a lengthy discussion of John 6:49, 54 Calvin writes that in sending the Israelites manna from heaven God was not simply feeding them physically, but was presenting “a spiritual mystery, to foreshadow the spiritual quickening we have in Christ.” He adds, “From this we can conclude with full certainty that the Lord not only communicated to the Jews the same promises of eternal and heavenly life as he now deigns to give us, but also sealed them with truly spiritual sacraments” (2.10.6). “For if something spiritual had not been set forth to which they were to direct their course, the Jews would have frittered away their effort in those matters, just as the Gentiles did in their trifles. Irreligious men ... do not pay attention to the purpose of the law; if the forms of the law be separated from its end, one must condemn it as vanity” (2.7.1).

no reason for them to trust God's promises (2.10.10). Through their faithfulness in the midst of such misery the patriarchs “testified that they hoped to receive the fruit of the promise only after death” (2.10.13).

Though he skips over it in the *Institutes*, in his commentaries Calvin stresses that the Sinai, or Mosaic, covenant was also an administration of the one eternal covenant. As he puts it in his comments on Romans 9:4, “the law was nothing more than a renewal of the covenant, and more fully sanctioned the remembrance of it.”¹³²⁹ The Sinai covenant was “the covenant of gratuitous adoption.” Its ceremonial confirmation in blood was “the blood of Christ in type and shadow.”¹³³⁰ When the people confidently declared, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do,” Calvin insists, the “faithful among them” made the promise only based on the presupposition of God's help and gracious reconciliation, as they looked beyond the law, to Christ. “This was not indeed the proper office of the Law, to incline men's hearts to the obedience of righteousness, as also under the Law there was no true and real expiation to wash away the guilt of sins. But the office of the Law was to lead men step by step to Christ, that they might seek of him pardon and the Spirit of regeneration.”¹³³¹

Calvin makes a similar argument about David, in whom “eternal life and Christ's kingdom are revealed in the fullest splendor.” Amid repeated testimonies of suffering and misery, David consistently expressed his faith that God's mercy to his people would endure. As Calvin sums up Psalm 102:25-28, “If the godly do not cease to be established before the Lord despite the destruction of heaven and earth, it follows that their salvation is joined to God's eternity” (2.10.15). David was confident that “whatever might happen in the world, the time would nevertheless come when God's promises would be fulfilled.” In the long run the wicked would perish and the righteous would prosper,

1329Commentary on Romans 9:4 [1556]; CO 49:173.

1330Commentary on Exodus 24:5 [1563]; CO 25:75.

1331Commentary on Exodus 24:5 [1563]; CO 25:76.

“when this world of appearances is overturned by the manifestation of God's kingdom.”

That kingdom would bring the “revelation of the new life that follows the end of the present age” (2.10.17).

Drawing similar arguments from scripture's testimony about Job, Samuel, and the prophets, Calvin argues that throughout the Old Testament God progressively revealed the truth that one day Christ's kingdom would be consummated in the whole earth. Thus

whenever the prophets recount the believing people's blessedness, hardly the least trace of which is discerned in the present life, let them take refuge in this distinction: the better to commend God's goodness, the prophets represented it for the people under the lineaments, so to speak, of temporal benefits. But they painted a portrait such as to lift up the minds of the people above the earth, above the elements of the world and the perishing age, and that would of necessity arouse them to ponder the happiness of the spiritual life to come (2.10.20).

For Calvin this is a fundamental principle of Old Testament interpretation. The old covenant “had not been limited to earthly things, but contained a promise of spiritual and eternal life.” Now that Christ has come, to cling to earthly pomp and power resembles “the obtuseness of the whole Jewish nation today in awaiting the Messiah's earthly kingdom” (2.11.23).¹³³²

Calvin's understanding of the continuity of substance between the Old and New Testaments seems to presuppose the distinction between the spiritual kingdom that pertains to the soul and to eternal life, and the political kingdom that pertains merely to the body and to the present life. The continuity of the covenant does not lie in its outward forms, whether ceremonial or political, but in its spiritual and eschatological substance.

¹³³²But Calvin refused to reduce the prophecies' meaning to the spiritual kingdom. He maintains that the prophecies are “improperly restricted by Christians to the spiritual redemption which we obtain through Christ; for we must begin with the deliverance which was wrought under Cyrus, and bring it down to our own time.” Commentary on Isaiah 52:10 (1559); CO 37:249-250. Christian interpreters have been “too rigid,” having “too violently turned the prophecies to spiritual redemption.” Commentary on Jeremiah 23:7-8 (1563); CO 38:414-415.

The Old and New Covenants: Differences

Calvin's account of the differences between the Old and New Testament, or between law and gospel, can be categorized into two different types: 1) differences of *form* between the Mosaic and new administrations of the one eternal covenant, both of them expressions of the gospel, and 2) differences in principle between the Mosaic law in its peculiar office of judgment and the eternal covenant of grace.¹³³³ As Peter Lillback puts it, “Calvin speaks of the covenant of the law as both part of the covenant of grace and distinct from it. This seeming contradiction is solved when one considers that the covenant of the law in both the broad and narrow senses is the same in administration (i.e., under Moses) yet different in substance (i.e., human merit vs. the righteousness of Christ).”¹³³⁴ Here I consider first the differences of form between the old and new covenants, then the difference in substance between the narrow covenant of law and the covenant of grace.

¹³³³In his excellent book *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, I. John Hesselink helpfully categorizes the differences that Calvin draws between the Old and New Testaments in 2.11 into two types. The first type involves differences of form, degree, or measure of fulfillment. The second type involves an essentially antithetical contrast. I. John Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 170-171. Harms stresses the first type as the primary difference. “For Calvin it appears to be a difference of degree, not substance – quantity, not quality – in the way God works more liberally (*liberalius*) in those who live in the restored new church (*nova ecclesia restituerat*) under the new covenant when compared with the law.” Frederik A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody: The Church, A History of Divine Protection: A Study of John Calvin's Ecclesiology Based on his Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 105. Cf. 112-114.

¹³³⁴Lillback recognizes that in his commentary on Galatians Calvin is comparing not the form of the old covenant and the form of the new, but “the covenant of the law in the narrow sense and the covenant of grace in the broad sense.” Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 160. Lillback observes that all five of Calvin's differences in 2.11 “relate only to the externals and not to the substance of the covenant” (151). He writes, “First Calvin notes, one must recognize what the law is in itself – a rule of righteousness that only speaks to the ear as 'letter' since it does not have the Spirit. But secondly, Calvin adds, this distinction ceases once the spirit is joined with the law. It is then no longer letter, but actually *spirit*, or the gospel itself... In light of this, Moses can be considered in two difference [*sic*] senses. If he is considered without Christ in his *narrow* office as lawgiver, his message was only letter that produced death. But if Moses is considered in his whole teaching, he is a preacher of the gospel which is found in the New Covenant” (154). “As we have seen, Calvin employs a twofold use of the covenant of the 'law.' It can be used to describe the Mosaic economy either in the strict Pauline sense of self-congratulatory works of merit, or in the broad sense of the rule of living well which is coupled with God's gracious enablement and the Messiah's forgiveness. In the first, there is a profound difference between law and gospel. In the second, however, there is no longer any difference between the law and gospel since the Spirit has been added to the law along with Christ's forgiveness” (158). In this respect, “The gospel covenant has now abolished the law covenant” (161).

Before doing so, however, it is important to recognize that the exegetically sensitive Calvin used the word 'law' in a range of different ways, just as does scripture itself. Most prominently, in Calvin's writings law can refer 1) to the old covenant in general (i.e., the doctrine of the Old Testament, or the Torah, the 'broad' law) especially in contrast to the new covenant, then designated as the 'gospel'; 2) more narrowly to the Mosaic covenant as ratified at Sinai (i.e., what is peculiar to Moses), with all its commandments, ceremonies, and threats; and 3) to God's timeless moral will represented in the Ten Commandments, or natural law (i.e., the moral law). In addition, in somewhat of an anomaly, with respect to the second category (i.e., what is peculiar to Moses) Calvin sometimes includes the ceremonies and sacrifices that are types of Christ (2a), whereas other times he focuses more narrowly on the principle of works as the basis for reward and punishment (i.e., the narrow law) (2b). In both of these cases Calvin can characterize the Mosaic covenant as a distinctive covenant, but when he does so with respect to the ceremonies and sacrifices (#2a) he is speaking of a distinction of form between administrations of the covenant of grace, whereas when he does so with respect to the narrow law (#2b) he is speaking of a distinction of principle between the legal covenant and the one covenant of grace. Identifying which of these meanings Calvin is using is sometimes difficult, but it is essential to understanding his meaning.¹³³⁵

Differences of Form

The basic difference between the form of the old covenant (the law) and the form of the new covenant (the gospel) is that the former was designed to lead the people of Israel through outward types and shadows, "as by steps," to Christ, whereas in the latter Christ himself is clearly present. Perhaps the *locus classicus* for this concept is Calvin's

¹³³⁵Calvin also uses the words for 'covenant' in different ways. Typically he uses the words *foedus* or *pactum* to refer to the one eternal covenant. He does not like using these words with reference to the Mosaic administration more narrowly considered, but recognizing that scripture often does so, he follows its lead on numerous occasions, usually using the word *pactum*.

commentary on Jeremiah 31:31-34. Calvin grounds the discussion with a reminder that the law in general (#1) is “a rule of the most perfect doctrine.”¹³³⁶ He then argues that the Sinai covenant was not a new covenant between God and Israel, but simply a ratification of the covenant had made with Abraham some 400 years before. God, he writes, “had already made his covenant with Abraham, and the Law [#2] was a confirmation of that covenant. As then the law depended on that covenant which God made with his servant Abraham, it follows that God could never have made a new, that is, a contrary or a different covenant. For whence do we derive our hope of salvation, except from that blessed seed promised to Abraham?” Here Calvin is not saying that the law, as a new covenant, could not annul or replace the earlier Abrahamic covenant. Rather, he is saying that the law is not a new covenant at all. “These things no doubt sufficiently show that God has never made any other covenant than that which he made formerly with Abraham, and at length confirmed by the hand of Moses.”¹³³⁷

Why then does Jeremiah call it the “*new covenant*”? The reason, Calvin declares, is because of the change in the covenant's *form*. “But the substance remains the same. By substance I understand the doctrine; for God in the gospel brings forward nothing but what the law [#1] contains... For he has included in the law the rule of a perfect life, and has also shown what is the way of salvation, and by types and figures led the people to Christ, so that the remission of sin is there clearly made manifest, and whatever is necessary to be known.”¹³³⁸ A little later he repeats the central point: “the newness ... was

¹³³⁶Commentary on Jeremiah 31:31-32 [1563]; CO 38:686-687.

¹³³⁷“God is never inconsistent with himself.” Commentary on Jeremiah 31:31-32 [1563]; CO 38:688. In Calvin's view, while the Sinai Covenant therefore contained a covenanted works principle, which principle Paul usually has in view when he describes the law, that principle was accidental to its true nature. Despite conceivably strong exegetical warrant, Calvin declines to interpret Jeremiah 31 through the lens of the sharp Pauline distinction between the law and the covenant made with Abraham.

¹³³⁸Commentary on Jeremiah 31:31-32 [1563]; CO 38:688. Calvin admits that when Jeremiah says that the new covenant will not be like the one made with their fathers, he is contrasting the new covenant with the law (#2). For the Jews, he says, it was inconceivable that anything could be better than the Mosaic law. The contrast is therefore designed to demonstrate that what God had in store for the people was “far more excellent.” Commentary on Jeremiah 31:31-32 [1563]; CO 38:689-690. In his commentary on Ezekiel 16:61 he explains that “a contrast must be understood between the people's covenant and God's.” The people had broken the covenant and therefore rendered it vain. Yet God

not so as to the substance, but as to the form only: for God does not say here, 'I will give you another law,' but I will write my law, that is, the same law, which had formerly been delivered to the fathers. He then does not promise anything different as to the essence of the doctrine, but he makes the difference to be in the form only."¹³³⁹ In short, the substance of the law (#1) continues, but its form (#2) does not.

Why was a new covenant necessary? Because a remedy had to be found for the sin that had led to the breakdown of the old covenant. This remedy is the forgiveness of sins and the writing of the law on human hearts. To be sure, these blessings were not alien to Israel, a point Calvin never tires of emphasizing. But they had nevertheless been weaker, obscured by types and shadows, and experienced as promises rather than as realities. The blessings to which faithful Israelites looked forward were alien to the form of the law (#2). "Therefore, if the law is regarded in itself [#2], the promise in the new covenant will not be found in it ... We see then that the difference which Jeremiah points out was really true; and yet the new covenant so flowed from the old, that it was almost the same in substance [#1], while distinguished in form [#2]."¹³⁴⁰

It is under this general rubric of substance and form that in *Institutes* 2.11 Calvin outlines five differences between the old and new covenants.

The first difference is that through *earthly* promises and blessings the Old Testament saints were pointed to *spiritual* or *eternal* realities. The contrast here is not between material and immaterial realities. Rather, it is between temporal blessings and those of the coming kingdom. Old Testament believers participated in the spiritual kingdom of Christ through earthly types, looking beyond their present earthly

remained faithful "and so he again erected his own covenant towards them." The new covenant is therefore nothing other than the old covenant, or the law, renewed. Indeed, Calvin can go so far as to say that "men had so revolted from the faith that God was free; nay, the covenant itself had no force, and lost its effect through their perfidy." For this reason God had to make a new covenant, different in form from the old, yet in fulfillment of the old's promises. "[I]t follows that our safety is not to be sought otherwise than in that covenant which God established with Abraham; but afterwards the same covenant was ratified by the hand of Moses" (Commentary on Ezekiel 16:61 [1565]; CO 40:395.).
 1339Commentary on Jeremiah 31:33 [1563]; CO 38:691.

1340Commentary on Ezekiel 16:61 [1565]; CO 40:396.

inheritance to a future heavenly one.

[T]he Lord of old willed that his people direct and elevate their minds to the heavenly heritage; yet, to nourish them better in this hope, he displayed it for them to see and, so to speak, taste, under earthly benefits. But now that the gospel has more plainly and clearly revealed the grace of the future life, the Lord leads our minds to meditate upon it directly, laying aside the lower mode of training that he used with the Israelites (2.11.1).

To be sure, Christians also await the fullness of the kingdom. But they participate in it directly in a way that the Israelites did not. Faithful Israelites always looked beyond the “elements of this world” such as the land of Canaan to that of which it was a symbol, the future “heavenly inheritance” of the “age to come” (2.11.2). The “future and eternal happiness” was “signified and figured under earthly benefits, [and] the gravity of spiritual death under physical punishments” (2.11.3).

In his commentary on Genesis Calvin points out that the text consistently speaks of the promises to the patriarchs in earthly terms. For instance, Isaac seems to desire earthly promises for his son, not even mentioning the hope of an eternal inheritance. Still, Calvin says, God used such means to point them to a better inheritance. “[T]he Lord did not formerly set the hope of the future inheritance plainly before the eyes of the fathers (as he now calls and raises us directly towards heaven), but he led them as by a circuitous course. Thus he appointed the land of Canaan as a mirror and pledge to them of the celestial inheritance.”¹³⁴¹

The same was true of the Davidic kingdom. “Whenever the prophets speak of the restoration of the church, they direct all the hope of believers to the kingdom of

¹³⁴¹His intent was that, “being aided by such helps, according to the time in which they lived, they might by degrees rise towards heaven; for since Christ, the first-fruits of those who rise again, and the author of the eternal and incorruptible life, had not yet been manifested, his spiritual kingdom was, in this way, shadowed forth under figures only.” Commentary on Genesis 27:27 [1554]; CO 23:378. “It therefore follow, that neither wealth, nor power, nor any other temporal gift, is promised to the sons of the Spirit, but an eternal blessing, which is possessed only by hope, in this world” (17:20; CO 23:246-247). Jacob's prophecy at the end of Genesis clearly demonstrated that “the kingdom ... shall be no common kingdom, because from it, at length, shall proceed the fullness of the promised benediction” (49:10; CO 23:598-599). Indeed “the land of Canaan was not otherwise so much valued except for this reason, because it was an image and a symbol of the spiritual inheritance.” Commentary on Hebrews 4:8 [1549]; CO 55:47. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:1 [1546]; CO 49:451-453.

David.”¹³⁴² But David's sins against Bathsheba and Uriah should have taught them that David's was a temporal kingdom,¹³⁴³ “a sort of prelude of the everlasting kingdom which was to be manifested at the proper time.”¹³⁴⁴ Likewise, the psalms speak of David winning an inheritance over the heathen, and while David did win some battles over Israel's enemies, “how little was this in comparison with the amplitude of Christ's kingdom, which extends from the east to the west?”¹³⁴⁵ The kingdom of Solomon represented the high point in Israel's history, but it was small compared to other kingdoms and it fell apart immediately after his death. In contrast, Christ's kingdom, of which David's and Solomon's was a type, is universal and eternal.¹³⁴⁶

Yet the Jews often missed this truth, focusing on the earthly realities in a way that left them deprived of the “spiritual Jerusalem.”¹³⁴⁷ Indeed, that is the error of the Jews all the way to the present day. “For the Jews, in consequence of having imagined to themselves a king who had been suggested to them by their own senses, rejected Christ crucified, because they reckoned it absurd to believe in him; while we regard it as the best and highest reason for believing, that he voluntarily subjected himself on our account to the ignominy of the cross.”¹³⁴⁸ The kingdom was not here or there, to be observed with signs, Jesus told the Pharisees. On the contrary, “That restoration of the Church ... must be looked for within; for, by quickening his elect into a heavenly newness of life, he establishes his kingdom within them.” The point here is not to emphasize the *immateriality* of the kingdom, but its *futurity*. Calvin makes this point explicitly: “It must be observed, however, that Christ speaks only of the beginnings of the kingdom of God; for we now begin to be formed anew by the Spirit after the image of God, in order

1342Commentary on Luke 1:32 [1555]; CO 45:28.

1343Commentary on Matthew 1:6 [1555]; CO 45:60.

1344Commentary on John 12:13 [1553]; CO 47:282. Cf. Commentary on Genesis 49:10 [1554]; CO 23:598-599; Commentary on Isaiah 9:7 [1559]; CO 36:198-199.

1345Commentary on Hebrews 1:5 [1549]; CO 55:14.

1346Commentary on Hebrews 1:5 [1549]; CO 55:15-16. Cf. Commentary on Romans 3:18 [1556]; CO 49:54; Commentary on Acts 2:34 [1552]; CO 48:48-49.

1347Commentary on Galatians 4:27 [1548]; CO 49:240.

1348Commentary on Matthew 27:42 [1555]; CO 45:771.

that our entire renovation, and that of the whole world, may afterwards follow in due time.”¹³⁴⁹

Calvin stresses the importance of reading the prophets through this exegetical lens. The prophets intentionally described Christ's kingdom in metaphorical, typological or analogical terms, accommodating themselves to the people's weakness by using images they could understand to communicate spiritual truths. “[W]e must grasp this analogy in the prophets: when they discuss Christ's Kingdom, they set forth God's outward blessings as figures of spiritual goods” (3.13.4). They used figures of earthly prosperity such as wine, oil, and wheat to point to something better and spiritual: “[W]hat is spiritual is conveyed under these figures, that the people might, by degrees, ascend to the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which was as yet involved in shadows and obscurity.”¹³⁵⁰ This principle is one of the most important elements of Calvin's exegetical method. The prophets, he writes,

describe the kingdom of Christ in a way suitable to the comprehension of a rude people, and hence they set before them external images; for when Christ's kingdom is the subject, mention is made of gold, of silver, of every kind of wealth, and also of great splendor and of great power, for we know that what is beyond and above the world cannot be immediately comprehended by the human mind... As, then, the kingdom of Christ is spiritual and celestial, it cannot be comprehended by human minds, except he raises up our thoughts, as he does, by degrees. This, then, is the reason why the prophets have set forth the kingdom of Christ by comparing it to earthly kingdoms.¹³⁵¹

1349Thus “they are greatly mistaken who seek with the eyes of the flesh the kingdom of God, which is in no respect carnal or earthly, for it is nothing else than the inward and spiritual renewal of the soul.” Commentary on Luke 17:20 [1555]; CO 45:424-425. “The Jews, who dream of an earthly kingdom of Christ, interpret all this in a carnal sense, and apply it to I know not what external power. But they ought rather to judge of it according to the nature of Christ's kingdom.” Commentary on Isaiah 11:14 [1559]; CO 36:248. Christians, in contrast, know that “we must continually fight under the cross.”

1350Commentary on Jeremiah 31:12 [1563]; CO 38:661-662. In this way the prophets “enable us to perceive the analogy between things earthly and visible [on the one hand], and that spiritual blessedness which Christ has afforded to us and which we now possess through hope in him [on the other].” Commentary on Daniel 7:27 [1561]; CO 41:81-86. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 55:13 [1559]; CO 37:292-293; Commentary on Psalm 45:10 [1557]; CO 31:456.

1351Commentary on Jeremiah 31:12 [1563]; CO 38:660. “And we know that whenever the Prophets set forth promises of a happy and prosperous state to God's people, they adopt metaphorical expressions, ... for they accommodated their mode of speaking to the notions of that ancient people ... At the same time, the Spirit under these figurative expressions declares, that the kingdom of Christ shall in every way be happy and blessed, or that the church of God, which means the same thing, shall be blessed, when Christ shall begin to reign.... The sum of the whole is, that there will be no common or ordinary

Interestingly, Calvin often draws lessons for Christians from the comparison between Israel and the kingdom of Christ. He affirms that it is a “first principle” for Christians that the promises of an earthly inheritance in the old covenant were “appendages” to the basic promise of God’s presence. “Unbelievers differ from the children of God in this respect, that while they enjoy in common with them the bounties of providence, they devour them like cattle and look no higher. The children of God, on the other hand, knowing that all their blessings have been sanctified by the promises ... are often directed in this way to the hope of eternal life.”¹³⁵² Like the saints of old, as the writer to the Hebrews says, Christians also “renounce the world” and “become pilgrims on earth.”¹³⁵³ They look to the spiritual kingdom and the resurrection from the dead, “for

abundance of blessings, but what will exceed belief, and even the course of nature, as the very mountains shall as it were flow down.” Commentary on Hosea 9:13 [1557]; CO 42:172-173. What the prophets say about the abundance of corn and wine “must be explained with reference to the nature of Christ’s kingdom. As then the kingdom of Christ is spiritual, it is enough for us, that it abounds in spiritual blessings.” The prophets paint the picture of a “happy state” in terms of the “conveniences of the present life and earthly blessings” because “they accommodated their style, as we have already stated, to the capacities of a rude and weak people.” Commentary on Hosea 9:15 [1557]; CO 42:175-176. The prophecies of agricultural prosperity are “metaphorical expressions, for the prophet treats of the kingdom of Christ, which is spiritual, but by means of these figures describes its perfect happiness, that we may understand it better from examples drawn from those things which are known to us.” Commentary on Isaiah 61:5 [1559]; CO 37:375. In his commentary on Psalm 45, he writes, “Nor is it an unusual style of speaking, that what is spiritual in Christ should be described under the form of earthly figures. The kingdom of Christ, it is said, shall be opulent; and in addition to this it is said, that it shall attain to a state of great glory, such as we see where there is great prosperity and vast power. In this description there is included also abundance of pleasures. Now, there is nothing of all this that applies literally to the kingdom of Christ, which is separated from the pomps of this world. But as it was the design of the prophets to adapt their instruction to the capacity of God’s ancient people, so in describing the kingdom of Christ, and the worship of God which ought to be observed in it, they employ figures taken from the ceremonies of the law.” Commentary on Psalm 45:6 [1557]; CO 31:453. Cf. Commentary on Haggai 2:6-9 [1559]; CO 44:106-108; Commentary on Joel 2:30-31 [1559]; CO 42:569-573; Commentary on Psalm 72:15 [1557]; CO 31:670; Commentary on Isaiah 2:2 [1559]; CO 36:59-60; 9:6; CO 36:198; 11:2; CO 36:235; 25:8-9; CO 36:419, 421; 30:25; CO 36:524-525; 42:7; CO 37:65; 60:2; CO 37:355; 62:8; CO 37:388. On the rich theme of accommodation in Calvin see Arnold Huijgen, *Divine Accommodation in John Calvin’s Theology: Analysis and Assessment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

1352Commentary on Galatians 3:6 [1548]; CO 49:206. “Ascension follows resurrection: hence, if we are the members of Christ, we must ascend into heaven, because he, on being raised up from the dead, was received up into heaven, that he might draw us up with him. Now we seek those things which are above when in our minds we are truly sojourners in this world, and are not bound to it.” Commentary on Colossians 3:1 [1548]; CO 52:117-118.

1353Commentary on Hebrews 11:16 [1549]; CO 55:156. The blessings of the kingdom are “above nature and the world,” tasted by faith, and received through “the participation of the Spirit.” (6:4; CO 55:71.

in the world there is nothing but what is transitory and fading.”¹³⁵⁴

The second difference is that the Old Testament used images and ceremonies to teach the people about spiritual realities that in the New Testament they enjoy directly in Christ. In this sense “the Old Testament of the Lord was that covenant wrapped up in the shadowy and ineffectual observance of ceremonies and delivered to the Jews; it was temporary because it remained, as it were, in suspense until it might rest upon a firm and substantial confirmation. It became new and eternal only after it was consecrated and established by the blood of Christ” (2.11.4). To be sure, “there was a real spiritual meaning in these things.”¹³⁵⁵ But that meaning was packaged in symbols and practices designed for children. Christians, on the other hand, have the substance of Christ, and focus on him with simplicity.¹³⁵⁶

Separated from faith in Christ and from the power of Christ's work, Calvin argues, the ceremonies of the law were worse than meaningless. Yet even when viewed in light of Christ the Old Testament rites constituted a burden insofar as they were designed to highlight the ongoing guilt of sin and the constant threat of judgment. “Whatever was done at that time showed in itself nothing but obligation. Grace was in a manner suspended until the advent of Christ.”¹³⁵⁷ Calvin takes this distinction quite seriously. He

1354Commentary on Hebrews 11:10 [1549]; CO 55:153. In fact, “they despised all that was in the world” in favor of the “spiritual kingdom of Christ.” “If the land of Canaan did not engross their attention, how much more weaned from things below ought we to be, who have no promised habitation in this world?” (11:13; CO 55:155-156). Here again it is not an immaterial reality on which the faithful had their eyes set, but “the hope of a blessed resurrection” (11:35; CO 55:168-169).

1355Commentary on Hebrews 8:5 [1549]; CO 55:99.

1356Commentary on Colossians 2:8 [1548]; CO 52:103-104. Paul's opponents wanted to maintain “childish rudiments” rather than focus on the heavenly life (3:1; CO 52:117). The people of Israel were kept in “the rudiments of knowledge” like children, but “at the coming of Christ he unfolded the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Commentary on Jeremiah 31:34 [1563]; CO 38:693. In the Mosaic covenant the Israelites were “governed [*gubernabantur*] by an economy that outwardly appeared as slavery, even though inwardly they were free in God's sight.” The gospel governs believers in a more “liberal” manner. Commentary on Galatians 4:24 [1548]; CO 50:238. When Christ came, “the kingdom of God was opened,” and its treasures are now found in him alone (2.11.5). See Harms, *In God's Custody*, 92-94.

1357Thus “all the ceremonies of Moses had in them some acknowledgment of guilt, which bound those that observed them with a firmer tie, as it were, in the view of God's judgment.” Commentary on Colossians 2:14 [1548]; CO 52:108.

stresses that Old Testament worshipers could not be inwardly cleansed by sacrifices because those sacrifices were fleshly or carnal, “earthly symbols which did not reach the soul.”¹³⁵⁸ As he puts it in his commentary on Galatians, “for what end did sacrifices and washings serve but to keep the mind continually fixed on pollution and condemnation?” Their purpose was to remind the people that their sins continued to condemn them. Only then did the Mosaic rituals point them to Christ. “The law, in short, was nothing else than an immense variety of exercises, in which the worshipers were led by the hand to Christ.”¹³⁵⁹ Sins were remitted under the fathers, but only in anticipation of Christ's work, not because of the sacrifices. Now that Christ's sacrifice has actually cleansed believers from sin, the ceremonies of the law are no longer necessary.¹³⁶⁰

Calvin argues that when Hebrews speaks of the abrogation of the old covenant it is this abolition of the old ceremonies and forms (#2a) that is in view. Just as the priesthood of Aaron was “annulled” at the coming of Christ, so too was the “ministry of Moses.” Christ is now both priest and lawgiver. But only that which “peculiarly belonged to Moses” was abolished. Insofar as the Mosaic covenant encompassed the “gratuitous covenant of life” (#1) it was not abolished.

For Christ is here compared with Moses. Whatever then they had in common, is

¹³⁵⁸Commentary on Hebrews 9:9 [1549]; CO 55:108-109.

¹³⁵⁹Commentary on Galatians 3:24 [1548]; CO 50:220-221.

¹³⁶⁰Commentary on Hebrews 9:15 [1549]; CO 55:112. The New Testament sacraments highlight the completion of Christ's work. Thus is abrogated “every handwriting which might declare us to be exposed to the judgment of God.” Commentary on Colossians 2:14 [1548]; CO 52:108. In contrast to Aaron's priesthood the priesthood of Jesus is spiritual because he ministers in heaven, at the right hand of God. This does not mean that Christ's work was somehow immaterial. It simply means that it had an eternal, spiritual significance. “What does the Apostle mean by locating Christ's priesthood in heaven? For doubtless he suffered on earth, and by an earthly blood he atoned for our sins, for he derived his origin from the seed of Abraham; the sacrifice of his death was visible; and lastly, that he might offer himself to the Father, it was necessary for him to descend from heaven to the earth, and as man to become exposed to the sorrows of this mortal life, and at length to death itself. To all this I reply that whatever of an earthly kind appears at first sight to be in Christ, it is to be viewed spiritually by the eye of faith... The Apostle therefore does not refer to what belongs peculiarly to human nature, but to the hidden power of the Spirit; and hence it is that the death of Christ has nothing earthly in it.” Commentary on Hebrews 8:2 [1549]; CO 55:97. As he puts it a little later, “he died on earth, but the virtue and efficacy of his death proceeded from heaven” (8:4; CO 55:98). “[I]n Christ and his sacrifice there is nothing but what is spiritual or heavenly” (10:22; CO 55:129). The things of the kingdom of Christ are “hid from the senses of the flesh” (12:18; CO 55:182).

not here to be taken to the account, but only the things in which they differ. They in common offer God's mercy to us, prescribe the rule of a holy and godly life, teach us the true worship of God, and exhort us to exercise faith and patience, and all the duties of godliness. But Moses was different from Christ in this respect, that while the love of the gospel was not as yet made known, he kept the people under veils, set forth the knowledge of Christ by types and shadows, and, in short, accommodated himself to the capacity of ignorant people, and did not rise higher than to puerile elements. We must then remember, that the law is that part of the ministration which Moses had as peculiarly his own, and different from that of Christ. That law, as it was subordinate to the ancient priesthood, was abolished when the priesthood was abolished.¹³⁶¹

It is here where the anomaly mentioned above appears. Reflecting the text on which he is commenting, Calvin identifies the ministry of Moses as its own covenant. But he is doing so with reference to its forms in comparison with the new covenant (i.e., use #2a), not with respect to a legal principle that can be contrasted to the eternal gracious covenant (i.e., use #2b). Thus in his comments on Hebrews 7:20 he writes that “the covenant which God has made by Christ with us is far more excellent than the old covenant of which Moses was the interpreter.”¹³⁶² Later he adds that “it was but right that Moses and Aaron should give way to Christ as to one more excellent, because the gospel is a more excellent covenant than the law.” But were not the fathers under the same eternal covenant? Yes, “But the comparison made by the Apostle refers to the form rather than to the substance.”¹³⁶³ Considered from the perspective of its distinctive and peculiar form, the Mosaic covenant can be considered as a covenant distinct from the new and it can be properly labeled the “covenant of the law [that] was neither valid nor permanent,”¹³⁶⁴ even though it is in substance the same eternal covenant of grace.

Calvin thus stresses that the fathers had all of the spiritual blessings that Christians have; they simply did not realize them to the same extent, or with the same

1361Commentary on Hebrews 7:12 [1549]; CO 55:89

1362Commentary on Hebrews 7:20 [1549]; CO 55:93.

1363Commentary on Hebrews 8:6 [1549]; CO 55:100.

1364Commentary on Hebrews 8:7 [1549]; CO 55:100-101. Calvin makes it quite clear that here it is “the whole dispensation of Moses,” that is in view, not simply the ceremonies. Commentary on Hebrews 8:8 [1549]; CO 55:101.

clarity: “he makes a comparison between the less and the greater.”¹³⁶⁵ Even here the question is not about the spiritual attainment of individual “persons.” The point, rather, is about the “economical condition of the church.” What is more, “whatever spiritual gifts the fathers obtained, they were accidental as it were to their age; for it was necessary for them to direct their eyes to Christ in order to become possessed of them.”¹³⁶⁶ The Israelite priesthood “had to do with external rites, but in Christ's priesthood there is nothing but what is spiritual.” Likewise “the former was evanescent and temporary,” while “the latter was to be perpetual.”¹³⁶⁷

In contrast to the saints of the old covenant, therefore, believers cling simply to Christ, and attempts to bind their consciences to forms or ceremonies is an invasion of Christ's spiritual kingdom. “The apostles invented no new worship of God, they had erected no new spiritual government.” They do not reign as lords over souls, but merely minister the spiritual government of Christ.¹³⁶⁸ Paul likewise “expressly lays down a distinction in the government [*discrimen regiminis*] which God has commanded to be observed.” Whereas the Israelites were bound like children, “God has broken those chains, governs [*regit*] his church in a more indulgent manner, and lays not upon us such severe restraint.” With respect to worship Christians “are now at liberty as to all outward matters, but only on the condition that the church shall not be burdened with a multitude of ceremonies, nor Christianity confounded with Judaism.”¹³⁶⁹

1365Commentary on Hebrews 8:10 [1549]; CO 55:103. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:4 [1546]; CO 49:455-456.

1366Commentary on Hebrews 8:10 [1549]; CO 55:103-104.

1367The ancient priesthood was spiritual in meaning, but “they were yet but shadows in themselves, and as they were made up of the elements of this world, they may justly be called earthly.” Commentary on Hebrews 7:15 [1549]; CO 55:90-91 (Cf. 7:17; CO 55:91). Because the law contained “only earthly images of spiritual things,” its rites could only be “carnal and figurative.” In contrast, Hebrews “calls the kingdom of Christ heavenly things, for it is spiritual and possesses a full revelation of the truth.” Commentary on Hebrews 9:23 [1549]; CO 55:117.

1368Commentary on Acts 16:4 [1554]; CO 48:372. “Paul did so order external things, that he was principally careful for the kingdom of God, which consists in the doctrine of the gospel, and far surpasses and surmounts external order.” Commentary on Acts 16:5 [1554]; CO 48:372-373.

1369Commentary on Galatians 4:1 [1548]; CO 50:225-226. Indeed, there was “a diversity in its government [*regimen*]” corresponding to the division between Jews and Gentiles (3:23; CO 50:219). This includes the sabbath. Christians don't observe days as if there were any “sacredness in holidays [*in*

The third difference is the Pauline contrast of “letter” and “spirit.”¹³⁷⁰ Calvin summarizes the contrast by observing that the Old Testament, *when viewed in light of what is proper to it*, represents the letter that has no real power, while the New Testament, *when viewed in light of what is proper to it*, contains life itself (2.11.7). But he applies it with considerable flexibility in his commentaries, using it to explain meaning and form with respect to the Old Testament ceremonies,¹³⁷¹ the New Testament sacraments,¹³⁷² and the commands of God,¹³⁷³ in addition to the general distinction between the two covenants.

Calvin introduces the letter/spirit contrast with reference to Paul's use of it in 2 Corinthians 3:6-11, where the apostle correlates the Old and New testaments with death and life, condemnation and mercy. Calvin explains, “The Old Testament is of the letter, for it was published without the working of the Spirit. The New is spiritual because the Lord has engraved it spiritually upon men's hearts” (2.11.8). In his commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:17 Calvin explains that Christ is the “spirit” of the law, for “it will be living and life-giving only if it is breathed into by Christ.” Just as the body dies when its soul is removed, so also when Christ is separated from the law it brings death. Calvin suggests that this is one of the keys to reconciling the “encomiums” David heaps upon the law

feriis aliqua sit religio], or as though it were not lawful to labor upon them.” To the extent that Christians set aside days for worship or rest, “respect is paid to government and order [*politiae et ordinis*], not to days.” Commentary on Colossians 2:16 [1548]; CO 52:110. Calvin writes, “Whatever was spoken of under the Law as eternal, I maintain to have had reference to the new state of things which came to pass at the coming of Christ; and thus the eternity of the Law must not be extended beyond the fullness of time, when the truth of its shadows was manifested, and God's covenant assumed a different form... [A]ssuredly what was peculiar to the Law could not continue to exist beyond the day of Jesus Christ. Besides, the Sabbath, although its external observation is not now in use, still remains eternal in its reality, like circumcision... But they calumniate us falsely, as if we disregarded the Sabbath; because there is nothing which more completely confirms its reality and substance than the abolition of its external use.” Commentary on Exodus 31:13 [1563]; CO 24:583-584.

1370This difference is arguably the most difficult to categorize according to Hesselink's schema because it involves dimensions of “degree” as well as dimensions that are “antithetical.”

1371Commentary on Philippians 3:3 [1548]; CO 52:44. Calvin notes that when Paul says he has no confidence in the flesh “he includes everything of an external (*externam*) kind in which an individual is prepared to glory” or “everything that is apart from Christ.”

1372Commentary on John 10:3 [1553]; CO47:453-455.

1373Commentary on Romans 2:28 [1556]; CO 49:45.

with Paul's statements that seem so critical of it. "For when it is animated by Christ, those things that David makes mention of are justly applicable to it. If Christ is taken away, it is altogether such as Paul describes."¹³⁷⁴ Calvin offers the same interpretation of the paradigmatic statement of John 1:17, "The law came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." He explains, "By the word grace I understand the spiritual fulfillment of those things, the bare letter of which was contained in the Law." The law pointed to Christ, but apart from Christ it was dead. "Christ is the soul which gives life to that which would otherwise have been dead under the law."¹³⁷⁵

But again, this does not mean the Old Testament saints did not have the Spirit. Calvin is quick to clarify that the contrast between letter and Spirit applies not to the whole of the old covenant or the whole of the new, but to what is *proper to*, or *derived from*, each source respectively. "To this I answer that the fathers, who were formerly regenerated, obtained this favor through Christ, so that we may say that it was, as it were, transferred to them from another source. The power then to penetrate into the heart was not inherent in the law, but it was a benefit transferred to the law from the gospel." Calvin emphasizes, "the main thing is to consider what the *law of itself* is, and what is *peculiar to the gospel*, especially when a comparison is made between the law and the gospel... the prophet speaks of the law in itself, as apart from the gospel, for the law then is dead and destitute of the Spirit of regeneration."¹³⁷⁶ The law promised salvation and was a sufficient guide to faith, but it did not provide salvation itself, for such benefits were "adventitious, and ... do not properly belong to the law." If Moses is rightly regarded as pointing to Christ [#1], the law contains the gospel. "But if Moses be set in opposition to Christ, he becomes the minister of death, and his doctrine leads to

1374Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:17 [1548]; CO 50:45-46.

1375Commentary on John 1:17 [1553]; CO 47:18.

1376Commentary on Jeremiah 31:33 [1563]; CO 38:691. As he puts it elsewhere, "Paul does not deny that prophets and teachers were endued with the same Spirit before the publication of the gospel, but he declares that this grace ought now to be especially powerful and conspicuous under the kingdom of Christ" (Commentary on 2 Timothy 1:7 [1548]; CO 52:351).

destruction, for the letter, as Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6 calls it, kills.”¹³⁷⁷

These examples stress promise and fulfillment, reflecting the organic imagery of body and soul. But at times Calvin interprets the letter/Spirit contrast in terms of antithesis. For instance, in his commentary on Romans Calvin writes, “Paul compares here the hidden power of the Spirit with the external letter of the law, as though he had said, ‘Christ inwardly forms our souls in a better way than when the law constrains them by threatening and terrifying us.’”¹³⁷⁸ Later he adds, “What the law does, in the absence of the inward teacher, the Spirit [*interior ille magister spiritus*], is increasingly to inflame our hearts so that they boil up with lusts.” Those who are under the law are in the flesh: “their ears are struck by its external [*externo*] sound without any fruit or effect, while they are inwardly [*intus*] destitute of the Spirit of God.” The only solution is emancipation. “It hence follows that the kingdom of righteousness [*iustitiae regnum*] is not established except when Christ emancipates us from the law.”¹³⁷⁹ Christians are freed from the law “when God emancipates us from its rigid exactions and curse” and provides his Spirit.¹³⁸⁰ Only the “reign of the Spirit [*regnum spiritus*]” which is “inward” gives life to the law.¹³⁸¹

Calvin's rhetoric here is integrally related to the distinction between the two kingdoms. Understood in itself, or without reference to Christ, the old covenant made with Israel is utterly alien to his spiritual kingdom of true righteousness. Interpreted as fulfilled in Christ, on the other hand, the Old Testament is full of meaning, even if it no longer makes sense to hold on to the types and shadows now that believers have the

1377“How so? Because whoever is attached to Moses departs from Christ, and Christ alone possesses in himself the fullness of all blessings. It then follows that nothing remains in Moses when considered in himself.” Commentary on Jeremiah 31:34 [1563]; CO 38:697.

1378Commentary on Romans 6:17 [1556]; CO 49:115.

1379Commentary on Romans 7:5 [1556]; CO 49:122.

1380Paul therefore “sets the Spirit in opposition to the letter, for before our will is formed according to the will of God by the Holy Spirit, we have in the law nothing but the outward [*externam*] letter, which indeed bridles our external [*externis*] actions, but does not in the least restrain the fury of our lusts.”

Commentary on Romans 7:6 [1556]; CO 49:123. Cf. Commentary on Romans 8:3 [1556]; CO 49:140.

1381Commentary on Romans 8:9 [1556]; CO 49:144.

substance.

The fourth difference Calvin identifies between the Old and New Testaments is that the former was accompanied by the experience of fear and bondage, whereas the latter is one of freedom, trust, and assurance. “The Old held consciences bound by the yoke of bondage; the New by its spirit of liberality emancipates them into freedom.” This difference is arguably the most antithetical, and because it overlaps so closely with what was peculiar to the narrow law as described below (though it is not precisely the same thing), here I treat it only briefly. Old Testament believers could attain to freedom of conscience insofar as they saw Christ, Calvin argues, but they nevertheless experienced the greater burden of ceremonial requirements and legal stipulations, all of which were attached to the threatened judgment of God. They therefore enjoyed peace of conscience in a much more anticipatory way than do Christians. In fact, they were lost if they focused on what was *proper* to the old covenant, but they participated in Christ insofar as they lived “in hope of spiritual, heavenly, and eternal benefits” (2.11.10).

The fifth difference is that in the Old Testament God set aside one nation to himself, allowing the other nations to walk in “vanity,” whereas in the New Testament God has broken down the wall that divides the nations (2.11.11). “The calling of the Gentiles, therefore, is a notable mark of the excellence of the New Testament over the Old” (2.11.12). The obvious proof-text for this principle is Ephesians 2:11-15, which declares, as Calvin summarizes it, that while the Gentiles were once “aliens from Christ, from the hope of salvation, and from the church and kingdom of God [*ecclesia et regno Dei*],”¹³⁸² now in Christ Jews and Gentiles have been incorporated into “one holy body [*sancti corporis unitatem*].”¹³⁸³ What has made this possible is the abolition of the “law of commandments and ordinances.”¹³⁸⁴ In order to make one new man in place of the two,

1382Commentary on Ephesians 2:11 [1548]; CO 51:168.

1383Commentary on Ephesians 2:12 [1548]; CO 51:169.

1384Here Calvin breaks with his typical interpretation of Paul's use of the word 'law,' in which he insists that the covenant of the law (#2) is in view (and that Christians are emancipated from it), suggesting

Jesus had to abolish the forms and badges that set Israel apart.

This expansion of Christ's kingdom to all nations, Calvin argues, was predicted throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. For instance Psalm 72 predicted that the messianic kingdom, by which it meant the “kingdom of Christ [*regno Christi*],” would be extended to the ends of the earth.¹³⁸⁵ Likewise Psalm 47 declared that the kingdom of Christ would be “the common privilege of all nations.”¹³⁸⁶ The point of such prophecies was not that the messiah would conquer the nations, or that Israel would dominate them. Rather, “he here treats of a new and a previously unheard of manner of reigning. There is an implied contrast between the time of the law, when God confined his empire, or kingdom, within the boundaries of Judea, and the coming of Christ, when he extended it far and wide, so as to occupy the whole world from one end to the other.”¹³⁸⁷

Of course, this distinction between Israel and the nations, or between the kingdom confined to Israel under the law and the universal kingdom of the gospel, is potentially chock full of significance for the way in which Israel's politics are deemed normative for the politics of Christendom. This is especially true in light of the previous four differences between the Old and New Testaments identified by Calvin, and in light of the even greater contrast between the narrow law and the eternal covenant of grace.

Differences of Principle (The Narrow Law)

While scholars tend to emphasize the foregoing differences between the Old and New Testaments as identified by Calvin, in large part because these differences receive

that here Paul simply has in view the ceremonial law, which had “excluded the Gentiles from the kingdom of God.” Commentary on Ephesians 2:14 [1548]; CO 51:171. For his more typical interpretation of Paul's use of the law see Commentary on Romans 3:20 [1556]; CO 49:57; Commentary on Galatians 2:15 [1548]; CO 50:193-196; 3:17; CO 50:213.

¹³⁸⁵Commentary on Ephesians 3:4 [1548]; CO 51:179.

¹³⁸⁶Commentary on Psalm 47:3 [1557]; CO 31:467-468. Cf. 67:1; CO 31:617; Commentary on Hebrews 12:26 [1549]; CO 55:185.

¹³⁸⁷Commentary on Psalm 47:8 [1557]; CO 31:470.

most of Calvin's attention in the *Institutes*, they have paid less attention to the antithesis that Calvin sees between the gospel and the Mosaic law considered narrowly as a covenant of judgment based on works. I. John Hesselink writes, “What is not always recognized – particularly by the critics of Calvin's view of law and gospel – is that there is not only a difference of form between the law and the gospel (or the two covenants) but also an antithesis between them in so far as the law in a narrower sense is opposed to the gospel.”¹³⁸⁸ This law, which is what the Apostle Paul was typically referring to when he used the word law, “is not the whole law, the *tota lex*, but the bare law, the *nuda lex*. It is the law abstracted from its real setting which is the covenant.”¹³⁸⁹ Calvin typically gets to the matter by comparing the rhetoric of King David to that of the Apostle Paul, which seem “wholly contradictory” to one another. “Paul makes the law the minister of death, declares that it effects nothing but to bring on us the wrath of God, that it was given to increase sin, that it lives in order to kill us. David, on the other hand, says that it is sweeter than honey and more desirable than gold, and among other recommendations he mentions the following – that it cheers hearts, converts to the Lord, and quickens.”¹³⁹⁰ David takes “such sweet delight in God's law, which, according to the testimony of Paul, does nothing else but strike fear into men.”¹³⁹¹

Calvin offers various explanations for this seeming discrepancy. In his commentary on 1 John he explains that Paul considered the law in light of human corruption, whereas David considered it with respect to regeneration and the relaxed rigor of the new covenant.¹³⁹² In his commentary on Psalm 119 he explains that Paul viewed the law simply in terms of its “commandments and threatenings,” whereas David “comprehends the whole doctrine of the law, the chief part of which is the free covenant

1388Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 157.

1389Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 158.

1390Commentary on 1 John 5:3 [1551]; CO 55:363.

1391Commentary on Psalm 119:103 [1557]; CO 32:258.

1392Commentary on 1 John 5:3 [1551]; CO 55:363.

of salvation.”¹³⁹³ When David praises the law so highly he is talking about “the covenant ... and the whole doctrine of Moses. Only when viewed through the lens of the gospel, “the whole body of doctrine of which true religion and godliness consists,” could the law be worthy of such encomium.¹³⁹⁴

It is true that Calvin also introduces a third consideration, suggesting that Paul's rhetoric about the law was shaped by his polemic with the Judaizers. “Paul, who had to deal with persons who perverted and abused the law, and separated it from the grace and the Spirit of Christ, refers to the ministry of Moses viewed merely by itself, and according to the letter.” From this perspective “The design of Paul is to show what the law can do for us taken by itself, that is to say, what it can do for us when, without the promise of grace, it strictly and rigorously exacts from us the duty which we owe to God. But David, in praising it as he here does, speaks of the whole doctrine of the law, which includes also the gospel, and, therefore, under the law he comprehends Christ.”¹³⁹⁵ In other words, in order to paint a stark contrast between the “literal disciples of the law” and the “faithful whom Christ ... teaches inwardly and effectually by his Spirit,” Paul had to take the perspective that “regards nothing but what was peculiar to the law itself, as it commands and forbids, and restrains transgressors by the denunciation of death.” In this sense, Calvin admits, the law is properly understood as a covenant of works: “He sets forth the law only, as that by which God covenants [*paciscitur*] with us on the ground of works.”¹³⁹⁶

But is Calvin saying that Paul merely granted this function of the law for the sake or argument, as if it does not really exist? Is Lillback correct that for Paul this is not the

¹³⁹³Commentary on Psalm 119:103 [1557]; CO 32:258.

¹³⁹⁴Commentary on Psalm 19:7 [1557]; CO 31:199.

¹³⁹⁵Commentary on Psalm 19:8 [1557]; CO 31:199-200.

¹³⁹⁶“And then, if the law be viewed in itself, it can do nothing but restrain those, devoted to its miserable bondage, by the horror of death; for it promises no good except under condition [*conditione*], and denounces death on all transgressors.” Commentary on Romans 8:15 [1556]; CO 49:148-149. Cf. Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:12-13 [1548]; CO 50:44. For an example of a place in which Calvin does interpret Paul as speaking about a sacrament simply as hypocrites or false teachers view it see Commentary on Galatians 3:27 [1548]; CO 50:222.

law's "normative use"?¹³⁹⁷ On the contrary, Calvin is quite clear that Paul was highlighting a genuine function of the law, part of its purpose as covenanted by God. "We admit that the doers of the law, if there were any such, are righteous, but since that is a conditional agreement, all are excluded from life because no man performs that righteousness which he ought."¹³⁹⁸ The law thus stands in "apparent contradiction" with the covenant of grace in the sense that they propose alternative modes of justification, even though they are not in actual contradiction in the sense that one serves only to condemn, while the other saves.¹³⁹⁹

The sense in which Paul's opponents were wrong was not in identifying a principle of judgment based on works within the law, what we might call a 'works principle,'¹⁴⁰⁰ but in viewing it as a reliable means of attaining righteousness for fallen human beings rather than as a means "to lead us as by the hand to another righteousness." By failing to understand the narrow law (#2b) in the context of the broad law (#1) the Jews "rejected its soul, and seized on the dead body of the letter. For though the law promises reward to those who observe its righteousness, it yet substitutes, after having proved all guilty, another righteousness in Christ, which is not attained by works, but is received by faith as a free gift."¹⁴⁰¹ The covenant of the law was never intended to stand in isolation, but in subservience to one eternal covenant.¹⁴⁰²

Thus Hesselink concludes that for Calvin "the origin of this concept of the law is not to be traced to a mere misunderstanding or misuse of the law; nor can these strong

1397 "It is the law severed from Christ, and so is not its normative use." Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 223. "Paul must be interpreted in light of his opponents" (155).

1398 Commentary on Galatians 3:12 [1548]; CO 50:209.

1399 Commentary on Galatians 3:21 [1548]; CO 50:217. "The law would be opposed to the promises if it had the power of justifying, for there would be two opposite methods of justifying a man" (3:21; CO 50:218).

1400 By the phrase 'works principle' I refer to the principle Calvin describes as follows: "It annexes to works a reward and a punishment; that is, it promises life to those who keep it, and curses all transgressors." Commentary on Galatians 3:25 [1548]; CO 50:221.

1401 Commentary on Romans 10:4 [1556]; CO 49:196-197.

1402 In *that* sense Hesselink is correct when he writes that for Calvin "There is, moreover, ultimately only one covenant and that covenant is the covenant of grace." Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 88.

words of Paul be dismissed simply as a polemic against an abuse of the law. The law as such has certain characteristics which not only differentiate it from the gospel but place it in a sense in opposition to the gospel.”¹⁴⁰³

The crucial distinction for Calvin is this: the antithesis lies in the special or peculiar office, function, and ministry of the law. Something intrinsic and inherent in the law, something characteristic of its very nature, sets it over against the gospel in the sharpest possible way. (The reference now is neither to the substance nor even the form of the law as such). For what separates the law from the gospel like fire and water is the matter of justification. There are two kinds of promises and two kinds of righteousness: legal promises and evangelical promises, the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith. Here there is no more or less, no gradation. These are two opposing systems which are totally irreconcilable.¹⁴⁰⁴

How does this square with viewing the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace? “Moses, he explains, had two offices: one was universal (*in universum*), *viz.*, 'the instruction of the people in the true rule of piety.' In this sense he was a minister of the whole law and accordingly preached repentance and faith.... But Moses also had another office (*munus*) which, unlike his universal office, he did not have in common with Christ.”¹⁴⁰⁵

Thus while some scholars have legitimately explained the relationship between Calvin's positive and negative statements about the law by correlating them to the difference between justification and sanctification, they have not adequately discerned its relation to Calvin's *covenant* theology, which arises out of his reading of the biblical text. They have not recognized that Calvin's distinction between justification and sanctification is reflected in his understanding of the distinction between the (narrow)

¹⁴⁰³Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 193-194. Nor can they be dismissed as truisms about the limitations of a scriptural text as a text. “Apart from Christ and the Holy Spirit, the whole Word of God is merely a dead letter without life and light.” Yet here Calvin is talking about something unique to the Mosaic covenant understood narrowly. “The opposition of Moses and Christ, law and gospel, therefore, does not depend solely on the absence of Christ or the Holy Spirit. Both can produce a negative reaction and both have ultimately the same doctrine and goal... But this does not explain how Calvin—and the Scriptures—can speak almost simultaneously both so positively and so negatively about the law.”

Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 195.

¹⁴⁰⁴Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 195-196.

¹⁴⁰⁵Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law*, 196.

covenant of the law and the eternal covenant of grace.¹⁴⁰⁶

Calvin's fullest explanation of this point appears in his discussion of Exodus 19:1-2 in his commentary on the law. Here Calvin begins by presenting the Sinai Covenant, the giving of the Ten Commandments, as a renewal of the covenant made with Abraham. God had made an “eternal, and inviolable covenant” with Abraham, “but because it had grown into disregard from the lapse of time, and the carelessness of mankind, it became needful that it should be again renewed. To this end, then, it was engraved upon the tables of stone, and written in a book, that the marvelous grace, which God had conferred on the race of Abraham, should never sink into oblivion.”¹⁴⁰⁷ The point here is not simply that the Abrahamic covenant “was repeated to his descendents by the instrumentality of Moses.”¹⁴⁰⁸ Rather, it is that the Sinai covenant *is*, in its essence, the Abrahamic Covenant, the one covenant that endures for all time.

But in fact, the matter is more complicated than this simple statement implies. For Calvin quickly explains that the Sinai covenant is actually quite different from the Abrahamic Covenant, holding its own peculiarly legal and conditional character.

But in the first place we must observe that although the law is a testimony of God's gratuitous adoption, and teaches that salvation is based upon His mercy, and invites men to call upon God with sure confidence, *yet it has this peculiar property, that it covenants conditionally [sub conditione paciscitur].* Therefore

¹⁴⁰⁶For instance, Potter correctly correlates Calvin's positive and negative statements about the law to theological and pedagogical uses of the law, which in turn correspond to justification and sanctification. But she says nothing about the peculiar use of the law, nor does she seek to address the question through Calvin's doctrine of covenant. Mary Lane Potter, “The 'Whole Office of the Law' in the Theology of John Calvin,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 3 (1985): 117-139. For instance, she is overly simplistic when she writes that Calvin “clearly states that it is the punitive function of the law that is abolished with the gospel, not the law itself” (133). It all depends, of course, what is meant by the “law itself.” Anthony Hoekema acknowledges that Calvin teaches conditionality in the covenant but does not discuss the law's peculiar office at all. Anthony Hoekema, “Calvin's Doctrine of the Covenant of Grace,” *Reformed Review* 15 (1962): 1-12. James Torrance entirely misses this dimension in Calvin's thought, and as a result erroneously concludes that Calvin could not have affirmed a prelapsarian covenant of works. See James B. Torrance, “The Concept of Federal Theology – Was Calvin a Federal Theologian?,” *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*. (ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 15-40.

¹⁴⁰⁷The intent of engraving the “rule of a just and pious life” on the tablets of stone was to ratify it with such solemnity “that the recognition of it might remain and flourish in future times.” Commentary on Exodus 19:1 [1563]; CO 24:192.

¹⁴⁰⁸Commentary on Exodus 19:1 [1563]; CO 24:193.

it is worthwhile to *distinguish between the general doctrine, which was delivered by Moses, and the special command which he received.*¹⁴⁰⁹

Here again is that distinction between the law considered broadly (#1) and the law considered narrowly (#2), but the emphasis is on the law considered *very* narrowly (i.e., #2b). The “general doctrine” or broad law is represented by Moses' proclamation of pardon and reconciliation and the ceremonial “expiatory rites,” all of which bore witness to God's mercy. As for the “special command” or narrow law, “this office was separately imposed upon him, to demand perfect righteousness of the people and to promise them a reward, *as if by compact [ex compacto]*, upon no other condition than that they should fulfill whatever was enjoined them, but to threaten and to denounce vengeance against them if ever they wandered from the way.”¹⁴¹⁰ This leads Calvin to a discussion of various Pauline passages in which the apostle characterizes the law in terms of what Calvin calls its “peculiar office,” distinct from the promises of grace. “But we must not pass over what I lately asserted to be peculiar to the law, viz., to fill men's minds with fear, and by setting forth its terrible curse, *to cut off the hope of salvation.*”¹⁴¹¹ It was always the distinct function of the law to drive the people “by fear to implore God's mercy.”¹⁴¹²

In his commentaries on the Pauline epistles Calvin makes the same distinction.

1409Commentary on Exodus 19:1 [1563]; CO 24:192-193. Emphasis added.

1410Commentary on Exodus 19:1 [1563]; CO 24:193.

1411Commentary on Exodus 19:1 [1563]; CO 24:193. Emphasis added. In his commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:6 Calvin writes, “Paul here takes into view what belonged peculiarly [*proprium*] to the law, for although God then wrought by his Spirit, yet that did not take its rise from the ministry of Moses, but from the grace of Christ.” Once again Calvin cross-references John 1:17 to establish the point, and then qualifies it with the reminder that while the grace of God was active during Old Testament times, “It is enough that it was not by means of the law, for it did not belong peculiarly to it.” Here I follow the French edition: “Il suffit, que ce n'estoit point par le moyen de la loy: car elle n'auoit point cela de propre.” Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:6 [1548]; CO 50:40. Calvin highlights five characteristics of the law articulated by Paul that mark its difference from the gospel. It is 1) the “ministry of death”; 2) “written in letters, and with ink”; 3) “engraven on stones”; 4) “temporary and fading”; and 5) the “ministry of condemnation.” Calvin again reminds his readers that Paul is *not* talking about “the whole of the doctrine that is contained in the law and the prophets” but that he is simply considering “what belongs peculiarly [*peculiariter*] to the ministry of Moses” (3:7; CO 50:41).

1412Commentary on Exodus 19:1 [1563]; CO 24:194. He identifies the same concept at work in Hebrews 12:18-22, where Mt Sinai is contrasted with Mt Zion. “The antithesis here proves that what was entrusted to Moses is separate and distinct from the gospel, because God, who appeared in the law as an avenger, now with fatherly kindness gently invites us to salvation and soothes our troubled minds by offering us the forgiveness of our sins.”

“The law has a twofold meaning; it sometimes includes the whole of what has been taught by Moses, and sometimes that part only which was peculiar [*propria*] to his ministration, which consisted of precepts, rewards, and punishments.” The faith taught by Moses involves promises of mercy and grace, and in this sense he was a preacher of the gospel. Yet he also had a more distinctive responsibility, which was to reduce the people to humility by means of the condition of works. “It was now the duty of the people to consider in how many ways they drew curses on themselves, and how far they were from deserving anything at God's hands by their works, that being thus led to despair as to their own righteousness, they might flee to the haven of divine goodness, and so to Christ himself. This was the end or design of the Mosaic dispensation.”¹⁴¹³

Calvin thus stresses that when Paul is discussing the law he typically has in view neither the ceremonies alone, nor the moral law more broadly, but the whole economy of the law taken in its narrow sense as a covenant binding human beings to obedience as a condition for blessing, and threatening punishment for disobedience. As he puts it in one place, “Paul is not reasoning here as to mere ceremonies.” Rather, he has in view the “whole of the Old Testament, *insofar as it is opposed to the gospel.*” Or to put it another way, it is “the ministry of Moses, *which was peculiar to him* and is distinguished from the gospel” that is “abolished.”¹⁴¹⁴

Let it be observed that Paul does not speak of the moral law only, but of everything connected with the office held by Moses. That office, which was peculiar [*proprium*] to Moses, consisted in laying down a rule of life and ceremonies to be observed in the worship of God, and in afterwards adding promises and threatenings. Many promises, no doubt, relating to the free mercy of God and to Christ, are to be found in his writings, and these promises belong to faith. But this must be viewed as accidental and altogether foreign [*accidentale et aliunde accersitum*] to the inquiry, so far as a comparison is made between the law and the doctrine of grace.¹⁴¹⁵

1413Commentary on Romans 10:5 [1556]; CO 49:197-198. Emphasis added.

1414Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:7 [1548]; CO 50:42. When Paul says that Christians are no longer under a guardian he “embraces the whole economy by which the Lord governed his people under the Old Testament [*totam oeconomiam ... gubernauit.*” Commentary on Galatians 3:23 [1548]; CO 50:219.

1415Commentary on Galatians 3:19-22 [1548]; CO 50:215.

In fact, Calvin admits that in the writings of Moses this narrow sense is predominant.

But as the evangelical promises are only found scattered in the writings of Moses, and these also somewhat obscure, and as the precepts and rewards allotted to the observers of the law frequently occur, it rightly appertained to Moses as his own and peculiar [*proprie ac peculiariter*] office to teach what is the real righteousness of works, and then to show what remuneration awaits the observance of it, and what punishment awaits those who come short of it.¹⁴¹⁶

Calvin therefore agrees that at Sinai the people of Israel were placed under a covenantal relationship distinct from the covenant made with Abraham, although it was embedded in the broader administration of that covenant. Thus in his commentary on Galatians Calvin follows Paul in identifying his distinction between the broad and narrow law with multiple covenants. He presents the doctrine that is “legal” and that which is “evangelical” as corresponding to these “two covenants [*duorum testamentorum/duplex ... pactum*].”¹⁴¹⁷ The law was a renewal of the covenant made with Abraham, but it also functioned as a distinct covenant. To be under the law [*sub lege*], then, is to be under “the covenant of the law [*legis pactum*]” by which is meant the “law with its appendages [*appendicibus*], which is different from the sense in which all believers are under the law [*sub lege*].”¹⁴¹⁸

In fact, Calvin invokes the medieval scholastics to clarify that had God not made such a covenant he would have had no obligation to reward the obedient. “And this has been pointed out even by the common theologians, that the reward of good works does not depend upon their dignity or merit, but upon his covenant [*ex pacto*].”¹⁴¹⁹ The

1416Commentary on Romans 10:5 [1556]; CO 49:197-198. Here again Calvin cross-references John 1:17. “And whenever the word law is thus strictly taken, Moses is by implication opposed to Christ, and then we must consider what the law contains, as separate from the gospel. Hence what is said here of the righteousness of the law, must be applied, not to the whole office of Moses, but to that part which was in a manner peculiarly [*peculiariter*] committed to him.”

1417Commentary on Galatians 4:22-24 [1548]; CO 50:236-238. Cf. Commentary on Galatians 3:17 [1548]; CO 214.

1418Commentary on Galatians 4:21 [1548]; CO 50:236. For “all who remain bound to the dominion of the law are subject to a curse; it is then certain that they are excluded from the participation of grace.” Commentary on Romans 4:16 [1556]; CO 49:80.

1419Commentary on Leviticus 18:5 [1563]; CO 25:6.

principle of a reward for works necessarily stems from a covenant of law. “Nor was this unknown to the schoolmen, who held it as an approved and common maxim that works have no intrinsic worthiness but become meritorious by covenant [*ex pacto*].” Though the scholastics underestimated human depravity, “yet this principle is still true, that the reward for works depends on the free promise of the law.”¹⁴²⁰ Calvin's thus insists that there is no works principle inherent to the moral law in itself. A works principle only arises from a covenant.

I answer, Paul took into account what was certainly true, that except by a covenant with God [*Dei pacto*], no reward is due to works. Admitting, then, that the law justifies, yet before the law men could not merit salvation by works because there was no covenant [*pactum*]. All that I am now affirming is granted by the scholastic theologians, for they maintain that works are meritorious of salvation, not by their intrinsic worth, but by the acceptance of God (to use their own phrase), and on the ground of a covenant [*pacti*]. Consequently, where no divine covenant [*Dei pactum*], no declaration of acceptance is found, no works will be available for justification.¹⁴²¹

But is there such a covenant? Absolutely. “He tells us that God made two covenants [*duplex ... pactum*] with men; one through Abraham, and another through Moses. The former, being founded on Christ, was free; and therefore the law, which came after, could not enable men to obtain salvation otherwise than by grace.”¹⁴²²

Calvin stresses that the reward promised by this covenant of law cannot be limited merely to blessing in “this earthly and transitory life.” Those who limit it in this way do so because they want to preserve the doctrine of justification by faith, but they wrongly assume that the problem with justification by works lies within the law. The real problem is with human depravity.

Scripture does not therefore deny that men are justified by works because the law itself is imperfect, or does not give instructions for perfect righteousness, but because the promise is made of no effect by our corruption and sin... Foolishly,

1420 Paul speaks of the “works of the law” because works take their conditional character only because of the law. Commentary on Romans 3:20 [1556]; CO 49:56. “[T]he word law that is added means the same as though he called them meritorious, for what is referred to is the reward promised in the law” (3:28; CO 49:65-66).

1421 Commentary on Galatians 3:17 [1548]; CO 50:213.

1422 Commentary on Galatians 3:17 [1548]; CO 50:214.

then, do some reject as an absurdity the statement, that if a man fulfills the law he attains to righteousness; for the defect does not arise from the doctrine of the law, but from the infirmity of men.¹⁴²³

Calvin therefore insists that “the original covenant [*prima pactio*] [of law] only avails to man's condemnation.”¹⁴²⁴ Only by turning from that covenant to the promise of mercy can human beings attain to its blessing. “For the law, as respects its doctrine, contains in it life and death. For the reward of eternal life is not promised in it in vain, but since no one is found worthy of the promised reward, Paul justly teaches that the law ministers death. Still this is accidental, and proceeds not from any fault in the doctrine, but from the corruption of men.” It is as an expression of that distinct office that the Torah usually emphasizes obedience and disobedience, blessing and curse, rather than justification by faith.¹⁴²⁵

It is this covenant of the law that gives rise to the theological use of the law, which only serves to condemn human beings. On the other hand, the one eternal covenant gives rise to the spiritual use of the law, which educates and exhorts the regenerate to true righteousness. Christians are no longer under the law in its narrow covenantal sense (i.e.,

1423Commentary on Leviticus 18:5 [1563]; CO 25:7. Calvin cites Romans 10:4 and Romans 8:3 as evidence for this argument. In his commentary on Romans 7:10, he writes that the law “was given in order that we by keeping the law of the Lord might obtain eternal life, except our corruption stood in the way.” Commentary on Romans 7:10 [1556]; CO 49:126.

1424Commentary on Deuteronomy 7:12 [1563]; CO 25:20-21.

1425This proceeds from Moses' distinct “legation,” from “the office peculiarly entrusted to him” and distinct from that of Christ. Commentary on Deuteronomy 30:19 [1563]; CO 25:56-58. See also 30:11; CO 24:258. It is with respect to that office that it is the unique and proper function of the law to condemn. Calvin admits that in 2 Corinthians 2:16 Paul refers to the gospel as the “odor of death” to unbelievers, suggesting that the condemning attribute is by no means unique to the law. But whereas this effect is *accidental* to the gospel, it is *proper* to the law. “We must always therefore distinguish between the proper [*proprium*] office of the gospel and the accidental [*accidentali*] one (so to speak) which must be imputed to the depravity of mankind.” Commentary on 2 Corinthians 2:15 [1548]; CO 50:34. But has Calvin not said that it is also accidental, i.e., a result of human sin, that the law condemns? Yes, Calvin admits, but there is a difference between the law and the gospel that is even more basic: *only* the gospel brings regeneration and reconciliation with God. “The law, on the other hand, as it simply prescribes the rule of a good life, does not renew men's hearts to the obedience of righteousness, and denounces everlasting death upon transgressors, can do nothing but condemn. Or if you prefer it in another way, the office of the law is to show us the disease, in such a way as to show us at the same time no hope of cure; the office of the gospel is to bring a remedy to those that were past hope” (3:7; CO 50:42) In other words, the law *necessarily and always* brings death to sinners (the effect is perpetual and inseparable), while the gospel has the power to bring life. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 11:4 [1559]; CO 36:239.

the first, or theological use of the law), but they remain under the law in its broader covenantal sense, as a school for teaching and exhortation (i.e., the third, or spiritual use of the law).¹⁴²⁶ In the former sense the law not only has a “subordinate rank [*subservire*]” to Christ, but it is “abolished [*abrogatum*].”¹⁴²⁷ Where the Spirit reigns the law has no dominion “so that our intercourse with him is not regulated by its covenant [*pacto*], nor our consciences bound by its sentence of condemnation.”¹⁴²⁸ In the latter sense, however, Calvin views the moral content of the Ten Commandments as “the covenantal law of God as a rule for his life.”¹⁴²⁹

Thus for Calvin the spiritual use of the law is necessarily separated from its distinctive role within the Sinai covenant. When Paul declared in Romans 6:14 that Christians are “not under law but under grace” he was making just this point. As Calvin puts it, “we are freed from the strictness of the law, so that God no more deals with us according to the high demands of justice. There is then no doubt but that he meant here to indicate some freedom from the very law of God.” The result is that Christians' works “are not now tested by the strict rule of the law” or subject to its “rigorous requirements.” Indeed, they are “no longer subject to the law as requiring perfect righteousness, and pronouncing death on all who deviate from it in any part.”¹⁴³⁰ On the other hand, the “righteousness which God approves of in his law” is not abolished because that righteousness is part of the one eternal covenant. “For the abrogation is by no means to

1426Commentary on Galatians 3:19 [1548]; CO 50:215.

1427Commentary on Galatians 3:19 [1548]; CO 50:216. Here again he quickly reminds his readers of the distinction between the “whole of that administration [*totam illiam administrationem temporalem*],” that is, the narrow law, which was “temporal,” and “the whole law [*totam legem*],” that is, the law in its broad sense, which is obviously not abolished. Calvin is essentially saying that considered from one perspective, the law, or the Mosaic office, is simply an administration of the covenant of grace, its forms being accidental to that covenant. But within the peculiar Mosaic office the works principle is central and definitive.

1428Commentary on Galatians 5:23 [1548]; CO 50:256. In addition to the commentaries on the law and the Pauline epistles, Calvin articulates the same view of the law in his commentaries on Hebrews, John, and Acts. See especially Commentary on Hebrews 6:4 [1549]; CO 55:71; Commentary on Hebrews 12:19 [1549]; CO 55:182-183; Commentary on John 16:10 [1553]; CO 47:360; Commentary on Acts 15:10-11 [1554]; CO 48:347-352.

1429Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 265.

1430Commentary on Romans 6:14 [1556]; CO 49:112-113.

be applied to the precepts which teach the right way of living, as Christ confirms and sanctions these and does not abrogate them.”¹⁴³¹

Calvin makes the same argument regarding the “great question respecting the use of the law”¹⁴³² in his discussion of Romans 7, where Paul declares that the believer is as free from the law as is a widow from her former husband. This demonstrates “that we are so loosed from the law that it does not any longer, properly and by its own right, retain over us any authority.”¹⁴³³ To be sure, Paul here is referring

only to that office of the law which was peculiar [*propria*] to the dispensation of Moses. For as far as God has in the Ten Commandments taught us what is just and right, and given directions for guiding our life, no abrogation of the law is to be dreamt of, for the will of God must stand the same forever. We ought carefully to remember that this is not a release from the righteousness which is taught in the law but from its rigid requirements and from the curse which thence follows.¹⁴³⁴

Under the “kingdom of Christ ... the law has resigned its office,” but it is not “so abolished that we have nothing to do with it.” Rather, “the law, so far as it is a rule of life, a bridle to keep us in the fear of the Lord, a spur to correct the sluggishness of our flesh – so far, in short, as it is 'profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, of instruction in righteousness, that believers may be instructed in every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16) – is as much in force as ever, and remains untouched.”¹⁴³⁵

Israel and the Politics of Christendom

1431Commentary on Romans 6:15 [1556]; CO 49:113-114. “With respect to doctrine, we must not imagine that the coming of Christ has freed us from the authority of the law: for it is the eternal rule of a devout and holy life, and must, therefore, be as unchangeable, as the justice of God, which it embraced, is constant and uniform.” Commentary on Matthew 5:17 [1555]; CO 45:171-172.

1432Commentary on Romans 7:1 [1556]; CO 49:119.

1433Commentary on Romans 7:2 [1556]; CO 49:120.

1434Commentary on Romans 7:2-3 [1556]; CO 49:120-121. As he puts it in his commentary on Romans 8:3, the law contains the “perfect rule of righteousness.” Commentary on Romans 8:3 [1556]; CO 49:138.

1435It is abolished with respect to specific qualities, among which Calvin includes the works principle, its strictness, and the ambiguity of its ceremonies. “All such qualities of the law, Paul tells us, are abolished [*abolitas*], so that the office of Moses is now at an end so far as it differs in outward aspect from a covenant of grace.” Commentary on Galatians 3:25 [1548]; CO 50:221. Cf. Commentary on Galatians 4:4 [1548]; CO 50:227.

Calvin's covenant theology begs the question, To what extent should the politics of Israel serve as a model for temporal Christian polities? Calvin's exegesis of Psalm 2 clearly illustrates his nuanced and paradoxical understanding of the Israelite kingdom. On the one hand, the Davidic kingdom was a uniquely “sacred kingdom,” a type of Christ's kingdom to come. On the other hand, it was temporal, “merely a shadow” of that kingdom which is spiritual. Calvin thus articulates a fundamental exegetical principle.

[I]n order to learn to apply to Christ whatever David, in times past, sang concerning himself, we must hold this principle, which we meet with everywhere in all the prophets: that he, with his posterity, was made king, not so much for his own sake as to be a type of the Redeemer. We shall often have occasion to return to this afterwards, but at present I would briefly inform my readers that ... David's temporal kingdom was a kind of earnest to God's ancient people of the eternal kingdom, which at length was truly established in the person of Christ.¹⁴³⁶

The distinction between Israel and Christ's spiritual kingdom thus bears a paradoxical relationship to the two kingdoms distinction. On the one hand, Christ's kingdom is spiritual, while Israel, being a temporal kingdom, was political. On the other hand, compared to other temporal kingdoms Israel was typological and spiritual, and therefore aligns more clearly with the spiritual kingdom. Depending on which of these perspectives one emphasizes, Israel might be more or less relevant to contemporary affairs in the political kingdom. Insofar as Calvin viewed Israel as a type of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, he no longer deemed it a model for Christian polities in the new covenant era. However, insofar as he considered Israel to be a temporal kingdom it was a divinely inspired (though imperfect) model of the application and enforcement of natural law by civil governments.¹⁴³⁷

¹⁴³⁶Commentary on Psalm 2:1 [1557]; CO 31:42-43. Examples, in addition to the ones I discuss here, include the following: Psalm 45, he says, is about Christ's kingdom and government, not simply a “transitory and earthly kingdom” (Commentary on Psalm 45:1 [1557]; CO 31:449). Cf. Commentary on Psalm 110:1-4 [1557]; CO 32:160-164. Cf. Commentary on Psalm 89:19 [1557]; CO 31:818. See also David Willis-Watkins, “Calvin's Prophetic Reinterpretation of Kingship,” in *Probing the Reformed Tradition* (ed. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian Armstrong; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 116-134.

¹⁴³⁷I turn to the ways in which Calvin did and did not appropriate Israel and the law as a model for contemporary politics in Chapters 8 and 9.

Calvin believed that although all kingdoms are established by God, compared with Judah (the faithful part of Israel), which “ranked above them as holy and sacred,” they are profane. God governed Judah “in a peculiar manner ... because under this figure of a kingdom he held up Christ to their view.”¹⁴³⁸ Thus although God is “the rightful proprietor of the whole earth, it is declared that he chose one people over whom he might reign.”¹⁴³⁹ God has always ordained all political governments, but “the kingdom of David was a type under which the Holy Spirit intended to shadow forth to us the kingdom of Christ.”¹⁴⁴⁰ In Jerusalem alone was God's spiritual government established.¹⁴⁴¹ Indeed, “when David was constituted king the foundation of that everlasting kingdom, which was eventually manifested in the advent of Christ, was then laid.”¹⁴⁴²

The distinction between Israel and the nations extended to the unique character of Israelite kings. Calvin distinguished between mere “earthly kings” and the sacerdotal kings of Israel. “For though the kings of the earth obtained not their authority, except as they were established by God’s decree, yet the king from David’s posterity was first-

1438Commentary on Isaiah 10:27 [1559]; CO 36:230.

1439Commentary on Psalm 105:6 [1557]; CO 32:100. Under the law “Judah was the proper seat of his kingdom, but his providence always extended to the world at large.” Commentary on Psalm 66:7 [1557]; CO 31:612.

1440Commentary on Psalm 18:43 [1557]; CO 31:190. “[U]nder the figure of this temporal kingdom, there was described a government far more excellent, on which the whole joy and felicity of the church depended” (20; CO 31:207). Israelites were to look “to the hope of the eternal kingdom, of which a shadow only, or an obscure image, was set forth in the person of the successors of David” (21:3; CO 31:214; Cf. 21:7; 216). “Now we know that in David was promised a spiritual kingdom, for what was David but a type of Christ? As God then gave in David a living image of his only-begotten Son, we ought ever to pass from the temporal kingdom to the eternal, from the visible to the spiritual, from the earthly to the celestial.” Commentary on Jeremiah 33:17-18 [1563]; CO 39:69-70. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 2:4 [1559]; CO 36:64; 32:1, 15; CO 36:542, 552; 33:20; CO 36:575.

1441“There is this difference, which is always to be remembered, that while other cities were founded and built by the guidance and power of God, merely for the sake of civil government, Jerusalem was his peculiar sanctuary, and his royal seat.” “Here the question is not about earthly polity, but spiritual government; for the pure religion, and the true worship of God, and the doctrine of godliness, were at that time to be found nowhere but in Jerusalem.” Commentary on Psalm 87:1 [1557]; CO 31:800-801.

1442Commentary on Psalm 118:25 [1557]; CO 32:210. “It was necessary that what was begun in David should be fully accomplished in Christ.” Commentary on Jeremiah 41:9 [1563]; CO 39:422. “David ... did not reign as a common king, but was a type of Christ, and God had promised his favor to the people as long as his kingdom flourished, as though Christ did then dwell in the midst of the people” Commentary on Hosea 8:4 [1557]; CO 42:365. See Hesselink, “Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ,” 150.

begotten among them all. In short, it was a sacerdotal, and even a sacred kingdom, because God had peculiarly dedicated that throne to himself.”¹⁴⁴³ Whereas ordinary kings come to rule by ordinary providential means, the Davidic monarchy was specifically appointed by God through prophetic intervention. In that sense the kingdom of Israel is “not to be estimated according to the common order of nature.”¹⁴⁴⁴ The kingdom of David “was a priestly kingdom and a type of that celestial kingdom which was afterwards fully revealed in Christ.”¹⁴⁴⁵ Calvin thus warns that Christian commonwealths are fundamentally different than that of Israel. In Israel the king was considered to be “the soul of the community,” but for Christians political office is much more mundane. “We have not now an earthly king who is Christ’s image, but it is Christ alone who vivifies the church.”¹⁴⁴⁶

That the Israelite kingdom was sacerdotal meant that the monarchy was integrated with the worship and the priesthood. In Israel God had “joined the kingdom and priesthood together.”¹⁴⁴⁷ They were not unified in one person, of course, but they

1443Commentary on Lamentations 4:20; CO 39:624-625. Cf. Commentary on Lamentations 2:2; CO 39:536.

1444Commentary on Psalm 89:36 [1557]; CO 31:825. Psalm 89 seeks “to distinguish this divinely-appointed king from all other kings. Although what Paul teaches in Romans 13:1, is true, ‘There is no power but of God,’ yet there was a great difference between David and all earthly kings who have acquired sovereign power by worldly means. God had delivered the scepter to his servant David immediately with his own hand, so to speak, and had seated him on the royal throne by his own authority” (89:19; CO 31:818). All kings are sons of God, according to Psalm 82, but the typological Davidic king was the Son of God in a unique sense (89:26; CO 31:820). “[A]s this kingdom was altogether peculiar, it was the design of David to make a distinction between it and all other kingdoms. God indeed invests kings with authority, but they are not consecrated as David was, that like him, in consequence of the holy anointing oil, they might be elevated to the rank of Christ’s vicegerents.” David “shows good cause why he is not to be classed with the ordinary kings of the earth, meaning that he reigned by a divine right.” Earthly kings often claim to rule “by the grace of God,” but in practice they usually “imagine that they reign either by their own policy, by hereditary right, or by the kindness of fortune.” Secular kings may be said to sit at God’s right hand in the analogous sense that they govern by his authority, but David’s government was uniquely designed to point the faithful forward in hope to the messianic king who would establish the kingdom of God forever (110:1; CO 32:160-161).

1445 David and his descendents were “types of Christ.” Commentary on Jeremiah 22:1-3 [1563]; CO 38:371-374.

1446Commentary on Jeremiah 30:21 [1563]; CO 38:635. Thus it was appropriate for Old Testament saints to pray for their civil government in a way that is inappropriate for Christians. For Israelites sought salvation through the Davidic monarchy. While Christians should pray for their rulers, on the other hand, they must “renounce all hope of salvation from any other quarter” but Christ. Commentary on Psalm 20:9 (1557); CO 31:211-212.

1447Commentary on Psalm 20:2 [1557]; CO 31:208.

were institutionally fused in a way that pointed forward to their more perfect union in the person of Christ.¹⁴⁴⁸ “God decreed nothing in relation to the kingdom but what had a certain connection with the sanctuary, the more perfectly to prefigure the mediator who was to come, and who was both priest and king, after the order of Melchizedek. The kingdom and tabernacle were, therefore, closely allied.”¹⁴⁴⁹

From this perspective, Calvin makes clear, the typological nature of Israel prohibits the simplistic drawing of lessons for Christian polities. For instance, the psalms describe the king's triumph over Israel's enemies, but whereas David and other kings forced the nations into slavish obedience by means of the sword, this is hardly something that Christian governments should imitate. The true fulfillment of such psalms, according to Calvin, is Christ's subjugation of the nations to a willing obedience by means of his word and Spirit. Thus in David's victories “God exhibited a type of the conquest which Christ would make of the Gentiles, who, by the preaching of the gospel alone, were subdued, and brought voluntarily to submit to his dominion; for the obedience of faith in which the dominion of Christ is founded 'comes by hearing' (Romans 10:17).”¹⁴⁵⁰ The fulfillment of such psalms is not in “that government of God which is general in its nature,” or in its providential manifestation through civil government, but in “that special and spiritual jurisdiction which he exercises over the church.”¹⁴⁵¹

One of the most important practical implications of this point is that when the prophets speak in terms of the material blessing of Israel, such prophecies are to be interpreted as fulfilled in Christ. They should only be applied to the church when

¹⁴⁴⁸Commentary on Zechariah 3:5 [1559]; 44:171-172; 6:12-13; CO 44:215. Cf. Commentary on Psalm 78:70 [1557]; CO 31:745-746. See Harms, *In God's Custody*, 115-116.

¹⁴⁴⁹Commentary on Psalm 132:13 [1557]; CO 32:349-350. In his commentary on Hosea he notes that in Judah the kingdom and priesthood were “divinely instituted” and “joined together” in contrast to the northern tribes of Israel that broke away to form their own kingdom. Commentary on Hosea 11:12 [1557]; CO 42:448. Cf. Commentary on Lamentations 2:6; CO 39:541.

¹⁴⁵⁰Commentary on Psalm 18:44 [1557]; CO 31:190-191. Cf. 22:28; CO 31:234-235; 47:2-3; CO 31:466-468.

¹⁴⁵¹Commentary on Psalm 67:3 [1557]; CO 31:618.

interpreted in light of the church's spiritual union with Christ, and not to temporal polities at all. Calvin explains the point by the analogy of the union of a body with its head and members. For instance, the prophets describe the nations coming to Jerusalem with tribute for Israel, and the papists used such prophecies as a pretext for “their luxuries, wealth, and magnificence.”¹⁴⁵² Yet Calvin warns, “We must not understand the enjoyment of the wealth of others to mean that they who are converted to Christ shall seize on the wealth, or glory, or rank of others, which is most inconsistent with true religion, but because all things shall be brought under the dominion of Christ, so that he alone shall hold authority and rule.”¹⁴⁵³

By the same argument, the church should not use prophecies of the kingdom's political power to claim authority over civil governments, as did the papacy, for it was Christ whom the nations would serve, not the church.

In this sense also government is ascribed to the church, not so as to obscure by haughty rule the glory of her head, or even to claim the authority which belongs to him, or, in a word, so as to have anything separate from her head; but because the preaching of the gospel, which is committed to her, is the spiritual scepter of Christ, by which he displays his power. In this respect no man can bow down submissively before Christ, without also obeying the church, so far as the obedience of faith is joined to the ministry of doctrine, yet so that Christ their head alone reigns, and alone exercises his authority.¹⁴⁵⁴

Because of the relation between the head and the members, “where Christ shines, there the church, which is his body, is said to reign, for Christ’s will is that he should have nothing apart from his members.”¹⁴⁵⁵

Thus when the prophets declare that the coming king will establish good government, the just administration of law, the protection of the good, and the restraint of the wicked, such prophecies must be interpreted spiritually rather than politically.

1452Commentary on Isaiah 60:6 (1559); CO 37:357-358.

1453Because of the connection between the head and the members, however, “when they come into the power of Christ, they are called ours, because Christ possesses nothing separate from his Church.”

Commentary on Isaiah 61:6 (1559); CO 37:375-376.

1454Commentary on Isaiah 45:14 (1559); CO 37:140-141.

1455Commentary on Zechariah 2:9 [1559]; CO 44:161.

It is ... necessary to bear in mind the character of Christ's kingdom. It is, we know, spiritual, but it is set forth under the image or form of an earthly and civil government. For whenever the prophets speak of Christ's kingdom they set before us an earthly form, because spiritual truth, without any metaphor, could not have been sufficiently understood by a rude people in their childhood. There is no wonder, then, that the prophets, wishing to accommodate their words to the capacity of the Jews, should so speak of Christ's kingdom as to portray it before them as an earthly and civil government.¹⁴⁵⁶

The primary significance of such prophecies is therefore for Christ's spiritual kingdom, not for Christian politics.

As then it is spiritual, the justice and judgment of which the Prophet speaks do not belong only to civil and external order, but rather to that rectitude by which it comes that men are reformed according to God's image, which is in righteousness and truth. Christ then is said to reign over us in justice and judgment not only because he keeps us by laws within the range of our duty, defends the good and the innocent, and represses the audacity of the wicked, but because he rules us by his Spirit... Hence we must come to spiritual jurisdiction.¹⁴⁵⁷

In other words, the true location of Christ's kingship and priesthood in the present age is the church, not civil government.¹⁴⁵⁸ When it comes to politics the prophetic text must be appropriated in a manner qualified by the difference between the two kingdoms. The messianic hope of justice and righteousness is not to be sought in the affairs of this world, but in "the spiritual and celestial kingdom of Christ."¹⁴⁵⁹ In the meantime, not only

¹⁴⁵⁶Commentary on Jeremiah 33:15 [1563]; CO 39:66-67.

¹⁴⁵⁷Commentary on Jeremiah 33:15 [1563]; CO 39:66-67. The same principle appears over and over. The promises of the prophets, though stated in temporal terms, "ought to be judged of according to the nature of the kingdom of Christ." Commentary on Zechariah 10:2 [1559]; CO 44:287. Whatever is prophesied concerning Christ's kingdom "must correspond with its nature and character." "Since then the kingdom of Christ is spiritual," prophecies of all good things must be interpreted in light of "the character of Christ's kingdom." Commentary on Zechariah 14:8 [1559]; CO 44:372. Even David and Solomon were simply earthly kings armed with the sword to defend the poor and to preserve a manner of peace and prosperity, but the "spiritual government of Christ, by which all things are restored to perfect order, ought much more to be considered a gift of heaven." Commentary on Psalm 72:2 [1557]; CO 31:665. While the former could "maintain the righteous," it is the office of Christ "to make men righteous," reforming their hearts "through the agency of his Spirit" (72:7; CO 31:667). Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 30:10 [1563]; CO 38:622. Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956), 156-157.

¹⁴⁵⁸"For where the kingdom and priesthood of Christ are found, there, no doubt, is the church." "Let us then learn to begin with the kingdom and the priesthood, when we speak of the state and government of the church." Commentary on Jeremiah 33:17-18 [1563]; CO 39:69-70. While in Israel there were priests and kings, the church consists of those who are both kings and priests by virtue of their participation in Christ. Commentary on 1 Peter 2:9 [1551]; CO 55:240.

¹⁴⁵⁹"[I]f we wish to know what it is, we must learn to raise our thoughts upwards, and above the world and everything that exists here." Commentary on Jeremiah 33:16 [1563]; CO 39:68. In that sense, however later Reformed political theology may have developed the concept, there is no evidence for the claim that for Calvin's political theology is rooted in his concept of the covenant. For instance, Haas

is it unhelpful for Christians to seek a political manifestation of the kingdom of Christ, but it is actually

injurious, as it would draw us back from the enjoyment of heavenly things. For we ought to distinguish between our state and that of the ancient people. Paul reminds us that they were children under a schoolmaster, being under the law, but that we are grown up, and that, therefore, the bondage under which the fathers lived, has come to an end through the coming of Christ (Galatians 3:23-25).¹⁴⁶⁰

On the other hand, for Calvin the very temporality of Israel's politics meant that it still served as an example for contemporary societies to a certain extent. For instance, Calvin finds it profoundly significant that the kingdom and priesthood were never actually combined in one person before Christ, even though they were combined in one commonwealth. The offices were to remain sharply distinguished in Israel, both in terms of the occupant and in terms of the family (the priesthood belonged to that of Aaron, the kingship to that of David).¹⁴⁶¹ In this respect Calvin identifies Israelite kings as an example to pagan kings, who tended improperly to appropriate for themselves sacerdotal tasks. "I grant, indeed, that anciently among heathen nations kings were wont to exercise the priestly office ... Ambitious of procuring greater reverence for their persons, heathen kings aspired after the honor of the sacerdotal office." Yet the Israelite king Uzziah was punished for attempting to offer incense to God. Only in Christ could the priesthood be merged with the royal throne.¹⁴⁶² Calvin's insistence that the difference between kingship and priesthood was preserved in Old Testament Israel, and that as such it was a model for pagan societies, created space for him to insist that Israelite kings legitimately served as a vocational model for contemporary Christian magistrates as well. Like Christian magistrates, the kings of Israel were not to claim for themselves spiritual powers of word,

claims, "The concept of the covenant is the foundation and the unifying principle of Calvin's understanding of the state." Guenther Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 108.

¹⁴⁶⁰Commentary on Jeremiah 31:12 [1563]; CO 38:660.

¹⁴⁶¹Commentary of Zechariah 6:9-11 [1559]; 44:211.

¹⁴⁶²Commentary on Psalm 110:4 [1557]; CO 32:164.

sacrament, or ecclesiastical discipline. Still, as temporal rulers they were to remain devoted to the care of true religion. While he therefore emphasized theological discontinuity between sacerdotal Israel and contemporary Christian societies, Calvin emphasized a degree of political continuity with respect to the magisterial vocation. Calvin's covenant theology led him sharply to distinguish Israel from contemporary Christian polities, but it also provided him with a means to emphasize their continuity.

Conclusion

Calvin's nuanced interpretation of Old Testament law arose directly out of his sophisticated covenant theology. On the one hand, Calvin stressed that both the old and new covenants are administrations of the one eternal covenant of grace, and that Israel was a type of the spiritual kingdom of Christ. For this reason he could emphasize that the moral law as revealed in the Old Testament remains binding on all persons, in all times and places. On the other hand, Calvin stressed the differences of form that characterized the old covenant, rendering it earthly, outward, and temporal, in contrast to the new covenant, which is heavenly, inward, and spiritual. He likewise argued that the Mosaic covenant contained a peculiar dimension according to which the law can only condemn sinners. These differences between the old and new covenants guided Calvin as he sought to determine what Old Testament laws are binding on Christians, and in what ways. The moral law no longer condemns Christians, he argued, but it continues to serve as a source for moral guidance, both for the spiritual and political kingdoms. On the other hand, Christians should avoid the temptation to subject themselves to Israel's ceremonial or civil laws, both of which reflect its unique role as a type of the kingdom of Christ. There remains much to learn from Israel's law and politics, but only insofar as Israel was a reflection of the natural moral law of God.

CHAPTER 8

THE MAGISTRATE'S CARE OF RELIGION

Calvin's eschatological distinction between the spiritual kingdom of Christ and the political kingdom (Chapter 4), and his covenantal distinction between Old Testament Israel and contemporary Christian commonwealths (Chapter 7), gave him excellent reasons to support full religious liberty and the separation of church and state. For Calvin the two kingdoms doctrine had concrete implications for the church's autonomy and the nature of its authority with respect to teaching, worship, and discipline, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, as well as for the nature and function of civil government, as I demonstrated in Chapter 6. On an institutional level Calvin distinguished between church and civil government more sharply than any of the other magisterial reformers, as was seen in Chapters 1-2.

Nevertheless, Calvin's model of ecclesiastical/civil engagement was one of cooperation rather than separation. He affirmed the authority of civil government to establish, defend, and care for the true religion, by which he meant the ministry of the church. In the final analysis, Harro Hopfl observes, Calvin believed that magistrates were empowered to do much that the church simply could not accomplish on its own:

the expulsion or execution of persistent and impenitent heretics, the chastisement of deriders of the ministry and the Word, of contemners of piety and of those of scandalous immorality of life, diplomatic and military activity to relieve hard-pressed brethren abroad and to defend reformation at home, the public mobilization of resources for ecclesiastical and charitable works such as the payment of ministers, teachers and officials, and public institutions for the relief of distress.¹⁴⁶³

In fact, all of the magisterial reformers viewed these as basic elements of what they called the care of religion (*cura religionis*), and here Calvin was no different. After all, Christ is

¹⁴⁶³Harro Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 190-191. Elsewhere Hopfl writes, "although piety would have forbidden him to admit it, he never for a moment supposed that merely spiritual weapons would be enough; more palpable back-up from secular punishments and threats was indispensable to the 'building up' of the Church in the world." Harro Hopfl, *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxii.

the lord of *both* kingdoms, and both kingdoms must serve his purposes.¹⁴⁶⁴ Gordon Keddie observes that for Calvin “Christ's kingly authority is all-embracing and must encompass the very *raison d'être* of the State.” Indeed, “The State can never be neutral and can never be regarded as existing merely to balance the broad spectrum of interests in society, as if obedience to God's Word were irrelevant and Christ-denying pluralism the irreducible norm.”¹⁴⁶⁵ Sharing this interpretation, some scholars go so far as to claim that Calvin ultimately collapsed the distinction between the two kingdoms, or that he assigned spiritual functions such as sanctification or edification to civil government.¹⁴⁶⁶

1464As Heiko Oberman points out, the doctrine of Christ's rule *extra ecclesiam* provides the foundation for Calvin's conviction regarding “the mutuality of Church and State.” Heiko A. Oberman, “The 'Extra' Dimension in the Theology of Calvin,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21 (1970): 48.

1465Gordon J. Keddie, “Calvin on Civil Government,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 32 (1981): 65-67; Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State* (ed. Richard C. Gamble; New York: Garland, 1992), 23. Boeke observes that Calvin “never embraced the notion that the authority of princes and magistrates should be restricted to secular affairs of state, leaving the church free from their often compromising or damaging influence.” Brandt B. Boeke, “Calvin's Doctrine of Civil Government,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 11 (1981): 61. Witte and VanDrunen suggest that Calvin superimposed on the Lutheran two kingdoms doctrine a “Gelasius-like” model of ecclesiastical and civil cooperation. “Calvin in effect superimposed on the Lutheran two kingdoms theory his own variant of the Catholic two swords theory. He assigned the church a legal role in the governance of the earthly kingdom, and the state a moral role in the governance of the heavenly kingdom. At the same time, he rendered obedience to church officials and law both a spiritual and a civic duty and obedience to political officials and law both a civic and spiritual duty.” John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 58. Cf. 76. Witte argues that in his early years Calvin drew “clear and easy lines between the heavenly and earthly kingdoms” (55) but that over time his thought became more nuanced and realistic. In the later years “Calvin began to think in more integrated and more institutional terms. He blurred the lines between the earthly kingdom and heavenly kingdom, between spiritual and political life, law and liberty. He also focused more closely and concretely on the institutional responsibilities and relationships of church and state” (56). VanDrunen agrees, then writes, “And this perhaps is where things must be left with Calvin: a mostly Luther-like two kingdoms theology intersected by a Gelasius-like two swords theory.” David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 93.

1466Willem Van't Spijker suggests that Calvin abandoned the two kingdoms doctrine altogether: “The Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms is transformed by Calvin to bring to expression the twofold character of the rule of Christ. The kingdom of Christ takes two forms. Even the civil government has a pastoral responsibility to fulfill and must oversee the progress and protection of the proclamation of the gospel... These two tasks may not be mixed, nor can they be separated from each other. Ecclesiastical office and civil service are related to each other like body and soul.” Willem Van't Spijker, *Calvin: A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought* (trans. Lyle D. Bierma; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 143. Stevenson argues that for Calvin the two governments “simply concern differing aspects of human life” and “are merely two aspects (or 'folds': remember *duplex*) of one God-ordained order.” William R. Stevenson, Jr., *Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52. Sanders likewise argues that while Calvin separated the functions of church and state, he adopted the “sacramental vision of the Middle Ages, which saw all of reality as a mirror of God and his purposes for mankind, a *corpus*

But Calvin's understanding of the magistrate's obligation to care for religion was more nuanced than scholars sometimes assume.¹⁴⁶⁷ First, consistent with his view of Israel and Israel's law described in Chapter 7, Calvin's fundamental argument concerning the care of religion was less the product of direct exegesis than of what he saw as the universal consensus arising from natural law itself. Thus while Calvin vigorously drew arguments from scripture in support of his position, especially from the

Christianum.” He therefore eliminated the distinction of the natural from the supernatural order and intensified the “theological or Christian significance of the state” (225). Calvin “felt that the state could and should exercise a godly, christological, salvific purpose” (226). He saw the state as responsible to “contribute to the salvation of its citizens” (227). Thomas G. Sanders, *Protestant Concepts of Church and State* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 225-227. Cf. Guenther Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 95, 107-108; Mary Lane Potter, “The 'Whole Office of the Law' in the Theology of John Calvin,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 3 (1985): 130; I. John. Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 247-249; Frederik A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody: The Church, A History of Divine Protection: A Study of John Calvin's Ecclesiology Based on his Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 132; Boeke, “Calvin's Doctrine of Civil Government,” 67. More modestly, O'Donovan and O'Donovan claim, “By comparison with even the later Luther, Calvin gives a more unequivocal endorsement of the magistrate's juridical role vis-a-vis ecclesiastical order, along with a more humanistic and classical account of civil community.” Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 665.

¹⁴⁶⁷Somewhat ironically, Karl Barth argued that the tendency of Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine was to *undermine* political engagement on the part of Christians by obscuring the Christological foundation of the state. The reformers did an excellent job distinguishing true justice and civil justice, church and state, he admitted, and they properly demonstrated that the two are complementary rather than antithetical. But they should have pressed farther. “Clearly we need to know not only that the two are not in conflict, but, first and foremost, to what extent they are connected.” Karl Barth, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (Eugene: *Wipf and Stock*, 1960), 102. Barth claimed that Calvin offered insufficient explanation of the degree to which civil government belongs to the external means by which God invites human beings and retains them within the society of Christ. He alleged that Calvin failed to develop the implications of his claim that all earthly rulers are subject to Christ, and of his embrace of a Christian political order (104). “[I]s there a connection between justification of the sinner through faith alone ... and the problem of justice, the problem of human law? ... Is there, in spite of all differences, an inner and vital connection between the service of God in Christian living ... and another form of service, what may be described as a 'political' service of God, a service of God which, in general terms, would consist in the careful examination of all those problems which are raised by the existence of human justice, of law, or, rather, which would consist in the recognition, support, defense, and extension of this law - and all this, not in spite of but because of divine justification?” (101-102). Due to the failure carefully to answer these questions, Barth argued, Christians had constantly been tempted too great a separation of church and state. As events in Germany made clear, it had become all too easy to construct “a highly spiritual message and a very spiritual Church” on the one hand, and “a secular gospel of human law and a secular church” on the other (105). But own Barth's reflection arose out of the two kingdoms tradition to a certain extent, and it is clearly reflected in the Barmen Declaration. Van Wyk thus argues that “the theory of two kingdoms played a crucial role in all his reflections on the relationship between the church and politics.” I.W.C. Van Wyk, “The Political Responsibility of the Church: On the Necessity and Boundaries of the Theory of the Two Kingdoms,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 61.3 (September, 2005): 665.

Old Testament, those arguments presupposed philosophical and political commitments that he shared with the majority of Christian theologians and pagan philosophers alike. Second, Calvin consistently argued that civil government can only care *indirectly* or *accidentally* for religion. Magistrates cannot take on spiritual functions nor can they enforce spiritual righteousness. They can only defend the outward proclamation of the truth and the outward practice of religion, what we might readily call civil religion. Third, Calvin only believed magistrates should punish heresy or idolatry in contexts in which the entire populace has embraced the true religion. In other words, only if a person's crimes against religion were willful and malicious – in defiance of what was *known* to be certain truth – should they be punished by the civil law.

In this chapter I outline Calvin's defense of the magisterial care of religion in light of the more complicated picture suggested by these important nuances. I trace Calvin's arguments as they developed chronologically through his New Testament commentaries (1546-1555), his 1554 *Defense of the Orthodox Faith*, his 1559 *Institutes*, and his Old Testament commentaries (1551-1564). I conclude by describing what Calvin conceived of as the ideal Christian commonwealth and by considering the extent to which he conceived of the possibility of pluralism.

Arguments from the New Testament

During the 1540s and early 1550s Calvin offered little exegetical defense of his claims about the magistrate's role in protecting the true religion.¹⁴⁶⁸ In large part this is because during these years he was devoting his exegetical energies to a series of commentaries on the New Testament, which is silent about such a magisterial role. But Calvin did not hesitate to exploit whatever warrant he could muster from the New Testament to promote his position. The best example of this is his use of 1 Timothy 2:2, a

¹⁴⁶⁸See Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 41, 56.

passage that Calvin forced to bear almost the entire weight of his claim that the New Testament confirms the teaching of the Old with respect to the magisterial care of religion. In his commentary on the passage Calvin insists that when Paul calls Christians to pray that magistrates will allow them to live in peace, godliness, and decency, he is not simply urging them to pray for religious toleration.¹⁴⁶⁹ On the contrary, Paul is summarizing “the fruits which are yielded to us by a well regulated government [*principatu rite composito*].” The first is peace, or the restraining of robberies, murderers, and the like. The second is godliness, “that is, when magistrates give themselves to promote religion [*fovendam religionem*], to maintain the worship of God [*asserendum Dei cultum*], and to take care that sacred ordinances be preserved with due reverence [*sacrorum reverentiam exigendam*].” The third is public decency. “If these three things are taken away, what will be the condition of human life?”¹⁴⁷⁰

What about magistrates who fail to perform these functions? Christians should pray that such leaders would

begin to impart to us those benefits of which they formerly deprived us. It is our duty, therefore, not only to pray for those who are already worthy, but we must pray to God that he may make bad men good. We must always hold by this principle, that magistrates were appointed by God for the protection of religion [*religionis ... publicae custodiam*], as well as of the peace and decency of society, in exactly the same manner that the earth is appointed to produce food.¹⁴⁷¹

Calvin then invokes Psalm 2:12 and Isaiah 49:23 to defend his argument that magistrates “have no right to flatter themselves if they neglect to lend their assistance to maintain the worship of God [*cultum Dei asserendum*].”¹⁴⁷² Calvin had invoked 1 Timothy 2:2 before, but never had he used it to justify his position on the magisterial care of religion.

A second New Testament text in which Calvin found warrant for the magisterial establishment of religion was Luke 14:23, the text Augustine famously used to justify the

¹⁴⁶⁹As he puts it later, “it is our duty to consider not what kind of persons the princes at that time were, but what God wished them to be. Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:4 [1548]: CO 52:269.

¹⁴⁷⁰Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:2 [1548]: CO 52:267.

¹⁴⁷¹Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:2 [1548]: CO 52:267.

¹⁴⁷²Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:2 [1548]: CO 52:267-268.

coercion of the Donatists. The context is the parable of Jesus in which the host of a wedding feast commands his servants not only to invite various social outcasts to the banquet, but to “compel them to come in.” Calvin admits that the primary meaning of the phrase is simply that the preaching of the gospel should be accompanied by “fervent exhortations.” But he cannot resist insisting that Augustine rightly used the text “to prove that godly princes may lawfully issue edicts for compelling obstinate and rebellious persons to worship the true God, and to maintain the unity of the faith. For though faith is voluntary, yet we see that such methods are useful for subduing the obstinacy of those who will not yield until they are compelled.”¹⁴⁷³

If both of these arguments seem weak compared to the typical rigor of Calvin's exegesis, the precariousness of Calvin's position is equally evident from his attempts to refute appeals to the New Testament *against* his position. Calvin often found himself taking a much more rigid position than the church fathers, rejecting any suggestion that the gospel has implications for the severity of civil law.¹⁴⁷⁴ The most striking of such examples is Calvin's rejection of Augustine's interpretation of John 8, the story of the woman caught in adultery. Whereas Augustine interpreted Jesus' refusal to judge the woman as testimony to the transcendence of grace over the Old Testament's capital laws, Calvin explicitly distinguishes himself from “the ingenuity of Augustine, who thinks that

¹⁴⁷³Commentary on Luke 14:23 [1555]; CO 45:401. Only a few paragraphs later he insists that “to inquire with great exactness into every minute part of a parable is an absurd mode of philosophizing.”

Commentary on Luke 16:1-15 [1555]; CO 45:403.

¹⁴⁷⁴In his discussion of 1 Corinthians 5:13 he notes that “Chrysostom compares the rigor of the law with the mildness of the gospel [*evangelii clementia*] inasmuch as Paul was satisfied with excommunication in case of an offense for which the law required the punishment of death.” But Calvin will have none of it. “For Paul is not here addressing judges that are armed with the sword, but an unarmed multitude that was allowed merely to make use of brotherly correction.” Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:13 [1546] CO 49:387. The French version declares the church to be “destitute of external power (*desnuee de puissance externe*).” Calvin stresses a similar point in his commentary on Titus 3:10, with its apparent reference to excommunication. While he readily admits that Paul is addressing the office of a bishop and not that of a magistrate, he insists that this passage does not support the denial of a magisterial role in protecting true religion. “They who infer from this passage that the supporters of wicked doctrines must be restrained by excommunication alone, and that no rigorous measures beyond this must be used against them, do not argue conclusively. There is a difference between the duties of a bishop and those of a magistrate [*magistratus*].” Commentary on Titus 3:10 [1550]; CO 52:436. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 10:29 [1549]; CO 55:136.

in this manner the distinction between the law and the gospel is pointed out.”¹⁴⁷⁵ Calvin uses his commentary as an opportunity to argue that adultery should be punished by death. “Indeed, there will be no crime whatever that shall not be exempted from the penalties of the law, if adultery be not punished, for then the door will be thrown open for any kind of treachery, and for poisoning, and murder, and robbery.” We must remember, Calvin insists, that Jesus did “not overturn political order, or reverse the sentences and punishments appointed by the laws.”¹⁴⁷⁶ In his commentary on 1 Corinthians Calvin appeals to Roman law to prove that adultery was punished with death “almost by the common law of nations.”¹⁴⁷⁷

One of the most fascinating strands of Calvin's thinking that runs throughout his New Testament commentaries is his reflection on instances of government involvement – or lack of it – in various religious disputes. Strikingly, Calvin repeatedly defends the various political powers that persecuted the early church as having the authority *in principle* to defend the true religion; the problem is simply that they misinterpreted what that true religion was. Even more ironic is that Calvin is resoundingly critical of the various pagan and Roman authorities that provided liberty and protection to the early church, criticizing them for their apathy toward religious truth. Calvin's evaluative comments in these instances say more about Calvin than they do about the narratives themselves because the narratives avoid such evaluation. His comments thus illustrate the broader political theological commitments that he brought to the text.

In his commentaries on John and Acts Calvin defends the Jews for their instincts in seeking the death penalty for Jesus and for the evangelist Stephen. In the case of Stephen the Jews were right to insist that false prophets should be stoned, but their actions were unjust because Stephen was manifestly not a false prophet.¹⁴⁷⁸ Likewise with

1475Commentary on John 8:6 [1553]; CO 47:189.

1476Commentary on John 8:11 [1553]; CO 47:190-191.

1477Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:10 [1546]; CO 49:410.

1478Commentary on Acts 7:58 [1552]; CO 48:169.

the case of Jesus and the charge of blasphemy:

Besides, this accusation was not altogether void of plausibility, but they erred grievously in the application of it. The general doctrine was undoubtedly true, that it was not lawful for men to assume any honor which is due to God, and that they who claimed for themselves what is peculiar to God alone deserved to be put to death. But the source of their error related to the person of Christ, because they did not consider what are the titles given by scripture to the messiah, from which they might easily have learned that he was the Son of God, and did not even deign to inquire whether or not Jesus was the messiah whom God had formerly promised. We see then how they drew a false conclusion from a true principle, for they reason badly. This example warns us to distinguish carefully between a general doctrine and the application of it, for there are many ignorant and unsteady persons who reject the very principles of scripture, if they have once been deceived by the semblance of truth.¹⁴⁷⁹

Calvin suggests that in his day Rome's error was much the same. The papists legitimately claimed divine sanction in defending the faith and peace of the church, but their hypocrisy was evident from the fact that they persecuted true doctrine and defended what was false.¹⁴⁸⁰

Calvin's concern to defend the religious responsibilities of magistrates led him to criticize the Pharisee Gamaliel's suggestion, recorded in Acts 5, that the Jewish leadership should refrain from persecuting the Christian movement in order to determine whether it was of God or of human beings. Calvin finds Gamaliel's advice absurd, for by the same logic civil magistrates should never punish anyone, nor should "any wicked fact ... be corrected."¹⁴⁸¹ Gamaliel's advice would be sound if it pertained to a "doubtful matter," but nothing could be more sure than the word of God.¹⁴⁸² To be sure, the word of God is able to flourish against any human power, and Calvin criticizes the Jews of Gamaliel's day and the "papists" of his own day for their refusal to dispute the meaning of scripture with those they deemed heretics. For "if Satan himself be vanquished with the sword of the word, why shall it not be able to put heretics to

1479Commentary on John 19:7 [1553]; CO 47:408

1480Commentary on John 19:7 [1553]; CO 47:408-409.

1481Commentary on Acts 5:34 [1552]; CO 48:113-114.

1482Commentary on Acts 5:34 [1552]; CO 48:114.

flight?”¹⁴⁸³ But despite this seemingly promising line of argument, Calvin insists that while Christ's kingdom does not need the protection of human authority *per se*, humans should still do their part, consistent with their vocation, to advance and protect it. God's promises are “no cause why the servants of Christ should be less diligent in maintaining the truth, ... [or] why they should carelessly wink at their wickedness who endeavor to turn all things topsy-turvy.”¹⁴⁸⁴

Calvin is equally critical of the various pagan authorities whose actions toward the Christian movement recorded in the book of Acts range from apathetic to tolerant. He sharply criticizes the city of Athens for the atmosphere of free speech and religious toleration that made it possible for Paul to speak freely on Mars Hill. Anywhere else, he notes, to speak in a public place and draw a crowd like this would have been “a crime worthy of death.” In Athens, however, “because those who did carry about trifles had liberty granted them to prate by reason of the immoderate desire they had to hear news, Paul was permitted to entreat of the mysteries of faith, being requested.” The policy promoted an infatuation with novelty and a predilection to idleness that rendered the Athenians unable to unite around a common philosophy or faith. “Wherefore, there could never be any certain government set down in that city, which was, notwithstanding, the mistress of sciences.” Eventually, Calvin claims, this policy brought Greece to its ruin.¹⁴⁸⁵

Calvin also criticizes the Roman authorities for their reluctance to intervene in the controversy between Paul and the Jewish leaders. Convinced that religion was a matter in which there can be no certainty, the Romans mistakenly believed that religious pluralism should be tolerated. Yet this belief flew in the face of what *all people understand by nature*:

1483Commentary on Acts 9:22 [1552]; CO 48:211.

1484Commentary on Acts 5:34 [1552]; CO 48:114.

1485Commentary on Acts 17:19 [1554]; CO 48:407.

Here we see what the ignorance of true godliness does in setting in order the state of every commonwealth and dominion. All men confess that this is the principal thing that true religion be in force and flourish. Now, when the true God is known, and the certain and sure rule of worshiping him is understood, there is nothing more equitable than that which God commands in his law, to wit, that those who bear rule with power (having abolished contrary superstitions) defend the pure worship of the true God... But seeing that the Romans observed their rites only through pride and stubbornness, and seeing they had no certainty where there was no truth, they thought that this was the best way they could take if they should grant liberty to those who dwelt in the provinces to live as they desired. But nothing is more absurd than to leave the worship of God to men's choice.

It was precisely for this reason, Calvin argues, that the Torah stipulated that the king should possess and study his own copy of the law, “that being well instructed, and certain of his faith, he might with more courage take in hand to maintain that which he knew certainly was right.”¹⁴⁸⁶ Disputes about religion are not, as the Roman official Gallio mistakenly thought, mere “vain contentions,” but “a matter of all others most serious.”¹⁴⁸⁷ It is important to notice the direction of Calvin's reasoning here. He begins by appealing to what “all men confess,” and then declares that there is “nothing more equitable” than that the command in the law concerning the magisterial obligation toward true religion be carried out. Only then does he invoke the Torah.

Because the Romans disregarded the law of God they cared nothing about the charge that Paul had apostatized from that law, let alone that he troubled the “church” with false opinions. They therefore instructed their governors not to interfere with such matters, nor to enforce various religious laws. But while profane persons might think religion is of little concern to political authorities, “among the people of God it is an offense worthy of no less punishment to corrupt the doctrine of godliness with wicked and false opinions than to do injury to or commit wickedness among men.” If God punishes those who violate his worship far more harshly than those who commit injustice, “surely nothing is more absurd than to let blasphemers escape without

¹⁴⁸⁶Commentary on Acts 18:12-14 [1554]; CO 48:431-432.

¹⁴⁸⁷Commentary on Acts 18:15 [1554]; CO 48:432.

punishment.”¹⁴⁸⁸ The Romans dismissed the Jewish law as mere superstition because they “had not learned that the rule of godliness must be sought from the mouth of God.”¹⁴⁸⁹ Calvin thus saw no virtue in the Romans' protection of Paul, nor did he believe Christians should put much faith in the toleration of their opponents. On the contrary, when “enemies of godliness” do not persecute Christians “let us know that we need not thank their moderation and clemency for this, but because, when the Lord spares his sheep, he does not suffer them [his enemies] to do so much hurt as they would.”¹⁴⁹⁰

Calvin's comments evaluating the reaction of various political authorities to the emergence of early Christianity showcase the strength of his conviction that to protect and uphold religious truth is central to the magisterial vocation. He reasoned from the responsibilities of a patriarch or householder to those of a prince: “if this duty [of making one's household an image of the church] be required at the hands of the householder, much more of a prince, that as much as it lies in him he does not suffer the name of God to be profaned in his realm.”¹⁴⁹¹ Calvin reasons that although scripture refers to fathers as “earthly” fathers because their parental role “properly belongs to the civil world,” no one would say that a father should not teach his children to observe the true religion. Thus it can be no contradiction to say that magistrates are secular, while insisting at the same time that they should establish true religion. Even so, he insists, in a revealing turn of logic, “though it belongs to magistrates to defend religion, yet we say that their office is confined to the limits of this life, for otherwise the civil and earthly government cannot be distinguished from the spiritual kingdom of Christ.”¹⁴⁹² The magistrate has a responsibility toward the true religion but that doesn't mean the political kingdom

1488When Paul appealed his case to Caesar, Calvin comments, his purpose was not to “make the doctrine of the gospel subject to the judgment of a profane and wicked man.” The appropriate response of an emperor is to submit to Christ's reign, not to evaluate it. Commentary on Acts 23:29 [1554]; CO 48:516. Cf. Commentary on Acts 25:18-19 [1554]; CO 48:533-534.

1489Commentary on Acts 25:18-19 [1554]; CO 48:534.

1490Commentary on Acts 12:2 [1552]; CO 48:267.

1491Commentary on Acts 16:15 [1554]; CO 48:379.

1492Commentary on Hebrews 12:10 [1549]; CO 55:176.

should be conflated or confused with Christ's spiritual kingdom. The magistrate's power remains outward, coercive, and limited in its influence to the present life.

Calvin seeks to explain this paradox in his commentary on Jesus' declaration to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate in John 18, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' The Jews sought to establish Jesus as an earthly king, he observes, and Jesus offended them by resisting their efforts.¹⁴⁹³ But that does not mean Christ's spiritual kingdom and the political kingdom are incompatible. While the Jews slanderously charged Jesus with seeking to overthrow the political order, Calvin interprets Jesus' statement as a clear declaration to the contrary: "there is no disagreement between his kingdom and political government or order." The reformer paraphrases Jesus to make the point. "I am falsely accused, as if I had attempted to produce a disturbance or to make a revolution in public affairs. I have preached about the kingdom of God, but that is spiritual, and therefore you have no right to suspect me of aspiring to kingly power." To be sure, the kingdom of Christ is *in* the world, "for we know that it has its seat in our hearts, as also Christ says elsewhere, 'The kingdom of God is within you.' But strictly speaking, the kingdom of God, while it dwells in us, is a stranger to the world because its condition is totally different." What is the difference? Jesus himself identifies it when he says that his kingdom does not use the sword as do the kingdoms of this world.¹⁴⁹⁴

This leads Calvin to what is arguably *the* great tension within his political theology. "But here a question arises, Is it not lawful to defend the kingdom of Christ by arms? For when kings and princes are commanded to kiss the Son of God not only are they enjoined to submit to his authority in their private capacity, but also to employ all the power that they possess in defending the church and maintaining godliness." Calvin responds that "they who draw this conclusion, that the doctrine of the gospel and the

¹⁴⁹³Had they succeeded, "his spiritual kingdom would have been ruined." Commentary on John 6:15 [1553]; CO 47:134.

¹⁴⁹⁴Commentary on John 18:36 [1553]; CO 47:403-404.

pure worship of God ought not to be defended by arms, are unskillful and ignorant reasoners.” First, Jesus' point in differentiating his kingdom from those that bear the sword was not to prohibit the defense of his church but to refute the charges of the Jews that his intentions were political. The second reason Calvin offers is his most sophisticated argument on the magistrate's responsibility to the kingdom of Christ to date:

[T]hough godly kings defend the kingdom of Christ by the sword, still it is done in a different manner from that in which worldly kingdoms are wont to be defended. For the kingdom of Christ, being spiritual, must be founded on the doctrine and power of the Spirit. In the same manner too its edification is promoted, for neither the laws and edicts of men nor the punishments inflicted by them enter into the consciences. Yet this does not hinder princes from *accidentally* defending the kingdom of Christ, partly by appointing external discipline and partly by lending their protection to the Church against wicked men. It results, however, from the depravity of the world that the kingdom of Christ is strengthened more by the blood of the martyrs than by the aid of arms.¹⁴⁹⁵

This is in many respects a stunning passage. More than anything Calvin has written up to this point, it clarifies just how and in what respect Calvin believed civil magistrates can be said to use temporal means to establish, promote, or defend a kingdom that is spiritual. It is important to pay close attention to several crucial elements.

First, Calvin argues that when foundational passages like Psalm 2 call magistrates to submit to Christ's rule, they call them to do so *as magistrates*, not simply as private individuals. He assumes that it is self-evident what this means: magistrates must defend the church and maintain godliness. But he does not defend that claim here.

Second, Calvin's final sentence amounts to a stunning recognition that potentially undermines his entire argument. He suggests that the “blood of the martyrs” contributes more to the strength of Christ's kingdom than does the “aid of arms.” Perhaps he is simply using rhetorical exaggeration to bemoan the injustice of magistrates. If so, why not draw the implication that magisterial involvement religious matters causes more harm than good? If, on the other hand, Calvin means his statement quite literally, that is,

¹⁴⁹⁵Commentary on John 18:36 [1553]; CO 47:403-404. Emphasis added.

that the efforts of magistrates contribute more to the strength of Christ's kingdom when they oppose it than when they defend it, why insist that it is part of the vocation of magistrates to use the sword to defend it? These questions push us back to Calvin's fundamental premise, that it is indeed the vocation of magistrates to establish and defend the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

Finally, Calvin recognizes that there is something counter-intuitive about claiming that a political authority whose power is merely external could defend a kingdom whose power is spiritual and inward. His response is to acknowledge that magistrates defend the kingdom of Christ in a different sense than they defend their own realms. Indeed, in a direct sense they cannot defend the kingdom of Christ at all. They can only defend it *accidentally* or *indirectly*. Here he mentions two means by which they do so: establishing external discipline and providing physical protection. In both cases what the magistrate is really doing is establishing and protecting the ministry of the church, which is itself the means of Christ's spiritual government. Calvin explicitly declares that the civil government's laws and edicts cannot promote spiritual edification because they do not enter into the conscience. At no point does civil government become spiritual, use spiritual power, or accomplish directly spiritual ends.¹⁴⁹⁶

Calvin's distinction seriously undermines Hopfl's claim that Calvin “worked out in very great detail, and with much care and acumen, the character of a Christian polity designed precisely to serve as an aid to sanctification: a polity devoted to the honor and glory of God, to *pietas*, to *aequitas* and to *aedificatio*.”¹⁴⁹⁷ Equating sin and crime, he

¹⁴⁹⁶It is the church's task to proclaim Christ and the Christian faith, Chenevière agrees, and “the State's highest function is to cause this mission to be respected,” but the state “is not the judge of its doctrine” and its responsibility to preserve the church from scandal should be kept to a minimum. Marc Chenevière, “Did Calvin Advocate Theocracy?” *Evangelical Quarterly* 9 (1937): 167. Boeke likewise observes that while it is civil government's task to promote and defend the kingdom of Christ, magistrates may not “usurp authority which belongs to the church and 'become chief judges as well in doctrine as in all spiritual government.’” Brandt B Boeke, “Calvin's Doctrine of Civil Government,” 60. Cf. John T. McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought,” *Church History* 18 (September 1949): 156.

¹⁴⁹⁷Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 211. Calvin viewed civil coercion an “aid to sanctification.” Hopfl, 190.

claims, Calvin believed that “the business of magistrates is to enforce virtue.” To be sure, Hopfl recognizes a major obstacle to the claim that Calvin thought this way: “[Calvin] did not think that true righteousness can be enforced.”¹⁴⁹⁸ Yet Hopfl claims that for Calvin the distinction between the spiritual and civil uses of the law did not lead to the conclusion that “neither virtue nor piety ought to be the concern of governors.” On the contrary, “the righteous are in no way harmed or inhibited by having virtue commanded as law, the views of the unrighteous on the matter do not have any standing at all, and the weaker brethren are, in Calvin's view, aided in their striving for sanctification by the elimination of stumbling-blocks to godliness of life.”¹⁴⁹⁹ Hopfl's explanation fails to account for Calvin's theological distinction between what magistrates can do directly – coerce outward action – and what they can do indirectly – create a context conducive of the work of the spiritual government. In fact, Hopfl undermines his own claim when he admits that for Calvin the magistracy's participation in “*aedificatio*,” is “primarily in a ground-clearing capacity,”¹⁵⁰⁰ and that the magistracy provides “valuable external support for the pursuit of sanctification.”¹⁵⁰¹ For this makes all the difference in the world. Civil coercion may be an indirect aid to sanctification, but by no means did Calvin think that magistrates actually participate in sanctification or *aedificatio*, let alone that it was the business of magistrates to enforce true virtue. Hopfl claims that for Calvin the Christian polity is an “educational enterprise,” but he immediately has to admit that “it does not appear that Calvin ever presented it in quite that light.”¹⁵⁰² For Calvin the church, not the civil order, is the school of virtue.

David Little concedes that Calvin's eschatology gave rise to a fundamental

1498Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 189.

1499Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 190.

1500Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 191.

1501Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 212. As Derek Jeffreys points out, Calvin did not believe government can eliminate impiety; it can only hope to mitigate its consequences. Derek S. Jeffreys, “It's a Miracle of God That There Is Any Common Weal Among Us!: Unfaithfulness and Disorder in John Calvin's Political Thought,” *The Review of Politics* (2000): 124-125.

1502Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 203.

dilemma regarding “[temporal] power which is fundamentally differentiated from the new order because of its coercive characteristics and which is, at the same time, subordinated and harnessed to the achievement of the new order.”¹⁵⁰³ Inevitably, he argues, such a dilemma must give way to an emphasis either on the subordination of the state to the church or the separation of the two. That Calvin leaned in practice toward the former (at least by contemporary standards) should not obscure the fact that the latter was also a possibility given Calvin's

fundamental antipathy toward confusing the true Christian order with the political-legal order. That is to say, the irreducible coercive element endemic to political order cannot finally be accommodated to the voluntaristic, free-willing characteristics of the Christian life. It is for this reason that though Calvin consistently attempts to adjust the law of God to the law of the world, he will never allow them to be collapsed into one another. A basic differentiation between new and old order obtains throughout.¹⁵⁰⁴

Thus, Little points out, the church “was always the primary focus of Calvin's considerable energies for organizational reform.”¹⁵⁰⁵

Before turning to Calvin's later writings, it is worth emphasizing that while Calvin's New Testament commentaries feature a theoretically sophisticated account of the magisterial obligation to establish and defend true religion, in most cases that account is defensive rather than constructive. By and large, Calvin took the opportunity offered by various texts to refute the arguments his opponents drew from those texts, or to present his perspective in relation to the details of the narrative. In only two cases, both of them tenuous, did he offer constructive arguments from the New Testament itself. All of this suggests that the real reasons for Calvin's position did not arise from the New Testament but from other philosophical and theological commitments.¹⁵⁰⁶

¹⁵⁰³David Little, *Religion, Order, and Law* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 75

¹⁵⁰⁴Little, *Religion, Order, and Law*, 56.

¹⁵⁰⁵Little, *Religion, Order, and Law*, 74.

¹⁵⁰⁶Reflecting on Calvin's early arguments Hopfl concludes, “There was nothing specifically evangelical about regarding it as part of the ruler's office to maintain the public form of religion: all the rulers of Europe subscribed to this view. What was specifically evangelical was that Luther's thought gave Christians grounds for uneasiness about it. Calvin on the contrary refastened the bonds which Luther had, perhaps inadvertently, begun to loosen, despite the fact that in order to do so he had to resort to the Old Testament, for the New did not yield a single unequivocal word in support. The justification for

Defense of the Orthodox Faith (1554)

Calvin's most sustained defense of the civil punishment of heresy appeared in his 1554 treatise in defense of Geneva's execution of Servetus.¹⁵⁰⁷ Surprisingly, the work remains untranslated into English, and thus it has received little scholarly attention.¹⁵⁰⁸ While most of it is a discussion and condemnation of Servetus's antitrinitarian theology, Calvin devotes nearly fifty pages at the beginning of the work to his more practical political argument.

The driving theme within this early part of the work is that just as magistrates punish temporal crimes, so they should punish those who blaspheme God and harm others by distorting the truth. Freedom of speech is not inherently good, for while people should be free to speak the truth, they should not be free to spew falsehood. "For what religion would remain any longer in the world? What mark would one have for discerning the true church? In brief, what would be[come] of the things of God and of Jesus Christ, if doctrine is uncertain and placed in suspension?"¹⁵⁰⁹ Magistrates who fail to punish blatant heresy are therefore complicit in its guilt, "for by sparing the wolves,

treating the Old Testament as authoritative in this manner he was not to provide until years later." Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 53.

1507For background on this see Chapter 2.

1508The Latin title is *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate, contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani, ubi ostenditur haereticos iure gladii coercendos esse, et nominatim de homine hoc tam impio iuste et merito sumptum Genevae fuisse supplicium* (CO 8:453-644), but it appeared along with a French translation. The extended French title is: *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy que tiennent tous chrestiens de la Trinité des personnes en un seul Dieu: Congre les erreurs détestables de Michel Servet Espagnol. Où il est aussi monstré qu'il est licite de punir les hérétiques, et qu'à bon droict ce meschant a esté executé par iustice en la ville de Genève* (Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1554; available online at the Post-Reformation Digital Library, <http://www.prdl.org/search.php?q=D%C3%A9claration+pour+maintenir+la+vraye+foy>). The following citations are my translations from the French except where otherwise specified. A summary of the work appears in Marian Hillar and Claire S. Allen, *Michael Servetus: Intellectual Giant, Humanist, and Martyr* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 193-201. Cf. Christoph Strohm, "Calvin and Religious Tolerance," *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society* (ed. Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Smallmann; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 184-191.

1509*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 17.

they make the poor sheep to be prey.”¹⁵¹⁰ The premise of this argument, of course, is that with respect to religion the truth has been decisively established and is not in question. Where religion is in legitimate question, Calvin concedes, free debate should be permitted. Coercion should never be used in defense of doctrines that are doubtful or that have been invented by human beings.¹⁵¹¹

This was an important point for Calvin, because he was aware that there were many orthodox persons, persons of good will, who opposed the punishment of heretics on the grounds that the papists were using such methods to persecute the faithful. The papists, Calvin claims, used fire and sword to defend every jot and tittle of their teaching.¹⁵¹² But their use of force was rooted in ignorance rather than reason. The papal abuse of coercion hardly meant that the just use of coercion had to be abandoned, for it was an entirely different thing for a magistrate to defend the “true faith of which he is certain.”¹⁵¹³ The key is that magistrates must only defend a cause that is known and established, acting temperately and always being sure carefully to investigate the cases that come before them. They should not engage in inhumane practices like torture, dismemberment, or even burning at the stake. And their work must always be accompanied by careful teaching.¹⁵¹⁴

Of course, there is a potential problem with Calvin's argument. If the truth is so certain, why does it require the protection of magistrates to preserve its certainty?

Calvin's answer is that while the truth is certain to those with education and wisdom, the

1510 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 35.

1511 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 17-19, 26.

1512 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 17-18.

1513 Calvin rejects the claim that all those persecuted for religious reasons are martyrs. Blasphemers cannot be categorized with the persecuted faithful, because the cause of their suffering is entirely different.

Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy, 23. Interestingly, Calvin admits that the early church father St. Hilary did challenge the legitimacy of religious persecution. But Calvin explains that Hilary was stirred to this argument by the fact that he himself was suffering from unjust persecution (20). Hilary's arguments can legitimately be used against the papists, but they take nothing from the fact that magistrates are given the sword in part to protect the church from unjust assault (21).

1514 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 24-26. There should always be a careful combination of teaching and force, because coercion without teaching makes hypocrites, while teaching without coercion only hardens those who are stubborn (36).

masses, who lack such gifts, are easily manipulated by arguments that have the mere appearance of credibility.¹⁵¹⁵ It is these latter arguments that magistrates are obligated to suppress. But to argue that matters of religion are not certain is to mock God and call him a liar. For “if we do not have religion certain and resolved in holy scripture, it follows that God wants us to be occupied in vain by I know not what fallacies.”¹⁵¹⁶

In the first part of the section on the punishment of heretics Calvin offers a running critique of a litany of arguments his critics brought against his position. Like Calvin's New Testament commentaries, this section is largely deconstructive. Much of it simply repeats arguments that Calvin had already articulated in his commentaries. At the heart of Calvin's opponents' position, as he describes it, was their claim that the punishment of religious crimes was abolished at the coming of Christ. They argued that Jesus did not desire to have his kingdom established by weapons but by the spiritual sword of the gospel. He called his followers to be prepared to suffer, but never to inflict suffering on others, being as sheep among wolves.¹⁵¹⁷ Christians should therefore follow the example of Christ, who did not break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick.¹⁵¹⁸ Proponents of toleration appealed to the parable of the wheat and the tares, in which Jesus warned his disciples not to pull up the tares too early (i.e., before his return), lest they also pull up the wheat.¹⁵¹⁹ They likewise cited Jesus' command to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane to put his sword back in its sheath,¹⁵²⁰ and Servetus followed Augustine in appealing to Christ's refusal to condemn the woman caught in adultery. He charged Calvin with the Judaizing error of insisting on obedience to the Old Testament law.¹⁵²¹

1515 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 17.

1516 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 17.

1517 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 27.

1518 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 33.

1519 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 36.

1520 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 40.

1521 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 13-14.

Calvin responds to these arguments with his standard refutations. Just because Christ did not condemn the adulterous woman did not mean he overturned capital punishment. The logical extension of his opponents' argument would be to abolish all criminal punishment. Christ also refused to act as a judge arbitrating over an inheritance, but only radicals thought this meant judges should not adjudicate such controversies. Jesus never commanded his disciples to punish thieves, adulterers, and murderers, but that didn't mean such crimes should be left unpunished.¹⁵²² The only reason Jesus did not take up these tasks himself was because it was not his vocation. His mission was to establish the “spiritual kingdom” and to atone for the sin of the world.¹⁵²³ Thus he remained silent when tried by Pilate, but that does not mean Christians are obligated to do the same when falsely accused in court. Thus he called Peter to avoid defending him with the sword, but that does not mean “that the hands of magistrates and of princes are bound from any longer exercising their ordained office.”¹⁵²⁴ Against the appeal to the parable of the wheat and the tares Calvin responds by carrying his opponents' argument to what he saw as its logical, yet absurd conclusion. If those who are blatantly hostile to the truth are to be left among the wheat, he points out, even excommunication would be destroyed. But Christ's point was simply to warn against destructive zeal in light of the fact that no one knows with certainty who are the elect.¹⁵²⁵

Calvin concedes that the kingdom was initially established without the protection or support of magistrates. Jesus commissioned the disciples under such conditions in order that the triumph of the gospel over its enemies might appear all the more miraculous and glorious, and that the disciples' truthfulness might be vindicated by their

¹⁵²²*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 17, 27. Calvin makes a similar argument in favor of capital punishment specifically. If it is the case that a reprobate person should not be put to death for a religious crime because that person will lose the chance to repent, he argues, then it is necessarily the case that all capital punishment of nonbelievers would have to be abolished, a conclusion that Calvin finds absurd (15-16). Calvin used the same argument to refute the appeal to the advice of Gamaliel. If Gamaliel's advice were followed, all discipline and police alike would be abolished (38-39).

¹⁵²³*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 33-34 (40).

¹⁵²⁴*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 40.

¹⁵²⁵*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 36-38.

willingness to suffer for it.¹⁵²⁶ But Calvin points out that like the prophets of Old Testament Israel, despite all the persecution they faced, the apostles never claimed “that one should not maintain the service of God by the sword.”¹⁵²⁷ In any case, in Christendom conditions had changed. Jesus had since chosen other ministers, including magistrates, to serve him and his kingdom.¹⁵²⁸ Just as God gives pastors temporal gifts such as rhetoric and eloquence for use in preaching, even though the gospel works by the Spirit alone, so “the Christian religion and faith, even as it is sustained only by the hand of God and triumphs under the cross, is nevertheless aided by men and has some support from their authority when it so pleases God.”¹⁵²⁹

Calvin's opponents raised another argument as well. They insisted that it is impossible to coerce a person to believe a religious doctrine. Calvin concedes that “it is not in the hand of princes to enter into the heart of men by their edicts, and to touch them such that they subject themselves to God and agree to the truth.” But Calvin invokes Augustine, reminding his readers that the purpose of punishment is not to create faith but to render the stubborn “benign and docile” so that they might be susceptible to teaching.¹⁵³⁰ In addition, civil punishments are appropriate for the sole reason that it is part of the magistrate's obligation to protect the name of God, his word, and his service from slander. Just as a father is culpable if he allows his family to be seduced into idolatry, so a prince is accountable if he allows this to happen within his realm.¹⁵³¹

In the second part of the section Calvin finally turns to his constructive argument.

1526*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 27-28.

1527*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 19. In fact, Calvin points out, Jesus and his apostles occasionally administered corporeal punishments. Jesus used a whip to cleanse the temple, Peter proclaimed the death of Ananias and Sapphira, and Paul struck Elymas with blindness, while informing the Corinthian church that some of their number had died due to their disrespect for the Lord's Supper. How much more civil magistrates? *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 35 (15). Paul urged Christians to flee from an evil person, but no doubt he would have taken recourse to a magistrate had he had the opportunity (56-57).

1528*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 30-31.

1529*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 30 (Cf. 38-39).

1530*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 32.

1531*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 32-33.

His intent, he declares is to show “that not only is it licit for magistrates to chastise those who attempt to corrupt the heavenly doctrine, but also that it is commanded to them to do so, inasmuch as they cannot leave the errors that are infecting the church unpunished without failing in their office and being reprehensible before God.” Significantly, Calvin begins his constructive argument not with scripture but with an appeal to natural law and the example of pagans. Pagan writers bore witness that “the natural sense teaches that religion must have the principal place in any well-regulated polity, and that it must be maintained by the laws. When one reads all the philosophers who have treated of this matter, there are none who do not begin with the service of God, and who do not give the first degree to religion.” Indeed, the pagan writers considered a legislator “barbarous” if “he did not care that the gods be served and honored.”¹⁵³²

Of course, there is a counter-argument, but Calvin is ready for it. Some claimed that the pagans made these arguments because of superstition. Calvin responds by highlighting the basic logic of the position apart from superstition. If it is just for a magistrate to punish crimes against human beings, why should he not punish crimes against the “glory of God”? Indeed, it is in the very interest of human beings for him to do so, for the glory of God is essential to the well-being of humanity. At the very least, oaths would be meaningless without the dignity of religion. “Thus, “since the goal of a good polity and right concerns a legitimate order between human beings, let us see, when the honor of God is held in contempt, if the principal order is not so dissipated that the life of men becomes brutal.” All forms of government are “imperfect without religion,” and “magistrates are only shadows, or as little runts half-formed, when they only occupy themselves with civil processes, not taking care to maintain the service of God.”¹⁵³³

Having established the witness of natural law as testified by the pagans, and as

1532 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraie foy*, 41.

1533 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraie foy*, 42.

substantiated by logic, Calvin then turns to scripture. But rather than beginning with the Torah, he bridges the argument from natural law to scripture by considering the example of the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar. As recorded in the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar condemned to death anyone who blasphemed against the God of Israel. Calvin claims that both Daniel and the Holy Spirit praised this action as an example for all magistrates. How can Christian rulers not “take care to guarantee the glory of God” and “conserve it in its entirety, seeing that the king of Babylon makes himself its guardian and protector?”¹⁵³⁴ The example of a pagan king makes Christian princes, who are “servants of the church, and to whom the truth of God is entirely clear,” “doubly culpable of villainous cowardice, if they do not demonstrate more courage in maintaining it.”¹⁵³⁵

Only after having laid the foundation of natural law, and having bridged the appeal to pagans by the biblical example of Nebuchadnezzar, does Calvin finally turn to the Torah, to the law God himself established in his “church.”¹⁵³⁶ The Torah confirms that it is not mere human authority that calls for the defense of true religion. Not only did God command Israel to put to death false prophets who sought to lead the people astray, but he told the people to have no mercy on their own brothers, sons, daughters, wives, neighbors, and friends who committed the same offense. Indeed, whole cities were to be destroyed. God's demand for such zeal, Calvin argues, makes mockery of the claim that crimes against religion should be tolerated.¹⁵³⁷

At this point, however, Calvin makes two fundamental qualifications, both of which he suggests are rooted in the Torah itself. First, God did not command that all

1534 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 43. On the other hand, Calvin is derisive of appeals to pagans against his position. Men like Claude Lysias, who declined to be concerned about the charges against Paul because they had to do with the Jewish law, spoke the way they did because they had no care for true religion (39).

1535 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 44. Cf. 22-23.

1536 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 44.

1537 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 45-47. Calvin observes that while Moses was known for his humility and mercy, when it came to the honor of God his zeal was unmatched. Though it may be a virtue to use clemency when it comes to sins against human beings, Calvin declares, when it comes to the service of God judges must use all rigor (49-50).

religion should be maintained in this way, but only “that which he has ordained from his own mouth.” The use of the sword to defend false religion is therefore unjust.¹⁵³⁸ Calvin warns that those who shed innocent blood in the name of religion will be accountable for every drop. It is not the authority of human beings that is to be defended, but the authority of God.¹⁵³⁹ Second, foreigners, or adherents of foreign religions, are not to be punished, but only “those who, after having received the doctrine of the law, would become apostates.”¹⁵⁴⁰ “God does not command that one punish indifferently all those who have sown wicked doctrine, but only the apostates who are alienated and straying from the true religion, and who work to seduce others.” Thus, as he had claimed in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, so here again Calvin confirms that “the Jews, the Turks, and similar peoples” are not to be punished.¹⁵⁴¹

Calvin brings these points together here more clearly than anywhere else in his writings, distinguishing between three levels of religious error, and describing the degree of toleration or suppression appropriate to each. It is worth quoting his statement at length:

Thus there are to be differentiated three degrees of errors: [1] those we admit, that are to be tolerated, [2] and others that are to be punished by moderate means [3] so that only the obvious impiety may be punished by a capital penalty... Certainly this means that if there is a certain small superstition or ignorance occupying the minds of the simple people, one should be patient in trying to correct them rather than too hastily seek violent retribution. Thus people should be punished according to their errors. Even the moderate type of errors call for severity. However, though the errors producing damage to the Church and resulting from negligence and ambition deserve a punishment – nevertheless, when there is no contempt of God and rebellion combined with mutiny, the severity should not be excessive so that the indulgence may not nourish the audacity and defiance of those who would desire to tear apart the

1538 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 45.

1539 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 45-46.

1540 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 45.

1541 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 46. It is those who are apostates from the true faith and who are soliciting others to rebel as well, so threatening the salvation of their souls, troubling the peace of the church and breaking the unity of the faith, who must be punished with such severity (26). This undermines Strohm's claim that Calvin's removal of the similar passage from the first edition of the *Institutes* was “emblematic” of a broader change in position. Strohm, “Calvin and Religious Tolerance,” 183-184. See R. White, “Castellio Against Calvin: The Turk in the Toleration Controversy of the Sixteenth Century,” *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 46.3 (1984): 573-586.

unity of faith. But since there are those who attempt to undermine religion at its foundations, and who profess execrable blasphemies against God and by impious and poisonous dogmas they drag the soul to ruin, in sum – those who attempt to revolt the public from the unique God and his doctrine, it is necessary to have a recourse to the extreme measure in order to prevent further spreading of the mortal poison. Such a rule which Moses received from the mouth of God he himself had followed faithfully.¹⁵⁴²

No doubt Calvin found the first degree of error rampant in Geneva, but he expected it to be corrected through teaching and perhaps church discipline. The second degree of error would land a person before the Council, and brief imprisonment, rebuke or banishment were the likely penalties. The third degree of error, resulting in a capital sentence, was only encountered once in Genevan history, in the case of Servetus. The purpose of *Defense of the Orthodox Faith* was to prove that Servetus was so wicked and harmful as to “merit being exterminated from the world.”¹⁵⁴³

Calvin concludes his defense of the punishment of heretics by returning to the question of whether or not it is consistent with the two kingdoms doctrine. He identifies the objection that the punishment of heresy is “not suitable to the reign of Christ (which is spiritual) ... seeing that in the church this is not commanded to judges.”¹⁵⁴⁴ Calvin responds by stressing that civil magistrates have always defended true religion, and that the only reason they did not in New Testament times is because none of them were Christian. He thus formulates a fundamental exegetical principle: “the advent of Christ did not change that which pertains to political order, and subtracted and retracted nothing from the right office of magistrates.”¹⁵⁴⁵ Calvin then offers what had become his standard litany of proof-texts. Psalm 2 demands that kings “kiss the Son,” Isaiah 49:23 prophesies that after the messiah comes kings and queens will serve as nursing fathers and mothers of the church, and in 1 Timothy 2:2 Paul charges believers to pray that kings

1542Cited from the Latin text: *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, CO 8:477. Quoted in Hillar, *Michael Servetus*, 201. For the French see *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 48-49.

1543*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 57.

1544*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 50.

1545*Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 50-51.

and rulers would enable Christians to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”¹⁵⁴⁶ Calvin concludes that in Christian contexts magistrates have no right to abandon the responsibility of caring for religion. “Therefore there is no doubt that this charge is committed by God to all faithful magistrates to maintain the kingdom of our Lord Jesus in its state, and to apply to this the authority of their sword.”¹⁵⁴⁷

Institutes of the Christian Religion (1559)

A number of scholars have emphasized the significance of the fact that in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin entitled Book 4, in which his chapter on civil government is situated, “the external means or aims by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein.”¹⁵⁴⁸ Just below that title he writes that God has provided outward helps “to beget and increase faith within us, and advance it to its goal” (4.1.1). Some argue that Calvin intended these descriptions to apply to the work of civil government, the subject of the last of Book 4's twenty chapters. Stevenson suggests that by making it one of the outward means of grace Calvin associates the work of civil government with the spiritual use of the law. He observes that for Calvin Christians have

1546 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 51. 1 Timothy 2:2 receives the most attention. Had Paul simply referred to modesty and honesty, Calvin admits, his opponents might have an argument, but Paul also identifies godliness, so assigning magistrates the task of “establishing order that God may be devoutly honored and served.” Paul “does not limit their charge to rendering to men what belongs to them, and enabling one to live in peace and good equity,” Calvin insists, “but he specifically pronounces that they are established to maintain religion. Then it follows that the sword is placed in their hand for defending the truth of God when it is needed, punishing heretics who oppose it” (52-53).

1547 *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, 52.

1548 Balke concludes, “For him the *cultus Dei* encompassed public life in society, as well as in the inner spiritual life... For him the *politica administratio* belonged to the *externa media salutis*.” Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 257. Hopfl writes that Calvin “treated both church and government as 'external media' whereby the grace of God is distributed to the world, and it dealt with both of them in the same book.” Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 191-192 (Cf. 208). Niesel admits that Calvin sharply distinguishes the spiritual kingdom from the civil order, but noting the overriding importance of the “kingly authority of our Lord Jesus Christ” (231), he insists that for Calvin “the state is among the “outward aids or instruments by which God calls us to and maintains us in communion with Christ” (230). See Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Methuen, 1956), 229-237. Godfrey interprets Calvin's structure more consistently with Calvin's theology, suggesting simply that for Calvin “civil government is one of the external aids by which God preserves the society of Christ.” W. Robert Godfrey, “Calvin and Theonomy,” *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (ed. William S. Barker, et. al.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 300-301.

a “need for external aids or helps,” and that God provides these helps in the institutions of church and civil government.¹⁵⁴⁹ This leads him to declare that “Calvin finds the effort to distinguish sharply between sacred law and secular law to be, in many ways, an artificial endeavor.”¹⁵⁵⁰ Indeed, “Sanctification, effectuated by the Holy Spirit through the instrumentalities of spiritual and political communities remains a constant task and a lifelong process.”¹⁵⁵¹ If a sovereign God exercises his power through the rule of Christ and his Spirit for the purpose of restoring and renewing the creation, human exercises of power such as civil government are “legitimate only when they work toward the same goals of renewal and revivification and do so in praise of God's incredible mercy.”¹⁵⁵² Given the shared end of renewal and sanctification, it “logically and inevitably” follows that “the institutions of church and state are simply two dimensions of one divine help.”¹⁵⁵³

1549Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 45. Hancock claims that for Calvin “The state ... is one of the external means of the spiritual kingdom.” Ralph C. Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 79. Earlier he says that Calvin presents civil government as “one of the 'external means' of spiritual government” (64). A similar example appears in the work of Paul (Sueng Hoon) Chung, who interprets Calvin as a liberation theologian. Chung writes, “As long as the secular government is faithful and obedient to its essential obligation, it belongs to Christ and Christ's eternal Kingdom, as the church has Christ as the head of his church and this world” (117). Paul (Sueng Hoon) Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics in John Calvin: A Pneumatological Perspective* (New York: University Press of America, 2000), 116-117.

1550“Hence, to suggest that rules promulgated by these institutions are ordinarily distinct from, or at substantial variance with, God's law is to question their divine ordination.” Thus believers must always “shoulder their responsibility to ensure that God's law as presented to others remains consistent with its biblical expression.” Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 50.

1551Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 53.

1552Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 61.

1553Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 52. In part Stevenson bases his claim on an erroneous comparison between the two kingdoms doctrine and the two tables of the law. He writes, “One is reminded, and Calvin proceeds to point to it, of the important distinction he names regarding the two tables of the law, the first concerned with the 'inner' person, the second with 'outer' behavior toward others” (52). But Calvin does not contrast the two tables of the law in terms of the inward person and outward behavior. Rather, he contrasts them in terms of obligations of piety and obligations of justice, both of which have inward and outward dimensions. Stevenson is correct, of course, to say that for Calvin there is an “indissoluble link between religious faith and public order” (25). He moves beyond Calvin, however, when he says that civil government “serves spiritual and pedagogical purposes” (Stevenson, “Calvin and Political Issues,” 174) and has “‘spiritual' responsibilities” (176). Stevenson never defines how he is using the word 'spiritual' here but his claims are contradicted by his own dialectical counter-assertions. “Government's role, Calvinist 'revolutionary' movements notwithstanding, is less to radically re-orient than to point subjects toward orderly peaceableness” (175). “Hence, we ought never to assume that civil government can re-make the world but only that it might 'provide that a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men' (IV.20.3)” (176). In

Yet Calvin himself is not unclear on the matter. Nowhere in his writings does he describe civil government as one of the “external means” or “outward helps” of spiritual grace. Here, when he writes that God has provided outward helps “to beget and increase faith within us, and advance it to its goal,” he is simply informing his readers that as a whole Book 4 is concerned with the ministry of the church as the means by which God brings about justification and sanctification. In fact, he immediately identifies the means he is talking about: the word, right order, and the sacraments, concluding that by these means God has accommodated himself to human beings to draw them to himself. In context there is no need to interpret right order as referring to civil government, because the church also has its right order. Significantly, it is only after this that Calvin declares what will be his outline in the book: “the church, its government, orders, and power; then the sacraments; and lastly, the civil order” (4.1.1).¹⁵⁵⁴ None of this suggests that Calvin views the civil order as one of the means by which God justifies and sanctifies human beings. It simply indicates that Calvin placed a relatively brief chapter on civil government at the end of a massive book on the church.

Notably, Calvin himself admits that the chapter on civil government fits oddly with the rest of the book. He only turns to civil government after reminding his readers that “we have established above that man is under a twofold government,” and that “we have elsewhere discussed at sufficient length the kind that resides in the soul or inner man and pertains to eternal life.” Now, he says, he will turn to “the other kind, which

Sovereign Grace he writes, “For Calvin, civil government does indeed have 'spiritual' responsibilities.” It “oversees the multidimensional growth ... of its subjects.” He gives the Consistory as an example of this. “In the Consistory ... one can see government taking on 'spiritual' responsibilities without its metamorphosing into a 'church'” (98).

¹⁵⁵⁴Roughly Calvin does follow this order. Chapters 1-13 discuss the church with its government, orders, and power, Chapters 14-19 discuss the sacraments, and Chapter 20 discusses civil government.

Throughout Calvin refutes the various errors with which he charges the papacy. The section on the church itself can be further outlined as follows: Chapters 1-2 describe the nature of the true church; Chapter 3 introduces the offices of the church; Chapters 4-7 engage church history; Chapters 8-9 discuss the teaching authority of the church; Chapter 10 discusses the legislative power of the church (particularly relative to matters of worship); Chapters 11-12 discuss church discipline; Chapter 13 discusses vows.

pertains only to the establishment of civil justice and outward morality” (4.20.1). Clearly he is differentiating Chapters 1-19, which pertain to the spiritual government, from Chapter 20, which pertains to the political kingdom.

But lest it be unclear, in a section he added in 1559, the same edition in which he added the title about the “external means,” Calvin confesses that “this topic seems by nature alien to the spiritual doctrine of faith which I have undertaken to discuss.” Still, he writes, “what follows will show that I am right in joining them, in fact, that necessity compels me to do so.” In other words, the reason why the discussion of civil government is part of Book 4 is not because it is part of the spiritual doctrine of faith, but because for several reasons it is necessary to discuss them together. What are those reasons? Calvin gives three: First, because “insane and barbarous men furiously strive to overturn this divinely established order.” Second, because “the flatterers of princes, immoderately praising their power, do not hesitate to set them against the rule of God himself.” These two threats need to be taken seriously by Christians because God uses civil government to protect and establish the ministry of the church that is his spiritual kingdom. Thus “Unless both these evils are checked, purity of faith will perish.” Third, because “it is of no slight importance to us to know how lovingly God has provided in this respect for mankind, that greater zeal for piety may flourish in us to attest our gratefulness” (4.20.1).

What is crucial, however, is what Calvin does *not* say. He does not say – nor does he ever say it – that civil government is a means of grace by which God justifies or sanctifies human beings. On the contrary, he is consistently emphatic that spiritual and political government are quite distinct. Civil government defends and establishes the kingdom of Christ, but it does so indirectly, not directly. The two kingdoms always remain distinct.

It is true that in the 1559 edition Calvin made significant additions emphasizing

civil government's responsibility to care for religion. When he describes “the flatterers of princes [who], immoderately praising their power, do not hesitate to set them against the rule of God himself,” he probably has in mind those magistrates across the Protestant world who refused to establish ecclesiastical church discipline, usurping that power for themselves, as well as those Catholic magistrates who actively persecuted the true faith. In the next section he made an equally important addition. To the list of purposes for which civil government was ordained he explicitly adds the care of religion: “to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church” (4.20.2). And where in the next paragraph he adds the clause “that honesty and modesty may be preserved among men” (4.20.3), it is difficult to doubt that by the preservation of honesty he means to include honesty about religious truth.

Calvin had always acknowledged the magistrate's obligation to defend the true religion, but beyond a brief and passing reference, in the 1536 *Institutes* he had never expanded on that claim. Now that changed. In an entirely new section targeted at the Anabaptists and their claim that the magistracy is outside of the perfection of Christ, Calvin finally incorporated the triumvirate of texts he had first used against the Anabaptists in the *Brief Instruction* of 1544. Summarizing Psalm 2, he argues that when David told magistrates to “kiss the Son” he was not telling them to lay down their authority, but to “submit to Christ the power with which they have been invested, that he alone may tower over all.” Invoking Isaiah 49:2-3, he claims Isaiah's reference to kings as “foster fathers of the church” and queens as “its nurses” as a prophecy through which God made civil magistrates “defenders of God's pious worshipers.” Finally, after suggesting that he could cite numerous references in the Psalms “in which the right of rulers is asserted for them all,” Calvin turns to his most important New Testament proof-text, 1 Timothy 2:2. When Paul told Timothy to have the church pray for civil government in order that the church might enjoy “a peaceful life under them with all

godliness and honesty,” the Geneva reformer insists, “he entrusts the condition of the church to their protection and care” (4.20.5).¹⁵⁵⁵

Even more telling than these additions was a significant expansion of Calvin's discussion of “the office of magistrates, how it is described in the word of God and the things in which it consists.” Whereas in all previous editions Calvin's description of the task of government had focused entirely on the second table of the law, now he added a vigorous defense of magistrates' responsibilities to enforce the first table as well. It is of tremendous significance that, as in his commentary on Acts, he introduces this new argument with an appeal to natural law. He points out that even if scripture did not teach that government's task extends to the first table of the law,

we could learn this from secular writers: for no one has discussed the office of magistrates, the making of laws, and public welfare, without beginning at religion and divine worship. And thus all have confessed that no government can be happily established unless piety is the first concern; and that those laws are preposterous which neglect God's right and provide only for men. Since, therefore, among all philosophers religion takes first place, and since this fact has always been observed by universal consent of all nations, let Christian princes and magistrates be ashamed of their negligence if they do not apply themselves to this concern (4.20.9).¹⁵⁵⁶

Calvin's first and foundational argument is an appeal to consensus of secular writers, philosophers, and the laws of nations. It is from the standpoint of this conviction about natural law that he turns to the authority of Old Testament law.

Calvin's emphasis on “secular writers” so dominates his argument that he hardly supplements it at all with proof-texts from scripture. Aside from citing the declaration of Judges 21:25 that when there was no king in Israel every person did as he pleased, the closest he comes to offering a fuller biblical argument is to declare that “holy kings are

1555In an addition to a later section he wrote that it was a “kingly virtue” for a magistrate to “destroy the wicked of the land, that all evildoers may be driven out of the city of God” (4.20.10).

1556Keddie thus writes, “The conclusion seems inescapable that Calvin regards 'rightly establishing religion' as the prime duty of a civil government. 'Civil righteousness' is clearly secondary in his thinking, though necessary to the proper accomplishment of the establishment of religion.” Keddie, “Calvin on Civil Government,” 26. But while for Calvin the care of religion is the highest magisterial duty in a well-regulated Christian commonwealth, for civil government in general it is the preservation of basic justice that is its *sine qua non*.

greatly praised in scripture because they restored the worship of God when it was corrupted or destroyed, or took care of religion that under them it might flourish pure and unblemished.” With that brief reference to the kings of Old Testament Israel, he immediately shifts to an argument from reason. It is absurd, he maintains, to think that God would have appointed magistrates for the purpose of deciding “earthly controversies” and “rendering justice among men,” and yet would have refused them authority to address matters of “far greater importance – that he himself should be purely worshiped according to the prescription of his law.” Aside from a general reference to Psalm 101 to show that David saw his task as being to “detest the impious, slanderers, and the proud,” that is the extent of Calvin's exegetical argument in the *Institutes* that government must enforce the first table of the law (4.20.9).

The Argument from the Old Testament

Throughout his Old Testament Commentaries Calvin maintains the same approach to the magisterial care of religion as is found in the 1554 *Defense of the Orthodox Faith* and the 1559 *Institutes*. While admitting that scripture typically describes good government according to the simple phrase “righteousness and judgment,” terms that refer to justice and the defense of the innocent, Calvin stresses that the magistrate's role could not be limited to the second table of the law. “It is undoubtedly true that the duty of a good prince embraces a wider extent than 'righteousness and judgment,' for his great aim ought to be to defend the honor of God and religion.”¹⁵⁵⁷ Calvin consistently begins his arguments with appeals to natural law before turning to scripture for confirmation, and then refuting arguments that the magisterial care of religion is no longer appropriate in the new covenant era.

The specific lesson Calvin drew from pagan testimony about natural law was that

¹⁵⁵⁷Commentary on Isaiah 32:1 [1559]; CO 36:542.

faithful Israelite kings cared for religion as an obligation of their general vocation rather than of their unique typological function as types of Christ. To be sure, as was seen in Chapter 7, Calvin did not consider the kings of Israel to be exactly equal to Christian kings. On the contrary, he emphasized that the Israelite kingdom was uniquely a type of the spiritual kingdom of Christ. This perspective gave him the theological option of dismissing the relevance of Israelite kings as models for their Christian counterparts. Just as Christians do not follow outward and earthly Old Testament prescriptions for worship, so there would be no need, according to this potential interpretation, for Christians to follow outward and earthly Old Testament prescriptions regarding polity. For unlike Israelite kings, the magistrates of Christendom are not representatives of the kingdom of Christ.

On the other hand, the very fact that Israel was also an outward, earthly kingdom, in sharp contrast to the spiritual kingdom of which it was a type, made it possible for Calvin to embrace it as a source of guidance for Christian politics. The key, once again, was to show that the primary functions of Israelite kings arose out of their political vocation rather than their typological purpose. And to establish this point Calvin tended to rely on arguments from reason and natural law.

Nowhere is this tendency more evident than in Calvin's commentary on the Law.¹⁵⁵⁸ Calvin published this work in 1563, only one year before his death, but given how concisely and poignantly it illustrates his fuller argument, it is helpful to start with this work before turning to the broader range of arguments in Calvin's Old Testament commentaries. Calvin's commentary on the Torah, like his commentary on the synoptic gospels, does not follow the chronological method of his other commentaries. Rather, he approaches the text topically, outlining the various rules and regulations as they

¹⁵⁵⁸On Calvin's argument in the sermons and commentaries on Deuteronomy see Philip C. Holtrop, *The Bolsec Controversy on Predestination, from 1551-1555* (2 vols.; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1993), 2:212-229. Cf. Sermon on Deuteronomy 13:6-11 [1555]; CO 27:260; Sermon on Deuteronomy 13:12-18 [1555]; CO 27:265, 271.

correlate to each of the Ten Commandments, which Calvin accepts as a representative summary of the law. Under each commandment, he then distinguishes between the moral law, which is always binding on human beings, and its political and ceremonial supplements, which are instances of the civil and ceremonial law unique to Israel. Calvin's discussion of the care of religion appears largely in his comments on the political supplements to the first commandment, 'You shall have no other gods before me.'

Calvin begins with a general principle that blurs the line between the two kingdoms: "political laws [*leges politicae*] are not only enacted with reference to earthly affairs [*terrenis negotiis*], in order that men should maintain mutual equity with each other, and should follow and observe what is right, but that they should exercise themselves in the veneration of God."¹⁵⁵⁹ In other words, civil government should be concerned about both tables of the law. Later in the commentary he articulates the principle somewhat differently: "[T]he worship of God should be by no means passed over in civil and earthly government [*civili et terrena gubernatione*], for although its direct object [*scopum dirigitur*] is to preserve mutual equity between men, yet religion always ought to hold the first place [*primum ... gradum*]."¹⁵⁶⁰ The distinction between the "direct object" of political government and the "first place" that religion ought to hold demonstrates that Calvin remains committed to the two kingdoms distinction in principle. Civil government, like any other human endeavor, should give the first place to the worship of God, but its role with respect to spiritual matters is indirect.

Here again Calvin begins by noting that civil government's obligation to care for religion was evident to all pagan philosophers. "For Plato also begins from hence, when he lays down the legitimate constitution of a republic, and calls the fear of God the preface of all laws; nor has any profane author ever existed who has not confessed that this is the principal part of a well-constituted state, that all with one consent should

¹⁵⁵⁹Commentary on Deuteronomy 18:19 [1563]; CO 24:354.

¹⁵⁶⁰Commentary on Deuteronomy 20:1 [1563]; CO 24:372.

reverence and worship God.”¹⁵⁶¹ This establishes the care of religion as a requirement of natural law and equity rather than of the Mosaic law unique to Israel. It is a just principle “that the whole system of law is perverted if the cultivation of piety is ignored by it.” Of course, magistrates do not have the discretionary authority to *determine* the true religion, but merely the executive authority to *recognize* and establish it. This they can only do if they submit themselves to God's word, “from the regulation of which it is sinful to decline.” Apart from such submission to the word pagan interference in religious matters is useless at best. “It has been wisely forbidden by human legislators that men should make to themselves private gods, but all this is vain unless the knowledge of the true God enlightens and directs them.”¹⁵⁶²

Thus as in his *Defense of the Orthodox Faith* Calvin maintains that there are limits on what action Christian magistrates may take to defend religion. First, capital punishment is only to be applied if the error is so serious that it constitutes outright apostasy or strikes at the roots of religion.¹⁵⁶³ Second, punishment is only to be applied in societies where the true religion has been publicly accepted and its certainty is beyond doubt. Thus “the season of this severity would not be until a positive religion should be established [*stabilita est certa religio*].”¹⁵⁶⁴ In Israel God had demonstrated his glory through their miraculous redemption and had clearly revealed himself in his law such that there was no such doubt. “It must then be remembered, that the crime of impiety would not otherwise merit punishment, unless the religion had not only been received by public consent and the suffrages of the people, but, being supported also by sure and

¹⁵⁶¹Commentary on Deuteronomy 18:19 [1563]; CO 24:354-355.

¹⁵⁶²Commentary on Deuteronomy 18:19 [1563]; CO 24:355. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:6 [1546]; CO 49:337.

¹⁵⁶³Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:5 [1563]; CO 24:355-357. Calvin would appear to support the death penalty for witches, as well as “all augurs, and magicians, and consulters with familiar spirits, and necromancers and followers of magic arts, as well as enchanters.” Commentary on Exodus 22:18 [1563]; CO 24:365-366. Cf. Commentary on Deuteronomy 17:2 [1563]; CO 24:557-558.

¹⁵⁶⁴Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:5 [1563]; CO 24:355-356. See Paul Woolley, “Calvin and Toleration,” *The Heritage of John Calvin* (ed. John H. Bratt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 141-149. Woolley observes that Calvin believed punishment was appropriate where it was clear that a heretic was firmly committed to promulgating his error, despite ample opportunity for correction.

indisputable proofs, should place its truth above the reach of doubt.”¹⁵⁶⁵ Heresy was unpardonable for the very reason that “its authors, being educated in the doctrines of the law, could not be deceived involuntarily, nor unless they had grown weary of religion and set their hearts on the impostures of the devil.”¹⁵⁶⁶

In a genuinely pluralistic society, by implication, punishing practitioners of pagan religions would be a grave mistake. Those guilty of false teaching must realize that they have willfully contradicted the truth itself, lest the act of punishment be dismissed as merely a human judgment, the abuse of political power for ideological ends. “[T]his severity must not be resorted to except when the religion is suffering, which is not only received by public authority and general opinion, but which is proved on solid grounds to be true, so that it may clearly appear that we are the avengers of God against the wicked.”¹⁵⁶⁷ Where such is clear, however, there is to be no mercy to false teachers or those who follow them, lest they corrupt the entire society.¹⁵⁶⁸

Calvin is harshly critical of those who would argue for mercy. The more deadly the pestilence, the more ruthless must be the means of destroying it, for “the desire to mitigate that severity to which he [God] would harden us betrays an effeminacy which he will not endure.”¹⁵⁶⁹ For “how unholy is the tenderness of those who would have no

1565Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:5 [1563]; CO 24:356. Cf. 17:12-13; CO 24:358).

1566Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:15 [1563]; CO 24:363.

1567Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:12 [1563]; CO 24:362.

1568Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:6-7 [1563]; CO 24:359-361. Not even one's closest neighbors or family members should be spared. Calvin asserted this point already in commentaries in 1555 and 1559. “Whoever has fear and reverence for God will not spare his own relatives, but will rather choose that all of them should perish if it be found necessary, than that the kingdom of Christ should be scattered, the doctrine of salvation extinguished, and the worship of God abolished.” Commentary on Matthew 10:21 [1555]; CO 45:284. “The Lord then would have all the godly to burn with so much zeal in the defense of lawful worship and true religion that no connection, no relationship, nor any other consideration connected with the flesh should avail to prevent them from bringing to punishment their neighbors when they see that God's worship is profaned, and that sound doctrine is corrupted.” Commentary on Zechariah 13:3 [1559]; CO 44:346-347.

1569Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:6 [1563]; CO 24:360. “Hence too we are admonished that zeal for God's glory is but cold among us unless true religion is held to be of more value than the preservation of a single city or people.” “[I]t is better that the whole world should perish than that men should enjoy the fruits of the earth in order that they may contaminate it with their blasphemies. If those who first professed Christ's name had been inspired with such zeal as this, true religion would never have been overwhelmed and almost extinguished by so many corruptions” (13:12; CO 24:362). The judgment

punishment inflicted for the violation of the religion of God.” It is clear that in his comments on the destruction of entire cities Calvin sought to refute the growing chorus of those who criticized his handling of Servetus. “But if so many together are to be dragged to death in crowds, their impudence is more than detestable, and their pity cruelty itself, who would take no account of God’s injured majesty, so that one man may be spared.”¹⁵⁷⁰ These impudent critics simply “desire to be at liberty to make disturbances with impunity,” openly defying God, who has clearly commanded false prophets to be put to death. Here the reformer of Geneva abandons his exegetical and political theological principles about natural law, equity, and love, writing as if the Torah’s decree is argument enough. He was clearly wary of even engaging in the argument, lest he concede any credibility to his opponents. “But it is superfluous to contend by argument, when God has once pronounced what is his will, for we must needs abide by his inviolable decree.”¹⁵⁷¹

Having thus rejected the credibility of his opponents, Calvin turns to their arguments. When it comes to their most basic principle, he admits, he agrees with them. “As to their denial that the truth of God stands in need of such support, it is very true ... God might, indeed, do without the assistance of the sword in defending religion.” Christ’s kingdom is spiritual. But here again Calvin falls back on God’s will. God could easily defend his kingdom without the use of magistrates, “but such is not his will,” and those who say he should not use civil government in this way are guilty of “imposing a law upon God.” The reformer then launches a barrage of rhetorical arguments from analogy. If God demands that political rulers punish theft, fornication, and drunkenness, how

Israel was often called to carry out “was by no means excessive if we reflect how much more grievous it is to profane the sacred worship of God, than to inflict injury on man.” Commentary on Exodus 32:27 [1563]; CO 25:94-95.

¹⁵⁷⁰In ordinary cases of sedition, he observes, the “just and moderate ruler does not usually proceed further than to punish the ringleaders. When therefore God commands all without exception to be destroyed the great atrocity of the crime is made apparent.” Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:12 [1563]; CO 24:362.

¹⁵⁷¹Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:5 [1563]; CO 24:356.

much more those who violate worship and religion? If capital punishment is appropriate for adulterers, how much more for those who “adulterate the doctrines of salvation”? If those who murder the body are rightly put to death, how much more those who lead souls astray to eternal destruction? If those guilty of treason are put to death for assaulting the authority of the magistracy, how much more those who reject the authority of God?¹⁵⁷²

For all of his polemical passion, Calvin was too conscious of his own two kingdoms theology to imagine that a simplistic appeal to the inviolable decree and will of God is sufficient. After all, the very point in question is whether or not God has imposed such an inviolable decree.

But it is questioned whether the law pertains to the kingdom of Christ, which is spiritual and distinct from all earthly dominion [*Christi regnum, quod spirituale est ac remotum a terrenis imperiis*], and there are some men, not otherwise ill-disposed, to whom it appears that our condition under the gospel is different from that of the ancient people under the law, not only because the kingdom of Christ is not of this world, but because Christ was unwilling that the beginnings of his kingdom should be aided by the sword [*exordia regni sui Christus noluit gladio adiuvari*].

Here Calvin addresses head on those two distinctions so fundamental to his political theology: the distinction between the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government, and the distinction between the spiritual kingdom of Christ and Old Testament Israel.¹⁵⁷³

He begins by denying that when magistrates use the sword in religious matters they threaten the nature of Christ's kingdom. “But, when earthly judges consecrate their work to the promotion of Christ's kingdom [*promovendo Christi regno consecrant suam operam terreni iudices*], I deny that on that account its nature is changed.” To be sure, the work of building Christ's kingdom is entirely that of the word, and it was evidently Jesus' will that his disciples should preach the word “like sheep among wolves.” The silence of the New Testament on the obligations of magistrates toward religion, however,

¹⁵⁷²Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:5 [1563]; CO 24:356.

¹⁵⁷³Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:5 [1563]; CO 24:356-357.

does not imply that magistrates, once converted, are to restrain themselves from protecting Christ's kingdom. "He did not impose on himself an eternal law that He should never bring kings under his subjection [*reges ipsos in obsequium cogeret*], nor tame their violence, nor change them from being cruel persecutors into the patrons and guardians of his church [*ecclesiae suae patronos et custodes*]." Here again Calvin turns to his classic triumvirate of biblical citations to prove that the magistrates of the new covenant era are to render their services to the promotion of true religion just like the Israelite kings of the old: Psalm 2, Isaiah 49:23, and 1 Timothy 2:2. Magistrates who fail to punish false teachers are complicit in their guilt when weak souls are led to their destruction.¹⁵⁷⁴

But were not such arguments irresponsible in a time when Protestants in France were being savagely persecuted on the basis of the very principles Calvin was defending? Calvin will have none of this objection.

But, if under this pretext the superstitious have dared to shed innocent blood, I reply that what God has once commanded must not be brought to naught on account of any abuse or corruption of men. For, if the cause alone abundantly distinguishes the martyrs of Christ from malefactors, though their punishment may be identical, so the papal executioners will not bring it to pass by their unjust cruelty that the zeal of pious magistrates in punishing false and noxious teachers should be otherwise than pleasing to God.¹⁵⁷⁵

In other words, the pervasive abuse of authority does not render authority itself unjust.

Elsewhere Calvin goes to great lengths to show that the law requiring capital punishment for false teachers was not unique to typological Israel. In one of his lectures Calvin discusses the prophet Zechariah's allusion to the law of Deuteronomy 13:1, according to which fathers and husbands were to be so zealous for true religion that they would put their own family members to death rather than see it corrupted. Calvin raises the possibility that this law was unique to Israel as the sacerdotal people of God, but he

¹⁵⁷⁴Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:5 [1563]; CO 24:357. Here, ironically, Calvin's argument parallels that which the Zurich reformers used to justify magisterial control over discipline.

¹⁵⁷⁵Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:5 [1563]; CO 24:357.

rejects it based on the fact that Zechariah is describing what will take place when the messiah comes. “[T]his zeal under the reign of Christ is approved by God, for Zechariah does not here confine what he teaches to the time of the law but shows what would take place when Christ came.”¹⁵⁷⁶ In other contexts Calvin is quick to remind his readers that the prophets regularly used metaphorical language appropriate to the circumstances of their hearers to describe spiritual realities.¹⁵⁷⁷ But here he permits no such interpretation. Those who “imagine” that the law in view was given only to the Jews are “fanatics” and libertines who desire license to “disturb the whole world.”¹⁵⁷⁸

In fact, Calvin was aware that it was not simply fanatics and libertines who questioned this interpretation of the prophetic idiom, because he goes on to offer, once again, his appeal to reason. If those who commit temporal crimes are punished, how much more those who destroy souls, “who by their poison corrupt pure doctrine, which is spiritual food, who take away from God his own honor, who confound the whole order of the Church?”¹⁵⁷⁹ Those who disagree fail to grasp just what is at stake. It is not simply a matter of the salvation of souls. To misrepresent God by speaking falsely in his name is to make him an “abettor of falsehood.” Indeed, “is it not the same thing as though one substituted the devil in the place of God?” Given these considerations, it cannot be doubted that Christians “are to exterminate from the world such pests [*exterminent e mundo pestes istas*] as deprive God of his own honor, and attempt to extinguish the light of true and genuine religion.”¹⁵⁸⁰

At the heart of Calvin's argument from reason was his conviction that all people are called to do whatever they can to promote and defend true religion within the limits

1576Commentary on Zechariah 13:3 [1559]; CO 44:347.

1577For instance, when interpreting prophecies that describe the nations beating their swords into plowshares, he insists that the prophets' language is metaphorical, having no bearing on Christian magistrates' right to bear the sword. Commentary on Isaiah 2:4 (1559); CO 36:65-66.

1578Commentary on Zechariah 13:3 [1559]; CO 44:347.

1579Commentary on Zechariah 13:3 [1559]; CO 44:347.

1580Commentary on Zechariah 13:3 [1559]; CO 44:348.

of their vocation. The greater power associated with a particular vocation, the greater responsibility it carries to promote the honor and cause of God. “As all men originally stand upon a level as to condition, the higher persons have risen, and the nearer they have been brought to God, the more sacredly are they bound to proclaim his goodness. The more intolerable is the wickedness of kings and princes who claim exemption from the common rule, when they ought rather to inculcate it upon others and lead the way.”¹⁵⁸¹ To say that the magisterial office exempts a person from having to promote true religion gets things exactly backwards, for it is precisely such persons who must “lead the way.” As he puts it in his commentary on Jeremiah, “the truth is more necessary for them than even for the common people; for not only the duty of the head of a family lies on each of them, but the Lord has also set them over a whole people. If, then, private men have need of being daily taught, that they may faithfully rule and guide themselves and their families, what ought to be done by those rulers who are as it were the fathers of the commonwealth?”¹⁵⁸² Persons in positions of political leadership “are as it were the eyes of the community; as the eyes direct the whole body, so also they, who are placed in any situation of honor, are thus made eminent, that they may show the right way to others.”¹⁵⁸³

Biblical stories about pagan rulers like Pharaoh of Egypt and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon provided excellent opportunities for Calvin to demonstrate that even the pagans recognized the duty of magistrates to protect true religion.¹⁵⁸⁴ Yet as is the case with his New Testament commentaries, the arguments Calvin musters in these cases are anything but exegetical. For instance, although the text of Genesis describes the actions of Joseph and Pharaoh largely without evaluative comment, Calvin openly expresses his admiration of Pharaoh's attitude toward religion. The narrative describes how during a

1581Commentary on Psalm 148:11 [1557]; CO 32:435.

1582Commentary on Jeremiah 26:10 [1563]; CO 38:522.

1583Commentary on Micah 3:1-3 [1559]; CO 43:318-321.

1584Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 22:21 [1559]; CO 36:382.

devastating seven year famine Joseph, governing in the name of Pharaoh, gradually enslaved the Egyptian population while sparing the lands and property of the priests. For Calvin the significance was obvious. “Moses wished distinctly to testify ... that a heathen king paid particular attention to divine worship.” Moses' intent was to provide a “mirror” in which it can be discerned that “a sentiment of piety which they cannot wholly efface is implanted in the minds of men.” Pharaoh's motives, of course, were informed by “wicked superstition.” But the general concern – to prevent the worship of God from falling into decay – was worthy of praise. The lesson was clear: “because this inconsiderate devotion (as it may be called) flowed from a right principle, what should be the conduct of our princes, who desire to be deemed Christians?”¹⁵⁸⁵

Calvin was similarly impressed with the story of Nineveh, which responded penitently to the prophet Jonah's warning of judgment. The story was a powerful confirmation of the clarity of natural law, a demonstration that even heathen kings, “who understood not a syllable of true religion,” recognized their responsibility to lead their people in repentance. “Hence this edict of the king ought to fill us with more shame than if one adduced the same doctrine only from the word of God, for though the authority of that king is not the same with that of God, yet when that miserable and blind prince acknowledged through the dictates of nature that God is to be pacified by prayer, what excuse, as I have said, can remain for us?”¹⁵⁸⁶

A narrative in the prophecy of Daniel describes how Nebuchadnezzar issued a declaration declaring that “Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins” (Daniel 3:29). Calvin has no difficulty with the law. “The edict is by itself pious and praiseworthy.”¹⁵⁸⁷ In fact, Calvin argues, it was recorded in the “testimony

¹⁵⁸⁵Commentary on Genesis 47:22 [1554]; CO 23:574-575.

¹⁵⁸⁶Commentary on Jonah 3:6-8 [1559]; CO 43:256-257.

¹⁵⁸⁷Commentary on Daniel 3:29 [1561]; CO 40:645.

of the Spirit” in order “to show the fruit of conversion” in the king. “Hence, without doubt, King Nebuchadnezzar bore witness to his repentance when he celebrated the God of Israel among all people, and when he proclaimed a punishment to all who spoke reproachfully against God.”¹⁵⁸⁸ Of course, in numerous other narratives Calvin makes a point of clarifying that scripture often praises individuals for their faith and motives even if their particular actions are sinful.¹⁵⁸⁹ Here, in contrast, Calvin claims the silence of the text as evidence of the Spirit's approval. Similarly, Calvin usually stressed that idolatry should only be punished in a community where the true religion was acknowledged as certain. Here he conveniently ignores that principle.

Calvin was aware that Augustine had used the example of Nebuchadnezzar in his argument for the use of force against the Donatists, and he summarizes the Donatist error for his readers: “they held this principle as of first importance. No punishment ought to be inflicted on those who differ from others in religious doctrine.”¹⁵⁹⁰ The same argument was being made by his own critics, Calvin notes, not the least of which was “that dog Castellio and his companions.” It is “clear enough” that such people are “impious despisers of God.” “[T]hey wish to render everything uncertain in religion, and as far as they can they strive to tear away all the principles of piety. With the view then of vomiting forth their poison, they strive eagerly for freedom from punishment, and deny the right of inflicting punishment on heretics and blasphemers.” Calvin doesn't really offer an argument against this position other than to declare that “it ought to be sufficient for men of moderate and quiet tastes to know how King Nebuchadnezzar's edict was praised by the approval of the Holy Spirit.” This was putting it somewhat strongly, but Calvin builds on the claim. “If this be so, it follows that kings are bound to

1588Commentary on Daniel 4:1-3 [1561]; CO 40:649.

1589See the story of Rahab's use of a lie to protect the Israelite spies, or of the midwives' lie in defense of Hebrew infants. Commentary on Exodus 1:18 [1563]; CO 24:18-19; Commentary on Joshua 2:7 [1564]; CO 25:441-442.

1590Commentary on Daniel 4:1-3 [1561]; CO 40:649-651.

defend the worship of God [*partes regum esse tueri Dei cultum*], and to execute vengeance [*vindictam sumere*] upon those who profanely despise it, and on those who endeavor to reduce it to nothing, or to adulterate the true doctrine by their errors, and so dissipate the unity of the faith and disturb the church's peace." Augustine showed "how ashamed Christian princes ought to be of their slothfulness, if they are indulgent to heretics and blasphemers, and do not vindicate God's glory by lawful punishments [*asserant legitimis poenis Dei gloriam*], since King Nebuchadnezzar, who was never truly converted, yet promulgated this decree by a kind of secret instinct."¹⁵⁹¹

But Calvin realized that the text of Daniel raises a potential problem for this interpretation. The narrative describes how Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree that the Chaldeans were to be put to death for failing to interpret the king's dream. Under the right conditions this would be laudable: "they deserved to be exterminated from the world, and the pest must be removed if it could possibly be accomplished. If Nebuchadnezzar had been like David, or Hezekiah, or Josiah, he might most justly have destroyed them all, and have purged the land from such defilements." The problem is that the text describes how Daniel *saved* the Chaldeans from the king's death sentence. Why would Daniel have defended such pagan charlatans, in direct contradiction to God's law? Calvin's solution is to suggest that Daniel was defending due process of law. The king was a hypocrite, with no legal basis for his actions.¹⁵⁹² In cases such as this, he suggests, "we ought to spare their persons, not through their worthiness, but through our own habitual sense of equity and rectitude."¹⁵⁹³ Here Calvin indicates his recognition, if only begrudgingly, that the magisterial defense of true religion is not so easily applied in pluralistic contexts.

1591Commentary on Daniel 4:1-3 [1561]; CO 40:649-650. Strikingly, Calvin admits that Nebuchadnezzar was "never truly converted" and criticizes him because "he mingled and confused the false gods with the God of Israel."

1592Commentary on Daniel 2:13-15 [1561]; CO 40:570.

1593Commentary on Daniel 2:24 [1561]; CO 40:582-583.

The significance of Calvin's appeals to reason or the pagans to prove that magistrates are obligated to defend true religion is even greater in light of the fact that on various occasions Calvin explicitly rejects the relevance of the Torah's calls for judgment on false religion. For instance, while it was legitimate for the Israelites to seek deliverance from slavery in Egypt through violence, Israel's experience should not be taken as normative for Christians. Because of its unique redemptive-historical situation, Israel was "excepted from ordinary laws."¹⁵⁹⁴ Likewise Israel was prohibited from making treaties with the Canaanites, but this prohibition does not apply to Christians, "since God does not now command us to execute vengeance by putting all the wicked to death, nor is a certain country assigned to the church in which it may dwell apart and have dominion."¹⁵⁹⁵ As he puts it in his commentary on Joshua, "It is now proper to consider how far this doctrine is applicable to us. It is true a special command was given to the ancient people to destroy the nations of Canaan, and keep aloof from all profane defilements. To us, in the present day, no certain region marks out our precise boundaries, nor are we armed with the sword to slay all the ungodly."¹⁵⁹⁶ Christian nations are obligated to follow the principles of justice and equity "naturally implanted in all nations," abstaining from bloodshed as much as possible.¹⁵⁹⁷

Calvin struggled to come to grips with the genocide of the Canaanites, admitting that "our reason struggles against this." Still, he insists, we must trust the command of God: "if it does not appear to us agreeable to reason that the whole race of evil-doers should be exterminated, let us understand that God is defrauded of his rights whenever

1594 "[T]his is not applicable to all believers in general, as if it were wrong for them to be subject to kings, or as if their temporal subjection deprived them of their inheritance of the world, but mention is here only made of the special prerogative with which God had honored the posterity of Abraham when he gave them the dominion of the land of Canaan." Commentary on Exodus 4:22 [1563]; CO 24:62-63. Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 34:8-17 [1563]; CO 39:87-91.

1595 Commentary on Exodus 34:11 [1563]; CO 24:548-549. Cf. Commentary on Deuteronomy 7:20-25 [1563]; CO 24:553-554.

1596 Commentary on Joshua 23:12 [1564]; CO 25:561-562.

1597 Commentary on Deuteronomy 20:10 [1563]; CO 24:632. Here Calvin references Cicero and the Romans in particular. Cf. Commentary on Exodus 1:9 [1563]; CO 24:13-14.

we measure his infinite greatness ... by our own feelings.”¹⁵⁹⁸ On the other hand, for Christians to practice such “indiscriminate and promiscuous slaughter” without the express command of God would be “barbarous and atrocious cruelty,”¹⁵⁹⁹ at which “all would ... be justly horrified” and against which no excuse could exculpate them from guilt.¹⁶⁰⁰ Christians are not to imitate Old Testament heroes like Moses and Phinehas, who at the inspiration of the Spirit avenged murderers and fornicators. It amounts to a “confounding of times, when men, devoting their whole attention to the examples of the fathers, do not consider that the Lord has since enjoined a different rule of conduct which they ought to follow.... Now, since the coming of Christ, matters are entirely changed. We ought therefore to consider what he enjoins on us under the gospel, that we may not follow at random what the fathers observed under the law.”¹⁶⁰¹

Calvin recognized that even Israel's penal code had spiritual and typological significance. Writing on Zephaniah 1:7-9 he suggests that “the executions on the gallows, when the wicked suffer, may be said to be sacrifices to God.”¹⁶⁰² Likewise when Israel was called to put a particular person to death by stoning, “the land was to be purged, as by a propitiation.”¹⁶⁰³ This recognition gave the reformer clear warrant to distinguish the

1598Commentary on Deuteronomy 13:15 [1563]; CO 24:363.

1599“‘The indiscriminate and promiscuous slaughter,’” Calvin writes, “making no distinction of age or sex, but including alike women and children, the aged and decrepit, might seem an Inhuman massacre had it not been executed by the command of God.” Commentary on Joshua 6:20 [1564]; CO 25:469. “If any one is disturbed and offended by the severity of the punishment, he must always be brought back to this point, that though our reason dissent from the judgments of God, we must check our presumption by the curb of a pious modesty and soberness, and not disapprove whatever does not please us. It seems harsh, nay, barbarous and inhuman, that young children without fault should be hurried off to cruel execution to be stoned and burned” (7:25; CO 25:480-481). “Away, then, with all temerity, whereby we would presumptuously restrict God’s power to the puny measure of our reason.” Commentary on Deuteronomy 7:2 [1563]; 24:550-551.

1600“Had he proceeded of his own accord to commit an indiscriminate massacre of women and children, no excuse could have exculpated him from the guilt of detestable cruelty, cruelty surpassing anything of which we read as having been perpetrated by savage tribes scarcely raised above the level of the brutes.” Commentary on Joshua 10:40 [1564]; CO 25:505-506. But Calvin's view is not that the will of God is above law, as Schreiner claims; it is that God's commandment in a particular instance is a higher revelation of that law than the general testimony of human feelings or reason. See Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 78.

1601Commentary on John 4:20 [1553]; CO 47:85-86.

1602Commentary on Zephaniah 1:7-9 [1559]; CO 44:14-18.

1603Commentary on Deuteronomy 17:7 [1563]; CO 24:558-559. Calvin also notes that the Apostle Paul

penalties appropriate to Israel's unique circumstances from those appropriate for Christendom, though he never explicitly used this argument.

Calvin likewise differentiated between the vengeance David was called to exercise as a typological spiritual king and the vengeance that is appropriate for Christian kings. For instance, David rightly governed the “posterity of Abraham” as brothers but he treated foreigners as slaves. Thus “it was allowable for him to exercise greater severities upon the profane and the uncircumcised.” Yet modern rulers should not claim precedent from David's actions. “In this he affords no precedent to conquerors who would inflict lawless oppression upon nations taken in war; for they want the divine warrant and commission which David had, invested as he was not only with the authority of a king, but with the character of an avenger of the church.”¹⁶⁰⁴ Similarly in his commentary on Psalm 18 Calvin notes that when David speaks in the psalms about vengeance “we ought always to remember David's vocation.”¹⁶⁰⁵ But David also had a higher, typological calling. “Farther, let us remember that under this type there is shadowed forth the invincible character and condition of the kingdom of Christ who, trusting to and sustained by the power of God, overthrows and destroys his enemies.” Christian magistrates are authorized for the former role and are called to “reign under Christ and acknowledge him as their head,” but none should presume to take up the latter.¹⁶⁰⁶ Calvin wrestles with Psalm 149's declaration that the godly will execute vengeance on the nations with doubled-edged swords. The reference to the sword, he admits, “applies more especially to the Jews, and not properly to us.” It was a distinct function of Israel's

identified the judicial curse of the law as having been fulfilled in Christ (21:22-23; CO 24:629).

¹⁶⁰⁴Commentary on Psalm 60:8 [1557]; CO 31:578. Cf. Commentary on Psalm 45:6 [1557]; CO 31:452-454. Writing on Psalm 72 Calvin places Israelite kings in the category of earthly kings but only to say that “the holy king of Israel, who was anointed to his office by divine appointment, is distinguished from other earthly kings.” While “no government in the world can be rightly managed but under the conduct of God, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” this is true in a special sense of the kings of Israel, “which he had chosen in preference to all others.” Commentary on Psalm 72:1 (1557); CO 31:664-665.

¹⁶⁰⁵Commentary on Psalm 18:47 [1557]; CO 31:192-193.

¹⁶⁰⁶Commentary on Psalm 18:37 [1557]; CO 31:187-188.

role as a political type of the spiritual kingdom of God. “As to the church collective, the sword now put into our hand is of another kind, that of the word and spirit, that we may slay for a sacrifice to God those who formerly were enemies, or again deliver them over to everlasting destruction unless they repent.”¹⁶⁰⁷

On the other hand, even in these passages Calvin sees a continuing relevance for those who bear the vocation of magistrate and “are vested by God with the sword to punish all manner of violence.”¹⁶⁰⁸ In his commentary on Psalm 106 he even draws a connection between the Israelite genocide against the Canaanites, which he admits was a unique display of God's judgment not to be repeated, and the ordinary task of civil punishment. “For if the Israelites are condemned for sparing some of these nations wholly, what are we to think of those judges who, from a timid and apathetic attention to the responsible duties of their office, exercise too much lenity to a few persons, thus weakening the restraints of the inlets to vice, to the great detriment of the public weal?”¹⁶⁰⁹ Even if the point is simply to argue from the greater to the lesser, it is striking that Calvin portrays the absolute judgment of God executed through Israel as a model for the level of clemency to be shown by contemporary civil magistrates.

A similar dynamic appears in Calvin's interpretation and application of the positive function of Old Testament kings in establishing piety and justice. Drawing from Psalm 72, a description of the reign of God's anointed one, he explains that the just kingdom will not only secure the rights of the poor and the vulnerable, but “will draw in its train true religion and the fear of God,” for its ultimate goal is nothing less than “the

1607Commentary on Psalm 149:9 [1557]; CO 32:440.

1608Commentary on Psalm 149:9 [1557]; CO 32:440. In his commentary on Psalm 18 he offers this paradoxical statement. “The church militant, which is under the standard of Christ, has no permission to execute vengeance except against those who obstinately refuse to be reclaimed. We are commanded to endeavor to overcome our enemies by doing them good and to pray for their salvation. It becomes us, therefore, at the same time to desire that they may be brought to repentance and to a right state of mind until it appear beyond all doubt that they are irrecoverably and hopelessly depraved.” Commentary on Psalm 18:47 [1557]; CO 31:192-193.

1609Commentary on Psalm 106:34 [1557]; CO 32:130.

advancement of the service and honor of God.”¹⁶¹⁰ He admits that temporal governments cannot establish true piety or justice. Even David knew that he could not purge all evil from the land, “however courageously he might have applied himself to the task.”¹⁶¹¹ Psalm 72 therefore finds its “highest fulfillment” in Christ's kingship, because only Christ actually transforms human character. “It was, indeed, the duty of Solomon to maintain the righteous; but it is the proper office of Christ to make men righteous. He not only gives to every man his own, but also reforms their hearts through the agency of his Spirit.”¹⁶¹² The ultimate reference and application of the psalm is therefore not to secular civil magistrates but to the “spiritual kingdom of Christ.”¹⁶¹³ But Calvin declines to restrict the psalm's significance to this ultimate reference. By way of 1 Timothy 2:2 he argues that David intends to show us that a “holy and righteous government ... will draw in its train true religion and the fear of God.” And for good reason: “there is no small danger, were civil government overthrown, of religion being destroyed and the worship of God annihilated.”¹⁶¹⁴ Calvin thus manages to emphasize the radical discontinuity between the politics of Israel and the New Testament church, while at the same time maintaining a decisive connection between contemporary civil coercion and the vocation of Old Testament kings.

The Possibilities and Pitfalls of the Care of Religion

Calvin's favorite text for describing the positive obligations of magistrates toward the true religion in the new covenant era was Isaiah 49:23. As he writes in a 1559 dedication to Queen Elizabeth, this text proves that the advancement of the true religion

1610Commentary on Psalm 72:5 [1557]; CO 31:666-667.

1611Commentary on Psalm 101:8 [1557]; CO 32:60.

1612Commentary on Psalm 72:7 [1557]; CO 31:667.

1613Commentary on Psalm 72:11 [1557]; CO 31:669.

1614Commentary on Psalm 72:5 [1557]; CO 31:666-667. Kings are therefore welcomed into the church, with crown, sword and all of their dignity, “to prostrate themselves at the feet of Christ” (72:11; CO 31:669).

is to be a magistrate's "chief care [*primam ... curam*]."1615 Isaiah presents magistrates as nurses raising and nurturing children because they "shall supply everything that is necessary for nourishing the offspring of the church." Not only would they acknowledge Jesus as their sovereign and "render to him all honor, obedience, and worship," but they would sponsor and support the church with all means at their power. This occurred historically when governments devoted their wealth "to raise up and maintain the church of Christ [*erigendam et fovendam Christi ecclesiam*], so as to be her guardians and defenders [*patronos ac tutores*]." The Lord has bestowed on magistrates "authority and power [*autoritas et potentia*] to defend the Church [*ecclesiam tueantur*] and to promote the glory of God [*gloriam Dei procurent*]. This is indeed the duty of all, but kings, in proportion as their power is greater, ought to devote themselves to it more earnestly, and to labor in it more diligently."1616 Those who fail to "enjoin what is good and right, and especially to defend the honor of God [*honorem Dei tueantur*] ... ought to be reckoned impostors and not rulers, for they give rise to miserable confusion."1617

Interestingly, Calvin admits that texts like Isaiah 49:23 were horribly abused, especially by the papists. "The papists have no other idea of kings being 'nursing-fathers' of the church," he charges, "than that they have left to their priests and monks very large revenues, rich possessions, and prebends on which they might fatten like hogs in a sty." Rome was also guilty of distorting Isaiah's prophecy in its insistence that secular rulers were to adore the pope. But Calvin maintains that such material extravagance forgets that the ministry of the church in the present age is under the cross. Magistrates bow down before the church by rendering obedience to the word and serving the church in accord with their vocation. Isaiah's prophecy is therefore about "removing superstitions and putting an end to all wicked idolatry, about advancing the kingdom of Christ and

1615Dedication of Commentary on Isaiah to Queen Elizabeth [1559]; CO 17:413-415 (414).

1616Commentary on Isaiah 49:23 [1559]; CO 37:210. Here again Calvin offers a cross-reference to Psalm 2.

1617Commentary on Isaiah 9:16 [1559]; CO 36:205.

maintaining purity of doctrine, about purging scandals and cleansing from the filth that corrupts piety and impairs the luster of the divine majesty.”¹⁶¹⁸

Still, even Calvin couldn't resist finding justification here for magistrates to sponsor a whole panoply of church ministries. Political authorities are to “supply the pastors and ministers of the word with all that is necessary for food and maintenance, provide for the poor and guard the Church against the disgrace of pauperism; erect schools, and appoint salaries for the teachers and board for the students; build poor-houses and hospitals, and make every other arrangement that belongs to the protection and defense of the church.”¹⁶¹⁹ The magistracy's support for the church is not to be extravagant, but it is no less temporal for that. Calvin was in the difficult exegetical position of claiming that the church's calling to serve under the cross means that it should not be characterized by wealth and honor, while insisting at the same time that magistrates are to enforce the church's monopoly on teaching and worship at the point of the sword.¹⁶²⁰

And yet, for all of his insistence that both nature and scripture teach that magistrates are to promote and defend the true religion, Calvin was well aware of the pitfalls of magisterial interference in religion. Most obvious of these is that the vast majority, even of Christian magistrates, have anything but the interests of the kingdom of Christ at heart. “If any one could enter into the hearts of kings, he would find scarcely

1618“*tollendis superstitionibus, atque exterminando omni impio et nefario cultu: de promovendo Christi regno, et conservanda puritate doctrinae: de submovendis scandalis, atque purgandis sordibus quae pietatem corrumpunt, et maiestatem Dei obscurant.*” Commentary on Isaiah 49:23 [1559]; CO 37:211.

1619“*pastoribus et ministris verbi omnia suppeditant quae ad victum et cultum necessaria sunt: consulunt pauperibus, nec mendicitatem ecclesiae indecoram tolerant: scholas erigunt, et doctoribus constituunt stipendia: atque studiosis literarum alimenta decernunt: ptochotrophia et xenodochia aedificant, et reliqua peragunt quae ad tuendam et conservandam ecclesiam pertinent.*” Commentary on Isaiah 49:23 [1559]; CO 37:211. Calvin complains that far too many “princes otherwise godly” are failing in this duty, a failure that Christians should recognize as a divine punishment on their own sins. “[L]et us confess that we do not deserve to have good 'nursing fathers.’” Still, believers may hold out hope for the sort of “restoration of the church” that brings with it the conversion of magistrates who are willing”bravely [to] defend the doctrine of the word.”

1620Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 60:16 [1559]; CO 37:365-366.

one in a hundred who does not despise everything divine.”¹⁶²¹ Magistrates love to use religion for their own purposes.

In these days monarchs, in their titles, always put forward themselves as kings, generals, and counts, 'by the grace of God,' but how many falsely pretend to apply God's name to themselves for the purpose of securing the supreme power! For what is the meaning of that title of kings and princes – 'by the grace of God' – except to avoid the acknowledgment of a superior? ... It is mere pretense therefore to boast that they reign through God's favor.¹⁶²²

Most political leaders, he wagers, “think that religion should yield to them, and so far as they imagine that it will be of service to them, follow it, or rather bend and change it for their own convenience.”¹⁶²³ They tolerate the sort of civil religion that advances their own agenda, such as the invocation of God's blessing or divine authority for their claims on their subjects' obedience, but they acknowledge little accountability. “They may, indeed, admit that they owe their elevation to royal power to the favor of God, and they may worship him by outward ceremonies, but their greatness so infatuates them that they ... cannot bear to be subject to reason and laws.”¹⁶²⁴ Princes “falsely assume the name of God, and by this pretense deceive the common people,” but the reality is that in so many of the courts of princes “the devil reigns.”¹⁶²⁵

Quite often, then, the problem was not so much getting magistrates to take seriously their obligations toward religion as it was their claiming *too much* control over religion. Calvin believed the English King Henry VIII was the prime example of this

¹⁶²¹Commentary on Daniel 6:6-7 (1561); CO 41:7. Most kings “despise every deity, and think of nothing but extolling their own magnificence.” Religion is for political rulers “nothing but a pretext.”

¹⁶²²Commentary on Daniel 3:13-15 [1561]; CO 40:629. Cf. Commentary on Acts 16:22 [1554]; CO 48:384

¹⁶²³Commentary on Daniel 4:25 [1561]; CO 40:670-671. Earlier in the commentary Calvin launches into a discussion of three kinds of ancient gods: philosophical, political, and poetical. The religion of the philosophical gods, inspired by “natural reason,” has Calvin's admiration. The poets, on the other hand, were guilty of pandering to human desires in in their portrayal of the gods. The political gods were the gods that were received by common consent. As the foci for shared piety, they served to unite a commonwealth under a common civil religion. But Calvin suggests that the teaching of the philosophers often undermined the public religion and was therefore opposed by political authorities. In Nebuchadnezzar's case, a refusal to listen to the best philosophers elevated the authority of charlatans like the Magi (3:6-7; CO 40:620-625).

¹⁶²⁴Commentary on Isaiah 22:23 [1559]; CO 36:383.

¹⁶²⁵Commentary on Psalm 82:1 (1557); CO 31:768-769.

¹⁶²⁶Commentary on Jeremiah 15:17 (1563); CO 38:229.

tendency, and in his commentary on Amos he compares Henry to the apostate Israelite King Jeroboam, who rejected the authority of the prophet Amos. Kings like Henry justified their compromising policies as being conducive of the peace of the community, but they rested on the false assumption that kings have the right to establish religion according to their own preferences. “They who at first extolled Henry, King of England, were certainly inconsiderate men. They gave him the supreme power in all things [*summam rerum omnium potestatem*], and this always vexed me grievously for they were guilty of blasphemy when they called him the chief Head of the Church under Christ [*summum caput ecclesiae sub Christo*].” Henry's chancellor, the Bishop of Winchester erroneously claimed

that it was in the power of the king to abrogate statutes and to institute new rites – that as to fasting the king could forbid or command the people to eat flesh on this or that days, that it was lawful for the king to prohibit priests from marrying, that it was lawful for the king to interdict to the people the use of the cup in the Supper, that it was lawful for the king to appoint this or that thing in his own kingdom. How so? Because supreme power is vested in the king [*Potestas enim summa est penes regem*].¹⁶²⁶

Yet, Calvin responds, when Isaiah called princes to “become patrons of religion and nursers of the Church” he did not give them authority to rule *over* the church but the responsibility of preserving its liberty.¹⁶²⁷

Too often, especially among the German princes and the Swiss cities, civil governments claimed spiritual power for themselves, so confusing the two kingdoms.

But still they are inconsiderate men, who make them too spiritual [*qui faciunt illos nimis spirituales*] and this evil is everywhere dominant in Germany. Even in these regions [the Swiss Confederation] it prevails too much. And we now find what fruit is produced by this root, which is this: that princes, and those who are

¹⁶²⁶Commentary on Amos 7:10-13 [1559]; CO 43:134. In his commentary on Hosea Calvin highlights the actions of Henry VIII of England as an example of magisterial conduct even worse than that of many Roman Catholic princes, “for they who continue under that bondage retain at least some kind of religion.” He compares Henry's actions to those of the Israelite king Jehu, who enthusiastically obeyed the call of a prophet to overthrow the dynasty of King Ahab but who refused to put an end to the idolatry that had corrupted that dynasty. Henry “pretended great zeal for a time: he afterwards raged cruelly against all the godly and duplicated the tyranny of the Roman Pontiff.” Commentary on Hosea 1:3-4 [1557]; CO 42:208.

¹⁶²⁷“What then is chiefly required of kings, is this – to use the swords with which they are invested to render free the worship of God.” Commentary on Amos 7:10-13 [1559]; CO 43:135.

in power, think themselves so spiritual [*putant se ita spirituales esse*], that there is no longer any church government [*ecclesiasticum regimen*]; and this sacrilege greatly prevails among us; for they limit not their office by fixed and legitimate boundaries, but think that they cannot rule, except they abolish every authority in the Church and become chief judges as well in doctrine as in all spiritual government [*aboleant omnem ecclesiae auctoritatem, et sint summi iudices tam in doctrina quam in toto spirituali regimine*].

The primary evidence of such magisterial usurpation of Christ's spiritual government was the refusal of the magistrate to permit church discipline as a fundamental element of Christ's spiritual government of his church. Magistrates acted as if the church was their own possession, simply a department of civil government to be administered in whatever way they deemed conducive of the peace of the community.¹⁶²⁸ In contrast, though Calvin demanded coercive support for the Reformed ministry, he insisted that magistrates respect the spiritual autonomy of the church.

Calvin was equally aware that where reformation or public repentance is led by magistrates, it is very often superficial. The masses are easily manipulated either for good or for evil. “Thus the common people are always blinded by prejudices, so that they will not examine the matter itself... there is nothing steady or fixed in the common people; for they are carried here and there like the wind, which blows now from this quarter and then from that.”¹⁶²⁹ In his commentary on Hosea the reformer of Geneva realistically describes the cycle he had no doubt observed in numerous cities and territories in Europe.

When pious men have the government of a city, and act prudently, then the whole people will give some hope that they will fear the Lord; and when any king, influenced by a desire of advancing the glory of God, endeavors to preserve all his subjects in the pure worship of God, then the same feeling of piety will be seen in all: but when an ungodly king succeeds him, the greater part will immediately fall back again; and when a magistrate neglects his duty, the greater portion of the people will break out into open impiety. I wish there were no proofs of these

1628 “Moderation ought then to be observed; for this evil has ever been dominant in princes – to wish to change religion according to their will and fancy [*inflexere religionem pro suo arbitrio ac libidine*], and at the same time for their own advantage.” Commentary on Amos 7:10-13 [1559]; CO 43:135.

1629 Commentary on Jeremiah 26:16 [1563]; CO 38:528. As he had written in his commentary on Acts, “the common sort is for the most part moved by authority.” Commentary on Acts 17:11 [1554]; CO 48:400.

things; but throughout the world the Lord has designed that there should exist examples of them.

Thus “when all readily embrace what a few introduce, it is quite evident that they have no living root of piety or of the fear of God.”¹⁶³⁰

In his commentary on Micah Calvin cynically describes the ease with which kings are able to make changes in religion. Even the reformation of that great King Josiah, whom Calvin so often praises as a great example for Christian magistrates, was largely superficial. The people “apparently pretended to worship God, and, in order to please the king, embraced the worship divinely prescribed in their law. Yet the event proved that it was a mere act of dissimulation, yea, of perfidy.” For all of Josiah's exemplary diligence, his “use of all means to revive the true and unadulterated worship of God in Judea, he did not yet gain his object.”¹⁶³¹

Such examples reminded Calvin that the kingdom of Christ advances by spiritual means alone. Godly magistrates can seek to establish and promote the kingdom of Christ, but they can only do so indirectly, and their work is vain apart from the work of the word and Spirit. The same is true of the defense of Christ's kingdom. In his commentary on Isaiah 62:6-7 Calvin specifies that the watchmen identified in the text, through whom God defends his kingdom, are pastors, not civil magistrates. The prophecy characterizes the kingdom as a city, but “we ought always to consider what is the nature of Christ's kingdom; for it is not defended by the weapons of war or by arms, but, being spiritual, is protected by spiritual arms and guards.”¹⁶³² Indeed, Calvin brashly asserts this point as central to what distinguished him from the papists.

In vain will the magistrate employ the sword, which undoubtedly he must employ, to restrain wicked teachers and false prophets. In vain I say will he attempt all these things unless this sword of the word go before. This ought to be

1630Commentary on Hosea 7:3 [1557]; CO 42:340-341.

1631Commentary on Zephaniah 1:2-3 [1559]; CO 44:3-4.

1632Commentary on Isaiah 62:6 (1559); CO 37:386. The kingdom of Christ “does not derive its strength from earthly supports... Christ's kingdom is not upheld and advanced by the policy of men, but that this is the work of God alone.” Commentary on Psalm 118:25 [1557]; CO 32:212-213.

carefully observed in opposition to the papists who, when the word fails them, betake themselves to new weapons by the aid of which they think that they will gain the victory.¹⁶³³

Coercion is useless unless it is accompanied by the persuasion of the word of God.

As for the people, they needed to learn to follow true teaching rather than constantly defer to self-interested magistrates. Calvin waxes eloquent about the damage that comes from the popular assumption that what is right and wrong rests on political decrees. “For we see how the common people think everything permitted to them which is approved by their kings and counselors. For in the common opinion of men, on what does the whole foundation of right and wrong rest, except on the arbitrary will and lust of kings?” Calvin's rejoinder is that the people need to learn to obey the prophets “even if a thousand kings should obstruct them.”¹⁶³⁴ Each person is charged to submit to the word of God for herself and that word requires no attestation or validation from magistrates. Still, Calvin was convinced that the refusal of so many magistrates in Europe to attest to that word was leading the masses astray. “Because the princes and preeminent ones of the world do not willingly submit to the yoke of Christ [*proceres et qui in mundo excellunt non libenter subeunt Christi iugum*], now even the rude multitude reject what is salutary before they even taste it.”¹⁶³⁵

Calvin thus insisted that magistrates must make the care of religion their first priority. If the masses are easily manipulated and if bad magistrates do so much damage, it is all the more essential that princes and governors act faithfully and use their power for good.¹⁶³⁶ And for all of his skepticism, Calvin did believe God often uses political

1633Commentary on Isaiah 11:4 [1559]; CO 36:240. See also Calvin's harsh criticism of Thomas More for persecuting good men by fire and sword. Commentary on Isaiah 22:17 [1559]; CO 36 379.

1634Commentary on Daniel 9:5-7 [1561]; CO 41:135-140. Hypocrites “took it as granted that kings and princes could not have fallen into ignorance... So when simple men speak of kings, their eyes are blinded or dazzled by the magnificence displayed, so that they think kings to be without dispute wise and endowed with the best understanding.” Commentary on Jeremiah 44:17 [1563]; CO 39:262-263.

1635Dedication of the Commentary on Daniel to the French Protestants [1561]; CO 18:618.

1636The susceptibility of the people to manipulation means that “they may also be easily restored ... to a right mind.” Commentary on Jeremiah 26:11 [1563]; CO 38:523.

authorities to bring about the conversion of a population.¹⁶³⁷ One of the most telling examples of this belief is his interpretation of the story of Jonah and Nineveh. Although the text describes the king's repentance after that of the people, Calvin reasons that the king must have been the first to accept Jonah's message, the people only humbling themselves in obedience to his commands. For "it is by no means probable that a fast was proclaimed in the royal city by the mere consent of the people, as the king and his counselors were there present." It was therefore "not any movement among the people, capriciously made," even if popular movements do "sometimes" happen.¹⁶³⁸

The difficulty of securing a true reformation even with the guidance of a just and pious king simply made Calvin all the more sure that such political leadership was necessary. The futility of Josiah's efforts simply makes him an example of perseverance: "let us learn to look to Josiah, who in his own time left undone nothing which might serve to establish the true worship of God, and when he saw that he effected but little and next to nothing, he still persevered, and with firm and invincible greatness of mind proceeded in his course."¹⁶³⁹ Josiah was not able to cleanse the land immediately, so Christian magistrates should not be surprised if they have the same experience.¹⁶⁴⁰ That the struggle is so difficult even when civil magistrates are godly simply demonstrates how much worse matters would be without such civil magistrates. "We hence learn how sedulously pious magistrates ought to labor, lest the state of the church should degenerate; for however vigilant they may be, they can yet hardly, even with the greatest care, keep things (as mankind are so full of vices) from becoming very soon worse."¹⁶⁴¹

1637Commentary on Isaiah 1:26 [1559]; CO 36: 1:53.

1638Commentary on Jonah 3:6-8 [1559]; CO 43:252-253.

1639Commentary on Zephaniah 1:2-3 [1559]; CO 44:3-4.

1640"But as Josiah could not attain his object so as immediately to cleanse the land from these pollutions, we need not wonder that at this day we are not able immediately to remove superstitions from the world, but let us in the meantime ever proceed in our course. Let those endowed with authority who bear the sword, that is, all magistrates, perform their office with greater diligence inasmuch as they see how difficult and protracted is the contest with the ministers of idolatry." Commentary on Zephaniah 1:4 [1559]; CO 44:8.

1641Commentary on Micah 3:11-12 [1559]; CO 43:337.

In the final analysis, then, Calvin fell back on his understanding of the vocation of magistrate and its God-ordained task to punish and restrain the disorder of impiety and injustice. All of God's servants ought to oppose evil as much as they can, "each in his particular sphere and vocation," but magistrates in particular cannot shirk this task.¹⁶⁴² Magistrates who fail to enforce true religion harm their people and rebel against God. "And certainly if those who hold a situation so honorable do not exert themselves to the utmost of their power to remove all defilements, they are chargeable with polluting as much as in them lies the sanctuary of God, and they not only act unfaithfully towards men by betraying their welfare, but also commit high treason against God himself."¹⁶⁴³ Such magistrates are absolutely disastrous for the church, far worse than are the problems associated with the care of religion. "For as no disease is more injurious than that which spreads from the head into the whole body, so no evil is more destructive in a commonwealth than a wicked and depraved prince, who conveys his corruptions into the whole body both by his example and by the liberty which he allows."¹⁶⁴⁴

It is important to remember that in all of this Calvin presupposed the context of a well-regulated state in which the word of God is publicly embraced, even if that society is in dire need of reformation. In his commentary on Isaiah Calvin describes what he considered the prophet's "comprehensive description of a well-regulated state [*status rite ordinati*]." Listing the prophetic office along with agriculture, military power, mechanical arts, and political government, he writes, "With these ornaments does God adorn the nations which he intends to render safe and sound."¹⁶⁴⁵ It is a blessing from God when the various orders within a commonwealth, including "judges and senators, soldiers, captains, artificers, and teachers, aid each other by mutual intercourse, and join

¹⁶⁴²Commentary on Zephaniah 1:4 [1559]; CO 44:8.

¹⁶⁴³It is a "cruel kindness which gives loose reins to the wicked." Commentary on Psalm 101:8 [1557]; CO 32:60.

¹⁶⁴⁴Commentary on Isaiah 1:23 [1559]; CO 36:50. Cf. Commentary on Hosea 5:10 [1557]; CO 42:310.

¹⁶⁴⁵Commentary on Isaiah 3:2 [1559]; CO 36:81-82.

in promoting the general safety of the whole people.”¹⁶⁴⁶ Clearly Calvin's two kingdoms theology did not prevent him from endorsing the ideal of Christendom as a unified Christian community under a twofold spiritual and temporal government.¹⁶⁴⁷

In fact, in his lectures on the prophets Calvin uses a new metaphor to describe the functions of magistrates and pastors within a well-regulated Christian society, one that emphasizes complementarity and organic unity between church and political society. The context for this metaphor is his discussion of Old Testament Israel, but Calvin presents it with reference to Christian nations in general. When the prophet speaks of the watchmen of the church in Isaiah 56, Calvin declares, “He includes both kinds of government, that of princes, and that of the ministers of the word, whom the Lord has placed as the two eyes in the body, to govern the established church [*regendam ecclesiam constituit*].”¹⁶⁴⁸ Magistrates and teachers “hold the same place in the commonwealth that the two eyes do in the human body.”¹⁶⁴⁹ Calvin has no difficulty synthesizing this organic metaphor with his two kingdoms doctrine. Within Israel there was a twofold public government, he writes in 1563, the priests ruling the “church with regard to the law, so that their government was spiritual,” and the elders managing “civil affairs.” The two were sharply distinguished, but they also cooperated closely, as “there were some things in which they ruled in common.”¹⁶⁵⁰

1646Commentary on Isaiah 3:4 [1559]; CO 36:82-83.

1647See Van't Spijker, *Calvin*, 142. Van't Spijker argues that not only did Calvin affirm the “*corpus christianum*, the Christian commonwealth,” in distinction from the *corpus Christi*, but it was “the ideal that Calvin strove for with all his might.”

1648Commentary on Isaiah 56:10 [1559]; CO 37:302. “And, doubtless, the kings with their counselors ought to have been one eye, the priests and the prophets the other; for the two eyes in a true and legitimate government are the judges and the pastors of the Church.” Commentary on Jeremiah 32:32 [1563]; CO 39:28. He also describes prophets and priests as “two eyes as it were in the church.” Commentary on Lamentations 4:13; CO 39:617.

1649Commentary on Isaiah 3:2 [1559]; CO 36:81.

1650Commentary on Jeremiah 19:1-3 [1563]; CO 38:320. Elsewhere Calvin writes, “let us learn to walk in solicitude and fear, while the Lord governs us by pious magistrates and faithful pastors: for what happened to the Jews might soon happen to us, so that wolves might bear rule over us, as indeed experience has proved even in this our city.” Commentary on Micah 3:1-3 [1559]; CO 43:318-321. Cf. Commentary on Deuteronomy 17:8 [1563]; CO 24:470-471.

The Possibility and Problem of Pluralism

But what about a commonwealth in which the gospel is *not* publicly accepted, or a country that does *not* have a well-regulated state? Calvin hardly addresses this question in his writings, nor are the answers he does provide entirely consistent. As has been seen, even when commenting on pagan governments such as those of Egypt and Babylon Calvin emphasizes the magisterial care of religion.¹⁶⁵¹ Yet he also insists that civil government has no discretionary authority over religion and that idolatry or false teaching should only be punished in societies where the true religion has been acknowledged by public consensus. He therefore finds himself repeatedly praising pagan magistrates for seeking to defend true religion, while at the same time criticizing them for defending the wrong religion and doing it for the wrong reasons. “We must hold, therefore, that no law can be passed nor any edict promulgated concerning religion and the worship of God, unless a real knowledge of God shines forth.”¹⁶⁵² Sometimes the best that can be hoped for in pluralistic circumstances is for pagan magistrates to provide religious liberty. Daniel presents the Persian King Darius as an example to Christian kings in that, although he was a pagan, he gave liberty of worship to Daniel and his fellow Jews. But even Darius comes under sharp criticism for commanding the worship of God as just one religion among others.¹⁶⁵³ Calvin does not explain why Darius should have punished false religion in a society where it was not publicly embraced. It seems clear, however, that he regarded the toleration of idolatry necessary in pluralistic contexts as a necessary evil.

On the other hand, Calvin offers greater concessions to pluralism when he thinks

¹⁶⁵¹For example, in a second dedication to his commentary on Acts, written in 1560, Calvin argues that if the apostles were so courageous in their proclamation of the gospel without the support of earthly princes, “there remains no excuse for Christian nobles, who are of any dignity, seeing God has furnished them with the sword to defend the kingdom of his Son.” Calvin urges Lord Nicolaus Radziwil, count palatine in Vilnius, to establish church discipline alongside the purity of doctrine. Dedication of the Second Edition of the Commentary on Acts to Nicolaus Radziwil [1560]; CO 18:157-158.

¹⁶⁵²Commentary on Daniel 3:29 [1561]; CO 40:645-647.

¹⁶⁵³Commentary on Daniel 6:25-27 [1561]; CO 41:30.

of the problems facing Christian magistrates serving in pagan countries. The story of Joseph involves just such a scenario, presenting Joseph, a faithful worshiper of God, as the governor who upheld Pharaoh's pagan religious establishment. Was it legitimate for Joseph to cooperate with a policy that supported idolatry? Here Calvin was baffled. "I dare not absolutely condemn this act, nor can I, however, deny that he may have erred in not resisting these superstitions with sufficient boldness." Calvin's tentative solution, as with the case of Daniel noted above, is to take refuge in the rule of law. He explains that as a minister obligated to execute Pharaoh's laws Joseph "was not altogether allowed to dispense the king's corn at his own pleasure. If the king wished that food should be gratuitously supplied to the priests, he was no more at liberty to deny it to them than to the nobles at court."¹⁶⁵⁴ Clearly the two kingdoms distinction is at work here. Joseph was a faithful servant of God, but he could not refuse to fulfill the duty imposed upon him by a lawful civil authority. A magistrate should not simply use his power to do whatever is right in an absolute sense, but must submit himself to the law of the land in which he resides. Despite what some scholars claim, Calvin did not believe magistrates should always enforce God's law regardless of constitutional concerns.¹⁶⁵⁵

Calvin's justification of Joseph's actions lies in tension, however, with his sharp criticism of Protestant princes who justified their caution in religious matters based on appeals to the common peace. Here Calvin's zeal for the spiritual kingdom of Christ trumps any appeal to the peace of the political kingdom. The princes charged Calvin with political naivete, such that he did "not understand how kingdoms are to be governed."¹⁶⁵⁶ "They who are desirous to be regarded as prudent and cautious have continually this song in their mouth: 'We must consult the public tranquility; the reformation which we

1654Commentary on Genesis 47:22 [1554]; CO 23:574-575. Calvin offers a similar judgment of Joseph's enslaving of the poor. Commentary on Genesis 47:16 [1554]; CO 23:572.

1655See Ralph Keen, "The Limits and Power of Obedience in the Later Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 265, 272.

1656Commentary on Jeremiah 38:1-4 [1563]; CO 39:156-160.

attempt is not unaccompanied by many dangers.”¹⁶⁵⁷ Calvin chafes at the suggestion that the reformers' doctrine was seditious,¹⁶⁵⁸ and he agrees that “the public advantage ought always to have the preference.”¹⁶⁵⁹ But he reminds his readers that peace is not to be purchased at the price of obedience to God.

First, we ought to inquire what is the will of God. Next, we ought to follow boldly whatever he enjoins and not to be discouraged by any fear, though we were besieged by a thousand deaths, for our actions must not be moved by any gust of wind but must be constantly regulated by the will of God alone. He who boldly despises dangers, or at least, rising above the fear of them, sincerely obeys God, will at length have a prosperous result.

It makes little sense, Calvin declares, “to appease the world by offending God.”¹⁶⁶⁰ In the short term the gospel might provoke violence and disorder but the fault lies with its opponents rather than with the gospel itself.¹⁶⁶¹ Presumably Calvin viewed all European societies as those in which the truth of scripture and the Christian religion was publicly embraced. But he also stresses that in the long run there can be no separation between the will of God and the welfare of the commonwealth. “Wherefore, let us learn never to separate what is useful from what is lawful, since we ought not to expect any prosperity or success but from the blessing of God, which is promised not to wicked and rebellious persons who ask assistance from the devil, but to believers who sincerely walk in their ways.”¹⁶⁶²

The fact is, Calvin believed that sincere piety and unity in religion are necessary for the welfare of any society for several reasons. First, although pagan governments can establish a certain degree of civil justice, more meaningful justice requires genuine piety. The second table of the law cannot be separated from the first. “Religion is the best mistress for teaching us mutually to maintain equity and uprightness towards each

1657Commentary on John 11:48 [1553]; CO 47:272-273.

1658Commentary on Micah 3:9-10 [1559]; 43:331. Cf. Commentary on Amos 8:10-13 [1559]; CO 43:127.

1659Commentary on John 11:49 [1553]; CO 47:273.

1660Commentary on John 11:48 [1553]; CO 47:272-273.

1661Commentary on Acts 28:25 [1554]; CO 48:570. Cf. Commentary on Psalm 2:1 [1557]; CO 31:42-43;

Dedication of the Commentary on Daniel to the French Protestants [1561]; CO 18:618.

1662Commentary on John 11:49 [1553]; CO 47:273. Cf. Dedication of the Second Edition of the Commentary on Acts to Nicolaus Radziwil [1560]; CO 18:156.

other; and where a concern for religion is extinguished, then all regard for justice perishes along with it.”¹⁶⁶³ Piety is the root of charity. Thus “there will never be true charity towards neighbors, unless where the love of God reigns; for it is a mercenary love which the children of the world entertain for each other, because every one of them has regard to his own advantage.”¹⁶⁶⁴

Second, the native Frenchman assumed that division in religious matters would inevitably give way to division in political matters. As he had written already in 1546,

where there are jarrings in religion it cannot but be that men's minds will soon afterwards burst forth in open strife. For as nothing is more effectual for uniting us, and there is nothing that tends more to draw our minds together and keep them in a state of peace, than agreement in religion, so, on the other hand, if any disagreement has arisen as to matters of this nature, the effect necessarily is that men's minds are straightway stirred up for combat, and in no other department are there more fierce contentings.¹⁶⁶⁵

For Calvin this is not necessarily a tendency to be bemoaned. After all, peace should never be purchased at the price of the truth. “For accursed is that peace of which revolt from God is the bond, and blessed are those contentions by which it is necessary to maintain the kingdom of Christ.”¹⁶⁶⁶ The “chief good” for human beings is “when mutually agreed in one faith, we are also joined together in mutual love.”¹⁶⁶⁷

Third, like most of his contemporaries, Calvin assumed that a commonwealth will be blessed or punished by God in proportion to its measure of faithfulness or disobedience to God's law. However much short-term conflict or suffering might accompany the progress of the kingdom, he urged foreign magistrates, in the long run

¹⁶⁶³Commentary on Psalm 14:4 [1557]; CO 31:139.

¹⁶⁶⁴Commentary on Luke 22:39 [1555]; CO 45:608. Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 22:16 [1563]; CO 38:387-388.

¹⁶⁶⁵Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:12 [1546]; CO 49:315.

¹⁶⁶⁶Commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:33 [1546]; CO 49:532. “Accursed then be the peace and unity by which men agree among themselves apart from God.” Commentary on Luke 1:17 [1555]; CO 45:17. “The name of peace is indeed plausible and sweet, but cursed is that peace which is purchased with so great loss, that we suffer the doctrine of Christ to perish, by which alone we grow together into godly and holy unity.” Commentary on Acts 15:2 [1554]; CO 48:339. Of course, what division and conflict results from the gospel is not the product of the gospel itself, but a result of humans' rejection of the gospel. Commentary on Luke 12:51 [1555]; CO 45:292.

¹⁶⁶⁷Commentary on Colossians 2:2 [1548]; CO 52:99. Cf. Commentary on Romans 3:10, 18 [1556]; CO 49:53, 54.

God would surely bless faithful magistrates and commonwealths with prosperity. As he puts it in one commentary, “the elements would be serviceable to us were we willingly to obey God, but ... on the contrary, the heaven and the earth and all the elements will be opposed to us if we pertinaciously resist God.”¹⁶⁶⁸ Thus regardless of whether or not the hearts of a people can be changed, “public sins” must be punished, lest the judgment of God fall on that people.¹⁶⁶⁹

This emphasis on corporate blessing and punishment stands in sharp tension with – if not outright contradiction to – Calvin's more basic insistence that the progress of the kingdom in this life always takes place under the cross. The faithful should not expect earthly blessing in response to their faithfulness, he so often reminds his readers, but suffering. Anyone who struggles for justice should expect to suffer persecution,¹⁶⁷⁰ but believers suffer even more than do unbelievers. “For though there are common miseries to which the life of men is indiscriminately subjected, yet ... God trains his people in a peculiar manner, in order that they may be conformed to the image of his Son.”¹⁶⁷¹ Thus believers should not seek “minute explanations or conclusions, or to determine those hidden and secret events which we have no right to search and explore.”¹⁶⁷² In this respect the situation of the church is quite different from that of Israel, for whom blessings pertaining to “this earthly and transitory life” were types of of the spiritual kingdom of Christ. The same is true of the Old Testament curses: “now-a-

1668Commentary on Jeremiah 27:11 [1563]; CO 38:551-552.

1669Commentary on Joel 1:13-15 [1559]; CO 42:526-528. Calvin speculates on the way the Greeks and Asians provoked God's anger, to deserve the wrath of the Turks falling on them. Commentary on Isaiah 36:20 [1559]; CO 36:613.

1670“I say not only they who labor for the defense of the gospel but they who in any way maintain the cause of righteousness suffer persecution for righteousness” (3.8.7). This refers to any who “through an earnest desire to do what is good and right ... oppose bad causes and defend good ones, as far as lies in their power.” Commentary on Matthew 5:10 [1555]; CO 45:164.

1671Commentary on Matthew 16:24 [1555]; CO 45:481-482. God “is more sharp and austere toward his children” than towards other people. Commentary on Acts 14:22 [1554]; CO 48:330-332. The Apostle Paul describes suffering as the necessary form of the Christian life under the cross “as though he had said that we are Christians on this condition.” Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 3:3 [1551]; CO 52:156. Cf. Commentary on Hebrews 12:7 [1549]; CO 55:174.

1672Commentary on Isaiah 44:25 [1559]; CO37:124.

days God does not openly take vengeance on sins as of old.” To be sure, God has not changed his nature, as the heretical Manicheans claimed. He continues to declare the wicked banished from his kingdom in the word of excommunication. But believers should not expect obedience to lead to the earthly blessings that are so prominent in the Old Testament, nor disobedience to lead to such punishments.¹⁶⁷³ “God does not appear, as of old, as the rewarder of his people by earthly blessings, and this because we 'are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God,' and because it becomes us to be conformed to our head and through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of heaven.” The Christian life is the life of hope, and although in a limited sense “believers already taste on earth of that blessedness which they shall here after enjoy in its fulness,” God calls them to fix their eyes on eternal life.¹⁶⁷⁴

Despite such warnings, in practice Calvin often appealed to a theology of blessing and cursing, arguing on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:30 that God still uses “diseases and other chastisements” to discipline his people.¹⁶⁷⁵ As a general rule, when it came to individuals Calvin tended to emphasize the expectation of suffering and the necessity to rest in hope until the future age. When it came to the prosperity of kingdoms, on the other hand, especially when he was lobbying magistrates for political and religious reform, he tended to emphasize Old Testament principles of corporate reward and punishment. The ancient prophets were relevant for Christian societies, he claimed, because “from their histories and examples we ought to make known the judgments of God; such as, that what he formerly punished he will also punish with equal severity in

¹⁶⁷³Commentary on Leviticus 26:3 [1563]; CO 25:13.

¹⁶⁷⁴Commentary on Leviticus 26:3 [1563]; CO 25:14. Calvin agrees that in Old Testament times God rewarded and punished with “outward tokens” and “corporal punishments” whereas now he does not usually use such “visible punishments. See Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:11 [1546]; CO 49:460-461. God's design with his people here is simply “to give them, by means of earthly things, a taste of the spiritual life . . . for as godliness has the promises of the present as well as of the future life, so the purpose of God was to consult the weakness of his ancient people, and to set forth the felicity of the spiritual life by means of earthly blessings.” Commentary on Zechariah 10:2 [1559]; CO 44:287. Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 33:16 [1563]; CO 39:68.

¹⁶⁷⁵Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:30 [1546]; CO 49:493.

our own day, for he is always like himself.”¹⁶⁷⁶ Calvin believed sixteenth century Europe was experiencing such corporate punishment. “And yet after all, we wonder how it comes that there are so many wars, so many pestilences, so many failures of the crop, so many disasters and calamities – as if the cause were not manifest! And assuredly we must not expect a termination to our calamities until we have removed the occasion of them by correcting our faults.”¹⁶⁷⁷

The irony is all the greater in light of Calvin's nostalgic conviction that Christ's kingdom flourished most before it was recognized by any political power, leading to its triumph over the Roman Empire. For “although the Son of God reigned under the cross, yet amidst the arduous conflicts of persecutions his glory shone brighter and his triumphs were more splendid than if the church had enjoyed undisturbed prosperity. At length, the haughty loftiness of the Roman Empire, yielding submission to Christ, became a distinguished ornament of the house of God.” Calvin likewise affirms that it was after it attained this political success that the church fell into centuries of desolation, confusion, and the rule of Antichrist. Only now was the Reformation once again restoring Christ's kingdom, once again under the persecution of the cross.¹⁶⁷⁸ Calvin offers the same provocative contrast in his commentary on Psalm 87.

Then the kings of the earth and their people voluntarily yielded themselves to the yoke of Christ. Wolves and lions were converted into lambs... [T]he goodly and unequalled condition of that age, which may be called the Golden Age, clearly demonstrate that she was truly the heavenly kingdom of God... At the time when she flourished most it was not purple, gold, and precious stones which imparted to her the splendor which invested her, but the blood of martyrs... In short, her dignity, venerable indeed, but yet spiritual, lay as yet hidden beneath the cross of Christ.¹⁶⁷⁹

1676Preface to the Commentary on Isaiah [1559]; CO 36:22. See Mark J. Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory, The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 39-40.

1677Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:30 [1546]; CO 49:494.

1678Dedication of the Commentary on Isaiah to Edward VI [1550]; CO 13:669-674.

1679Commentary on Psalm 87 [1557]; CO 31:798-800. It was when the church was poorest that “the force of Christ's Kingdom flourished most.” Never was the prophecy in Psalm 72: 10-11 about kings submitting their scepters to Christ better fulfilled than when the Emperor Theodosius “having cast away his purple robe and laid down the insignia of rule, like any one of the common folk, submitted himself before God and the church to solemn penance.” Yet in the day of Ambrose bishops “knew nothing to be

The triumph of Constantine and the Christianization of the Roman Empire was not the fulfillment of Daniel's famous prophecy because Christ's kingdom is spiritual. Earthly kingdoms can submit to Christ and obey him, but their rule never becomes identifiable with his rule. "Christ did not utter these words in vain, 'My kingdom is not of this world.'"¹⁶⁸⁰ At a theological level Calvin affirmed that temporal prosperity and the political power of the sword have little to do with the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

Conclusion

Calvin recognized that Old Testament Israel had a typological function that precluded its simplistic use as an example for Christian polities, but he believed that the care of religion that Israel's kings exercised was a central part of the magisterial vocation that transcended their typological status. Calvin defended this position from both the Old and New Testaments. However, his biblical arguments presupposed his prior judgment that reason, philosophy, and the laws of nations show it to be the clear testimony of natural law that the care of religion is a fundamental magisterial obligation. Many of Calvin's arguments from scripture were defensive, designed to refute arguments against this conclusion.

At the same time, Calvin agreed that the punishment of crimes against the true religion, such as idolatry or false teaching, can only take place in societies where the true religion is acknowledged by public consensus. Although he was not always consistent on this point, and although he was convinced that the establishment of true religion is vital for the health of any society, he agreed that pluralistic contexts preclude a vigorous magisterial stance toward religion. Calvin also insisted that even in Christian societies

more contrary to the pastoral office" than wealth and splendor, following "that very poverty which Christ consecrated among his ministers" (4.5.17).

¹⁶⁸⁰Commentary on Daniel 2:44-45 [1561]; CO 40:605. Daniel prophesied that the future kingdom would destroy four great kingdoms, the last of which was commonly thought to be the Roman Empire.

magistrates can only indirectly promote or defend true religion, and that only in its public form. They cannot perform spiritual functions because their office is of the political order rather than the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

CHAPTER 9

LAW, DEMOCRACY, AND RESISTANCE TO TYRANNY

Although Calvin's commitment to a Christian commonwealth fostered a measure of the same religio-political intolerance that was so pervasive throughout mid-sixteenth century Europe, I have argued that Calvin's position on the care of religion was determined more by his interpretation of natural law than it was by the direct exegesis of scripture. This suggests that the political theology underlying Calvin's practical conclusions regarding the care of religion is potentially less alien to a Christian democratic politics than at first seems to be the case. Ultimately it was Calvin's interpretation of reason and natural law, not his exegesis of scripture, that grounded his conviction about the magistrate's role in caring for religion.

In Chapter 9 I extend this argument. I show that despite his own political conclusions, Calvin's theoretical distinction between the spiritual and civil uses of the law makes possible an appropriation of biblical law that is anything but rigid. I then turn to Calvin's approach to forms of government, demonstrating that with respect to institutions and constitutional practices Calvin's two kingdoms theology allows pragmatic flexibility and an openness to certain democratic practices. Finally, I show that as expressed in Calvin's theory of resistance, his two kingdoms political theology is conducive toward a theory of limited government appropriate to pluralistic contexts.

Throughout this chapter, I must stress, my argument is not that Calvin supported or would conceivably have supported political pluralism or liberal democracy. Calvin was no liberal. His conviction that civil governments must enforce God's law as much as circumstances permit clearly forecloses such a possibility. My point, rather, is to show that there are resources in Calvin's two kingdoms political theology for Christian democratic politics that accepts and respects pluralism.

Before turning to Calvin's approach to the civil use of the law, it is important to

address the claim that Calvin did not take natural law as seriously as his statements imply. As was discussed in Chapter 3, some scholars have argued that Calvin rejected a positive use of natural law in politics. Here I engage the work of Harro Hopfl in particular. Hopfl argues that Calvin paid lip service to natural law, but that in reality he was essentially a biblicist.

Hopfl begins by questioning Calvin's unwillingness as a theologian to write more about politics. He complains that Calvin “declined to enter into a discussion concerning the best kind of laws in a Christian polity, on the singularly unconvincing grounds that it would 'be endless and would not pertain to the present purpose'.”¹⁶⁸¹ Hopfl thus criticizes Calvin's discussion of forms of government as being “notable chiefly for its derivativeness and superficiality.”¹⁶⁸² Later in the book he observes that “Calvin never drew together his ideas about polity in one treatise”¹⁶⁸³ and developed no “comprehensive casuistry of the evangelical life.”¹⁶⁸⁴ Calvin's references to politics from the pulpit, he points out, were remarkably restrained. Indeed, Hopfl is astonished that “no political event or issue, not even the persecution of the French brethren from the late fifties or their taking up arms in the early sixties, elicited from Calvin's pen a volume devoted to the elaboration of his political theology; even the defense of the execution of heresiarchs ... was incidental to a defense of trinitarian doctrine.”¹⁶⁸⁵ And he finds it “curious that Calvin did not see fit to publish to the world at least the sumptuary and disciplinary laws of Geneva which he and the ministers had always urged on the magistrates, and which bear the unmistakable imprint of his teaching, and possibly of his own drafting.”¹⁶⁸⁶

Hopfl points out that Calvin did not hesitate to invoke the authority of scripture

1681Harro Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 51.

1682Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 51.

1683Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 141.

1684Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 142.

1685Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 147 (Cf. 143-147)

1686Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 150.

in favor of a host of laws that he supported.¹⁶⁸⁷ “The propensity to minimize the significance of the gap between general [biblical] imperative and specific conduct, by insisting that it was bridged by Scripture itself, ran riot in Calvin's ecclesiology, where ever more precise detail of ecclesiastical organization was discovered in Scripture.”¹⁶⁸⁸ The same tendency, Hopfl thinks, increasingly characterized Calvin's politics. The morals legislation Calvin favored in Geneva became “ever more detailed” over the years,¹⁶⁸⁹ even leading “towards legalism.”¹⁶⁹⁰

But it is not clear why Hopfl thinks Calvin should have written more systematically about politics, or defended Geneva's policies. He admits that Calvin “was not the propagator of the Genevan example in its civil aspect, and he never made any particular civil order into a part of evangelical doctrine as the counterpart of scriptural ecclesiastical polity.”¹⁶⁹¹ The Geneva reformer “felt no need to demonstrate the scriptural provenance of every item in the Genevan polity of which he approved, and ... he offered no image of an ideal commonwealth to the world.”¹⁶⁹² Indeed, Calvin never endorsed the view that magistrates are simply to enforce the divine will as proclaimed to them by the church.¹⁶⁹³ He did not think pastors should micromanage magistrates because he was convinced that the civil authorities need much more than the bare word to perform their task. “Calvin did allow that there is a certain gap between the imperatives of Scripture and the knowledge of what is to be done in a particular time and place. And this gap, he thought, must be filled by a godly spirit and prudence.”¹⁶⁹⁴ When Calvin did articulate his political theology in the *Institutes*, he “regarded what he had to say about governance as

1687Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 149.

1688Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 178-179.

1689Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 177. But the examples Hopfl provides for this –

“punishment of heretics, permitted Christian names, laws governing dress, ornament and consumption, the law and discipline of marriage” – are hardly unique to Calvin in the 16th Century, as Hopfl himself admits (188).

1690Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 178.

1691Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 151.

1692Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 185.

1693Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 185.

1694Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 187.

simple reporting from Scripture, and [maintained] that it was no part of his intention to allot to natural reason any power over the minds of the righteous.”¹⁶⁹⁵

But Hopfl thinks that Calvin deceived himself on this point. He accuses Calvin of sneaking philosophy by the back door into what was supposed to be a purely scriptural treatise. “For although Calvin seems to have understood his discussion of things political as simply a summary or report of gospel teaching on the matter, he had in fact appealed to 'philosophical' considerations without explaining what business these had appearing in a 'tota fere pietatis summa'.”¹⁶⁹⁶ Specifically, Hopfl thinks philosophy is the source of Calvin's distinction between scripture's civil law, not binding on all times and places, and the more general natural law of equity, which can be worked out variously in different times and places. This distinction, Hopfl claims, finds no support in scripture and is simply residue of the “scholastic and humanist styles of thought” that Calvin elsewhere rejected. “Calvin's discussion here is conspicuously devoid of scriptural buttressing, and seems to depend on appeals to 'conscience', 'nature' and 'equity' which sit oddly with Calvin's more usual conceptual equipment.”¹⁶⁹⁷ Hopfl thinks philosophical considerations shaped Calvin's particular convictions even where the reformer claimed he was exclusively following scripture.

Yet Hopfl seems to want to have his cake and eat it too. Even as he claims that Calvin unfairly imported philosophical considerations into his theology, he refuses to take at face value Calvin's endorsement of – and repeated appeals to – natural law. So on the one hand Hopfl admits that Calvin's natural law references are everywhere, and that they are not “peripheral or casual, even if deficient in precision.”¹⁶⁹⁸ On the other hand, he claims, “Calvin never allowed to natural knowledge of the moral law any independent adequacy as a guide to moral conduct for Christians; it was always treated as an inferior

1695Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 52.

1696Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 53-54.

1697Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 50.

1698Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 180-181.

adjunct to the written divine law, and as unreliable.” It was simply used polemically, or to account for the soundness in pagan morality. On all the genuinely controversial issues, he always found support for his position in scripture. Thus “natural law was systematically being ground into insignificance between the upper millstone of divine law and the nether millstone of positive law.” In reality, then, Calvin was a biblicist. “Having set to work, Calvin found himself able to extract from Scripture more and more detail about the form and content of positive law.”¹⁶⁹⁹

But Hopfl discounts the evidence that contradicts his claim. He admits,

Perhaps the only contentious issues on which Calvin was prepared to call upon the oracle of natural law and *naturalis sensus* were the suppression of blasphemy and heresy, and the death-penalty for adultery... Under these circumstances he was prepared to adduce the *sensus naturae* as dictating 'that in every well-ordered polity, religion must have pride of place and is to be preserved intact under the supervision of the laws, as even unbelievers confess'.¹⁷⁰⁰

Hopfl admits that Calvin distinguished the nonbinding civil punishments of the Torah from the binding natural law, leaving the former at the discretion of civil governments. He likewise admits that Calvin's argument that adultery should receive capital punishment depended on the reformer's appeals to natural law. And these were two of the most genuinely controversial political issues of Calvin's tenure in Geneva!

Still, Hopfl insists,

There is no question of any serious examination of the idea of natural law: Calvin never clearly specified the manner in which it is apprehended, but merely referred to the 'heart' or the 'intellect' or the 'conscience,' and on occasion to 'natural sense' and 'reason'. His appeal to the consent of the ages, or of the Gentiles, to specific articles of the natural law was equally unconcerned with the difficulties of this type of argument. All of which points to the entirely secondary importance of natural law within his thought.¹⁷⁰¹

Certainly, like all orthodox Christian theologians, Calvin placed scripture above natural law. But Hopfl assumes that unless Calvin understood natural law to function through systematic reason, as did Aquinas or the medieval scholastics, his idea of it could not

1699Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 181.

1700Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 182.

1701Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 184.

have been very serious. But Calvin was quite explicit about his theological conviction that the knowledge of natural law lies in the conscience, in intuition, and in social human experience. His method is more general than that of Aquinas, but it is not unconsidered. In the final analysis Hopfl has not substantiated his thesis that natural law does not play a major role in the reformer's political theology. He has simply shown that he, Hopfl, is dissatisfied with it.

Hopfl's move here is significant because he uses it as leverage to reject what he calls a "tempting" interpretation of Calvin's political theology, one he admits is "not altogether without support in Calvin's own writings." This tempting interpretation sees a "neat parallelism or homology" in Calvin's distinction between the roles of pastors and magistrates, between spiritual and political government. According to it, pastors find their commission and its content in scripture, while magistrates find the terms of their commission in natural law, with the specific duty of enforcing *aequitas* and *humanitas*.

Of course [according to this model] Scripture also has much to offer magistrates. But Scripture leaves to magistrates rather more freedom than it does to the church, which is subject to divinely revealed laws governing its organization and conduct in very considerable detail. By contrast, magistrates are left free to devise such laws and arrangements as they judge expedient within the limits of natural law, except of course *in sacris*, where they are bound as much as ministers by divine law.¹⁷⁰²

But Hopfl rejects this interpretation due to Calvin's alleged lack of seriousness about natural law. "Since natural law is thus neither a necessary nor a sufficient guide for magistrates in their performance of their duty, the parallelism suggested earlier between a ministry subject to scriptural law and enforcing it upon their congregations, and a magistracy subject to natural law and enforcing that by positive law, must be abandoned as too neat and unequivocal a statement of Calvin's views."¹⁷⁰³

Of course, stated too precisely no brief description captures all of the complexities and practical nuances of the reformer's political theology and practice. But in fact, as a

¹⁷⁰²Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 179.

¹⁷⁰³Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 185.

general outline of Calvin's thought, Hopfl's "tempting" interpretation is fairly accurate. Hopfl's interpretation fails because it does not take into account the substantive role that natural law plays as it guides the reformer's judgments regarding what parts of biblical law are normative for contemporary politics and what parts are not. The point is not that Calvin's theory or interpretation of natural law is adequate. The point is that the reformer recognized the testimony of natural law to be authoritative, and he presented it as the standard for civil government. For Calvin pastors and theologians could not impose the enforcement of biblical laws (or their interpretations of them) on civil magistrates both because the ultimate authority is the natural moral law and because it is not possible for magistrates to enforce the whole of that law. In short, the relevance of scripture for civil politics must always be interpreted through the lens of natural law and the limits of politics, and this requires humility in its proclamation on the part of pastors, theologians, and the church.

The Civil Use of the Law

Calvin believed that scripture alone holds authority in matters of faith, but in "matters which concern men" he recognized that "human reasons" hold an important place.¹⁷⁰⁴ To be sure, counsel is always to be taken with reference to the teaching of scripture.¹⁷⁰⁵ And Calvin agreed with the other magisterial reformers that the essence of the magisterial task is the enforcement of the outward piety and justice of the natural moral law, which is most clearly revealed in scripture.¹⁷⁰⁶ O'Donovan is therefore accurate when he writes, "For Calvin the law, in its dialectical relation to divine grace, promise, and freedom, is the constitutive structure of Christian spirituality and morality,

¹⁷⁰⁴Commentary on Acts 17:2 [1554]; CO 48:393.

¹⁷⁰⁵Commentary on Numbers 10:2 [1563]; CO 24:374. Cf. Commentary on Numbers 18:19; CO 24:187-188.

¹⁷⁰⁶Magistrates "hold power only in order to protect and implement the divine law." Ralph Keen, "The Limits and Power of Obedience in the Later Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 264.

binding together the civil and ecclesial realms in a single overarching unity of revelation and salvation.”¹⁷⁰⁷ For Calvin the law of God is what Stevenson calls the “clear, scripturally based criteria for good government.”¹⁷⁰⁸ And in the case of a Christian commonwealth, “the primary roots of good government lie in the public official's sense of connectedness to God's will through his word in Scripture.”¹⁷⁰⁹

But for Calvin this continuum was always qualified by the fundamental difference between the spiritual and civil uses of the law, and between what is attainable among the redeemed and what is attainable at the point of the sword. Thus while there is an element of truth to the claim that Calvin conceives of the task of political order with respect to the same ideal of righteousness as he does the spiritual kingdom of Christ, it is crucial to emphasize that whereas the spiritual kingdom is involved in the *restoration of righteousness* (the spiritual use of the law) the civil order is involved in the *restraint of unrighteousness* (the civil use of the law). For instance, Milner claims that for Calvin “The ideal for the church and the ideal for society are the same,” but it is surely misleading to declare that “Calvin's description of life in the body of Christ is not materially different from his normative conception of the *ordo politicus*.”¹⁷¹⁰ For Calvin the decisive feature of the political order, and of the civil use of the law, is its inherent limitations as a coercive restraint on human sin. The best civil government can do is to use fear to preserve human beings in outward, civil righteousness, so creating the conditions in which the gospel can create true righteousness.¹⁷¹¹ For Calvin, as Stevenson

1707Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 664.

1708William R. Stevenson, Jr., *Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 94-95.

1709Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 97.

1710Benjamin Milner, Jr., *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 188. Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956), 151.

1711Hancock makes a more plausible attempt to bring the purposes of civil and spiritual government into alignment. Hancock claims that Calvin rejects the classical ideal of the polis as a school of virtue. But he suggests that Calvin endorsed the model of a repressive state aimed at prompting outward sanctification through the use of fear, in cooperation with the church's appeal to the conscience by the word and Spirit, and in obedience to the will of an infinitely transcendent God. He claims, “The

claims, “we ought never to assume that civil government can remake the world but only that it might 'provide that a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men.’”¹⁷¹² Indeed, “To the extent that government should *try* to remake human beings, spiritually or any other way, it is, as we have already seen, doomed to fail.”¹⁷¹³

In addition, Calvin believed that the relevance of scripture for civil government is rarely direct. As was discussed in Chapter 6, he rejected the claim that a commonwealth must conform to the laws and political system of Moses as being “perilous and seditious,” not to mention “false and foolish” (4.20.14). He argued in all editions of the *Institutes*:

It is a fact that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men. Consequently, the entire scheme of this equity of which we are now speaking has been prescribed in it. Hence, this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws. Whatever laws shall be framed to that rule, directed to that goal, bound by that limit, there is no reason why we should disapprove of them, howsoever they may differ from the Jewish law or among themselves (4.20.16).¹⁷¹⁴

Elsewhere Calvin reminds his readers that the moral law “prescribes nothing which

Calvinist church and state were effective agencies of Calvinist sanctification precisely because they did not aim at human virtue or perfection.” Ralph C. Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 60 (59-61). In this model “an infinitely transcendent God can only use political fear as a preparation for the fear of holiness” (61). Hancock thinks that in the final analysis “it is clear that he tends to apply a single, fundamental understanding of order to both the political and the religious spheres... Not only does the religious notion of a voluntary community serve as the motive or spirit for political action, but the coercive power characteristic of politics is the practical reality of the voluntary community” (80). But Hancock's argument suffers from his assumption that even the church, through the gospel, cannot know God's ultimate purposes for human beings in Christ, and therefore cannot promote true natural virtue.

¹⁷¹²Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 93.

¹⁷¹³Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 94.

¹⁷¹⁴Hesselink writes, “Whether it was due to biblical or legal insight – or the exigencies of his situation – he recognized that we must not seek for absolute expressions of the law of God in state constitutions. The forms of civil law are necessarily relative. But he did not therefore resign himself either to quietism or ethical relativism. The state must always recognize its inability and failure to express adequately the absolute command. But the standard and goal remains, which is inescapable and uncompromising.” I. John. Hesselink, *Calvin's Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 247. “Therefore, the three uses or functions of the law are in the last analysis inseparable... Confusion of these functions would be fatal, but severance of any one use from the others will also result in damage to the whole concept of the law” (249). Hesselink describes some of the debates that have centered on Calvin's appeal to love and equity (245-247).

nature does not itself dictate to be most certain and most just [*natura dictet certissimum et aequissimum esse*], and which experience [*experientia*] itself does not show us to be more profitable, or more desirable than anything else.”¹⁷¹⁵ For that reason Christians could expect to find it reflected in the politics and philosophies of all peoples and nations, not only that of the Jews.

Certainly Calvin believed the natural moral law is summarized and clarified in the Ten Commandments, beyond which “nothing can be wanted as the rule of a good and upright life.”¹⁷¹⁶ He interpreted the Decalogue representatively, such that a host of moral principles not explicitly mentioned in it were nevertheless to be understood as part of its implicit teaching.¹⁷¹⁷ But that still left a host of specific rules and regulations in the Mosaic Law that had to be categorized as timeless principles of moral law, ceremonial regulations unique to Old Testament worship, or civil laws potentially useful for, but no longer binding on, Christian commonwealths. In his commentary on the Law he writes that both ceremonial laws, which pertain to the first table of the Decalogue (piety and the worship of God), and political laws, which pertain to the second table (justice and relations between human beings) are to be regarded as supplements that do not add anything to the moral content of God's law, but that serve “merely to aid in the observance of the moral law.” They are “only helps which, as it were, lead us by the hand to the due worship of God, and to the promotion of justice towards men.” To put it in Aristotelian terms, “they are not, to speak correctly, of the substance of the law,” but are “appendages.”¹⁷¹⁸

It is true that Calvin was much more sensitive to the error of conflating the

1715Commentary on Deuteronomy 10:12 [1563]; CO 24:723.

1716Because sin has distorted natural perception, Schreiner writes, “The Decalogue clarifies that which fallen reason can no longer understand or which it now perceives only dimly.” Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 78.

1717See Guenther Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 72-75, 84-90.

1718Preface to Calvin's Commentary on the Law [1563]; CO 24:7-8.

Torah's ceremonial laws with the moral law, which he associated with Judaism, than he was to the danger of conflating the political laws with the moral law. In certain respects Calvin also held to a uniquely dogmatic interpretation of scripture's moral teaching compared to other magisterial reformers.¹⁷¹⁹ Still, he repeatedly articulates points at which he finds Israel's civil law to be anachronistic, insufficient, or even counter to natural law.¹⁷²⁰ Although he did appeal to the authority of the Torah in arguments about what magistrates should or should not do, he recognized that taken in isolation, such appeals are insufficient.

The most theologically significant reason Calvin offers why certain laws in the Torah are not binding on all nations is that God gave Israel laws appropriate for its unique mission as God's sacerdotal kingdom.¹⁷²¹ Calvin includes in this category the laws that called Israel to exterminate the Canaanites and to execute propitiatory judgment on the wicked, but he includes other laws as well. In his commentary on Leviticus 25:23 he notes that Israel's jubilee laws, which guaranteed each Israelite family an inheritance in the land, “can hardly be applied to other nations” because “the land of Canaan was an earnest, or symbol, or mirror of the adoption on which their salvation was founded.”¹⁷²²

The purpose of the law was to preserve liberty among Israelites by preventing inequality,

¹⁷¹⁹Paying particular attention to polygamy and resistance to authority, Thompson shows that among the magisterial reformers Calvin was much less inclined to excuse immoral behavior on the part of biblical characters, or to allow exceptions to general moral rules. See John Lee Thompson, “Patriarchs, Polygamy and Private Resistance: John Calvin and Others on Breaking God's Rules,” *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 25/1 (1994): 3-28. Calvin was “singularly resistant to the use of scripture as a warrant or pretext for social change, largely because Calvin refuses to concede any ambiguity to the teachings and examples of scripture” (3).

¹⁷²⁰Haas writes, “Given Calvin's approach to the Bible, it is clear that some of the civil legislation does fall short of the principles of love of neighbour.” Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 98. He also links Calvin's approach to the issue with his two kingdoms theology.

¹⁷²¹In addition to those considered here, other significant laws Calvin identified as having been unique to Israel's circumstances include the law about the sharing of manna (Commentary on Exodus 16:17 [1563]; CO 24:171-172); laws pertaining to the chief priest (Commentary on Numbers 3:5 [1563]; CO 24:444-445); the laws on tithes (Commentary on Numbers 18:20 [1563]; CO 24:479-481); the law about breaking down altars and tearing down images (Commentary on Exodus 23:24 [1563]; CO 24:546); laws calling for the extermination of the Canaanites (Commentary on Deuteronomy 7:20-25 [1563]; 24:553-554); and laws prohibiting alliances with pagan nations (Commentary on Isaiah 30:1 [1559], 15; CO 36:506, 517).

¹⁷²²Commentary on Leviticus 25:23 [1563]; CO 24:706.

“lest a few persons of immense wealth should oppress the general body.” But the reformer goes on to explain that “we are not bound by this law at present,” except with respect to the principle of general equity that requires mercy to debtors and generosity to the poor. “The condition of the ancient people, as I have said, was different. They derived their origin from a single race; the land of Canaan was their common inheritance; [and] fraternal association was to be mutually sustained among them, just as if they were one family.”¹⁷²³

The same was the case with slavery. God prohibited the permanent involuntary enslavement of Hebrew persons, though suffering temporary slavery “by indulgence,” because he desired that his people, whom he had delivered from slavery in Egypt, be a free people.¹⁷²⁴ The design of this law, Calvin argues, was to distinguish Israel from the nations.¹⁷²⁵ For “it was yet a very mournful thing for God’s children to be the slaves of servants; for they were before a sacerdotal kingdom, and God had so taken them under his protection, that their condition was better and more desirable than that of any other kingdom.”¹⁷²⁶ To be sure, by nature all people are fundamentally equal and are to be treated in accord with general principles of justice. “Any inequality which is contrary to this arrangement is nothing else than a corruption of nature which proceeds from sin.”¹⁷²⁷ Despite the various regulations found in the Mosaic law, therefore, Christians should continue to prohibit slavery “lest the condition of those who have been redeemed by Christ’s blood should be worse among us than that of old of its ancient people.”¹⁷²⁸ But political laws will necessarily vary based on what is possible and appropriate under particular circumstances. Calvin found slavery abhorrent and lauded its abolition, but he refused to declare that its abolition, or the Mosaic form of its regulation, is binding on all

1723Commentary on Deuteronomy 15:1 [1563]; CO 24:697-698.

1724Commentary on Leviticus 25:42 [1563]; CO 24:704.

1725Commentary on Jeremiah 34:8-17 [1563]; CO 39:86.

1726Commentary on Lamentations 5:8; CO 39:635-636.

1727Commentary on Genesis 1:28 [1554]; CO 23:28.

1728Commentary on Leviticus 25:42 [1563]; CO 24:704.

nations.

Similar again is Calvin's approach to the issue of usury.¹⁷²⁹ Often considered one of his most groundbreaking and enduring moral arguments, Calvin's justification of usury presupposes a distinction between political laws unique to Israel's mission as the sacerdotal people of God and the principles according to which Christian polities ought to be governed.¹⁷³⁰ The goal of policy, for Calvin, was to approximate the principles of equity to the greatest extent possible in any particular set of circumstances. For practices that were inevitable, such as usury, it was better to bring them under legal regulation and curb excesses than to drive them underground by quixotic efforts to eliminate them entirely.

The key places where Calvin discusses the question of usury are his commentaries on Exodus 22:25, Psalm 15, and Ezekiel 18:5-9, and his letter to a friend "On Usury." In his commentary on Exodus Calvin introduces his discussion of usury by noting that the prohibition of usury was a "political [*politicum*]" law but that its application "depends on the rule of charity [*caritatis regula*]." Calvin's logic here is tight: "It is plain that this was a part of the Jewish polity [*politiae iudaicae*] because it was lawful to lend at interest to the Gentiles, which distinction [between Jew and Gentile] the spiritual law [*lex*

¹⁷²⁹On Calvin's approach to usury see Mark Valeri, "Religion, Discipline, and the Economy in Calvin's Geneva," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 129-131; L. F. Schulze, "Calvin on Interest and Property – Some Aspects of His Socio-Economic View," *Our Reformational Tradition*. South Africa: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1984, 217-230; Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Calvin's Relation to Social and Economic Change," *Church and Society* 74 (1984): 79; Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 117-121; W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1971), 77-94, 117-126. Graham notes that Geneva's pastors appealed to the Council to regulate usury, which it did, capping it at 5 percent, in 1543 (118). In 1557 the Consistory expressed its concern to the Council that usurers were not being punished. This led to a new edict raising the maximum rate to 6.67 percent (120).

¹⁷³⁰Graham argues that Calvin's pragmatism concerning commerce, a product of his willingness to subject policy considerations to calculations concerning the common good, distinguished the Geneva reformer from the other great medieval and Reformation theologians. Calvin spurned both "OT legalism" and "Aristotelian axioms" in order to relate the spiritual values of the gospel to "the real world in which he lived." Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 94. Yet Calvin's flexible attitude toward usury, like his attitude toward other social, economic, and political matters, was not simply the result of a common sense pragmatism. Rather, it reflected the reformer's conviction that the authority of the word, to which pastors are bound, prevents dogmatism on such matters.

spiritualis] does not admit.” In other words, the law regarding usury was evidently political because it distinguished between Jews and Gentiles. Though Israel was distinct from the Gentile nations, Christian nations are not, and therefore they cannot simply incorporate the Torah's usury law into their own polities. “Moreover, since the wall of partition which formerly separated Jew and Gentile is now broken down, our condition is now different, and consequently we must spare all without exception, both as regards taking interest and any other mode of extortion, and equity is to be observed even towards strangers.”¹⁷³¹ Contemporary nations have flexibility with regard to laws concerning interest, but they must observe the principles of equity and charity that underlay those laws. “The judicial law [*ius forense*], however, which God prescribed to his ancient people, is only so far abrogated [*abrogatum*] as that what charity dictates should remain, i.e., that our brethren, who need our assistance, are not to be treated harshly.”¹⁷³² Also, Christians are held to the standard of charity regardless of what the civil law permits.¹⁷³³

When it comes to working out the principle of charity according to which the charging of interest might be just, Calvin interacts with pagan perspectives, including

1731Commentary on Exodus 22:25 [1563]; CO 24:680. Cf. Commentary on Ezekiel 18:5-9 [1565]; CO 40:425-432. Calvin distinguishes the usury law that was “a part of the political law which God appointed for the Jews in particular [*politica ... lex ... peculiariter Iudaeis*]” and the “common principle of justice which extends to all nations and to all ages, that we should keep ourselves from plundering and devouring the poor who are in distress and want.” Commentary on Psalm 15:5 [1557]; CO 31:148. Cf. “On Usury”; CO 10:246-247.

1732Commentary on Exodus 22:25 [1563]; CO 24:680. In his commentary on Ezekiel Calvin offers an argument that sheds light on his complicated attitude toward the Torah: “But because God’s law embraces complete and perfect justice we must hold that interest ... is not altogether to be condemned. Otherwise ignominy would clearly attach to the law of God if it did not prescribe to us a true and complete rule of living justly. But in the law there is that perfection to which nothing can be added... [W]e shall not find all interest contrary to the law, and hence it follows that interest is not always to be condemned.” Commentary on Ezekiel 18:5-9 [1565]; CO 40:430. Calvin's logic here can be reduced to the following syllogism: A) God's law embraces perfect justice; B) God's law permits some charging of interest; C) Therefore, charging of interest is not necessarily unjust. The description of the law as embracing complete and perfect justice seems to contradict the reformer's admission that given the difference between the civil and moral law, matters are somewhat more complicated. The only way to make sense of the statement is to assume that Calvin thinks of the law permitting the charging of interest (when it is in accord with charity) as being a spiritual law (i.e., the complete and perfect justice), which means that the law prohibiting interest must be a political law.

1733Sermon on Deuteronomy 23:18-20; CO 28:117-118.

those of Plato, Aristotle, and Cato. O'Donovan comments, "Methodologically, his argument is as much dependent on philosophical concepts (e.g., prudence, moderation, natural equity, justice, and the *publii* good) as on biblical injunctions."¹⁷³⁴ As Calvin himself puts it, "surely that which heathens even have detested appears to be by no means lawful to the children of God. We know that the name of usurer has everywhere and always been infamous and detested."¹⁷³⁵ Calvin outlines three reasons why usury might justly be prohibited. First, as Cato recognized when he compared usury to murder, usurers nearly always have the object of exploiting others. "It is scarcely possible to find in the world a usurer who is not at the same time an extortioner, and addicted to unlawful and dishonorable gain." Second, very often usurers neither work nor contribute anything to the community. It is shameful that "while all other men obtain the means of their subsistence with much toil ... money-mongers should sit at their ease without doing any thing, and receive tribute from the labor of all other people." Third, it always seems to be the poor who suffer from usury.¹⁷³⁶

But Calvin adds that this is not all that needs to be said on the matter, for a person might lend at interest without being a professional usurer. The key is to "consider when and from whom a person exacts interest."¹⁷³⁷ Calvin explicitly rejects Aristotle's argument that usury is unnatural because money is barren. On the contrary, he maintains, a borrower "might make much profit by trading with another man's money, and the purchaser of the farm might in the meantime reap and gather his vintage."¹⁷³⁸ The borrower might even be wealthier than the lender and use the money borrowed further to grow his wealth. "Why should the creditor be deprived of his rights [*suo iure*]

1734 O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 666.

1735 Commentary on Exodus 22:25 [1563]; CO 24:681. Even "the profane" see that usury that takes advantage of the poor is utterly banished from a "well regulated state [*republica bene constituta*]." Commentary on Ezekiel 18:5-9 [1565]; CO 40:431.

1736 "[G]enerally it is not the rich who are exhausted by their usury, but poor men, who ought rather to be relieved." Commentary on Psalm 15:5 [1557]; CO 31:147-148.

1737 Commentary on Ezekiel 18:5-9 [1565]; CO 40:431.

1738 Commentary on Exodus 22:25 [1563]; CO 24:682.

when his money brings profit to a neighbor richer than himself?”¹⁷³⁹ Finally, there is the case of debtors who would otherwise take advantage of their creditors. “If the debtor have protracted the time by false pretenses to the loss and inconvenience of his creditor, will it be consistent that he should reap advantage from his bad faith and broken promises? Certainly no one, I think, will deny that usury ought to be paid to the creditor in addition to the principal to compensate his loss.” Under such circumstances the payment of interest is merely a form of purchase.¹⁷⁴⁰

There are therefore numerous factors and circumstances that must be taken into account when evaluating the morality of usury, which should be permitted “neither everywhere, nor always, nor [with respect to] all things, nor from all.”¹⁷⁴¹ As he writes in his letter on usury, “we ought not to judge usury according to some certain or particular sentence of God [in scripture], but in accordance with the principle of equity.”¹⁷⁴² Calvin is aware that “those who think differently may object that we must abide by God’s judgment when he generally prohibits all usury to His people.” But the declarations of David and Ezekiel “ought to be judged of by the rule of charity,” the “universal rule of justice” “on which hang the law and the prophets – Do not do to others what you would not have done to yourself.” According to such principles, not slavish imitation of the laws of Moses, should Christian polities be organized. “It is abundantly clear that the ancient people were prohibited from usury, but we must needs confess that this was a part of their political constitution [*ordinis politici*]. Hence it follows that usury is not now unlawful except insofar as it contravenes equity and brotherly union.”¹⁷⁴³

¹⁷³⁹Commentary on Ezekiel 18:5-9 [1565]; CO 40:432.

¹⁷⁴⁰Commentary on Exodus 22:25 [1563]; CO 24:682.

¹⁷⁴¹Commentary on Ezekiel 18:5-9 [1565]; CO 40:431.

¹⁷⁴²“On Usury”; CO 10:247-248.

¹⁷⁴³Commentary on Exodus 22:25 [1563]; CO 24:682-683. Calvin likewise uses this “rule of equity” as the foundation for his exegesis and application of the prohibition of theft. “Since charity is the end of the Law, we must seek the definition of theft from thence. This, then, is the rule of charity, that every one’s rights should be safely preserved, and that none should do to another what he would not have done to himself.” All people are under the mutual obligation to “benefit, care for, and succor their neighbors.” The prohibition of theft therefore implies responsibilities of “liberality and kindness, and the other duties, whereby human society is maintained” (20:15; CO 24:669). Cf. Commentary on Psalm

A second reason why Calvin believed the political laws of the Torah are not binding on all nations is that Israel's laws tolerated some injustice due to the hardness of human hearts.¹⁷⁴⁴ Here Calvin's purpose was to call the nations to follow the higher natural and moral law where possible. The exegetical basis for his claim that the political laws of the Torah were relaxed to account for human hardness of heart was Jesus' interpretation of Moses' law of divorce, which Christ claimed was trumped by the higher law of creation. Calvin extends this interpretive principle to a broader range of cases revolving around marriage, divorce, violence, and the treatment of slaves and prisoners. In each of these cases he judges the law to be lacking in comparison with the natural law of equity, and in each of these cases he explicitly appeals to human hardness of heart as a reason for that imperfection.¹⁷⁴⁵ Calvin argues that this limitation was inherent to all of the Torah's "civil laws [*leges forenses*], the principle of which is not so exact and perfect, since in their enactment God has relaxed his just severity in consideration of the people's hardness of heart [*populi duritiem*]."¹⁷⁴⁶ Civil laws must necessarily accommodate the hardness of human hearts, and this was all the more true in the case of Israel, whom God accommodated as a people in its childhood.¹⁷⁴⁷

Calvin interprets Jesus' comments on divorce against the backdrop of his criticism of the Pharisees, who he says wrongly interpreted the Torah's accommodation

15:5 [1557]; CO 31:147-148. But Calvin rejects too strict an interpretation of the principle, lest "every kind of purchase is to be condemned." Commentary on Genesis 47:20 [1554]; CO 23:573.

1744On the place of this theme within the context of Calvin's broader doctrine of accommodation see Arnold Huijgen, *Divine Accommodation in John Calvin's Theology: Analysis and Assessment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 190-200.

1745Haas writes, "The obvious question that arises here is: How does Calvin determine whether Old Testament civil legislation expresses God's perfect law, or whether it is a concession to the Jews' hardness of hearts ... ?" He answers, "it is equity – the interpretive principle of the moral law – that is the essential criterion for evaluating the moral nature of the civil legislation of the Old Testament." Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 99. Haas concedes that Calvin appeals to both scripture and natural law, but in my view he mistakenly downplays the importance of the latter.

1746Commentary on Exodus 22:1-4 [1563]; CO 24:688. See Thompson, "Patriarchs, Polygamy and Private Resistance," 14. Cf. Commentary on Genesis 22:19; 26:34 [1554]; CO 23:320, 370; Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:2 [1548]; CO 52:281; Sermon on 1 Timothy 3:2; CO 53:245-249; Commentary on Titus 1:6 [1550]; CO 52:410); Sermon on Titus 1:6; CO 54:423.

1747Huijgen, *Divine Accommodation in John Calvin's Theology*, 208-236.

of divorce as indication that divorce is morally justified. The Pharisees failed to recognize that the law of divorce was a political law rather than a spiritual law. The difference is crucial. “For political laws are sometimes accommodated to the manners of men [*leges politicae interdum ad hominum mores flectuntur*], but God, in prescribing a spiritual law [*legem spiritualem*], looked not at what men can do but at what they ought to do.” Jesus therefore challenged the assumption that “what is allowed [*tolerat*] by the political law [*lex politica*] of Moses is on that account considered licit in the sight of God [*protinus licere coram Deo*].”¹⁷⁴⁸ Divorce was permitted because the people were incapable of attaining to a higher legal standard, not because it is just. The political laws of the Torah, like all civil laws, had to accommodate “rebellious and intractable” people. Yet as Jesus made clear, the true standard of justice is much higher, rooted in the created order itself.¹⁷⁴⁹ “Although what relates to divorce was granted in concession to the Jews, yet Christ pronounces that it was never legitimate [*fuisse legitimum*], because it is directly repugnant to the first institution of God, from whence a perpetual and inviolable rule is to be sought. It is proverbially said that the laws of nature [*iura naturae*] are indissoluble.”¹⁷⁵⁰

Calvin did not embrace Jesus' logic because he wanted to reduce the rigor of political laws. On the contrary, as Hopfl observes, Calvin believed the church's duty is “to urge on the magistracy an ever stricter conformity of positive with divine law, and an ever stricter enforcement of obedience to the law.”¹⁷⁵¹ In a striking display of his own political predilections, Calvin warns magistrates not to use the principle as an excuse for approving injustice. Commenting on Jesus' declaration, “what therefore God has joined together, let not man separate,” Calvin writes, “And as he declares that it is not in the

1748Commentary on Matthew 5:31 [1555]; CO 45:180. Cf. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:10 [1546]; CO 49:409.

1749Commentary on Matthew 19:1-9 [1555]; CO 45:528.

1750Commentary on Deuteronomy 24:1-4 [1563]; CO 24:657-658. Cf. Commentary on Numbers 5:11; CO 24:654; Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 100.

1751Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 196.

choice [*arbitrio*] of the husband to dissolve the marriage, so likewise he forbids all others to confirm by their authority illicit divorces [*ita et aliis omnibus legem edicit, ne sua auctoritate illicita repudia confirmet*], for the magistrate abuses [*abutitur*] his power when he gives favor [*gratiam facit*] to the husband to divorce his wife.¹⁷⁵² The reformer insists that Jesus' principle does not justify magistrates' "indolence, if they voluntarily abstain from correcting vices, or neglect what the nature of their office demands." Nor should subjects or citizens use such legality as an excuse for acting unjustly, because the rule of a holy and pious life is not to be sought from political laws.¹⁷⁵³

Should Moses have "permitted [*permittere*] what was in itself bad and sinful [*malum et vitiosum*]"? To answer the question Calvin refines the distinction to the difference between what is legally permitted and what is legally approved. "[I]n an unusual sense of the word, he is said to have permitted [*permissum*] what he did not severely forbid [*vetuit*]." As it reads in the French version of the commentary: "strictly speaking, he did not permit [*permis*] it; but in so far as he did not strictly forbid it, he is said to have permitted [*permis*] it." What is the difference? The former connotes approval whereas the latter simply seeks to regulate and mitigate the destructive consequences of what is unavoidable.

[H]e did not lay down a law about divorces, so as to give them the seal of his approbation [*approbaret*], but as the wickedness of men could not be restrained in any other way, he applied what was the most admissible remedy, that the husband should, at least, attest the chastity of his wife. For the law was made solely for the protection of the women, that they might not suffer any disgrace after they had been unjustly rejected. Hence we infer, that it was rather a punishment [*poenam*] inflicted on the husbands, than an indulgence or permission [*venia aut permissu*] fitted to inflame their lust.¹⁷⁵⁴

1752Commentary on Matthew 19:6 [1555]; CO 45:529.

1753Commentary on Matthew 19:7 [1555]; CO 45:529-530. In fact, it is only the "wicked forbearance of magistrates" that "makes it necessary for husbands to put away unchaste wives, because adulterers are not punished" (19:9; CO 45:531).

1754" Moses conceded [*concesserit*] it on account of their obstinacy and not because he sanctioned it as licit [*licitum probaverit*]." Commentary on Matthew 19:7 [1555]; CO 45:529-530. Calvin's refusal to use even the word 'permission' reflects the dogmatism of his own political proclivities that are in tension with the biblical text. In Matthew's narrative it was Jesus himself who declared Moses to have 'permitted' divorce. In the NASB Matthew 19:8 reads, "He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.'"

Calvin reminds his readers that one cannot conflate what is legal with what is moral, and he explicitly appeals to the two kingdoms doctrine as underlying the distinction: for “political and outward order [*politia et externo ordine*] is widely different from spiritual government [*spirituale regimen*].” The law that is moral and spiritual, summarized in the Ten Commandments, demands much more than can profitably be enforced by a human court. It is therefore “not wonderful if those things are connived at by political laws [*leges politicae*].” As an analogy Calvin observes that civil law allows much broader rights of litigation than the spiritual law of charity permits. This is necessary because “the right [of litigation] cannot be conferred on individuals unless there be an open door for demanding it.” Freedom to perform what is necessary or loving, in other words, is impossible without the broader freedom to use one's discretion. Magistrates cannot micromanage their subjects' access to the courts.¹⁷⁵⁵ Calvin returns to the question in his commentary on Malachi, making the same distinction between what is permitted by political laws and what is justified by the law of creation.¹⁷⁵⁶ A magistrate “is constrained to bear many things [*cogetur tamen ferre*] which he does not approve [*probabit*], for we cannot so deal with mankind as to restrain all vices [*cohibeantur omnia vitia*]. It is indeed desirable that no vice should be tolerated [*toleretur*], but we must have a regard to what is possible.”¹⁷⁵⁷

Calvin clearly affirmed the position that it is not always possible for civil government to enforce the moral law, even outwardly. In addition, he affirmed that, as in the case of the divorce law designed to protect women, civil authorities must sometimes

¹⁷⁵⁵Commentary on Matthew 19:7 [1555]; CO 45:529-530.

¹⁷⁵⁶Commentary on Malachi 2:15 [1559]; CO 44:454-455.

¹⁷⁵⁷“[T]hough it was not punished under the law [*impunitas sub lege*], yet it was not permitted [*permissio*].” “Moses has specified no punishment [*poenam*], according to the heinousness of the offense [*delicti*], if one repudiated his wife, and yet it was never permitted [*permissum*]. Commentary on Malachi 2:16 [1559]; CO 44:456-457. A similar case is the law's toleration of polygamy. Calvin argues that polygamy is enormously cruel to women and that it should be ameliorated by the lesser evil of divorce. And yet while the law restricted and regulated polygamy, it did not eliminate it entirely. See Commentary on Leviticus 18:18 [1563]; CO 24:664; Commentary on Psalm 45:8 [1557]; CO 31:455. See Thompson, “Patriarchs, Polygamy and Private Resistance,” 15.

regulate unjust actions so as to prevent their worst potential consequences. Yet such toleration and regulation of injustice does *not* constitute moral approval or even moral permission. Faithfulness to God on the part of a Christian magistrate does not necessarily require the enforcement of biblical morality.

While the law of divorce is the preeminent instance of a political law accommodating injustice due to the hardness of human hearts, throughout his commentary on the Torah Calvin identifies numerous analogous cases. In many of these instances there is nothing in the text to cue him to this interpretation, nor can he appeal to an authoritative interpretation by Jesus or the apostles. Rather, Calvin appeals to reason or the law of nations as a higher standard of justice. Take, for instance, the law that permitted Israelites to enslave and marry women captured during war. Calvin argues that such marriages should not have taken place at all. But because it was so difficult to restrain the lust of victors in war “God so tempers his indulgence.” There is no ideal law here, only the embarrassing political regulation of libidinous men for whom there was clearly “no room for perfect purity.”¹⁷⁵⁸ The Torah likewise outlined a procedure for adjudicating cases in which a man had sex with an enslaved woman who was “assigned to another man.” Although adulterers were ordinarily to be put to death, because the woman was a slave the penalty was reduced to a fine and a guilt offering. Calvin points out that in God's eyes there is no difference between slaves and free persons and that even in this case the guilty deserved capital punishment. “Notwithstanding therefore that the crime is worthy of death, still, in consideration of the people's infirmity, the punishment is mitigated.” Christians should not draw the false conclusion from the “lenity or indulgence of the law, that the offense was a trifling one.”¹⁷⁵⁹

Calvin's handling of the law regulating the treatment of male prisoners is even

¹⁷⁵⁸Commentary on Deuteronomy 21:10 [1563]; CO 24:353.

¹⁷⁵⁹Commentary on Leviticus 19:20-22 [1563]; CO 24:649-650.

more striking because Calvin explicitly describes it as being deficient in comparison with the work of heathen writers (specifically Cicero). The law stated that when a city refused to surrender, all of its male inhabitants were to be killed.

The permission here given seems to confer too great a license, for since heathen writers command even the conquered to be spared, and enjoin that those should be admitted to mercy who lay down their arms and cast themselves on the good faith of the general, although the battering-ram may have actually made a breach in the wall, how does God, the father of mercies, give his sanction to indiscriminate bloodshed?

In contrast to Bullinger, Calvin refuses to accept the law as a valid norm for just war. His solution, once again, is to concede that the civil law tolerated crimes – in this case murder – that were patently against the law of nature.

It has already been stated that more was conceded to the Jews on account of their hardness of heart than was justly lawful for them [*iure ipsis liceret*]. Unquestionably, by the law of charity [*caritatis regula*], even armed men should be spared if, casting away the sword, they crave for mercy. At any rate, it was not lawful [*licuit*] to kill any but those who were taken in arms, and sword in hand. This permission [*permissio*] therefore to slaughter, which is extended to all the males, is far distant from perfection.

Though the law was imperfect, Calvin suggests, its purpose was to regulate the injustice so as to restrain the Israelites from the even greater cruelty of murdering women and children.¹⁷⁶⁰

The law of Exodus 21:7-11 actually provided regulations for the event that a man sold his daughter as a slave-wife to another man. If she did not please her master-husband, the law stated, she should be divorced and freed rather than sold to a foreign people. Calvin is appalled. “From this passage, as well as other similar ones, it plainly appears how many vices were of necessity tolerated [*toleranda*] in this people. It was altogether an act of barbarism that fathers should sell their children for the relief of their poverty. Still it could not be corrected as might have been hoped.” He infers that the

¹⁷⁶⁰Commentary on Deuteronomy 20:12 [1563]; CO 24:632. See Mark J. Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory, The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 44-50; Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 97-98.

intent of the law was to protect enslaved girls by forcing their masters either to marry or free them.¹⁷⁶¹ Another law permitted a slave who had the opportunity to win his freedom to divorce his enslaved wife and forsake his enslaved children. Slavery was sufficiently terrible that such a procedure was tolerated, Calvin declares, but “nothing could be more opposed to nature than that a husband, forsaking his wife and children, should remove himself elsewhere.” There was no remedy to “this impious violation of marriage” because if the wife and children were set free “it would have been a spoliation of their lawful master.” In this case the slave's opportunity to win his freedom and the master's right to his slaves equally trumped the sanctity of marriage. But Calvin refuses to consider this procedure just. “The sanctity of marriage therefore gave way in this case to private right, and this defect is to be reckoned among the others which God tolerated on account of the people's hardness of heart, because it could hardly be remedied.”¹⁷⁶²

A final set of cases in which Calvin explained the weakness of the law in terms of the hardness of human hearts related to violence. In one case Calvin complains that the punishment for inflicting violent injury was “so slight that it might have served as a provocative.” Yet again, he acknowledges, it is important to “remember the declaration of Christ,” that many things that were immoral were allowed to the Jews “because of the hardness of their hearts.”¹⁷⁶³ The case is the same with the law that allowed a man to

1761Commentary on Exodus 21:7-11 [1563]; CO 24:650-651.

1762Commentary on Exodus 21:1 [1563]; CO 24:700-701. Calvin describes other weaknesses in the Mosaic laws pertaining to slavery as well. For instance, the law placed a lighter penalty on a master who injured his slave than on a person who injured a free man. Yet this is hardly in accord with human justice. Calvin explains, “Since, in the sight of God, there is neither slave nor free-man, it is clear that he sins as greatly who smites a slave, as if he had struck a free-man. Still, a distinction is made as regards the civil law and human justice.” In this case the master is treated leniently because the victim was his slave, but the victim does receive the compensation of “ what is more advantageous to him, viz., that, being set free, he should not be exposed to another's cruelty.” Commentary on Exodus 21:26 [1563]; CO 24:626. While the civil law distinguished between slaves and freemen with regard to injuries, when it came to murder it called for the same penalties in either case. Here Calvin views the law as far superior to what was “gross barbarism amongst the Romans and other nations, to give to masters the power of life and death.” Human beings are bound by sacred ties that prohibit one person from usurping tyranny over another; reason itself prohibits violence (21:20; CO 24:624). Cf. Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*, 103.

1763Commentary on Exodus 21:18 [1563]; CO 24:623-624.

avenge his relative's murder without a fair trial. The law “was tolerated and not approved of,” yet another indulgence “conceded on account of the people’s hardness of heart.”¹⁷⁶⁴ Calvin even suggests that in some cases the law was designed to be imperfect in order to demonstrate just how evil the people must be if they could not even obey such imperfect laws.

[T]he fact that God did not carry out the political laws to their perfection shows that by this leniency he wished to reprove the people’s perverseness, which could not even bear to obey so mild a law. Whenever therefore God seems to pardon too easily, and with too much clemency, let us recollect that he designedly deviated from the more perfect rule because he had to do with an intractable people.¹⁷⁶⁵

The conclusion that Calvin drew from all of these examples was that while Israel's civil laws may be useful for contemporary commonwealths, they are by no means authoritative nor are they always the best. Calvin's openness to other legal traditions as legitimate expressions of natural law and sources for civil law appears from his constant comparisons between the Mosaic law and Roman law.¹⁷⁶⁶ Where the Mosaic law differed from Roman law he occasionally finds the former to be superior. For instance, Calvin compares the Roman law negatively with the Mosaic law when it comes to the excessive power of life and death that Roman law gave a father over his children. The Mosaic law

¹⁷⁶⁴Commentary on Numbers 35:19 [1563]; CO 24:638-640.

¹⁷⁶⁵Commentary on Exodus 21:18 [1563]; CO 24:623-624. In at least one case Calvin admits that the law of Moses seems to violate natural law, but then proceeded to speculate about the way the law must have been enforced in such a way as to ensure its justice. A law commanded the Israelites to provide refuge for runaway slaves from other countries. The law “has a tendency to humanity and kindness,” Calvin agrees, but he is concerned that it “does not appear to be altogether just.” The reason is that it is unjust for slaves to run away from their masters, and most slaves that do flee in this way do so because they have committed crimes worthy of punishment. What is more, it seems to be a violation of the law of nations for Israel to have defrauded other nations of their “just right.” Calvin is not persuaded that the implicit rationale for the law was that the escaped slaves were seeking to join themselves to God's people, the church at that time. “[I]t was by no means decorous that whatever crime had been elsewhere committed should be sheltered under God’s name.” Calvin therefore decides that there must have been a system whereby judges would examine whether or not the escaped slaves had committed crimes, or whether they had just cause to flee from their masters. Surely “it may be inferred that judicial proceedings were to be instituted.” Commentary on Deuteronomy 23:15-16 [1563]; CO 24:633-634.

¹⁷⁶⁶He offers comparisons on debt slavery (Commentary on Exodus 22:3; CO 24:690); theft (Commentary on Exodus 22:1-4; CO 24:687-689); the theft of neighbor's landmark (Commentary on Deuteronomy 19:14; CO 24:676); the treatment of slaves (Commentary on Leviticus 25:39; CO 24:703); contract law (Commentary on Leviticus 19:35; CO 24:675-676); laws on incest (Commentary on Leviticus 18:6; CO 24:661-663); and just conduct in war (Commentary on Deuteronomy 20:10; CO 24:632).

was superior because it required parents to follow a court procedure.¹⁷⁶⁷ Calvin similarly claims that although the ancient Athenian legislators Solon and Draco borrowed laws from the Torah, “both Solon and the Decemvirs have made a change for the worse wherever they have varied from the law of God.” But here Roman law compares more favorably than that of the Greeks, and Calvin accepts it as a clear application of natural law.¹⁷⁶⁸

Calvin's own political predilections were quite dogmatic. He believed civil magistrates should try to enforce the natural moral law as much as possible. In his commentary on the various incest laws in Leviticus 18 he raises the question of whether or not a magistrate might decide not to enforce such laws of nature. Civil governments might fail to punish certain forms of immorality, he concedes, but they cannot make such actions moral. Natural law remains supreme. “It may indeed be decreed that it should be lawful and unpunished, since it is in the power of princes to remit penalties. Yet no legislator can effect that a thing, which nature pronounces to be vicious, should not be vicious; and, if tyrannical arrogance dares to attempt it, the light of nature will presently shine forth and prevail.”¹⁷⁶⁹

Strikingly, Calvin defends his dogmatism with appeals to the laws of nations. The classic case is that of capital punishment for adultery. In his commentary on Genesis Calvin observes that even before the law was given to Israel,

¹⁷⁶⁷Commentary on Deuteronomy 21:18-21; CO 24:607-608.

¹⁷⁶⁸Commentary on Exodus 22:1-4 [1563]; CO 24:687-689. Calvin followed Roman law closely when it came to the codification of Geneva's laws.

¹⁷⁶⁹Calvin rejects the interpretation that the laws concerning incest and sexuality found in Leviticus 18 were merely political laws. He concedes that pagan practice was often contrary to such laws, but argues that it was just as often complementary. “If any again object that what has been disobeyed in many countries is not to be accounted the law of the Gentiles, the reply is easy, viz., that the barbarism, which prevailed in the East, does not nullify that chastity which is opposed to the abominations of the Gentiles; since what is natural cannot be abrogated by any consent or custom.” In this case “nature itself repudiates and abhors filthiness, although approved of by the consent of men.” Political laws can vary from place to place, but the natural moral law remains inviolable. Commentary on Leviticus 18:6 [1563]; CO 24:661-663. When it comes to the moral law, or the rule of a holy life, the word of God always trumps “long custom” and even “the universal consent of the world.” Commentary on Leviticus 18:4; CO 24:661. Cf. Commentary on Exodus 20:14 [1563]; CO 24:641-642.

by the universal law of the Gentiles, the punishment of death was always awarded to adultery. Wherefore it is all the baser and more shameful in Christians not to imitate at least the heathen. Adultery is punished no less severely by the Julian law than by that of God, while those who boast themselves of the Christian name are so tender and remiss, that they visit this execrable offense with a very light reproof.¹⁷⁷⁰

In the commentary on Genesis he attributes the widespread practice to natural law. “This seems to have been done by a divine instinct, that, under the direction and authority of nature, the sanctity of marriage might be fortified, as by a firm guard.” To be sure, with respect to adultery and other sexual sins, the customs of the nations did not always reflect those nations' own best insights. “Truly, the world was beguiled by the wiles of Satan, when it suffered the law, engraven on all by nature, to become obsolete.”¹⁷⁷¹ Christians should follow the nations' better judgments rather than their more recent lapses. The maximum possible enforcement of God's law, within the constraints of wisdom and circumstances, always remained the appropriate objective. Calvin's ideal political society was a society of Christians, even though he admitted that most baptized persons in Christendom were and always had been hypocrites. “There never was a state of human society so happily constituted, that the greater part followed Christ.”¹⁷⁷²

But what about a context in which Christians are mixed with pagans? Calvin was conscious that the New Testament was written in just such a context, and he wrestles with the implications when interpreting Paul's instructions to believers in 1 Corinthians 10:5-9-10, “not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the

¹⁷⁷⁰Commentary on Deuteronomy 22:22 [1563]; CO 24:648-649.

¹⁷⁷¹Calvin reasons directly from this point to the laws of contemporary societies. “How much more vile, and how much less excusable, is our negligence at this day, which cherishes adulteries, by allowing them to pass with impunity. Capital punishment, indeed, is deemed too severe for the measure of the offense. Why then do we punish lighter faults with greater rigor?” In both the Deuteronomy and Genesis commentaries Calvin explicitly rejects the argument taken from John 8, the story of Jesus' forgiveness of the adulterous woman. For “those who have been invested with the sword for the correction of crime, have absurdly imitated his example, and thus their relaxation of the penalty has flowed from gross ignorance.” Commentary on Genesis 38:24 [1554]; CO 23:498-499. Cf. Commentary on Leviticus 20:13 [1563]; CO 24:646-647. See Thompson, “Patriarchs, Polygamy and Private Resistance,” 13.

¹⁷⁷²Commentary on Luke 2:34 [1555]; CO 45:92. Jesus himself predicted that as soon as the gospel gained many disciples there would be “very many of the common people who falsely and hypocritically submit to it.” Commentary on Matthew 7:21 [1555]; CO 45:227.

sexually immoral of this world ... since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty [of such sins].” Calvin observes that when Paul wrote these words Christians lived “mingled with heathens and dispersed among them [*permisti adhuc impiis ... et inter eos dispersi*].” Yet he raises the question, how should Christians follow Paul's instructions in the era of Christendom, “when all have given themselves to Christ in name”?¹⁷⁷³

Calvin rejects the explanation that Paul's instructions refer to excommunication. Rather, Paul was urging Christians to avoid “intimacy [*consuetudine*] with the wicked.” They are not “to be on terms of familiarity [*familiariter*]” or “in habits of close intimacy [*consuetudine*]” with them.¹⁷⁷⁴ Calvin claims that Paul simply viewed it as a matter of course that the Corinthians would be separated from unbelievers. The apostle “makes no mention of those that are without [*extraneorum*], inasmuch as the Corinthians ought to be already separated [*segregati*] from them, that they may know that even at home they required to maintain this discipline of avoiding the wicked [*fugiendi malos*].”¹⁷⁷⁵ Christians must avoid participation in unbelievers' way of life because “intercourse with them is dangerous.” Social interaction must be kept to a minimum “lest, while we are mingled together in partaking of food and on other occasions, we be defiled by their pollutions, and by little and little become profane.”¹⁷⁷⁶ People are “gradually infected ... by the vices of those with whom we have intercourse and familiarity.” Indeed “we are more prone by nature to copy vices than virtues.”¹⁷⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷³Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:10 [1546]; CO 49:384.

¹⁷⁷⁴Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:9 [1546]; CO 49:383-384. Christians must avoid “private” and “familiar intercourse” with the wicked. Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3:6 [1550]; CO 52:212. But they should continue to show them humanity, “for it is one thing to withdraw from intimate acquaintance with an individual, and quite another to keep altogether aloof from his society” 3:14; CO 52:215-216. Cf. Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2:16 [1550]; CO 52:153; Commentary on Acts 13:51 [1552]; CO 48:316; Commentary on Hebrews 12:16 [1549]; CO 55:180.

¹⁷⁷⁵Commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:10 [1546]; CO 49:385.

¹⁷⁷⁶Commentary on Colossians 4:5 [1548]; CO 52:129. Cf. Commentary on Philippians 2:15 [1548]; CO 52:34-35; Commentary on Genesis 47:3 [1554]; CO 23:566

¹⁷⁷⁷Commentary on Isaiah 30:1 [1559]; CO 36:506. Cf. Commentary on Psalm 1:2 [1557]; CO 31:38-39.

As much as possible, therefore, must all ties of connection be rather broken, than that by union with God's enemies we should allow ourselves to be drawn away from him by their allurements; for they will always be attempting, by all the artifices they can, to make a divorce between us and God. Besides, if we desire faithfully to serve God, there ought to be a perpetual quarrel between us and them.

After all, "it is a most uncommon case that the religion of those should remain unaffected who seek to curry favor with the ungodly."¹⁷⁷⁸

Calvin clearly assumed that intimacy with unbelievers in a pluralistic society would force intolerable moral compromises. Christians would be forced to offer approval, consent, and even assistance to impiety and injustice. "As however peace cannot be maintained with the ungodly except on the condition of approving of their vices and wickedness, the Apostle immediately adds that holiness is to be followed together with peace, as though he commended peace to us with this exception."¹⁷⁷⁹ Christians are to seek peace, but only insofar as it is compatible with the demands of conscience. "We must beware of joining or assisting those who do wrong. In short, we must abstain from giving any consent, or advice, or approbation, or assistance, for in all these ways we have fellowship."¹⁷⁸⁰

Such comments make Calvin's political theology seem anything but amenable to a context of principled political pluralism. But Calvin offers two important qualifications that reopen the possibility. First, he emphasizes the distinction between a corrupting intimacy and "contracts ... which do not at all diminish our liberty." For "As long as we live among unbelievers, we cannot escape those dealings with them which relate to the ordinary affairs of life."¹⁷⁸¹ Thus when Paul calls for separation he "does not mean as to food, clothing, estates, the sun, the air ... but as to those things that are peculiar to

1778Commentary on Exodus 34:11 [1563]; CO 24:548-549.

1779Commentary on Hebrews 12:14 [1549]; CO 55:178.

1780Commentary on Ephesians 5:11 [1548]; CO 51:217-218. Cf. Commentary on James 3:18 [1550]; CO 55:414.

1781Commentary on Exodus 34:11 [1563]; CO 24:548-549.

unbelievers, from which the Lord has separated us.”¹⁷⁸² Calvin concedes, “Believers, it is true, live on earth intermingled with the wicked; they breathe the same air, they enjoy the same soil and at that time they were even more intermingled, inasmuch as there could scarcely be found a single pious family that was not surrounded on all sides by unbelievers.”¹⁷⁸³ Christians should not seek to undermine such social interaction and dependency.

Second, while observing that in the Torah Moses prohibited alliances and marriages between Israel and pagan nations, Calvin concedes that “our condition now-a-days is more free.”¹⁷⁸⁴ Calvin supported alliances between Protestant and Catholic nations if those alliances were to the advantage of the former, and while he insisted that believers could not knowingly marry unbelievers, he also followed the New Testament in maintaining that a Christian already married to an unbeliever could not divorce her. “God therefore has called us in peace to this end, that we might cultivate peace with all by acting properly towards everyone.”¹⁷⁸⁵

What is more, Calvin agreed that Christians need not always publicly reprove vice. There are times for silence, even before magistrates, and silence does not always constitute cowardice.¹⁷⁸⁶ Christians are not called to “assert and proclaim what has been given us by the Lord everywhere, and always and among all indiscriminately, for the Lord gives his people the spirit of discretion, so that they may know when and how far and to whom it is expedient to speak.”¹⁷⁸⁷ Christian witness is always to be accompanied

1782Commentary on 2 Corinthians 6:5 [1548]; CO 50:81.

1783Commentary on Philippians 2:15 [1548]; CO 52:34-35.

1784Commentary on Exodus 34:11 [1563]; CO 24:548-549.

1785Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:15 [1546]; CO 49:413. Cf. Commentary on 1 Peter 3:1 [1551]; CO 55:253.

1786Commentary on Acts 24:25 [1554]; CO 48:526. Calvin sometimes seems to want to have it both ways here. Silence is sometimes appropriate, but Christians need to find some way to communicate their discontent when God is dishonored. Commentary on Isaiah 36:21 [1559]; CO 36:614. Calvin agrees that Christians should not overreact to criticism or false accusation. People who are “not deeply rooted in the word of God, instantly quail, as soon as any thing is said against it.” Those who do walk in the ways of the Lord expect this sort of assault.” Commentary on Hosea 14:9 [1557]; CO 42:512-514.

1787Commentary on 1 Peter 3:15 [1551]; CO 55:262. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 10:32 [1555]; CO 45:291.

by charity for all persons, regardless of desert, because all are made in the image of God. Believers are called to imitate God not in his judgment of the world, his unique prerogative, but in his “fatherly goodness and liberality.”¹⁷⁸⁸ Christ reached out to adulterers and drunkards, and Christians should likewise eschew self-righteousness, associating with sinners even in baptism and the Eucharist.¹⁷⁸⁹ Such qualifications suggest that Calvin does offer political theological resources for Christian participation in a society characterized by pluralism.

That Calvin finds it necessary to qualify the political relevance of biblical law in light of natural law and the inherent limits of civil law is significant. Despite the reformer's own political conclusions, his two kingdoms theology provides the foundation for a legal theory that is conducive toward contexts of democratic pluralism. It suggests that it is not always best for civil government to act with too much rigor, for magistrates must be sensitive to what is possible in particular circumstances featuring human beings whose tendency is toward hardness of heart. And it recognizes the difference between the intimacy and friendship of coreligionists, on the one hand, and the sort of interaction necessary for life in political and civil society, on the other. Along with Calvin's observations that in pluralistic contexts Joseph and Daniel held higher obligations to fairness and legality than to the enforcement of true religion, the reformer's method of determining the relationship between natural, moral, biblical, and civil law suggests the possibility of a Christian democratic politics that is greater than his particular political conclusions otherwise imply.

Forms of Government.

In the first edition of the *Institutes* Calvin declared his lack of interest in discussing the best form of government. The reformer was certainly familiar with the

¹⁷⁸⁸Commentary on Matthew 5:45 [1555]; CO 45:189 (Cf. 5:44; CO 45:188).

¹⁷⁸⁹Commentary on Luke 5:29 [1555]; CO 45:249; Commentary on Matthew 9:12 [1555]; CO 45:250.

classical discussion of the various types of government, but owing to the distinction between the two kingdoms, he believed it was his task simply to summarize what scripture teaches about government, not to wander down the path of political philosophy. Those for whom “the will of the Lord is enough” should resign themselves to the fact that “divine providence has wisely arranged that various countries should be ruled by various kinds of government.” As far as Christians are concerned, “it is our duty to show ourselves compliant and obedient to whomever he sets over the places where we live” (4.20.8).

In the 1536 edition Calvin left the discussion at that, but in 1543 he began to argue cautiously in favor of “aristocracy, or a system compounded of aristocracy and democracy,” suggesting that such a system “far excels others.” Significantly, he justifies this new position both on the basis of “experience” and by appeal to scripture. Probably thinking of passages like Exodus 18:13-26 and Deuteronomy 1:9-17, which outline dimensions of a system of aristocratic government for pre-monarchical Israel, Calvin proposes that God “willed to keep them in the best condition until he should bring forward the image of Christ in David.” The best government is that in which “freedom is regulated with becoming moderation and is properly established on a durable basis.” The happiest people are “those permitted to enjoy this state; and if they stoutly and constantly labor to preserve and retain it, I grant that they are doing nothing alien to this office.” The best magistrates are those who “apply themselves with the highest diligence to prevent the freedom (whose guardians they have been appointed) from being in any respect diminished, far less be violated.” Those magistrates who do not protect this democratic-aristocratic freedom are “faithless in office, and traitors to their country” (4.20.8).

In 1559 Calvin expanded the argument further, noting that “it is very rare for kings so to control themselves that their will never disagrees with what is just and right;

or for them to have been endowed with such great keenness and prudence, that each knows how much is enough.” His argument depends on assumptions about human depravity rather than human potential. “Therefore, men's fault or failing causes it to be safer and more bearable for a number to exercise government, so that they may help one another, teach and admonish one another; and, if one asserts himself unfairly, there may be a number of censors and masters to restrain his willfulness” (4.20.8).¹⁷⁹⁰ As with the civil law, the hardness of human hearts is the proper context for reasoning about the best form of government in the political kingdom.

The same trajectory of thought that marks successive editions of the *Institutes* appears in Calvin's commentaries. Through the course of his life Calvin became increasingly cynical about magistrates in general, and kings in particular, although he always stressed that Christians are to obey their leaders. Yet when he argued that a democratic aristocracy is the best form of government he stressed that nowhere does scripture prescribe such a system. Where he did see an ideal form of government in scripture, on the other hand, he insisted that this ideal is not binding in the political kingdom.

Paradoxically, Calvin identified monarchy as the ideal form of government chosen by God himself. In his commentary on Genesis 49:8 he writes, “when God would institute a perfect state of government among his people, the monarchical form was chosen by him.”¹⁷⁹¹ The establishment of the Israelite monarchy was clouded by the fact that the people sought it too hastily and for the wrong reasons, but it was nevertheless the design of God.¹⁷⁹² The prosperity of the nation of Israel was inseparable from the coming of the promised king. “Hence we gather that its state was not perfect until it

1790On Calvin's preference for collective government see Robert M. Kingdon, “Calvin's Socio-Political Legacy: Collective Government, Resistance to Tyranny, Discipline,” *The Legacy of John Calvin* (ed. David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2000), 112-116.

1791Commentary on Genesis 49:8 [1554]; CO 23:597. Cf. Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 160-161.

1792Commentary on Deuteronomy 17:14 [1563]; CO 24:368-369.

began to be governed by the hand of a king.”¹⁷⁹³ The high point of Israel's history was therefore the monarchy of David, followed by that of his son Solomon, both of whom were types of the future king whose government would one day restore the entire world to order.

Of course, Israel's monarchy was designed to be a monarchy under God and under the law. The Torah's law of the king prohibited kings from practicing polygamy or hoarding wealth, and it required the king to maintain and study a copy of the law in order to understand piety and justice. Calvin emphasizes the constitutional significance of the point.

The royal power is here circumscribed within certain limits, lest it should exalt itself too much in reliance on the glory of its dignity. For we know how insatiable are the desires of kings, inasmuch as they imagine that all things are lawful to them. Therefore, although the royal dignity may be splendid, God would not have it to be the pretext of unrestrained power, but restricts and limits it to legal bounds.¹⁷⁹⁴

Prevented from ruling for their own interest and exhausting the blood of the people in unjust wars, the kings were to be reminded of their fundamental equality with the people, “lest they should imagine that the law of brotherhood was abolished.”¹⁷⁹⁵ The prophets were to proclaim this law to the magistrates, and the great and pious kings of Israel were exemplary in their willingness to submit to the prophetic word.¹⁷⁹⁶

It is important to pay attention to Calvin's emphasis that magistrates are under the rule of the law, because a few scholars have claimed the opposite.¹⁷⁹⁷ Even the “philosophers” have perceived that “as far as possible, judges should be restrained by fixed laws, lest, being left free, they should be swayed this way or that by favor or will.”¹⁷⁹⁸ The very purpose of “political government” is that “God's tribunal should be

1793Commentary on Numbers 24:17 [1563]; CO 25:293.

1794Commentary on Deuteronomy 17:16 [1563]; CO 24:369.

1795Commentary on Deuteronomy 17:18 [1563]; CO 24:371-372.

1796Commentary on Isaiah 39:8 [1559]; CO 36:669-670.

1797See R. N. Carew Hunt, “Calvin's Theory of Church and State,” *Church Quarterly Review* 108 (1929): 61-63; Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*, 75-78; David Little, *Religion, Order, and Law* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 44.

1798Commentary on Deuteronomy 1:16 [1563]; CO 24:191-192.

erected on earth, wherein he may exercise the judge's office.” Magistrates therefore “should not arrogate to themselves a power uncontrolled by any laws, nor allow themselves to decide anything arbitrarily or wantonly, nor, in a word, assume to themselves what belongs to God. Then, and then only, will magistrates acquit themselves properly: when they remember that they are the representatives [*vicarios*] of God.”¹⁷⁹⁹ Government exists on the sole premise, the “distinct understanding,” that it is accountable to God's judgment.¹⁸⁰⁰ Thus those who refuse to acknowledge God deny themselves just title.¹⁸⁰¹ Though they might claim absolute power, even “through the tacit consent of all men,” this doesn't make such a claim just or legitimate.¹⁸⁰² Magisterial authority presupposes the greater authority of natural, revealed, and positive law.¹⁸⁰³

A good king is characterized by judgment and justice, which Calvin defines in terms of the rendering of rights. “To do judgment means to render to every one according to his right [*pro ius suum cuique reddere*], but when the two words, judgment and justice, are connected together, by justice we are to understand equity, so that every one has his own right [*cuique ius suum reddatur*]; and by judgment is to be understood the execution of due punishment.” The primary test of whether or not kings fulfill this function is whether or not they provide justice for the poor and defenseless, for strangers, orphans, and widows.¹⁸⁰⁴ Kings are to be characterized by love and compassion

1799Commentary on Exodus 18:15 [1563]; CO 24:187. Cf. Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 90-91.

1800Commentary on Psalm 82:6 [1557]; CO 31:771. It is “preposterous” and a “perversion of the order of nature” to give the authority of the sword to human beings without grounding that authority in God. Commentary on Daniel 6:21-22 [1561]; CO 41:23-26.

1801Commentary on Psalm 110:1 [1557]; CO 32:160-161. If kings are ordained in order to preserve a modicum of order in the world, “things are to be considered as in disorder and confusion, unless God alone be acknowledged supreme.” Commentary on Psalm 145:10 [1557]; CO 32:416. Kings only “retain their authority if they keep an intermediate position between God and men.” Commentary on Isaiah 37:16 [1559]; CO 36:626.

1802Commentary on Daniel 5:18-20 [1561]; CO 40:711-713.

1803Commentary on Psalm 82:2 [1557]; CO 31:769. Governments usurp God's “rightful claim to the obedience of all nations” when they “confound good and evil, right and wrong.” Commentary on Psalm 82:8 [1557]; CO 31:772.

1804Commentary on Jeremiah 22:1-3 [1563]; CO 38:372. See William R. Stevenson, Jr., “Calvin and Political Issues,” *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Edited by Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 173-187; Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 97. In his commentary on Psalm 72 Calvin similarly writes, “the ornaments or distinctions which chiefly secure to a sovereign

for their subjects, “For it was truly said in the old proverb, Mercy is the virtue most suitable for kings.”¹⁸⁰⁵ Thus “to cultivate faithfulness and justice, and to temper their government with mercy and kindness, is the true and solid foundation of kingdoms.”¹⁸⁰⁶

But the particular responsibility of kings to protect the poor from the lawless exploitation of the powerful requires the grace of God and the influence of his Spirit. “[K]ings can keep themselves within the bounds of justice and equity only by the grace of God; for when they are not governed by the Spirit of righteousness proceeding from heaven, their government is converted into a system of tyranny and robbery.”¹⁸⁰⁷ This does not mean that such kings must necessarily be Christians. Through common grace the Spirit gives wisdom in justice and righteousness to pagan kings as well. But Calvin is confident that magistrates who self-consciously follow the Spirit's leading as found in the word of God are the most likely to govern in accord with these principles, and such individuals are few and far between. It is “a rare virtue for the man who may do as he pleases to exercise such moderation as not to allow himself liberty in any degree to do evil.”¹⁸⁰⁸

Over the years Calvin became increasingly critical of monarchs with their

reverence from his subjects are his impartially securing to every man the possession of his own rights [*ius cuique suum aequaliter reddat*], and his manifesting a spirit of humanity ready at all times to succor the poor and miserable, as well as a spirit determined rigorously to subdue the audacity of the wicked.” Commentary on Psalm 72:5 [1557]; CO 31:666-667. “We are here briefly taught that a just and well-regulated government will be distinguished for maintaining the rights of the poor and afflicted.” Commentary on Psalm 82:4 [1557]; CO 31:769-770. “[I]t is the principal duty of a king to yield to every man his own right.” Commentary on Psalm 101:1 [1557]; CO 32:56. It is the task of civil judges “to extend a helping hand to the miserable and the poor, to avenge wrongs, and to give to every one his right [*ius*].” Commentary on Amos 2:6 [1559]; CO 43:23. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 10:2 [1559]; CO 36:211.

1805Commentary on Genesis 4:3 [1554]; CO 23:60.

1806Commentary on Psalm 45:3 [1557]; CO 31:450-451. Clemency and truth are “the best safeguards of a kingdom.” Commentary on Psalm 61:7 [1557]; CO 31:584.

1807Commentary on Psalm 72:4 [1557]; CO 31:665-666. Note, that does not mean they are not still legitimate authorities, ordained by God, to be honored and obeyed. As he writes elsewhere, “Whosoever, then, are endued with the power of the sword and public authority, are God’s servants, though they exercise tyranny and be robbers.” As far as their subjective identity as persons is concerned, they are tyrants and robbers, but by virtue of their office they remain servants. Commentary on Jeremiah 27:6-7 (1563); CO 38:543-545.

1808Commentary on Psalm 101:2 [1557]; CO 31:56-57.

tendency to exalt themselves above the people and to defy the rule of law.¹⁸⁰⁹ In his commentary on Genesis he argues that in early human history this was not so common.

[T]he condition of men was at that time moderate, so that if some excelled others, they yet did not on that account domineer, nor assume to themselves royal power; but being content with a degree of dignity, governed others by civil laws and had more of authority than power... such was their moderation, that they cultivated equality with their inferiors, who yielded them a spontaneous rather than a forced reverence.¹⁸¹⁰

Now, Calvin muses, one can only affirm the old proverb “Great kingdoms are great robberies.”¹⁸¹¹ Kings are not satisfied with their power “unless they not only flay their subjects, but entirely devour them.”¹⁸¹² They “flatter themselves that they are loosed from the laws which bind the rest of mankind, and the pride of this so greatly blinds them as to make them think it beneath them to submit even to God.”¹⁸¹³ Unlike Israel's King Solomon, modern kings treat their people like slaves. They regard it as “derogatory to their dignity to converse with their subjects, and to employ remonstrance in order to secure their submission,” displaying “a spirit of barbarous tyranny in seeking rather to compel than to persuade them.”¹⁸¹⁴ Such kings imagine themselves to be “in no respect indebted to their subjects,”¹⁸¹⁵ having lost sight of the fact that the purpose of their

1809Scholars debate just how inherently problematic monarchy was in Calvin's view. See John T. McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought,” *Church History* 18 (September 1949): 159-161.

1810Commentary on Genesis 10:8 [1554]; CO 23:159.

1811Commentary on Genesis 10:11 [1554]; CO 23:160.

1812Commentary on Genesis 47:23 [1554]; CO 23:575. Even in the midst of famine, Calvin points out, when the country depended on the government for food, Joseph only appropriated twenty percent of the land's income.

1813Commentary on Genesis 2:10 [1554]; CO 23:49-50. They “think not that they belong to the common class of men, and imagine themselves exempt from all reprehension; in short, they wish to rule without any equity, for power with them is nothing but unbridled licentiousness.” Commentary on Amos 5:10 [1559]; CO 43:79-80. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 3:14 [1559]; CO 36:89-90; Commentary on Isaiah 10:1 [1559]; CO 36:211; Commentary on Malachi 2:4 [1559]; CO 44:431-433; Commentary on Jeremiah 19:1-3 [1563]; CO 38:322; Commentary on Daniel 4:28-32 [1561]; CO 40:682-683.

1814Commentary on Psalm 45:2 [1557]; CO 31:450. “By trusting to their elevated station they flatter themselves that they are loosed from the laws which bind the rest of mankind, and the pride of this so greatly blinds them as to make them think it beneath them to submit even to God.” Commentary on Psalm 2:10-11 [1557]; CO 31:49-50. “[E]arthly princes are so proud, that as soon as they order anything, they wish every dispute about their authority to be suspended; for they will have their own ordinances to be counted laws, and their own decrees to be sacred and authoritative; and yet we know, that by following their own wills, they decree often what is wholly unjust and inconsistent with everything that is reasonable.” Commentary on Jeremiah 37:18 [1563]; CO 39:152.

1815Commentary on Psalm 101:2 [1557]; CO 31:56-57.

authority is for the good of their people and imagining that “their pomp and dignity raised them altogether above the common state of man.”¹⁸¹⁶ Excessive power itself corrupts, but it also happens all too often that “those who are invested with the government of kingdoms and empires are fools and blockheads.”¹⁸¹⁷ The courts of kings were consequently characterized by rampant corruption covered by a facade of “hypocrisy and servile flattery.”¹⁸¹⁸

Calvin complains that the princes of Europe found virtually any excuse to wage war, violating treaties and alliances with impunity. “When a slaughter is made in war they express their grief, but it is only on account of their own glory or advantage.”¹⁸¹⁹ So many people were caught up in the folly of it all (Calvin highlights the Spanish and French in particular), being “desirous to have a powerful and wealthy king reigning over them,” and yet the result was their own misery.¹⁸²⁰ In later years Calvin's rhetoric became even more heated, the reformer complaining that kings “are ashamed to appear humane and devise means only to exercise tyranny.”¹⁸²¹ They “cannot contain themselves in the ordinary rank and station of men, but wish to penetrate the clouds and become on a level with God.”¹⁸²² The typical king was “avaricious and rapacious, cruel and perfidious, as well as forgetful of his duties.” Calvin mourns, “Since, then, we see how very unworthy

1816Commentary on Psalm 28:9 [1557]; CO 31:286.

1817Commentary on Psalm 101:2 [1557]; CO 31:56-57.

1818Commentary on Matthew 14:3-12 [1555]; CO 45:431. “[I]t is a rare thing for holiness to reign in the courts of sovereigns.”Commentary on Philippians 4:22 [1548]; CO 51:66. Even lowly courtiers act “as though they themselves possessed all the power of God.” Commentary on Jeremiah 15:17 [1563]; CO 38:229. Cf. Commentary on Luke 23:11 [1555]; CO 45:753; Commentary on Daniel 6:12 [1561]; CO 41:14; Commentary on Exodus 2:10 [1563]; CO 24:25. Calvin observes that Joseph was inevitably corrupted by being present in Pharaoh's court and only the most strenuous puritanism on the part of Daniel enabled him to avoid the same: “it is very difficult for those who desire to retain their purity to have much intercourse with courts, without contracting some spots of corruption.” Commentary on Daniel 2:46 [1561]; CO 40:612-613. Cf. Commentary on Genesis 42:15 [1554]; CO 23:532.

1819Commentary on Habakkuk 2:15-16 [1559]; CO 43:554.

1820Commentary on Isaiah 19:4 [1559]; CO 36:332.

1821Commentary on Jeremiah 22:15 [1563]; CO 38:386-387.

1822Commentary on Daniel 6:16 [1561]; CO 41:17. “[A]s kings usually think the human race created for their sakes, they are taken up with their own private reasoning and do not consult the interests of the wretched people whom they are divinely appointed to cherish under their wings.” Commentary on Ezekiel 17:23 [1565]; CO 40:419.

kings usually are of their empire and their power, we must weep over the state of the world.”¹⁸²³

As much as monarchy might in theory be the ideal form of government, therefore – and as much as monarchy characterizes Israel and the kingdom of Christ – human depravity makes the system far too susceptible to corruption and tyranny to be ideal for the political kingdom. As with the civil law and its accommodation of the hardness of human hearts, then, Calvin's ultimate conclusion on the best form of government is shaped by his realism about human depravity. Few men or women can handle having such tremendous power placed in their hands, and the people are inevitably the ones made to suffer. Indeed, even if a prince is “the best of men,” no prince can rule without counselors and officers, and if such are corrupt “his subjects will experience hardly any advantage from his uncorrupted integrity.” Calvin had seen it all too often. “This has been more than sufficiently demonstrated by experience.”¹⁸²⁴

But Calvin identifies another way, one more “reasonable among a free people” and having precedent in the Torah itself. The book of Exodus describes how when the task of governing Israel proved too much for Moses, his father-in-law Jethro suggested that judges be chosen on the basis not of wealth or rank, but of virtue, to assist in the responsibilities of governance. Calvin notes that Jethro identified four principal qualifications for such judges: “ability in business, the fear of God, integrity, and the contempt of riches.”¹⁸²⁵ The leaders were to be elected by the people rather than appointed from above, a feature on which Calvin places his firm stamp of approval. “And this is the most desirable kind of liberty, that we should not be compelled to obey every person who may be tyrannically put over our heads, but which allows of election, so that

1823Commentary on Daniel 6:3-5 [1561]; CO 41:2-4. Cf. Commentary on Isaiah 39:1 [1559]; CO 36:665.

Commentary on Daniel 11:6 [1561]; CO 41:227.

1824Commentary on Psalm 101:6 [1557]; CO 32:59.

1825Commentary on Exodus 18:21 [1563]; CO 24:188.

no one should rule except he be approved of by us.”¹⁸²⁶ Such a procedure could be followed without the authority of God over the nation being undermined.¹⁸²⁷

Calvin specifically contrasts an elective system with hereditary monarchy. “In this especially consists the best condition of the people, when they can choose, by common consent, their own shepherds. For when anyone by force usurps the supreme power, it is tyranny, and when men become kings by hereditary right, it seems not consistent with liberty.”¹⁸²⁸ Not only is a republic freer than an absolutist regime, but it is more stable as well. “If stability is sought for in any kind of government, it surely ought to shine forth in a republic, or at least in an oligarchy in preference to a despotism, because when all are slaves, the king cannot so confidently trust his subjects, through their constant fear for themselves.” The most stability comes from expanding participation in government as broadly as possible. “But when all unite in the government, and the very lowest receive some mutual advantage from their commonwealth, then, as I have said, superior stability ought to be conspicuous.”¹⁸²⁹

But Calvin stresses that the democratic-aristocracy, or republican, form of government is not morally binding. There is no scripturally sanctioned best form of government. “Jethro then had no wish to establish a law for posterity, but points out a remedy for present inconveniences and a provisional arrangement until the people should obtain a peaceful resting-place.”¹⁸³⁰ Elsewhere Calvin reminds his readers that it is “not conceded to all to elect their judges, because God honored his chosen people with this prerogative ... Whether, then, magistrates are appointed by the suffrages of the people, or imposed in any other way, let us learn that they are the necessary ministers of

1826Calvin notes with satisfaction, “Moses recounts that he awaited the consent of the people, and that nothing was attempted which did not please them all.” Commentary on Deuteronomy 1:13 [1563]; CO 24:190.

1827Commentary Exodus 18:23 [1563]; CO 24:189.

1828Commentary on Micah 5:5 [1559]; CO 43:374.

1829Commentary on Daniel 2:40-43 [1561]; CO 40:599-603.

1830Commentary Exodus 18:23 [1563]; CO 24:189. See Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 151-160.

God, to confine all men under the yoke of the laws.”¹⁸³¹ The political kingdom is not the realm of the perfect but the realm of circumstances, and systems of government are dictated not by theological prescription but by providence.¹⁸³²

Scholars continue to debate Calvin's relationship to democracy, but it is important to distinguish the democratic aristocracy that Calvin favored from modern theories of liberal democracy.¹⁸³³ Calvin did not believe that government derives its power from the consent of the governed. “For many are wont to inquire too scrupulously by what right power has been attained, but we ought to be satisfied with this alone, that power is possessed and exercised.”¹⁸³⁴ Those not blessed with republican liberty have no right to seize it for themselves. Indeed, “even to think of such a move will not only be foolish and superfluous, but altogether harmful” (4.20.8).

Nor did Calvin think that a popularly elected government has the right to violate the moral law of God. On the contrary, the foundation of human society is the recognition that human rights and political authority come from God and are regulated by his law. Rulers claim for themselves absolute authority only because “no religious considerations have the effect of inclining them to moderation. All sound knowledge and

1831Commentary on Deuteronomy 16:18 [1563]; CO 24:610-611.

1832See Marc-Edouard Chenevière, *La pensée politique de Calvin* (Geneva and Paris: Labor and Fides, 1937), 181-190. Excerpt translated and published in Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?* Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970.

1833For a mild defense of Calvin as a proponent of “conservative democracy” see McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought.” Cf. John T. McNeill, “John Calvin on Civil Government,” *Calvinism and the Political Order* (ed. George L. Hunt; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 34-38. Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder have compiled a number of classic readings representing the various sides of the debate in their *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?* Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970. Arguing that Calvin was a proponent of democracy is Émile Doumergue, *Jean Calvin, Les Hommes et Les Choses de Son Temps* (Lausanne: Georges Bridel and Company, 1917), 5:440, 450-453, 611-614, 701-706. Taking the opposite position is Georges De Lagarde, *Recherches Sur L'esprit Politique de la Réforme* (Paris: A. and J. Picard and Cie, 1926), 66.453-455. Mediating positions are offered by Chenevière, *La pensée politique de Calvin*, 181-190; Winthrop S. Hudson, “Democratic Freedom and Religious Faith in the Reformed Tradition,” *Church History* 15 (1946): 177-194. See also Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. Olive Wyon; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992 [1912]), 2:628-630.

1834Commentary on 1 Peter 2:13 [1551]; CO 55:244. For this reason a conquered people is obligated to submit to its new government as having been established by the providence of God. Commentary on Jeremiah 38:1-4 [1563]; CO 39:156-160.

wisdom must commence with yielding to God the honor which is his due, and submitting to be restrained and governed by his word.”¹⁸³⁵ Thus an elected government, just like a monarchy, must confess that its authority comes from God, and it is bound to submit to his word when it is proclaimed. In this respect magistrates are in the same situation as are other humans: “even kings are not exempted from the duty of learning what is commonly taught, if they wish to be counted members of the Church; for the Lord would have all, without exception, to be ruled by his word.”¹⁸³⁶

This does not mean that pastors hold personal or discretionary authority over magistrates. Their sole authority is in the word, and where they go beyond scripture, or misapply it, their authority is nullified. Whatever Calvin's consistency on this point in practice, in principle it means that pastors must respect the difference between the natural moral law revealed in scripture and the civil law as applied and enforced by the magistrate. As for their *conduct*, of course, magistrates have no immunity from the word. Pastors are to follow the example of the prophet who “spared neither the king, nor his counselors, nor the princes of the kingdom; and he did not spare before the priests.”¹⁸³⁷ Faithful magistrates will feel anything but threatened by this authority of the word.¹⁸³⁸ If anything, its proclamation simply makes government's task easier by rendering its subjects more just and coercion less necessary. “And this is what pious magistrates always desire, that their toils may in some measure be alleviated by the aid of the ministers of the word; for when the ministers of the word ... are not intent on reproving

1835Commentary on Psalm 82:5 [1557]; CO 31:770-771. Hancock writes, “a vast chasm, it seems, separates Calvinist politics from modern politics: the chasm between the defense of the sovereignty of God and the assertion of the sovereignty of man.” Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*, 70.

1836Commentary on Hosea 5:1 [1557]; CO 42:296-297.

1837Commentary on Hosea 6:10-11 [1557]; 42:335.

1838In practice, Calvin observes, “all who govern the state, when they hear their corruptions reprov'd, or their avarice, or their cruelty, or any of their other crimes, immediately cry out, — 'What! if we suffer these things, every thing will be upset: for when all respect is gone, what will follow but brutal outrage? for every one of the common people will rise up against the magistrates and the judges.' Thus then the wicked ever say that God's servants are seditious whenever they boldly reprove them.” Commentary on Micah 3:9-10 [1559]; 43:331. Cf. Commentary on Amos 8:10-13 [1559]; CO 43:127.

vices, the severity of the magistrates will be hated by the people.”¹⁸³⁹

One did not have to be a Christian to be a magistrate, in Calvin's view, but in elections Christian magistrates were obviously to be preferred. Josef Bohatec argues that Calvin held to a sort of “Christian heroism,” substituting “pneumatic personalities” in place of the “classical ideal personality.”¹⁸⁴⁰ Like the pastors of the church, magistrates were to be chosen “with reference to their spiritual endowments by which he distinguishes and commends those whom he has destined to any exalted office.” They are “not duly ordained unless they are placed in the presence of God; nor rightly inaugurated in their offices, unless when they consecrate themselves to God himself, and when his majesty, on the other hand, acquires their reverence.”¹⁸⁴¹

Calvin's conditional support for democratic aristocracy is closely related to his distinction between the nature of the kingdom of Christ, foreshadowed by the monarchical yet typological kingdom of Israel, and the realities of temporal politics among sinful human beings. Where Calvin saw scripture affirming the ideal of monarchy he agreed that this did not mean monarchy is the best form of temporal government. Where he saw scripture affirming the validity of a democratic aristocracy he embraced the evidence while maintaining that such a system is not commanded. What was non-negotiable for Calvin was the principle that all governments must rule consistent with the moral law of God, punishing injustice where possible and refusing to encourage it where not.¹⁸⁴²

1839 “[I]t is hence, as I have said, a desirable thing for them, that the free reproofs of teachers should be added to the punishments and judgments of the law.” Commentary on Micah 3:11-12 [1559]; CO 43:338. Cf. Commentary on Jeremiah 26:17-19 [1563]; CO 38:533.

1840 Josef Bohatec, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche* (Breslau: Marcus Verlag, 1937), excerpt reprinted in Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970), 28-29.

1841 Commentary on Numbers 11:16 [1563]; CO 25:171.

1842 As Keen puts it, “The *form* of government is subordinate to the *nature* of government.” Keen, “The Limits and Power of Obedience in the Later Calvin,” 270. Bohatec writes, “It is noteworthy that Calvin sets the establishment of order theologically over that of his ruling ideal. God has stamped those who govern with the signs of His majesty, because He wants those who govern, those who are endowed with such authority, power, and intelligence, to be in a position to maintain order.” Bohatec, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche*, cited in Kingdon and Linder, *Calvin and Calvinism*, 29.

Theories of Resistance.

As was described in Chapter 6, Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine guided his approach to questions of resistance to tyranny in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, leading the reformer to distinguish between the responsibilities of Christians as individuals and the responsibilities of Christian magistrates. Understanding Calvin's view of resistance sheds light on his two kingdoms theology because it is closely related to the way in which Calvin thought of pluralism. The question of resistance was faced by Protestants who found themselves in contexts of religious pluralism under hostile political authorities.

Most important to Calvin was the situation in his own native country, France. There, where persecution raged and where the Huguenots veered ever closer to resistance against the crown, the Frenchman's followers worked out the implications of their two kingdoms theology in circumstances vastly different from in Geneva. Calvin's lectures on Daniel, published in 1561, were influenced by the rapidly deteriorating situation. The hostility of the French crown and the independent existence of the Protestant church seemed to find a powerful analogy in the situation of Daniel and his fellow exiles in Babylon.¹⁸⁴³ Calvin thus rages against those French authorities who “turn every stone and try every possible scheme to prevent his [Christ's] entrance into their territories!” While “they put forward the name of Christianity, and boast themselves to be the best defenders of the Catholic faith [*fidei catholicae optimos defensores*],” they seek to drive the scepter of Christ's kingdom away “by threats and terrors, by the sword and flame.”¹⁸⁴⁴ The result was horrific: “How some were slain in their dwellings, and

1843As Calvin puts it in his dedication of the commentary to the French Protestants, “The similarity of the times adapts these predictions to ourselves, and fits them for our own use.” Dedication of the Commentary on Daniel to the French Protestants [1561]; CO 18:614-624 (620).

1844Dedication of the Commentary on Daniel to the French Protestants [1561]; CO 18:617-618. Their “frivolous vanity is easily refuted, if men hold the true and genuine definition of the kingdom of Christ [*vera et genuina regni Christi definitio*]. For his throne or scepter is nothing else but the doctrine of the

others by the wayside while the bodies of your dead were dragged about as a laughing-stock, your women ravished, and many of your party wounded, and even the pregnant female with her offspring pierced through, and their homes ransacked and made desolate.”¹⁸⁴⁵

The primary lesson Calvin drew from comparing the experience of Protestants in France to that of the Israelite exiles in Babylon was not that the faithful should rebel against the government, but that they should continue to submit to it, while waiting patiently for God's sure deliverance.¹⁸⁴⁶ In his lectures on Jeremiah Calvin, following Augustine, calls Christians to follow the advice that the prophet gave the Israelites who were going into exile: to build houses, plant crops, marry, and have children in Babylon “as though they were at home.” In the meantime, they were to have their hearts set on their return to the land of Israel in seventy years, not “raising commotions” or undermining the common good in the name of their eschatological hope, but waiting patiently for God to fulfil his promises.¹⁸⁴⁷ Indeed, Calvin argues, Jeremiah called the exiles not only to reject all forms of rebellion but “to do what they could, to exert themselves to the utmost, so that no harm might happen to the Chaldean monarchy.”¹⁸⁴⁸ The Jews “were to be so fixed in Babylon that they ought to have deemed their union such as though they were of the same body. For by saying that their peace would be in the peace of Babylon, he intimates that they could not be considered as a separate people until the time of seventy years was completed.” In seeking Babylon's welfare they were praying for their own associates in happiness and prosperity. Calvin derives from this “a

gospel.”

1845Dedication of the Commentary on Daniel to the French Protestants [1561]; CO 18:620.

1846Calvin compared the circumstances of Protestants to that of the exiles in Babylon in his commentary on 1 Timothy 2:2. The example of the exiles, like that of the early church, demonstrates that however much political leaders “fall short of the divine appointment,” believers are still to seek their prosperity. Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:2 [1548]; CO 52:266.

1847Commentary on Jeremiah 29:3-6 [1563]; CO 38:585. The difference, Calvin recognizes, is that Christians facing persecution are not exiled from God's temple. See Commentary on Psalm 137:4 [1557]; CO 32:369-370.

1848Commentary on Jeremiah 29:7 [1563]; CO 38:586.

very useful doctrine – that we ought not only to obey the kings under whose authority we live, but that we ought also to pray for their prosperity, so that God may be a witness of our voluntary subjection.”¹⁸⁴⁹ Christians should willingly cooperate with those around them in the affairs of the present life, while setting their hope on the future kingdom.

Thus Calvin steadfastly rejected any interpretation of Christian liberty that would undermine the obligations of service in the political order. Christians should be known for their tendency to honor the social order, and for the virtues of respect, peaceableness, and friendship. “A regard ought to be had for all, since we ought to cultivate, as far as we can, peace and friendship with all; there is, indeed, nothing more adverse to concord than contempt.” Such love and service is to be extended to all persons, regardless of faith.¹⁸⁵⁰ Calvin spilled quills of ink insisting that the establishment of the spiritual kingdom occurs without any injury to particular political power because the two kingdoms are distinct.¹⁸⁵¹ Christians are “to cultivate peace with the wicked” insofar as is possible, preferring in a conflict to “recede from that right, than originate contention by our own fault.”¹⁸⁵²

This is the case, Calvin stressed from the beginning of his life to the end, even in cases of tyranny.¹⁸⁵³ Magistrates “often abuse their power and exercise tyrannical cruelty rather than justice,” and such were “almost all the magistrates” when the New Testament was written. Nevertheless, even tyrants are to be honored as having been ordained by God, for there has never been a tyranny, no matter how cruel “in which some portion of equity has not appeared, and further, some kind of government, however deformed and

¹⁸⁴⁹Commentary on Jeremiah 29:7 [1563]; CO 38:587-588.

¹⁸⁵⁰Commentary on 1 Peter 2:17 [1551]; CO 55:247.

¹⁸⁵¹The apostles Paul and Silas had been charged with the same slander as were the reformers: “That we overthrow all civil government; that laws and judgments are quite taken away; that the authority of kings if subverted by us.” But on the contrary, Calvin insisted, like Paul and Silas, he merely “sought to erect the kingdom of Christ, which is spiritual.” Commentary on Acts 17:7 [1554]; CO 48:398. Cf. 16:20; CO 48:383.

¹⁸⁵²Commentary on Genesis 32:5 [1554]; CO 23:438.

¹⁸⁵³“God never commits the government to evil and vicious princes, except in righteous judgment.” Commentary on Genesis 34:25 [1554]; CO 23:462.

corrupt it may be, is still better and more beneficial than anarchy.”¹⁸⁵⁴ This emphasis held strong even in Calvin's later lectures on Daniel and Jeremiah. At times he got carried away when depicting the terrors of anarchy, though no more so than did British Prime Minister Winston Churchill when he said he would consider the Devil himself as an ally against Adolf Hitler. “It is better that the devil should rule men under any sort of government, than that they should be set free without any law, without any restraint.”¹⁸⁵⁵ Invoking the examples of Hagar and Daniel, Calvin insists that Christians must always fulfil their vocations, yielding even to unjust masters their legitimate rights.¹⁸⁵⁶

The two kingdoms doctrine shaped Calvin's understanding of the extent of the obedience Christians owe to civil magistrates. Whereas Christians are never to yield to tyranny in Christ's spiritual kingdom, in the temporal affairs of the political kingdom they must be prepared for sacrifice. As Calvin explains it in his commentary on Acts, “there is some difference between civil magistrates and the prelates of the church. For though the administration of earthly or civil rule [*terreni vel civilis imperii*] be confused or perverse, yet the Lord will have men to continue still in subjection. But when the spiritual government [*spirituale regimen*] degenerates, the consciences of the godly are at liberty, and set free from obeying unjust authority.”¹⁸⁵⁷ Similarly, when civil government invades the spiritual kingdom, such as by commanding Christians to act impiously or unjustly, not only may Christians disobey; they must. As Peter and John

1854Commentary on 1 Peter 2:14 [1551]; CO 55:245. Calvin repeatedly affirms “the old proverb, that it is better to live under a prince who gives no allowance, than under one who imposes no restraint.”
Commentary on Psalm 45:6 [1557]; CO 31:451-452.

1855Commentary on Jeremiah 30:9 [1563]; CO 38:618. No matter how tyrannical a particular magistrate might be, “God would have them to be acknowledged as his ministers until their time shall come.”
Commentary on Jeremiah 27:6-7 [1563]; CO 38:544.

1856Even when “rulers treat their subjects with unjust asperity, their rigour is still to be endured . . . although they may exercise their power too imperiously... If the flight of Hagar was prohibited by the command of God, much less will he bear with the licentiousness of a people who rebel against their prince.” Commentary on Genesis 16:8 [1554]; CO 23:227-228. Daniel was called to “be faithful to his own king [Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon], although he exercised tyranny against the people of God.”
Commentary on Daniel 4:19 [1561]; CO 40:665-666.

1857Commentary on Acts 23:5 [1554]; CO 48:505-506.

declared to the Sanhedrin, “We must obey God rather than men.”¹⁸⁵⁸

Here, Calvin clarifies, we do not really violate the authority of magistrates at all. The reason magistrates have authority in temporal matters is that they have been given it by God. And of course, “We must obey God's ministers and officers if we will obey him!”¹⁸⁵⁹ But magistrates are no longer representatives when their commands contradict God's. At the point where a person holding the office of magistrate commands one of his subjects to disobey God, therefore, that person is no longer acting as God's representative.¹⁸⁶⁰ For God always preserves his own authority. “We must obey princes and others which are in authority, but in such a way that they do not rob God (who is the chief king, father, and lord) of his right and authority.”¹⁸⁶¹

In 1559 Calvin added this argument to the *Institutes*. Defending Daniel's disobedience to the Persian king in Daniel 6:22-23, Calvin declares that “the king had exceeded his limits, and had not only been a wrongdoer against men, but in lifting up his horns against God, had himself abrogated his power” (4.20.32). He makes the point even more explicitly in his lectures, noting that the disobedient prophet claimed he had done nothing against the king. How could Daniel say this? The answer is that he obeyed the king *insofar as the king held authority over him*.

But Daniel was not so bound to the king of the Persians when he claimed for himself as a god what ought not to be offered to him. We know how earthly empires are constituted by God, only on the condition that he deprives himself of nothing [*sed hac lege, ut ipse nihil sibi deroget*], but shines forth alone, and all magistrates must be set in regular order [*ordinem cogantur*], and every authority that exists in the world must be subject to his glory.

Magisterial authority is inseparable from that of God, revealed in the law and in nature.

This is why the Apostle Peter commanded Christians, “Fear God, Honor the King” (1

1858Commentary on Acts 5:29 [1552]; CO 48:109.

1859Commentary on Acts 5:29 [1552]; CO 48:109.

1860This is to put the point more narrowly than Keen does when he claims Calvin believed that, “If the magistrate is entrusted by virtue of his office with the preservation of law, then by definition he no longer acts in that capacity if he willfully neglects that duty.” Keen, “The Limits and Power of Obedience in the Later Calvin,” 274.

1861Commentary on Acts 4:19 [1552]; CO 48:88.

Peter 2:17).

The two commands are connected together, and cannot be separated from one another. The fear of God ought to precede, that kings may obtain their authority [*autoritatem*]. For if any one begins his reverence of an earthly prince by rejecting that of God, he will act preposterously, since this is a complete perversion of the order of nature [*naturae ordinem*]. Then let God be feared in the first place, and earthly princes will obtain their authority [*autoritatem*], if only God shines forth, as I have already said... For earthly princes lay aside their power [*potestate*] when they rise up against God, and are unworthy of being reckoned in the number of mankind. *We ought rather utterly to defy than to obey them whenever they are so restive and wish to spoil God of his rights, and, as it were, to seize upon his throne and draw him down from heaven.*¹⁸⁶²

Calvin is not saying here, as some scholars have claimed, that magistrates who rise up against God forfeit their office entirely. He is not saying that usurpation of God's throne is a legitimate cause for rebellion. The point, rather, is that with respect to the case at hand the magistrate has laid aside his authority and may justly be defied.¹⁸⁶³

In such circumstances subjects are implicated in the impiety of their magistrates if they do *not* disobey them. In his commentary on Hosea Calvin explains that the Israelites could not shift the blame for their idolatry to the rulers who had led them in it. “The people might indeed have appeared to be excusable, since religion had not been changed by their voice, or by public consent, or by any contrivance of the many, but by the tyrannical will of the king alone.” But, Calvin goes on, “the prophet shows that all were implicated in the same guilt before God, because the people adopted with alacrity the impious forms of worship which the king had commanded.” Calvin is not suggesting that the people should have rebelled. It was their “promptness” and “willingness” that was so problematic. The Protestants in France faced a similar temptation.

If any one should now ask, whether they are excusable, who are tyrannically

1862“*Potius ergo conspuere oportet in ipsorum capita quam illis parere, ubi ita proterviunt ut velint etiam spoliare Deum iure suo, et quasi occupare solium eius, ac si possent eum e coelo detrahere.*”

Commentary on Daniel 6:21-22 [1561]; CO 41:25-26. Emphasis added. Cf. Commentary on Luke 2:49 [1555]; CO 45:106. In his commentary on Isaiah Calvin argues that when God overthrows the power of such unjust rulers he merely removes an “empty title.” “God does not overturn just dominion; and hence it follows that the dominion which they usurped over the people of God is mere robbery and wicked tyranny.” Commentary on Isaiah 49:25 [1559]; CO 37:213.

1863See Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 32; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2:219-221.

drawn away into superstitions, as we see to be done under the papacy, the answer is ready, that those are not here absolved who regarded men more than God, nor is terror, as we know, a sufficient excuse, when we prefer our own life to the glory of God, and when, anxious to provide for ourselves and to avoid the cross, we deny God, or turn aside from making a confession of the right and pure faith.¹⁸⁶⁴

Not only should Christians disobey such tyranny, but they ought to challenge it publicly.

“For there is hardly any conduct more offensive, or more fitted to disturb our minds, than when the worst examples of every sort are publicly exhibited by magistrates, while no man utters a syllable against them, but almost all give their approbation.”¹⁸⁶⁵

Calvin believed subjects have the obligation to criticize and disobey their magistrates when they violate justice, not only when they violate piety.¹⁸⁶⁶ For example, Calvin praises the midwives who defied Pharaoh's unjust decree to kill the male Hebrew children. While Calvin does not believe the midwives should have lied, he endorses their refusal to cooperate with injustice as an example for Christians.

But this doctrine extends still more widely, for many would be more than preposterously wise while, under pretext of due submission, they obey the wicked will of kings in opposition to justice and right [*ius et fas*], being in some cases the ministers of avarice and rapacity, in others of cruelty. Yea, to gratify the transitory kings of earth, they take no account of God, and thus, which is worst of all, they designedly oppose pure religion with fire and sword. It only makes their effrontery more detestable, that while they knowingly and willingly crucify Christ in his members, they plead the frivolous excuse that they obey their princes according to the word of God, as if he, in ordaining princes, had resigned his rights to them, and as if every earthly power which exalts itself against heaven ought not rather most justly to be made to give way.

When a person acts unjustly it is not a valid excuse that the unjust action has been commanded by a person with civil or military authority. Obedience to such unjust laws is “criminal obedience [*scelerati obsequii*].”¹⁸⁶⁷

¹⁸⁶⁴Commentary on Hosea 5:11 [1557]; CO 42:310-311. Cf. 7:3; CO 42:340-341; 9:15; CO 42:406.

¹⁸⁶⁵Commentary on Isaiah 3:12 [1559]; CO 36:89. It is the “vulgar” who are easily “dazzled by the splendor of princes... [Thus] they do not think it lawful for them to inquire strictly into the conduct of princes.” Commentary on Daniel 4:10-16 [1561]; CO 40:658-659.

¹⁸⁶⁶Christians are innocent when they disobey and protest the “impious and unjust edicts of kings.” Commentary on Jeremiah 37:18 [1563]; CO 39:152. This is in contrast to the claims of Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 74; Brandt B. Boeke, “Calvin's Doctrine of Civil Government,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 11 (1981): 73.

¹⁸⁶⁷Commentary on Exodus 1:17 [1563]; CO 24:17-18. In his “paternal indulgence” God values his people's good works “as if they were pure, notwithstanding they may be defiled by some mixture of

These are pregnant words and potentially inflammatory in a revolutionary setting, but it is crucial to interpret them within the parameters of Calvin's broader political theology. All people are called to disobey and resist laws that command impiety or injustice, but each person is to do so in a way appropriate to her vocation. For instance, in his commentary on John 2, the story of Christ's cleansing of the temple, Calvin writes,

let each of us apply to the invitation of Christ, that – so far as lies in our power – we may not permit the temple of God to be in any way polluted. But, at the same time, we must beware lest any man transgress the bounds of his calling. All of us ought to have zeal in common with the Son of God but all are not at liberty to seize a whip that we may correct vices with our hands, for we have not received the same power, nor have we been entrusted with the same commission.¹⁸⁶⁸

Later in the commentary Calvin makes the same point with reference to Jesus' rebuke of Peter for drawing his sword in defense of his lord. People think that anything is justified under the cloak of zeal, but Peter failed to “consider what his calling demands.” By offering violent resistance, “he acts the part of a highwayman, because he resists the power which God has appointed.”¹⁸⁶⁹ Ordinarily Christians “ought to be prepared for enduring the cross,” remembering Jesus' warning that “He who strikes with the sword shall perish by the sword.” The only exceptions are when institutions and procedures provide opportunity for legitimate civil action. “We must also beware of repelling our enemies by force or violence, even when they unjustly provoke us, *except so far as the institutions and laws of the community admit.*”¹⁸⁷⁰

In fact, Calvin interprets this last clause somewhat flexibly. In his commentary on Matthew he observes that the law sometimes authorizes a private person's use of force [*privatis hominibus ... usus gladii*], thus making her a public person.

impurity.” But unlike Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Calvin did not think a Christian should ever intentionally violate God's law in the name of responsibility, and while resting on grace. The midwives took the right action, he argues, but their lies show that they were too influenced by their fear at the consequences of their just actions (1:18; CO 24:18-19).

1868Commentary on John 2:17 [1553]; CO 47:46. Cf. Commentary on Matthew 21:12 [1555]; CO 45:580. 1869Commentary on John 18:10 [1553]; CO 47:394.

1870 “[T]he Lord permits us to defend our life *by those aids which he has himself appointed.*” Commentary on John 18:11 [1553]; CO 47:395. Emphasis added.

First, we must make a distinction between a civil forum and the forum of conscience [*civile et conscientiae forum*], for if any man resist a robber, he will not be liable to public punishment, because the laws arm him against one who is the common enemy of mankind... [However,] in order that a man may properly and lawfully defend himself, he must first lay aside excessive wrath, and hatred, and desire of revenge ... As this is of rare occurrence, or rather, as it scarcely ever happens, Christ properly reminds his people of the general rule, that they should entirely abstain from using the sword.¹⁸⁷¹

Here the two kingdoms distinction explicitly informs Calvin's approach to the question of violence. Christians are called to take up their cross and follow Christ, but just as Christian liberty does not destroy the legitimate authority of the political kingdom, so the call to bear the cross does not nullify the legitimate vocational and civil prerogatives of the political kingdom. It always remains within the prerogative of political officials to resist tyranny to the extent permitted by their vocations (4.20.31).

Calvin did not claim that resistance on the part of lesser magistrates was always due to their fidelity to God's law rather than to constitutional or secular concerns, as Keen thinks.¹⁸⁷² On the contrary, Calvin justified the Huguenot cause in the first war of religion on definitively constitutional grounds, and as was demonstrated in Chapter 8, he appealed to Joseph's constitutional circumstances to explain why Joseph did *not* have to enforce the law of God against the pagan decrees of Pharaoh. Furthermore, Calvin praised constitutional structures that make rulers accountable to their subjects, and his very emphasis on the magisterial vocation implies a reliance on constitutional considerations.¹⁸⁷³ Nor is Keen correct when he claims that Calvin forbade lesser magistrates from practicing *active* resistance to tyranny, as Calvin's defense of the

1871Commentary on Matthew 26:52 [1555]; CO 45:731.

1872Keen, "The Limits and Power of Obedience in the Later Calvin," 265, 272.

1873See Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:233-234. McNeill rightly points out that for Calvin accountability to God and accountability to human beings should not be played off against one another. In his commentary on Romans Calvin clearly declared that magistrates are accountable to both. McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," 164-165. Commentary on Romans 13:4 []; CO 49:251. This is an important qualification to Stevenson's claim that "A ruler is then *primarily* a 'minister of God,' and his true accountability is to God alone." Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 22. Cf. Winthrop S. Hudson, Calvin a Source of Resistance Theory, and Therefore of Democracy," in Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970), 23.

Huguenot cause demonstrates.¹⁸⁷⁴ Most scholars agree that Calvin affirmed a right of passive resistance on the part of private individuals, while affirming a right of active resistance on the part of lesser magistrates.¹⁸⁷⁵ This is true even though Calvin's theory of active resistance was much less defined, and his personal proclivities were much more restrained than were the theories of later Calvinist writers.¹⁸⁷⁶

W. Nijenhuis challenges this consensus. He claims that in sermons he preached during the last few years of his life Calvin began to defend violent resistance to tyranny on the part of Christians who were not magistrates. According to Nijenhuis, when Calvin declared in a 1560 sermon on 1 Samuel that God often raises up one of his servants with the special vocation of saving his people, it was “the first step on the way to acknowledging the private citizen's right of resistance.”¹⁸⁷⁷ By 1562, he claims, Calvin's

1874Keen writes, “The message about tyranny conveyed by the later Calvin is the same as that of the younger Calvin: It is passive disobedience. Calvin does not say that there are conditions under which a magistrate may be actively resisted: That would be a major change in his thinking.” Keen, “The Limits and Power of Obedience in the Later Calvin,” 272. When the magistrate commands against God, Keen claims, “the solution is not revolution but individual noncompliance with ungodly orders” (275). “Calvin would have repudiated the work of his successors” (276).

1875Thompson, “Patriarchs, Polygamy and Private Resistance,” 15-18, 27; Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 32-35, 54; Boeke, “Calvin's Doctrine of Civil Government,” 67-73; Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State*, 55-60; McNeill, “John Calvin on Civil Government,” 38-40; Kingdon, “Calvin's Socio-Political Legacy,” 116-120. David Willis-Watkins, “Calvin's Prophetic Reinterpretation of Kingship,” *Probing the Reformed Tradition* (ed. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian Armstrong; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 126-129; David M. Whitford, “Robbing Paul to Pay Peter: The Reception of Paul in Sixteenth Century Political Theology,” *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation* (ed. R. Ward Holder; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 597-605; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:192-193, 214, 219-221, 232-233. I am unpersuaded, however, by Whitford's and Skinner's claims that Calvin took a more radical stance in his later years, seeing consistency in the reformer's thought from 1536 to the end. On the implications of Calvin's argument about the lesser magistrates for democracy see McNeill, “The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought,” 163-165; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:232-233; H. A. Lloyd, “Calvin and the Duty of Guardians to Resist,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 (1981): 65-67 and Peter Stein, “Calvin and the Duty of Guardians to Resist: A Comment,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 (1981): 69-70. Thompson notes that while Calvin declared that God could raise up exceptional deliverers, he never outlined contemporary circumstances under which this might occur, nor did he ever support such a scenario in practice (27).

1876While he supported the Huguenots cause, he did so only because he endorsed their position on constitutional grounds, and in the name of fidelity to the monarchy. As Stevenson points out, “Calvin's resistance to the idea of an *all-out* Huguenot rebellion is notable.” Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace*, 140. Cf. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:192-193. Winthrop S. Hudson correctly concludes that “Calvin did not define the role of the inferior magistrates, nor did he describe the manner in which they were to exercise their vocation as guardians of the liberties of the realm, but his disciples did.” Winthrop S. Hudson, “Calvin a Source of Resistance Theory, and Therefore of Democracy,” 21.

1877W. Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata: Studies on the Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 84. Nijenhuis admits that even in his sermons on 1 Samuel Calvin insisted that “Private citizens have to leave any act

ideas on resistance had become “more ambivalent,” laying more emphasis on resistance, “even by the private citizen.” Nijenhuis claims that for Calvin, in these last years,

If the honour of God is violated, resistance is required, even armed resistance by the private citizen. For the first time, we now hear the Reformer speaking of two general rules ('reigles générales'). The first is the one we know already: resistance may be offered only by those into whose hands God has put the sword, that is, the lower magistrates.... But, on 31 July 1562, we find an interesting new accent in Calvin's public pronouncements... he comes this time to the formulation of a second 'reigle commune': not only the lower magistrates, but all citizens are called upon to resist an evil ruler so as to protect the poor.¹⁸⁷⁸

Nijenhuis offers the following quote from Calvin's sermon as his chief evidence for this claim:

'So let us notice that the Scriptures use these two words [justice ('justice') and righteousness ('iugement')] in order to express that it is not enough to rule over us in peace without harming anyone, but that we should resist evil as much as we can. And this has been enjoined on all people in general; I tell you, this was said not only to princes, magistrates, and public prosecutors, but also to all private persons ... Consequently, we see that this is a common rule referring to all: perform justice and righteousness, that is to say, rule the whole world with equity and uprightness, oppose evil and offer resistance, when support for the troubled poor and the relief they need is called in question'.¹⁸⁷⁹

Nijenhuis concludes from this evidence that, “Constrained by the civil war in France, Calvin had radicalized his political ideas.” Yet he admits that this entails a contradiction within Calvin's thought, given his continued insistence that only magistrates can bear the sword. “How the two rules could be harmonized is not clear. It seems that life had become stronger than doctrine.”¹⁸⁸⁰

It is true, of course, that Calvin believed God could authorize a person to wield the sword outside of the ordinary channels of his providence, and that God did so in Old

of resistance to the 'magistratus et ordines', i.e., the States General, a rule which remained valid even under the most violent tyranny” (88). He continued to invoke the Sermon on the Mount and the example of Jesus, “forbidding any resistance on the part of the 'homo privatus,’” and frequently sounding “the dominant note of nonviolence in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount” (88-89).

1878Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 91-92. The only other evidence he offers is a reference to the murder of Antoine de Bourbon, King of Navarre, by a 'homo privatus' as a “reason for thanksgiving to God.” Nijenhuis assumes this meant that Calvin approved of the act of murder. “The second 'common rule' was obviously superseding the former principle” (93). Yet Calvin had always insisted that God might raise up a deliverer for his people even from among the ranks of the wicked, and that Christians can observe this providence at work with adoration and thanksgiving.

1879Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 91-92.

1880Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata*, 92.

Testament days through figures like Moses and Phinehas.¹⁸⁸¹ But Calvin stresses, in a commentary published in 1563, that

private persons [*homines privatos*] would act improperly, and would be by no means countenanced by his example, if they sought to repress wrong by force and arms. Thus far we should imitate Moses in rendering aid to the suffering and oppressed, as far as our means go, and in caring not to incur the ill-will of the wicked, when we oppose ourselves to their oppressions; but we must leave it to the judges, who are invested with public authority [*publico imperio*], to draw the sword of vengeance.¹⁸⁸²

The evidence Nijenhuis presents does not demonstrate that Calvin changed this position in any way. Calvin argued that all people, not only magistrates, should “resist evil *as much as we can*,” but that is hardly the same thing as arguing that all people can take up the sword, *regardless of vocation*. Indeed, virtually no French Protestants held such a position during Calvin's lifetime.¹⁸⁸³ The emphasis on vocation is so fundamental to Calvin, as Nijenhuis himself admits, that it requires much more than an ambiguous use of the phrase 'resist evil' to demonstrate that he had abandoned it. Nijenhuis hardly offers sufficient evidence to justify the implausible claim that Calvin was so overcome by events that he could articulate two blatantly contradictory rules side by side. And in fact, even in Calvin's sermons on 1 Samuel, Keen has shown, the French reformer enjoins obedience to the worst of monarchs and under the worst of circumstances.¹⁸⁸⁴ “Calvin's

1881“When Moses slew the Egyptian, though not yet called by God to be the deliverer of Israel, and while he was not yet invested with the power of the sword, it is certain, that he was moved by the invisible and internal impulse of God to undertake that deed. Phinehas was moved by a similar impulse. No one indeed imagined that he was armed with the sword of God, yet he was conscious to himself of being moved by a heavenly influence in this matter. And hence it is to be observed, that the common mode and order of calling which God adopts, does not prevent him, whenever it seems proper, to stir up his elect by the secret influence of the Spirit to the performance of praiseworthy deeds.” Commentary on Psalm 106:31 [1557]; CO 32:128. An analogous authorization made it just for the prostitute Rahab to betray her native city to the Israelite spies. Commentary on Joshua 2:7 [1564]; CO 25:441-442.

1882Commentary on Exodus 2:12 [1563]; CO 24:27.

1883For instance, around 1562-1563 a pamphlet appeared in Lyon that claimed a right of popular resistance to magistrates that suppress the true faith, even without the leadership of lesser magistrates. A representative group of pastors denounced it as “full of false and bad doctrine, conforming on several points to that of the Anabaptists, inducing men to sedition, rebellion, and disobedience of kings and princes.” There is no reason to think Calvin would have challenged this assessment during his later years. Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement 1564-1572* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 155.

1884Keen, “The Limits and Power of Obedience in the Later Calvin,” 255-257. Cf. Willis-Watkins, “Calvin's Prophetic Reinterpretation of Kingship,” 125-129.

reluctance to countenance disobedience is so strong in these sermons as to appear reactionary. This conservatism is not new for Calvin, but the point has been to establish that Calvin did not change his thinking in the last decade of his life.”¹⁸⁸⁵

Nijenhuis is correct, however, that Calvin's criticism of monarchy grew sharper during these later years. In his lectures on Daniel Calvin spoke in increasingly dark terms about political powers – monarchs and empires in particular – that oppose themselves to the work of Christ's kingdom. In the dedication to the French Protestants he writes that “all earthly power which is not founded on Christ must fall [*omnem terrenam potentiam, quae in Christo fundata non est, caducam esse*].” Those kingdoms that “obscure Christ’s glory by extending themselves too much [*quae se nimium efferendo*] ... shall feel by sorrowful experience how horrible a judgment will fall upon them, unless they willingly submit themselves to the sway of Christ [*se Christi imperio subiiciant*]!”¹⁸⁸⁶

Does this mean the progress of Christ's kingdom would overthrow a kingdom like that of France? Later in the commentary Calvin wrestles with Daniel's prophecy that the messiah would “break up the political order [*ordinem politicum*] which we know God approves of, and has appointed and established by his power.”¹⁸⁸⁷ He answers the questioning by distinguishing between what is proper to Christ's kingdom and what is accidental to it, or between what Christ's kingdom does directly, and what it does indirectly. Christ does not break such empires “directly [*simpliciter*],” “since all the kingdoms of this world are clearly founded on the power and beneficence of Christ [*fundata esse omnia regna huius mundi in Christi virtute et beneficentia*].”¹⁸⁸⁸ Thus

¹⁸⁸⁵Keen, “The Limits and Power of Obedience in the Later Calvin,” 263. Even where there is a shift toward more polemical rhetoric in Calvin's later years, “It is more difficult to assign a precise doctrinal value to these changes and considerably harder to state that these changes reflect a modification of the descending model of political authority to which Calvin had consistently subscribed” (254). “If Calvin is consistent in these sermons, he cannot countenance rebellion” (257). The conservatism of Calvin on resistance stands out all the more clearly in contrast to the Lutheran Justus Menius, who *was* a vocal advocate of armed resistance (259-263).

¹⁸⁸⁶Dedication of the Commentary on Daniel to the French Protestants [1561]; CO 18:617.

¹⁸⁸⁷Commentary on Daniel 2:31-35 [1561]; CO 40:592.

¹⁸⁸⁸Commentary on Daniel 2:40-43 [1561]; CO 40:601-602. “The kingdom of Christ is said to break up all the empires of the world, not directly, but only accidentally, as the phrase is. [*Dicitur regnum Christi*]

“Christ's kingdom [*Christi regnum*] is not contrary to their power.” Rather, political empires are broken up “accidentally [*accidentaliter*]” because they oppose themselves to Christ's kingdom.¹⁸⁸⁹ Daniel's prophecy is simply a proclamation of Psalm 2, a declaration of “how evanescent and uncertain are all the empires of the world [*omnia mundi imperia*] which are not founded in God, and not united to the kingdom of Christ [*non fundata essent in Deo, et non coniuncta essent regno Christi*].” Without Christ, political power is “vain and unstable and worthless.”¹⁸⁹⁰

There is no doubt that Calvin believed a well-established and prosperous commonwealth is grounded in subservience to Christ, the lord of both the spiritual and the political kingdoms. Although all political rule will one day pass away, during the present age those that turn themselves against Christ and his gospel will find their power to be particularly fleeting. But Calvin is emphatic that this does not in any way justify triumphalism or rebellion on the part of Christians. True, Christians are called to wage a constant struggle against the devil and the world, but Calvin warns his readers that this is a spiritual struggle, one waged with the armor and weapons of faith, righteousness, the Spirit, and the word.¹⁸⁹¹ Focusing on a military or political struggle is a dangerous distraction for Christians, because “our difficulties are far greater than if we had to fight with men. There we resist human strength, sword is opposed to sword, man contends with man, force is met by force, and skill by skill, but here the case is widely different.” When it is Satan who is attacking us, to struggle against flesh and blood must “not only be useless, but highly pernicious.”¹⁸⁹² The Apostle Paul compares Christians to warriors, but “their condition as warriors consists not in inflicting evils, but rather in patience.”

conterere omnia mundi imperia, non simpliciter, sed per accidens, ut loquuntur].

1889Commentary on Daniel 2:31-35 [1561]; CO 40:592.

1890Commentary on Daniel 2:44-45 [1561]; CO 40:607.

1891Commentary on Ephesians 6:15 [1548]; CO 51:236. The human opposition to the gospel is the result of the fact that the world has become the “kingdom of the devil” (6:12; CO 51:234). “Though the Church is also attacked by outward foes, and is delivered from them by Christ,” he concedes, “because the kingdom of Christ is spiritual” prophecies of Israel's deliverance from its enemies refer “chiefly to Satan, the prince of this world, and all his legions.” Commentary on Luke 1:71 [1555]; CO 45:48.

1892Commentary on Ephesians 6:12 [1548]; CO 51:233-234.

Christians demonstrate their willingness to fight through their willingness to suffer.¹⁸⁹³

Thus when critics accused the French Protestants of seeking to overthrow all order and authority Calvin retorted that the charge was absurd: “as if he who offers a celestial [kingdom] [*coeleste offert*] to the least and most despised of the people, would snatch away the empires of the earth from its monarchs [*terrena imperia raperet monarchis*].”¹⁸⁹⁴ The native Frenchman testifies to his efforts to render Protestants submissive and even claims credit that so many spurned rebellion. “It is not necessary for me to relate how strenuously I have hitherto endeavored to cut off all occasion for tumult; ... it is no fault of mine if the kingdom of Christ [*Christi regnum*] does not progress quietly without any injury. And I think it is owing to my carefulness that private persons [*privati homines*] have not transgressed beyond their bounds.”¹⁸⁹⁵ If the kingdom of France was going to be overthrown it would be due to its own hostility to the gospel of Christ, not the preaching of the reformers or the faithfulness of French Protestants. God could use whatever means he willed, and in the meantime faithful Christians were simply to “obey and suffer.” It was therefore God of whom the French king should be afraid, and it was of God that Calvin was thinking when he declared in the second last section of the *Institutes*, “Let the princes hear and be afraid” (4.20.31).¹⁸⁹⁶

Calvin's two kingdoms theology led him to call Christians to support and submit to the powers that exist, spurning the temptation of religious war, even as he outlined a means by which lesser magistrates could resist tyranny in accord with their vocation. The result was a political theology that prioritized the legitimacy of political order, even as it sought to limit that political order through the accountability of law and the authority of multiple levels of magisterial power. Like his theory of law and of forms of government, Calvin's theory of resistance was informed by scripture and fidelity to the lordship of

1893Commentary on 2 Timothy 2:3 [1548]; CO 52:361.

1894Dedication of the Commentary on Daniel to the French Protestants [1561]; CO 18:618.

1895Dedication of the Commentary on Daniel to the French Protestants [1561]; CO 18:619-620.

1896See Willis-Watkins, “Calvin's Prophetic Reinterpretation of Kingship,” 125-129.

Christ, even as it sought to distinguish the prerogatives of political authorities from the righteousness of the kingdom of Christ.

CONCLUSION

CALVIN'S TWO KINGDOMS AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

As I acknowledged in the introduction to this book, Calvin was not a political liberal. It is a vain exercise to speculate how Calvin would have responded to political and religious circumstances far removed from his own, let alone to the political philosophies that have sought to come to grips with such changes. Indeed, it would be unhelpful even if we could know the answers to such questions. Calvin's relevance for political ethics lies not in his political record or opinions, but in his political *theology*. But there can be no doubt that Calvin's theology stands in acute conflict with the Kantian sort of liberalism that makes the human person an autonomous end in herself. For the reformer of Geneva communion with God in the kingdom of Christ is characterized by obedience to the will of God as revealed in nature, in divine law, and in the person and work of Christ. As Timothy P. Jackson argues, especially against the early John Rawls, there can be no Christian endorsement of liberal democracy if the latter demands the rejection of Christ in favor of some other comprehensive doctrine.¹⁸⁹⁷

But the best sort of political liberalism – even that of the later Rawls – does not demand such religious conversion.¹⁸⁹⁸ Rather, it calls each of the various individuals and groups of a pluralistic society to endorse the institutions, practices, and commitments of liberalism due to commitments arising from their own comprehensive doctrines. The appropriate commitment to liberalism described by philosophers such as Jeffrey Stout is therefore *temporal* or *secular*, rather than ultimate.¹⁸⁹⁹ It does not require Christians to leave their faith at the door of the voting booth, legislative chamber, or court, let alone to

1897 Timothy P. Jackson, "The Return of the Prodigal? Liberal Theory and Religious Pluralism," *Religion in Contemporary Liberalism* (ed. Paul J. Weitzman; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 182-217; Timothy P. Jackson, "To Bedlam and Part Way Back: John Rawls and Christian Justice," *Faith and Philosophy* 8:4 (October, 1991): 423-447; Cf. Timothy P. Jackson, *Political Agape*, forthcoming.

1898 See especially Rawls's 1997 essay, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," published as Part 4 in John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 440-490.

1899 Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

swear an allegiance to the flag or commanding officer that transcends the obligations of one's baptism in Christ. Yet it does ask that for the sake of the common good and civic virtue Christians seek to engage with their nonbelieving neighbors in the sorts of moral and political arguments that the latter can reasonably accept, to propose laws and policies on the basis of procedures that all can regard as just, and to serve together in the building of communities in which Christians and Buddhists, Muslims and Atheists, Agnostics and Spiritualists alike can expect to be treated as equal citizens with equal rights.

The argument of this conclusion is that Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine warrants and guides such a temporal commitment to political liberalism as a faithful expression of the service of Christ. I begin by reviewing the nature of Calvin's political theology as analyzed in the previous nine chapters. Though I acknowledge various ways in which Calvin's life and work contradicts a democratic ethos, I argue that the two kingdoms doctrine itself encourages the commitment of Christians to political liberalism as the form of government most appropriate for societies characterized by religious, social, and moral pluralism, and that it provides the church with a model for how to fulfill its mission to Christ given such a commitment. I then identify three general implications of Calvin's two kingdoms theology for contemporary Christian political engagement: America as a secular society; natural law as public reason; and the church as a public church. Given that this book has focused on Calvin's political theology in its own time and context, any account of what a critical appropriation of that theology might look like will necessarily be suggestive and subject to dispute. But if my description of the central theological principles of Calvin's thought has been clear, I believe the contemporary implications that I draw should be persuasive for Christians committed to political liberalism as a form of government.

Calvin's Two Kingdoms Theology: Summary

In the first half of the sixteenth century Calvin's two kingdoms theology constituted the sharpest distinction between church and commonwealth articulated by a mainstream theologian who did not reject Christian participation in civil government. The papacy claimed that civil government was ultimately subject to the authority of the pope as the vicar of Christ. Luther and Melancthon distinguished between the two kingdoms but relegated matters of discipline and ecclesiastical order to the civil realm. Zwingli, Bullinger, and the apologists of the royal supremacy in England adopted the Marsilian or caesaropapist position that subjected the church and its discipline to the control of the civil magistracy. And the Anabaptists, when they were not turning toward apocalypticism, separated church and civil government so far apart as to reject Christian participation in civil government, which in sixteenth century terms meant essentially to overthrow the civil order, given that virtually everyone was Christian. But against his fellow magisterial reformers Calvin insisted on the autonomy of the church from the state with respect to worship, discipline, and poor relief. Against the papacy he rejected claims that the church holds magisterial authority, let alone the plenitude of power, over ecclesiastical and temporal affairs. And against the Anabaptists he insisted on the legitimacy of civil government as an institution in which Christians should participate. He worked hard to implement this political theological vision in circumstances as diverse as Geneva, which could approximate a "well-regulated" Christian commonwealth in which church and state were mutually supportive and coterminous, and France, in which the true church was organizationally autonomous and endured the persecution of a hostile state.

Calvin's eschatology, I show in Chapter 3, led him to argue that human beings were made for communion with God and that creation is destined for a spiritual transformation into the eternal kingdom of Christ. Although the fall into sin disrupted

this process, God provided means both for the creation's preservation and for its restoration, means that correspond to Calvin's distinction between the two kingdoms. Through his providence, by the continued influence of natural law, and through civil government God preserves society and its moral order even among pagans. This enables human societies to maintain meaningful levels of justice and order even without special revelation or the grace of Christ. Christians thus have common ground with nonbelievers with reference to temporal affairs, and a society does not need to be Christian in order to be meaningfully just.

Although Calvin described the kingdom of Christ as a fundamentally spiritual reality, by the word 'spiritual' he did not mean that the kingdom is immaterial, otherworldly, or otherwise irrelevant to creation. On the contrary, Calvin insisted that the kingdom of Christ brings about the restoration of the entire material creation. To be sure, Calvin used the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accidents to distinguish between the temporal affairs of life, which he argued will pass away, and the world itself, which he said will be both restored and transformed in accord with its original eschatological purpose. But he understood the restoration of all things in Christ to have practical ethical implications. Only through participation in Christ, he argued, can human beings rightfully possess and use the blessings of creation. Only when they use such blessings in accord with the will of God, through the regeneration of the Spirit, furthermore, do persons begin to enjoy the restored creation, in hope.

Calvin's eschatological theology thus grounds a paradoxical understanding of the relation between the kingdom of Christ and the present world. On the one hand, Christians should never seek the full realization of the kingdom in temporal affairs, so falling into the dangerous errors of utopianism, triumphalism, and arrogance. On the other hand, Christians should seek the manifestation of the justice (and piety) of the kingdom in temporal affairs. There can be no meaningful liberty apart from obedience to

the will of God, and the church is called always to point the world to the gospel that reveals its purpose and future in the kingdom of Christ.

For Calvin God's dual purposes of preservation and restoration come to expression in the doctrine of the two kingdoms, or of the twofold government, as I outline in Chapter 4. Calvin introduced the two kingdoms doctrine as a means of clarifying the nature of Christian liberty. Although Christians are justified by faith alone and sanctified by the Spirit alone, and so free from all the traditions and laws of human beings as far as the kingdom of Christ is concerned, they are nevertheless subject to such authorities as necessities of the present life. Government is one means by which human beings serve one another in a fallen world, a vocation necessary to the demands of love. At the same time, by submitting where necessary to unjust relations of political power, gender, or slavery (though escaping them where possible), Christians are further conformed to the image of Christ. Here again the implications for Christian politics are somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, Christians should do all within the power of their vocations and the possibility of their circumstances to exhibit the justice of the kingdom of Christ. There can be no yielding of love, no resignation to the powers of evil. On the other hand, love itself demands that Christians often submit to unjust circumstances, not using the gospel as a pretext to overthrow the common good or its necessary order. Liberty and equality are biblical Christian ideals worth pursuing to this extent; Christians should never conflate their temporal expressions with the true thing itself (the liberty and equality of the kingdom of Christ), but they should seek their attainment where possible according to the bounds of love.

A correlate of Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine is his distinction between spiritual (i.e., inward) righteousness and civil (i.e., outward) righteousness, and the related distinction between the spiritual use of the law and its civil use. Calvin consistently contrasted what civil magistrates can accomplish in terms of punishing injustice and

coercing outward conformity to the law, and what Christ can do by his word and Spirit, actually making human beings just. This by no means suggests that the civil forms of piety or justice should be minimized or despised. On the contrary, Calvin argued that such forms are essential to the existence of human society and to the demands of love alike. But a government that seeks to command or shape the conscience beyond God's law invades the kingdom of Christ, and a government that imagines it can instil true virtue or faith is dangerously deluded. Calvin's two kingdoms theology therefore demands humility on the part of those in political authority. Insofar as the civil government's purposes and powers are temporal, not spiritual, Christians should affirm the secular character of the state.

Calvin identified the church as the expression of the kingdom of Christ in the present age, as I demonstrate in Chapter 5, both insofar as the church ministers the gospel of Christ and insofar as it is the society of those who have been regenerated by that gospel. The church's primary task and chief mark is to proclaim the word of God – the gospel of the restoration of the world and the moral law of justice and holiness to which all human beings are called to conform. Indeed, the church only represents Christ's kingdom insofar as it fulfills this task. Its entire ministry is contained within the word of Christ, and even its sacraments and discipline are merely extensions of that word. Yet when the church faithfully proclaims God's word it is placed above every other authority – spiritual and temporal alike. Here the church speaks with binding authority to magistrate, citizen, and subject alike, whatever the form of government in existence. Only the word of God can point human beings to their ultimate purpose, and only the word operating by the Spirit can restore them to that purpose.

At the same time, as an institution of the present world, the church also contains a temporal or political dimension, and its members and ministers therefore exercise temporal functions that must be sharply distinguished from the spiritual kingdom of

Christ. The church must enact an order and polity for its worship and life, a process that requires prudence and the use of discretionary authority. But Calvin charged the Roman church with conflating the political and the spiritual by claiming the right to exercise binding spiritual authority over spiritual and political matters alike. In so doing, it invaded the kingdom of Christ, ruling tyrannically over the consciences of believers. Calvin insisted that the church's spiritual authority is limited by the word. The church cannot bind consciences in matters of polity which are necessarily subject to circumstances and prudence. The same principle applies to the church's proclamation of the word to magistrates. The gospel and moral will of God cannot be conflated with the contextual demands of love and prudence amid the complexities of politics. Ministers may not usurp the responsibilities of magistrates. The true church restrains its teaching and discipline to the constraints of God's word, and insofar as ministers bring their own political ideologies into the pulpit they can safely be disregarded. Similarly, the church has the power to discipline or excommunicate an unrepentant magistrate if he has clearly *violated* God's moral law. But such a violation must be clear and direct; Calvin has in mind here a magistrate who is guilty of murder or adultery, for example, rather than a magistrate who for prudential or circumstantial reasons is unable or unwilling to *enforce* the whole of God's law. The pastoral office cannot be used to promote political acts, laws, or policies that are not commanded by God, nor can it be used to oppose acts, laws, or policies that have not been forbidden by God.

Of course, this simply begs the question of what scripture teaches concerning politics and the obligations of magistrates. Calvin articulated his general theology of civil government in several writings during the 1530s and 1540s, as I describe in Chapter 6. The Anabaptists illegitimately sought to transfer gospel standards of liberty and justice to political life because they failed to understand the distinction between civil government and the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Expecting the full manifestation of

Christ's kingdom, they failed to take into account human sin and the ongoing need of human beings for coercive political institutions, property, courts of law, and the use of the sword in just wars. For Calvin government is a limited institution ordained by God to fulfill specific temporal objectives. Calvin believed that in Christian societies government is responsible to defend the outward worship and teaching of true religion according to God's law, but his focus in the *Institutes* and the commentary on Romans was almost entirely on government's secular purposes, especially peace and order. He explicitly defended religious liberty for Turks and Jews, thus affirming a measure of religious pluralism even in Christian societies. And he clarified that while it is government's task to enforce God's *moral* law as much as possible, this does not require Christian governments to conform to the laws of Moses as found in the Old Testament. The appropriate laws and form of government in a Christian commonwealth are to be determined in accord with the rule of love (informed, of course, by scripture) and the virtue of prudence to determine its application to particular circumstances.

Calvin rejected any sort of simplistic appeal to the law or politics of Old Testament Israel as a standard for Christian politics on the basis of a sophisticated theory of the relation between the various biblical covenants, one that complemented his substantive accounts of law and gospel, justification and sanctification, and the two kingdoms. As I argue in Chapter 7, Calvin emphasized that although all of the major covenants in scripture, including the Mosaic, were in substance expressions of the one eternal covenant, the forms of the various covenants were different. The Mosaic, or old, covenant differed from the new in that it used outward, temporal, and political forms to denote spiritual realities. Especially with respect to worship, but also with respect to Israel's political nature as a type of the kingdom of Christ, Christians were not to follow Israel's example. In addition, *narrowly* considered the Mosaic covenant embodied a works principle that promised blessing to the obedient and threatened judgment on the

disobedient. Calvin recognized that such a principle is entirely foreign to the gospel, and he therefore agreed that it cannot be understood to be normative for Christians; in *that* sense Christians are not under the law and its severe judgments. The practical implication is that only insofar as Israel and its law reflected God's natural moral law, a condition that must always be demonstrated, could it serve as a model for Christian politics. Thus Calvin sometimes argued that when the prophets described the role of magistrates in the future kingdom of Christ they spoke in analogical or metaphorical terms, but other times he insisted, via arguments from natural law, that their predictions were to be taken literally.

In the case of Calvin's argument concerning the care of religion, with which I deal in Chapter 8, this principle led the reformer consistently to appeal to natural law in the form of arguments from pagan philosophers, the laws of nations, reason, and experience, in order to prove that what the Old Testament presented as the responsibilities of magistrates remained such for Christian rulers. It was the argument from natural law that determined Calvin's use of numerous scriptural narratives in which the text itself presented no application, and that led him to interpret particular political prophecies literally rather than metaphorically. Calvin recognized that his position could be challenged by virtue of the two kingdoms distinction, but he clarified that while magistrates can not convert individuals to faith or make them righteous, they can nevertheless indirectly or accidentally promote and defend Christ's kingdom by establishing and defending the ministry of the church and by punishing notorious teachers of heresy. Calvin openly acknowledged, however, that the premise for this argument was that the Christian faith and the authority of scripture had been embraced by the consent of the whole society, such that the persons subject to punishment could be said to have knowingly and willingly distorted the truth and led weak persons astray. Calvin's controversial argument against religious liberty thus rests on two fundamental

conditions : 1) a consensus across peoples and religions regarding a magisterial obligation to care for religion; and 2) a public consensus about the truth of scripture and the Christian faith.

Calvin clearly acknowledged that in societies with religious diversity the magisterial care of religion will look different than in societies committed to the Christian faith. He did not discuss this possibility very often or in much detail, let alone consistently, but he recognized that figures like Joseph and Daniel had to take nuanced political positions toward false religion given their obligations to pagan political superiors and to the rule of law. In such circumstances Calvin recognized the value of government protection of the religious liberty of all persons, including the freedoms of worship, speech, and conscience. But whereas with respect to matters of life or sustenance Calvin often used the language of rights, nowhere did he recognize an open-ended right to religious liberty. Government is bound by the law of God, for Calvin, and it is always responsible to promote and defend true religion as much as possible in accord with the virtues of love and prudence.

But while Calvin did not acknowledge an open-ended *right* to religious liberty, let alone an open-ended human right to do wrong of any sort, he decisively rejected the claim that civil government is obligated to enforce the whole law of God regardless of circumstances. As I argue in Chapter 9, he offered as a fundamental principle (of even the divinely inspired civil law of scripture) that political laws must take into account what is possible given human depravity. Not only is government unable to convert persons to faith or to punish inward vices, but sometimes it must even tolerate public injustices as abhorrent as murder, violence, slavery, adultery, divorce, and polygamy. Indeed, it should even regulate such injustice in order to mitigate its destructive consequences. To be sure, civil government should never affirm or promote unjust conduct, and where it does so it nullifies its own moral authority. But Calvin nevertheless

recognized that as a matter of principle government should sometimes tolerate evil for the sake of the greater good, and even regulate it so as to mitigate its worst consequences.

In fact, whereas conformity to the example of Israel and the kingdom of Christ might have led Calvin to follow some early medieval theologians in proclaiming a theocratic monarchy that strictly enforced God's law to be the best form of government, Calvin's convictions regarding circumstances, prudence, and the nature of human depravity led him increasingly to affirm the superiority of a form of government that distributed authority among a plurality of magistrates elected by a free people to serve under the rule of law. To be sure, here again Calvin never claimed that voting or political participation are human or civil rights. Far more important to him was the obligation of magistrates to rule justly and in accord with God's law. But Calvin nevertheless determined that where possible, the virtues of love and prudence ideally lead to a form of republicanism or aristocratic democracy that operates according to procedures in accord with public freedom, consent, and the rule of law.

Calvin raised the rule of law – both the law of God and constitutional law – to such a height as to affirm the *obligation* of all persons to disobey government when it commands injustice or impiety, and the *obligation* of lesser magistrates actively to oppose such a government. Here again the two kingdoms doctrine led Calvin to distinguish what is necessary in politics from what is otherwise demanded by the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Although he insisted that politics is a holy vocation for Christians, he viewed it as a messy business that requires the coercive use of the sword, the toleration of sin, the dilution of political authority, and even, occasionally, opposition to such authority. The two kingdoms doctrine therefore made it possible for Calvin to emphasize civil government's role under the sovereignty of Christ, while at the same time maintaining substantial flexibility regarding its forms, policies, and laws.

Calvin's Two Kingdoms Theology: Contemporary Implications for Political Liberalism

Most Protestant theologians articulated *some* version of a two realms distinction, but it was Calvin and his followers who insisted most clearly and consistently on the doctrine's implications for an *institutional* distinction between church and civil government. Later Protestants would clash on just this point, most famously in Heidelberg, where Thomas Erastus gave his name to the Zurich view that the civil magistrate is the lawful governor of the church and its discipline, and most enduringly in England, where Elizabeth I's determination to be the supreme governor of the church eventually led to the rise of Puritanism with its legacy in the Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, and Separatist churches that became so important for America's later separation between church and state.¹⁹⁰⁰ It was no accident that whereas the radical Marsilian Thomas Hobbes viewed two kingdoms theology as one of the great threats to the sovereignty of the monarchy, the founder of political liberalism John Locke appealed to two kingdoms theology as a basis for religious toleration.¹⁹⁰¹ More than any other Protestant theologian, Calvin founded the model of a church that could operate independently from the state, in virtually whatever political and social context it found itself. Alongside his insistence on the temporal character of civil government, this model helped to enable the later separation of church and state as well as the phenomena of denominational pluralism, developments that in turn could not help but promote the

1900 Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 214-215, 238-254, 395-405.

1901 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (ed. Edwin Curley; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 210-217; John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration* (ed. Ian Shapiro; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 217-226. Cf. John Perry, *The Pretenses of Loyalty: Locke, Liberal Theory, and American Political Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jakob De Roover and S. N. Balagangadhara, "John Locke, Christian Liberty, and the Predicament of Liberal Toleration," *Political Theory* 36:4 (2008): 523-549; J. Wayne Baker, "Church, State, and Toleration: John Locke and Calvin's Heirs in England, 1644-1689," *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives* (ed. W. Fred Graham. Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1994), 525-543.

secularization of political structures.¹⁹⁰² The obligation of civil government to protect the autonomy of the church and the moral liberty of the Christian, similarly, encouraged the articulation of basic rights as the foundation of a just society.¹⁹⁰³

There is, then, good *historical* reason to suspect that, his illiberal political commitments notwithstanding, Calvin's political theology offers substantive resources for Christians and churches seeking guidance as they participate in liberal democratic societies. Here I want to make that case on *theological* grounds. My purpose is not to speculate about how Calvin would have worked out the implications of his political theology in twenty-first century liberal democracies. In that respect Calvin *was* a product of his time, just as we are of our own time, and there is an unbridgeable chasm between him and us. My purpose, rather, is to suggest how we might appropriate Calvin's two kingdoms theology critically yet constructively, evaluating and building on its core dimensions in light of scripture, experience, reason, and contemporary challenges.

My proposal presupposes a practical commitment to political liberalism that, regrettably in my view, not all Christians share. I believe the gospel of Christ give us good reasons for such a commitment, in addition to the insights of reason and experience. Yet even for those who do not, political liberalism demands honor and submission at least to the degree that it has been providentially ordained by God as the established governing authority (Romans 13). As citizens of a pluralistic liberal democracy we are called to make sense of our political obligations and limits in light of the particular individuals, parties, laws, and policies that hold sway, regardless of the measure of our support for them. I believe Calvin's two kingdoms theology offers us both good reasons to embrace

1902One need not claim that the origins of democracy or capitalism lie in Calvinism in order to make these claims for its legacy as a factor in the emergence of the separation of church and state. See John Witte, Jr., *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment* (3rd ed.; Boulder: Westview, 2011), 21-29. For the classic argument see Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. Olive Wyon; two vols.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992 [1912]), volume 2.

1903John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

political liberalism and helpful guidance for what our participation in its practices and institutions might look like. However different was his own context, Calvin's theology provides churches and believers with a model for faithfully serving Christ as the Lord of politics, even as we maintain charity, respect, and good faith toward our fellow human beings.

Here I describe that model in terms of three general principles for contemporary Christian political engagement: America as a secular society; natural law as public reason; and the church as a public church.

1. America as a Secular Society

First, neither America nor any other political society represents Israel or the kingdom of Christ. Coercive political institutions are inherently secular, or temporal, and they exist for fundamentally secular purposes. The primary purpose is the maintenance of outward peace, justice, and order. This does not mean that such institutions must be irreligious, however. The distinction between the two kingdoms, between the spiritual and the secular, does not represent a distinction between religion and politics. They do not represent two hermetically-sealed realms into which life can be divided, nor should they be identified with the various “spheres” of human society that theorists like Abraham Kuyper, Max Weber, and Michael Walzer have identified as the product of modern differentiation and rationalization.¹⁹⁰⁴ The temporal and the eternal, the spiritual and the political, overlap substantially in the real world, and they are both subject to the lordship of Christ. It is the material world that Christ will transform at the end of the age, and it is in the temporal affairs of the political kingdom that Christians testify to the

¹⁹⁰⁴Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (ed. James D. Bratt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461-490; the various essays on vocation by Max Weber in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (ed. C. Mills and Charles Wright; New York: Oxford University Press, 1946); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

restoration that is already taking place through the church. Christians thus seek to confess and practice such righteousness in every sphere of life, even such secular spheres as marriage, economics, and civil government.

But Christians must distinguish between the way in which Christ is establishing his kingdom and restoring human righteousness through the ministry of his word in the church, on the one hand, and the preservative and restraining functions for which he has established civil government, on the other. Calvin could not be clearer that although civil government has certain responsibilities with respect to religion, it cannot regenerate or sanctify human beings. The task of politics is not to make human beings just or pious in any ultimate sense, but to call them to practices of civil virtue and piety conducive of outward peace and justice. Contemporary liberal governments accomplish this in a variety of ways, such as by punishing crimes, regulating trade, caring for the poor, ensuring the education of the citizenry, protecting the environment, and a myriad of lesser means and functions. But in doing so they necessarily take into account the limits of politics and law in the context of human depravity.

Calvin's awareness of the limitations of civil law due to the hardness of human hearts complements the liberal aversion to imposing the moral commitments of a portion of society on the whole. Moral coercion is intrinsic to the work of government, to be sure, but it requires a measure of public consensus if it is to succeed. Whether the inability to establish such consensus is lauded as the praiseworthy effect of religious pluralism or mourned as the regrettable consequence of humans' hardness of heart, the result is the same: the law must respect the moral pluralism of its subjects if it is to win their allegiance. Calvin argued that even the civil law of Israel, given by God himself, tolerated such abhorrent injustice as the murder of prisoners in war, the enslavement and forced marriage of captured women, the mistreatment of slaves, polygamy, casual divorce, and more. For all their frustration at the erosion of Christian morality in the

public square in recent decades, contemporary Christians should take comfort from the fact that in many of these areas American law maintains a superior standard! Calvin urged his own contemporaries to aspire to the higher standard of the natural moral law of God in their politics, and we should do the same. But the political principle remains both valid and necessary: as abhorrent as the toleration and even regulation of a particular vice might be, it is sometimes necessary either as a matter of fact or a matter of wisdom.

The point here is not to laud moral and political relativism but to remind Christians of the still impressive moral *health* of contemporary liberal societies, while putting the moral *failures* of such societies in theological perspective. Political liberalism embraces exhilarating commitments to the fundamental human and civil rights of the poor, women, and racial and religious minorities, rights that Christians should wholeheartedly affirm and promote as appropriate expressions of natural law and the virtue of love. Liberalism tends to be less admirable in its dismissive attitude toward justice in sexuality and marriage, with deplorable results especially for children, including the unborn, but also for women and men. Christians should work to heighten moral sensitivities in such areas, building consensus for better laws. But that is precisely the point: they should work to build *consensus* rather than to override moral pluralism with brute political force, so undermining the moral authority of the law itself.¹⁹⁰⁵ It is possible for the law to demand too much of persons, thus causing more harm than good, and Christians have too often been prey to political or legislative campaigns that had just such an effect. Yet where it is necessary, compromise is not the sign of moral weakness but of moral integrity, the limits of law arising out of the demands of the virtues of love and prudence rather than a lack of money or votes. As the French scholar Jacques Ellul

¹⁹⁰⁵Indeed, James Davison Hunter argues that Christians are too quick to view politics as the primary means of social or cultural transformation. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

put, “Our task, therefore, is not to determine what law with a Christian content is; rather, it is to find out what the lordship of Jesus Christ means for law (law as it exists), and what function God has assigned to law.”¹⁹⁰⁶

To be sure, there is a minimum standard of justice below which government sometimes falls, and when it is government itself that acts unjustly Christians and the church must respond vigorously. Christians should not hesitate to challenge the authority of political institutions that take innocent life, that oppress the poor, or that suppress the worship of God or the speaking of the truth, and the church *must* condemn such injustice. (Mis)interpretations of two kingdoms theology that require political passivity on the part of the church, such as that which was advocated by certain German Christians in Nazi Germany, or a similar doctrine advocated by some southern churches during the days of racial segregation, are at most an abhorrent distortion of Calvin's (not to mention Luther's) political theology.¹⁹⁰⁷ In contrast to Luther or Calvin, these political theologies rejected the church's obligation to preach the word and law of God and to discipline professed Christians guilty of flagrant injustice. Their protests of political passivity notwithstanding, they actively aligned the church with injustice. The church is called to recognize the limits of secular political institutions, but in its teaching and discipline it can never compromise its obligation to proclaim the word of Christ.

The two kingdoms doctrine also leads to what Robert Kraynak regards as the most important practical implication of Augustine's two cities concept: the need for the church to oppose “any political regime that attempts to unify [temporal and spiritual] sovereignty under one head.”¹⁹⁰⁸ Both totalitarianism and theocracy make just this

1906 Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundations of Law* (trans. Marguerite Wieser; New York: Doubleday, 1960), 13.

1907 See, for instance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's criticism of compromised versions of two kingdoms theology throughout his *Ethics* (ed. Clifford J. Green et. al.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009). Against the claims of Green in his introduction to Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, I follow Patrick Nullens in viewing Bonhoeffer as a two kingdoms theologian in the tradition of Luther. See Patrick Nullens, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Third Way of Christian Social Engagement,” *European Journal of Theology* 20:1 (2011): 60-69.

1908 Robert P. Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World*

Hobbesian attempt. Totalitarianism does so by raising the state or its ideology to the level of a religion, demanding the absolute allegiance of its subjects without regard to God or principles of justice. Even the early theory of justice of John Rawls, implicitly requiring all citizens to commit to one comprehensive doctrine, falls into this error.¹⁹⁰⁹ Theocracy does so by placing the church (or some other religious institution) in the place of God, from whom the state derives its authority (even if via the people), so demanding ecclesiastical control over the state. This is the mistake of churches, pastors, or religious groups who imagine that their own convictions regarding the practical details of politics, policy or law represent the will of God himself, thus seeking to use the church's spiritual power (in word or sacrament) for narrowly political ends. In their messianic and spiritual pretensions totalitarians and theocrats alike reject the claim that the state's purpose is *secular*, meaning that it is limited to the temporal purpose of preserving peace, justice, and order.

Of course, in Calvin's view such order included the establishment of religion and the defense of the public honor of God (including God's revealed truth). Yet it is crucial to remember that even here Calvin's concern was fundamentally secular, both in that it had to do with the *outward* forms of religion and in that it rested on appeals to natural law and the consensus of nations. It was not only Moses who called for the public establishment of religion (and certainly not Jesus!), but Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. Only once this premise had been granted, and only in a society where the Christian religion and Christian scripture had been universally embraced as truth, did Calvin's argument that government should punish idolaters or false teachers remain relevant. Following Calvin's own political theological method might lead contemporary Christians to quite different conclusions. Why give Greek and Roman philosophers, whose political horizon was limited to the unified, hierarchical city-state, more weight than Locke, Rousseau, or

(Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 186.
 1909 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

Kant, not to mention Rawls, Walzer, or Stout, whose reflection arises from our own context of growing religious pluralism? If the experience of medieval Christians taught them that unity in religion was crucial to public peace, the experience of the religious wars of the seventeenth century and the ideological wars of the twentieth have convinced many contemporary Christians of the opposite. If it was once assumed that the alliance of religion and power increased the credibility of faith among the masses of the unlearned, scholars since Alexis de Toqueville have observed that in societies where the masses are educated and their instincts are democratic, it is the *separation* of church and state that works to the advantage of religion.¹⁹¹⁰ Communitarian political theologians can still make their case that a morally vacuous liberalism needs Christianity, but for many Christians it is just as clear that a fractured Christianity flourishes best amidst a global commitment to human rights and to the civil rights associated with liberalism. For such Christians the claim that natural law calls government to care for religion is a hard sell.

Based on Calvin's own political theological method, then, a religion should not be imposed on a pluralistic society from the top down, but that does not mean, as even the best liberal philosophers have recognized, that civil government should have no concern for religion at all. For Christians the state is not outside the lordship of Christ, and as Karl Barth pointed out, that means that at a bare minimum the state should recognize its subservience to God and protect the free proclamation of the gospel.¹⁹¹¹ Yet the relevant question for our time is not, How should the king or magistrate care for, exhibit, and defend true religion? but, How should the impersonal, constitutional state recognize its subservience to God and protect the public exercise of religion? Religion thus continues to hold a prominent place in many contemporary liberal democracies, including

1910See Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America* (trans. George Lawrence; ed. J. P. Mayer; New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 287-301.

1911Karl Barth, *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (Eugene, *Wipf and Stock*, 1960), 113-114.

countries like Germany and the United Kingdom, where churches are still to a degree established, and countries like the United States, where, despite the separation of church and state, there is what Robert Bellah has famously described as American “civil religion.”¹⁹¹² The very charter of American freedom, cited by Abraham Lincoln as the basis from which the Constitution itself could be criticized, roots human rights and public authority in the sovereignty of God. The rhetoric of presidents from Washington to Obama, the prominence of religion in the way politicians and intellectuals across the political spectrum debate hot-button issues from immigration to same-sex marriage, the symbolism of public monuments, coins, and songs, and the pledge of allegiance, the prominence of chaplains in the military and legislative assemblies, the tax exempt status of religious bodies, and the legal protection for the religious liberty of both individuals and institutions – all demonstrate that the state does in fact recognize the sovereignty of God and the sanctity of religion, regardless of the way in which particular individuals and groups may object. Some Christians question the propriety of certain elements of America's civil religion, but in general, they follow ancient and liberal philosophers alike when they laud a salutary public stance toward religion as a healthy expression of humility that is compatible with the secular character and purpose of the state. There is still a public consensus that if the state is to preserve peace, justice, and order, it needs to pay its respect to God; that without God morality itself, not to mention the idea of human rights, rests on a shaky foundation.¹⁹¹³

To be sure, the gospel calls all persons to confess *Christ*, not simply the generic deity of American civil religion. But America is a pluralistic and democratic society in which the impersonal constitutional state represents all citizens. Public power is a function of the rule of written law, to be exercised not primarily by persons as individuals

1912 Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *The Robert Bellah Reader* (ed. Robert N. Bellah and Steven M. Tipton; Durham, : Duke University Press, 2006), 225-245.

1913 See, for instance, Michael Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

but through offices with defined prerogatives and limits. Thus the most important expressions of piety and public faithfulness will arise from persons not acting in their *public capacity* as judges, members of congress, presidents, bureaucrats, or officers, but as *individuals* (and worshiping communities) open about their motives and the comprehensive doctrines to which they are committed. Forms of liberalism that seek to exclude religious motives or expression from public life are dangerous precisely because they undermine this fundamental right of religious expression. Calvin's two kingdoms theology does not encourage a sharp distinction between private religion and public life, but it does call for a distinction between the personal and the official, a distinction that both expands and limits what persons acting in a public capacity can do. On the one hand, in her public capacity a magistrate is authorized to use the sword to defend justice, even though as an individual she is commanded by Christ to turn the other cheek. On the other hand, Joseph had no right to interfere with Egypt's pagan religious establishment when he served as Pharaoh's governor, and Daniel was right to object to the punishment of pagan astrologers on the basis of due process of law. Analogously we might say that a Christian council member, governor, judge, or president has no authority to advance a Christian agenda regardless of constitutional constraints. This does not challenge Calvin's assertion that all persons are to honor Christ and to do what they can to advance his cause, because Calvin always qualifies this assertion with the reminder that a person may only act in accord with the limits of her vocation. This suggests that it is appropriate, despite what is sometimes claimed by Christians, to conceive of political power as the expression of public authority that must remain distinct from the personal agenda of a particular person or group. Christians may not use whatever power is practically available to them to promote the kingdom of Christ and its righteousness. Those who hold office in a civil government are not above the rule of law.

Calvin also lauded the benefits of making public authority plural and subject to

the oversight of a free electorate, even though he recognized that expanding access to such public authority also expanded opportunities for its abuse. Of course, Calvin did not articulate the liberal notion of a social contract, nor did he affirm a fundamental human right to political participation. He supported aristocratic-democracy not because he thought human beings are naturally good, but because he believed they are depraved. As he saw it, to delegate authority is always to create the possibility for the abuse of that authority, whether in the case of a monarch, an aristocracy, or a democracy. Nevertheless, in any society such authority must be delegated to some individual or group of individuals for the good of all. The key, then, is to limit the possibilities of abuse. Calvin thus endorsed aristocratic-democracy because he believed that under ideal conditions the pluralization of power under law creates the best possible system of checks and balances.

As with the delegation of political authority, access to courts of law can provide the space for the legitimate use of liberty only by providing the space for its potential abuse as well. As Calvin pointed out, a legal system must authorize general access to the courts, even though individuals might abuse that access, because if it did not, greater injustice would follow. By analogy, we should expand access to political and social participation, even though the majority might often err, because if we do not, greater evils will follow. We can and should solidify just constitutional and legal constraints, but the more democratic a society becomes, the more it requires persons to be responsible for their own just use of liberty. Promoting the broadest possible public participation of an educated society in the affairs of a community – whether law, politics, trade, the academy, the arts, entertainment, or worship or whatever differentiated sphere of life we might identify – requires the granting of civil rights with respect to freedoms of speech, association, trade, and more, even though this requires the toleration of the abuses that inevitably accompany such rights.

This is hardly a sufficient argument for Christians committed to religious liberty as a matter of principle, of course, and it is here especially that Calvin's political theology deserves substantive criticism. In my view Calvin failed to follow the logic of his own theological premises to their practical political conclusions when he identified Israel's punitive civil code as even an *option* for contemporary polities. Calvin recognized that the peculiar (or narrow) office of Moses was to demonstrate the curse of the law on sinners, so convicting the people of Israel of sin, and he recognized by extension that Israel's conquest and genocide of the Canaanites was a typological expression of God's eternal judgment not to be repeated. But he failed to tie these threads together so as to recognize that Israel's thirty uses of capital punishment (for cases such as idolatry, false teaching, adultery, rebellion against parents, and sabbath-breaking) were also typological expressions of eternal judgment unique to Israel, whose exercise is foreclosed to contemporary political societies. Here we should follow Calvin's theology rather than his conclusions, distinguishing not only between law and gospel, but between the form of civil politics under the covenant of the law and civil politics in the time of the gospel.¹⁹¹⁴ Just as the role of Israel's priests is fulfilled not in the Christian clergy but in Christ, so the role of Israel's kings is fulfilled not in contemporary civil magistrates but in Christ. No contemporary nation, no matter how widely the gospel is publicly embraced, is in a covenanted relationship with God analogous to that of Israel, and Christians should never try to force the typological judgment of God's law on contemporary political societies, whether Christian or not.

Christians can make a strong argument for religious liberty based on the creation of human beings in the image of God, each of whom is called to follow her conscience with respect to the demands of piety and justice, not to mention the truth. Human beings

¹⁹¹⁴That Christ declined even to *admit* that the woman caught in adultery should be stoned – something hardly outside of his mission as a prophet of God's word! – suggests that he intended to teach more than simply that private persons should not execute judgment.

are not *right* when they act impiously or unjustly, but they do have *the right* to exercise agency and responsibility in acting according to conscience before God. The new covenant of the gospel, in contrast to the old covenant of the law, recognizes the importance of such voluntary righteousness in its use of the means of word and sacrament (rather than the sword) for the building of a voluntary community of faith. The example of Christ and his apostles thus suggests that Christians should seek the conversion of the nations and the manifestation of the truth through persuasion rather than through appeals to the authority of public magistrates. The honor of God in the age of the gospel is defended not by the willingness of Christians to kill blasphemers, idolaters, or false teachers, but by the willingness of Christians to die for such persons in conformity to Christ's self-sacrificial love. Here the sectarian side of Calvin's ecclesiology *should* be emphasized as a key premise for the affirmation of religious liberty, even though the social context of Christendom limited Calvin's ability practically to implement the reality of a voluntary church (what we might identify as the limits of Calvin's theological "social imaginary").¹⁹¹⁵ To conceive of the church as the body of the faithful gathered around the Eucharist and subject to discipline is necessarily to abandon the dangerous ideal of Christendom in which all persons are expected to be members of the church. We cannot have it both ways. If the church is a voluntary institution under the free proclamation of the gospel, it cannot also rest on the coercive authority of civil law or the limitation of free speech. Still, we should not forget that it is Calvin who gave us the tools to recognize this differentiation of the church as a voluntary society from the broader society in which membership is obligatory, and it is Calvin who stressed so strongly the difference between the typological commonwealth of Israel under the law and a political society of Christians under the gospel.

¹⁹¹⁵See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

2. *Natural Law as Public Reason*

Second, Calvin's emphasis on natural law, a standard known to believers and nonbelievers alike, as the standard for just government offers Christians a basis for public engagement that corresponds closely to John Rawls's later account of public reason. As such, it poses a challenge to Christians who assume that scripture is somehow a blueprint for Christian politics. For Calvin the standard for civil government is not the Torah nor is it biblical law in general. Rather, the standard is the moral or natural law, which Calvin also identifies as the law of love or the standard of equity. The final authority as to the content of natural law is scripture, but natural law, especially as it pertains to the temporal life of society, is also known through reason, the sciences, human experience, and conscience. Indeed, in practical terms these sources have much more to say about the various questions that arise under the general rubric of political science than does scripture, and in pluralistic societies they are the only widely accepted basis for policy and law.

John Rawls describes the core concern of his concept of public reason as

the fact of reasonable pluralism – the fact that a plurality of conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious, philosophical, and moral, is the normal result of its culture of free institutions. Citizens realize that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding on the basis of their irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines. In view of this, they need to consider what kinds of reasons they may reasonably give one another when fundamental political questions are at stake. I propose that in public reason comprehensive doctrines of truth or right be replaced by an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens.¹⁹¹⁶

Rawls argues that it is essential for religious believers to recognize that their “zeal to embody the whole truth in politics is incompatible with an idea of public reason that belongs with democratic citizenship.”¹⁹¹⁷ Thus he posits public reason as an outworking of the “criterion of reciprocity [which] says: our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we should offer for our political options ... are

¹⁹¹⁶Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 441.

¹⁹¹⁷Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 442.

sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept those reasons.”¹⁹¹⁸ The point is not to exclude religion from political culture, but to seek a common basis for discussion in the discourse of judges and government officials and the oratory of elective politics. Although Rawls's early version of public reason was justifiably criticized for its suggestion that political commitments could not be driven by religious reasons or motives, his final version of the concept accepts the legitimacy of political engagement decisively rooted in a religious comprehensive doctrine, as long as such engagement conforms to agreed upon liberal principles and procedures and seeks to persuade the other members of society on the basis of arguments that are publicly accessible (whether or not persuasive) to all. Rawls thus distinguishes public reason, which seeks to be accessible to multiple comprehensive doctrines, from what he calls “secular reason,” which would require all citizens to be committed to a comprehensive non-religious doctrine. Rejecting the latter, Rawls goes so far as to identify a Thomist version of natural law theory, such as that articulated by John Finnis, as just such a legitimate form of public reason.¹⁹¹⁹

Clearly problems remain with the many finer details of Rawls's description of public reason, and it is well-beyond the scope of this conclusion to engage those problems here. My point is simply to suggest that Calvin's emphasis on natural law as a standard for politics that is universal in its scope and accessibility offers Christians *something like* public reason: a means by which they can participate in moral and political arguments without always preaching at non believers or requiring the confession of Christ and the authority of scripture as a basis for discussion. Christians need not and should not require *exclusively* on public reason, I would argue, but the

¹⁹¹⁸Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 446-447.

¹⁹¹⁹Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 451-452. See John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). Timothy P. Jackson rightly identifies cases such as the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr., in which prophetic religion is called to challenge what is broadly accepted to be within the bounds of public reason. Jackson, *Political Agape*, forthcoming.

inclusive use of something like public reason, the attempt to find common moral and political ground with persons who are not Christians, is integral to the sort of neighbor-love that Christ requires. Christians are called not only to walk as self-sacrificial servants, doing good to the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:43-48), but to exercise humility and to seek peace insofar as it depends on them. At the very least this requires that we work through our temporal disagreements with nonbelievers in a manner that prioritizes peace and mutual respect, recognizing and fostering common ground where it exists. If Paul could appeal to the common ground he shared with Athenian pagans in his evangelistic appeal on Mars Hill (Acts 17), surely we ought to do the same when it comes to the matters of secular politics. To prioritize moral or political perfection above the existence of peace and order itself is to undermine the very reason for which civil government was ordained by God. In the name of perfect piety or justice, it destroys the possibility of any public peace or justice at all. It reduces politics to a zero-sum game in which participants are driven to the moral extremes, preventing the sort of problem-solving that rests on consensus or compromise.¹⁹²⁰

If Rawls's version of public reason has the virtue of calling us to the “duty of civility,”¹⁹²¹ Calvin's political theology calls us to appeal to publicly accessible natural law because it is the key to understanding the temporal purpose of the state under Christ and the appropriate form of love in political contexts. Even in the context of a commonwealth of Christians, Calvin argues, it is insufficient to justify a particular political position or policy simply on the basis of scriptural proof-texts. Any given commandment, practice, or narrative of scripture must be interpreted in terms of its biblical and covenantal

¹⁹²⁰Excellent examples of this are two of the most hot-button issues in contemporary American politics: same-sex unions and abortion. The intransigence of right and left alike on these issues have prevented the enactment of common sense laws that have widespread public support, such as the legalization of civil unions and the prohibition of second and third trimester abortions except where the life of the mother is threatened, leading to outcomes (such as abortion-on-demand, same-sex marriage, or the rejection of same-sex unions altogether) in which the lack of public support threatens the integrity of the law itself.

¹⁹²¹Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 465.

context in light of the work of Christ. Laws must be identified as moral, ceremonial, or civil. Even if a certain principle is identified to be a fundamental principle of justice, it remains to do the hard work of determining whether or not that principle should be coercively enforced, and if so, how. This entire process of reasoning depends not only, and usually not even primarily, on the careful interpretation of scripture, but on a myriad of factors drawn from extrabiblical knowledge and experience, areas in which Calvin recognized that nonbelievers often excel above Christians. Given the increasing complexity and differentiation of modern societies, our reliance on relatively independent strands of rationality and expertise only render this recognition all the more apt. Common sense, in addition to love, requires Christians to listen to their nonbelieving neighbors rather than simply to rule over them.

The point is not that the rhetoric and terminology of 'natural law' – often seen as highly compromised due to its abuse over the centuries – must be used. Indeed, it is important to stress once again that Calvin's account of natural law is not a systematic epistemological theory at all, as is that of Thomism. Though Calvin's use of natural law is sometimes criticized for being casual and unsystematic, in the real world of democratic politics this is actually an advantage. When claiming that a particular political or moral principle is taught in nature Calvin appealed to a range of authorities in addition to scripture, including reason, the testimony of pagan philosophers, human sentiment or conscience, experience, or the laws of nations, all of which can be described as expressions of what the Reformed confessions came to call 'general revelation.' In the twenty-first century we might compare Calvin's use of natural law to philosophical arguments about human and civil rights, widely embraced moral values, the data of science, history and sociology, or the UN Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. All of this data should be used by Christians as the primary means, subject to scripture, of determining how civil and political affairs should rightly be organized and conducted. In

this way Christians demonstrate what Tipton, appealing to Troeltsch's categories of church and sect, calls

a 'church-like' stance of willingness to engage the society as a whole and wrestle with it dialectically, practically, and structurally, in the cautiously hopeful expectation that such engagement can make the world more humane and just. It respects yet seeks to press beyond the stance of the sect as a witness community set against the world or a sheltering community adapted to it. By arguing across multiple moral languages and visions, the church is willing to engage the larger society more intimately and dialectically than the religious kingdom holding itself at arms length from the political and economic realms.¹⁹²²

In short, whereas in its faithful gathering around the word and sacraments under the discipline of the gospel the church functions as a 'sect' proclaiming salvation to the world, as a body of believers participating in social life by means of general revelation and public reason it functions as a 'church' serving the temporal good of the world.

3. *The Church as Public Church*

Finally, as the ministerial expression of the kingdom of Christ whose very existence is tied to its faithful proclamation of the gospel, the church's public engagement must be characterized by a clear distinction between the faithful proclamation Christ's word and the attempt of Christians humbly to follow that word in the real world, in service to their neighbors and in accord with the virtues of love and prudence. Synthesizing the best features of Troeltsch's types of 'sect' and 'church', as Calvin did, the church functions as a public church concerned with both the salvation and the temporal welfare of the world.¹⁹²³

As a sect, the church is embodied in the gathering of the faithful around the word and sacraments in the exclusive sense that the church's authoritative proclamation is

1922Steven M. Tipton, *Public Pulpits: Methodists and Mainline Churches in the Moral Argument of Public Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 436.

1923On the idea of the public church see Robert N. Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), especially 243-248; Robert N. Bellah, et. al., *The Good Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), especially 179-219; Martin Marty, *The Public Church: Mainline-Evangelical-Catholic* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981); and Tipton, *Public Pulpits*, 399-442.

limited to the word and its celebration of the sacraments is *limited by discipline*. The ministers of the church have no discretionary power over such functions and may not turn them toward the prudentially ordered practices of politics, so politicizing the church. But this does not mean the church's purpose or vision are sectarian. On the contrary, the church's vision is always universal, its character always public. Its central task is to proclaim the restoration of the world, in both its material and human dimensions, to all who are willing to hear it. This involves a complete proclamation of both law and gospel, including God's purposes for human beings in restoring them to communion with God and one another. Thus the church's proclamation of the word encompasses what scripture teaches about the whole human being as a social creature made in God's image for communion, for justice, and for holiness. It is the gospel that provides the ultimate horizon for our understanding of human flourishing, and it is toward the law, virtues, and example of Christ that all human social endeavors should aspire. The will of Christ is the *final* measure of the appropriate aims of law and policy. But here the church is only a servant; it does not have the authority to determine what it will or will not proclaim as the word of God. It may not exceed that word, nor may it fall short of it. The faithful proclamation of the word is *the* essential mark of the true church.

That said, Calvin was no scriptural literalist. He recognized that scripture must always be interpreted, and that it is only properly interpreted in light of its covenantal and eschatological fulfillment in Christ, the true Word of God. Thus the church should be very wary of moving from a proclamation of the word of God to an authoritative proclamation of policy or politics based on the use of proof-texts. It is well beyond the spiritual authority of the church in most cases to endorse particular candidates or to call for specific legislation, for example, and insofar as the church transgresses that boundary it ceases to administer the authority of Christ's kingdom. At this point I draw precisely the opposite implication from Calvin's political theology and regarding modernity as

does André Biéler. Biéler calls the church to refuse the sort of secularization and social differentiation that results in moral pluralism, maintaining instead the need for the church to preach a holistic ethic that covers every aspect of life. “The time has come to put an end to the alienation of modern men and women, who – in obeying all kinds of different, frequently contradictory imperatives in their professional political, family and individual behaviour – find their personalities thus chopped into compartments and their responsibility brought to naught.”¹⁹²⁴ For Biéler, as for so many other Calvinists over the years, the legacy of the reformer of Geneva is to be understood in terms of a comprehensive and expansive worldview that is to be brought authoritatively to bear in every area of life.

“Too many believers ... condemn what they call the faith's or the church's meddling in political, social or occupational matters. Having lost the fundamentally biblical vision of the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, they take refuge in sentimental pietism that allows only a rudimentary part of the individual to be governed by the faith... For lack of a systematic theological vision of the purposes of society and of the appropriate ways for acting, they want to work for their faith but remain unconsciously prisoners of the sociological pressures from which they suffer.”¹⁹²⁵

Yet Biéler confuses humility on the part of the church, necessitated by faithful openness to the forms of God's revelation beyond scripture, with moral confusion. It is not an abandonment of the lordship of Christ in favor of sociological pressures that makes Christians wary of dogmatic political theological visions, but a refusal to see the two confused.

Does this destroy any possibility of the church's authoritative prophetic witness?

It does not, because the church's prophetic witness does not consist in particular statements of politics or policy but in its proclamation of the righteousness of God. It is when the church faithfully proclaims that the love and justice of God require care for the poor and the oppressed, for instance, or that it condemns rape and murder, that it calls

¹⁹²⁴André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought* (ed. Edward Dommen; trans. James Greig; Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2005 [1961]), 458.

¹⁹²⁵Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, 459.

societies to judgment. The Reformed churches of South Africa pulled the foundation out from under Apartheid when they declared racism to be a heresy, not when they offered political proposals for its dismantling. Similarly, the Protestant churches of Germany challenged the Nazi state when they simply proclaimed the unity of Gentile and Jew in Christ and the justice embodied in the Ten Commandments (as some leaders of the Confessing Church recognized).¹⁹²⁶ The church's uncompromising proclamation of the word renders it prophetic in its witness; there is no need for pastors or denominations to model themselves after think tanks, interest groups, or political parties by packaging such proclamation in the form of policy statements.

When the church does remain faithful to its mission in the word, sacraments, and discipline, it prophetically shapes its members' understanding of justice. The proclamation of Jesus as the new humanity calls all human beings across race, gender, religion, and socio-economic status to communion in Christ and in the love of Christ, all of which comes to expression in the Eucharist. The church's worship testifies to the equality of all of its members, who are called to devote themselves, in love and justice, to a political economy of mutual service and the sharing of material possessions. Even here, where the church is arguably at its most 'sectarian,' the public ethical implications are immense.¹⁹²⁷ There are the obvious areas traditionally emphasized by Christian ethics, of course, such as honor for parents and those in authority, respect for the sanctity of human life, care for the economic, social, and spiritual needs of others, especially the weak and the oppressed, the inviolability of the truth, and love and fidelity in marriage. Yet the church's sectarian witness also calls human beings to embody the virtues of Christ, including public virtues like love, justice, peacemaking, generosity, mercy, and

¹⁹²⁶Similarly, it was the failure of the Presbyterian churches of the antebellum South to preach the whole word of God, to share the Eucharist with blacks in a spirit of equality, and to discipline their slave-holding members in accord with the word and sacraments, rather than their refusal to offer political proposals, that indicts them for their collusion in racial oppression.

¹⁹²⁷This is the excellent contribution of so many Christian ethicists working from within Neo-Anabaptist and liturgical perspectives in recent years.

compassion, and inward virtues like contentment, piety, and humility. It calls human beings to embody the self-sacrificial service of Christ toward the suffering and the marginalized, to seek peace and reconciliation among those who are in conflict or at war, and to resist by all appropriate means those who act unjustly toward others. It even points toward the appropriate relationship of human beings to the material creation and its resources as one of stewardship and care. Where the church fails in these areas and where Christians sin, as happens more often than not, the discipline and reconciliation offered through the word and sacraments exhibits the hope of the kingdom of Christ in a manner that far transcends temporal politics. It therefore calls human beings to avoid foisting messianic and utopian dreams upon the state, a burden whose weight too often results in political and moral tragedy, casting their hope instead on Christ.

But the church in Calvin's conception does not only consist of the body of the faithful gathered around the word and sacraments. The church also refers to the body of the faithful as they serve Christ and their neighbors in the world at large, working out the implications of the word and sacraments to the best of their ability, in a spirit of humility and in accord with their various vocations. Here the church corresponds to Troeltsch's 'church' type insofar as it turns in service to seek the temporal well-being of the world. This public service also makes sense only against the backdrop of the church's ministry of the gospel. The gospel vision of righteousness is the ultimate prophetic horizon for all of human life, enabling the church to fulfill what Steven Tipton calls the role of "questioner" or "interlocutor" for the moral argument of public life. But the church must avoid the temptation too readily to "foreclose public argument," as if even thoughtful Christians were agreed on most matters of public import. It must leave believers free to pursue – and debate – the political implications of the gospel in accord with wisdom and prudence, not to mention in a manner appropriate to their own vocation, education,

skill, and opportunity, and always chastened by humility.¹⁹²⁸ As Tipton puts it,

If public life or the public sphere is defined by such moral argument, dialogue, and 'backtalk' taking place in it, then we can distinguish the idea of public churches from the paradigmatic forms religion takes within the state, that is, from a state church such as the Church of England or a theocratic state such as the Khomeini regime of Iran. We can also distinguish public churches from the forms religion takes within political society, that is, from specific parties or movements mobilized against other religious or secular parties to work for against the state itself, like the Christian Democratic parties of postwar Europe or the Catholic Church in Poland under Communist rule.¹⁹²⁹

It is in the public words and deeds of the church's members in the political kingdom, witnessing to the righteousness of Christ, in other words, that the church also serves as a public church. Here Christians witness to their convictions regarding the justice or love demanded by the gospel, both as individuals and as groups. Here it is appropriate for ethicists, farmers, politicians, soldiers, mothers, students, or business owners to argue vigorously and thoughtfully for the vision of public righteousness most in accord with their own experience, expertise, and conviction. Yet here we are in the realm of freedom, each Christian ultimately responsible for his own conduct. To limit the authoritative proclamation of the church in this area is to free Christians for witness, rather than to restrain them. Within the appropriate constraints of a vigorous political theology, Christians should be free to act according to the best insights of their virtue, character, and conscience, in the spirit of Christian liberty.

As Paul Ramsey warned in his 1967 book *Who Speaks for the Church?*, a church that misuses scripture and its authoritative proclamation to overdetermine the actions of Christians in politics undermines its own moral authority, tyrannizes over consciences, and prevents the body from fulfilling its calling with integrity before God. In Ramsey's view the mid-twentieth century mainline Protestant denominations in America became obsessed with constructing policy statements that confused political positions

¹⁹²⁸Tipton, *Public Pulpits*, 413, 317.

¹⁹²⁹Tipton, *Public Pulpits*, 413-414.

determined by prudence with the *de jure* prophetic authority of the church. They indicated that the church had lost sight of its true message.

[E]cumenical social action pronouncements have presumed to encompass the prudence of churchmen in their capacities as citizens. It has been easier to arrive at specific recommendations and condemnations after inadequate deliberation than to penetrate to a deeper and deeper level the meaning of Christian responsibility—leaving to the conscience of individuals and groups of individuals both the task and freedom to arrive at specific conclusions ... about particular social policies. Radical steps need to be taken in ecumenical ethics if ever we are to correct the pretense that we are makers of political policy and get on with our proper task of nourishing, judging, and repairing the moral and political *ethos* of our time.¹⁹³⁰

When pastors and theologians address matters of policy dictated by prudence, Ramsey observes, they have no more expertise – and they often have less – than the individual Christians in whose vocation and area of expertise such matters properly lie. In his own day, he notes wryly, the conservative and liberal wings of the church looked remarkably like “the secular variety of the same opinions.”¹⁹³¹

The reality is that it is only insofar as the church demonstrates that its proclamation is that of Christ, rather than that of a particular ideological movement or agenda, that the church maintains prophetic credibility at all. It was the conviction of his hearers that he was prophetically bringing the *gospel* to bear on the injustice of racial segregation that gave Martin Luther King, Jr., his public moral authority, not the creativity of his political proposals. Likewise it was Karl Barth's zeal for the *sovereignty of Christ* in the proclamation of the church that gave the Barmen Declaration such authority as an inspiration for the Confessing Church. We should not forget that for every example of a King and a Barth there were a myriad of pastors who claimed prophetic authority for the unjust causes of segregation or Nazism, and it was against such *abuses* of prophetic authority that Barth and King waged their battles. The pulpits of every nation cried out with patriotic rhetoric during World War I, and American clergy

1930Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 15.

1931Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church?*, 21.

have rushed to claim the support of God in every war the United States has fought. Yet when the church abandons the restraint of the word in the name of relevance it is rightly ignored by Christians and nonbelievers alike. Who pays any attention to the statements of denominations on political matters, or the political ranting of a pastor from the pulpit, except those who hear in them the echo of their own previously existing commitments? The authoritative prophetic proclamation of the church is sufficiently sacred that it should not be squandered in the name of every political cause that happens to excite our passions. Pastors are the servants of the word, not its lords.

It is the dual insistence on 1) the authority of the *word* of the kingdom as proclaimed by the church, and 2) the liberty of the *Christian* as she serves Christ in the passing affairs of the present age that is the heartbeat of Calvin's two kingdoms theology. Calvin's two kingdoms theology frees the church to proclaim a word to the world that is truly prophetic, even as it frees believers for engagement in politics that can be truly faithful. It keeps the church focused on the priority of the gospel of restoration, even as it reminds the state of its temporal mission subject to God. For contemporary Christians it offers a warning that we dare not reject political liberalism in order to serve Christ as Lord. Our calling is serve him in *this* place, at *this* time, through *these* people, and through *these* liberal practices and commitments that we have been blessed to inherit. Through the prophetic proclamation of the gospel by the church and the public engagement of Christians we convey to our secular communities the immeasurable wealth of Christ's gospel and the wisdom of the moral tradition that flows from it. Christ calls the church to love him and our neighbors in two kingdoms, and that is a calling that we should not take lightly.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Calvin's Writings.

Calvin's Commentaries. 22 volumes. Translated by John King et. al. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's 'De Clementia'. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo. Leiden: Brill, 1969.

Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice. Translated by Mary D. Beaty and Benjamin Wirt Farley. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991.

Calvin: Theological Treatises. Translated by J.K.S. Reid. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954.

Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy que tiennent tous chrestiens de la Trinité des personnes en un seul Dieu: Congre les erreurs détestables de Michel Servet Espagnol. Où il est aussi monstré qu'il est licite de punir les hérétiques, et qu'à bon droict ce meschant a esté executé par iustice en la ville de Genève. Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1554. Post-Reformation Digital Library: <http://www.prdl.org/search.php?q=D%C3%A9claration+pour+maintenir+la+vraye+foy>).

Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1536 Edition. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.

Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1559 Edition. Edited by John T. McNeill et. al. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960.

Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos. Edited by T. H. L. Parker. Leiden: Brill: 1981.

Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia, Corpus Reformatorum. Volumes 29-87. Edited by Johann Wilhelm Baum, August Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss. Brunswick and Berlin: 1863-1900.

John Calvin's Sermons on 2 Samuel: Chapter 1-13. Translated by Douglas Kelly. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1992.

John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians. Revision of the translation by Arthur Golding. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1973.

John Calvin's Sermons on Galatians. Translated by Arthur Golding. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1997.

John Calvin's Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1:1-11:4. Translated by Rob Roy McGregor. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009.

John Calvin's Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles: Chapters 1-7. Translated by Rob Roy

McGregor. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2008.

John Calvin's Sermons on the Beatitudes. Taken from the *Gospel Harmony*. Delivered in Geneva in 1560. Translated by Robert White. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2006.

John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments. Translated by Benjamin W. Farley. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980.

Men, Women, and Order in the Church: Three Sermons (Sermons on 1 Corinthians). Translated by Seth Skolnitsky. Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications.

Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters. 7 Volumes. Edited by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983.

Sermons from Job. Translated by Leroy Nixon. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952.

Sermons on Deuteronomy. Translated by Arthur Golding. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987.

Sermons on Jeremiah. Translated by Blair Reynolds. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.

Sermons on the Book of Micah. Translated by Benjamin Wirt Farley. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2003.

Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy and Titus. Translated by Arthur Golding. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983.

Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ. Translated by Leroy Nixon. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950.

Songs of the Nativity: Selected Sermons on Luke 1 and 2. Translated by Robert White. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2008.

Supplementa Calviniana: Sermons inédits. Edited by Hanns Rückert et. al. Neukirchen: 1936-2006.

The Gospel According to Isaiah: Seven Sermons on Isaiah 53 Concerning the Passion and Death of Christ. Translated by Leroy Nixon. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953.

Treatises against the Anabaptists and against the Libertines. Translated by Benjamin Wirt Farley. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982.

Other Sources.

Ainsworth, Arthur David. *The Relations Between Church and State in the City and Canton of Geneva*. Atlanta: Stein Printing Company, 1965.

Allen, J. W. *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century*. Second Edition.

London: Methuen, 1941.

Armstrong, Brian G. *Calvin and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.

Armstrong, Brian G. "Exegetical and Theological Principles in Calvin's Preaching, with Special Attention to His Sermons on the Psalms. *Ordentlich und Fruchtbar: Festschrift fur Willem van't Spijker*. Edited by Wilhelm Neuser and Herman Selderhuis. Leiden: J.J. Groen en Zoon, 1997. [191-203]

Armstrong, Brian G. *Semper Reformanda: The Case of the French Reformed Church, 1559-1620. Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*. Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 22. Edited by Fred Graham. Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994. [119-140]

Armstrong, Brian G. "The Pastoral Office in Calvin and Pierre du Moulin." *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag*. Edited by Willem Van't Spijker. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991.

Armstrong, Brian G. "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Teaching on the Ministry." *Calvin and the Holy Spirit*. Edited by Peter De Klerk. Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1989. [99-111]

Augustijn, Cornelis. "Calvin in Strasbourg." *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*. Edited by Wilhelm H. Neuser. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. [166-177]

Avis, Paul D. *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.

Backus, Irena. "Calvin's Concept of Natural and Roman Law." *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 7-26.

Backus, Irena. "Calvin's Knowledge of Greek Language and Philosophy." *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research, Princeton, August 20-24, 2002*. Edited by Herman J. Selderhuis. Geneva: Droz, 2004. [343-350]

Backus, Irena. *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003.

Backus, Irena. "These Holy Men: Calvin's Patristic Models for Establishing the Company of Pastors." *Calvin and the Company of Pastors: Papers Presented at the 14th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society May 22-24, 2003*. Edited by David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2004. [25-51]

Baker, J. Wayne. "Christian Discipline and the Early Reformed Tradition: Bullinger and Calvin." *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin*. Edited by Robert V. Schnucker. Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1988. [107-119]

Baker, J. Wayne. "Christian Discipline, Church and State, and Toleration: Bullinger,

- Calvin, and Basel 1530-1555." *Das Reformierte Erbe: Festschrift für Gottfried W. Locher zu seinem 80. Geburtstag*. Volume 1. Edited by Heiko A. Oberman, et. al. Theologischer Verlag Zürich: 1992. [35-48]
- Baker, J. Wayne. "Church Discipline or Civil Punishment: On the Origins of the Reformed Schism, 1528-1531." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23.1 (Spring, 1985): 3-18.
- Baker, J. Wayne. "Church, State, and Dissent: The Crisis of the Swiss Reformation, 1531-1536." *Church History* 57.2 (June, 1988): 135-152.
- Baker, J. Wayne. "Church, State, and Toleration: John Locke and Calvin's Heirs in England, 1644-1689." *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*. Edited by W. Fred Graham. Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1994. [525-543]
- Baker, J. Wayne. "Erastianism in England: The Zurich Connection." *Die Zürcher Reformation: Ausstrahlungen und Ruckwirkungen*. Edited by Alfred Schindler and Hans Stichelberger. Bern: Peter Lang, 2001. [327-349]
- Baker, J. Wayne. *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980.
- Baker, J. Wayne. "Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect." *Calvin Studies VIII: The Westminster Confession in Current Thought*. Edited by John H. Leith. Davidson, NC: Colloquium on Calvin Studies, 1996. [58-75]
- Baker, J. Wayne. "John Owen, John Locke, and Calvin's Heirs in England." *Calvin and the State*. Edited by Peter De Klerk. Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1993. [83-102]
- Balke, Wilhelm. "Some Characteristics of Calvin's Eschatology." *Christian Hope in Context*. Volume 1. Edited by A. Van Egmond and D. Van Keulen. Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2001. [30-64]
- Balke, Willem. *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*. Translated by Willem Heyner. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981.
- Ball, Milner S. "The Significance for Political Theory and Action of Calvin's Sermons Second Samuel." *Calvin Studies I*. Edited by John H. Leith et al. Davidson, NC: Davidson College, 1982. [40-51]
- Barth, Karl. *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*. Eugene, Wipf and Stock, 1960.
- Battenhouse, R.W. "The Doctrine of Man in Calvin and in Renaissance Platonism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (1948): 447-471.
- Bavinck, Herman. "Calvin and Common Grace." *Calvin and the Reformation: Four Studies*. Originally published in *Princeton Theological Review*, 1909. Edited by William Park Armstrong. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004. [99-130].

Republished as Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace." Translated by Raymond C. Van Leeuwen. *Calvin Theological Journal* 24:1 (1989): 35-65.

- Bell, Daniel M., Jr. *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church Rather than the State*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009.
- Bellah, Robert N. "Civil Religion in America." *The Robert Bellah Reader*. Edited by Robert N. Bellah and Steven M. Tipton. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. [225-245]
- Bellah, Robert N., et. al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008 [1985].
- Bellah, Robert N., et. al. *The Good Society*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992 [1991].
- Benedict, Philip. "Calvin and the Transformation of Geneva." *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society, 1509-2009*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. [1-13]
- Benedict, Philip. "Un roi, une loi, deux fois: parameters for the history of Catholic-Reformed Co-existence in France 1555-1685." *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*. Edited by Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. [65-93]
- Benedict, Philip. *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Bennett, John. *Christian Ethics and Social Policy*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946.
- Berman, Harold J. *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Berman, Harold J. *Law and Revolution II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Biel, Pamela. *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness: Heinrich Bullinger and the Zurich Clergy 1535-1575*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1991.
- Biéler, André. *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*. Edited by Edward Dommen. Translated by James Greig. Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2005 [1961].
- Bierma, Lyle D. "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 304-321.
- Boeke, Brandt B. "Calvin's Doctrine of Civil Government." *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 11 (1981): 57-79. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [19-41]
- Boer, Erik Alexander de. *John Calvin in the Visions of Ezekiel: Historical and*

Hermeneutical Studies in John Calvin's 'sermons ineditis' especially on Ezek. 36-48. Kerkhistorische Bijdragen 21. Leiden/Boston, 2004.

- Boer, Roland. *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Bohatec, Josef. *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche.* Breslau: Marcus Verlag, 1937.
Excerpt of pp 124-128 and 158-164 in Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?* Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970. [26-30]
- Bolt, John. "A Pearl and a Leaven': John Calvin's Critical Two-Kingdoms Eschatology." *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology: Legacy and Prospect.* Edited by Sung Wook Chung. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009. [242-265]
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Ethics.* Edited by Clifford J. Green et. al. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.
- Bonivard, Francois de. "On the Ecclesiastical Polity of Geneva." *Transition and Revolution.* Edited by Robert M. Kingdon. Minneapolis: Burges, 1974. [104-107]
- Bouwsma, William J. *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Bouwsma, William J. "The Peculiarity of the Reformation in Geneva." *Religion and Culture in Renaissance and Reformation.* Edited by Steven Ozment. Volume XI. Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies. Kirksville, Mo: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989.
- Breen, Quirinus. "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition." *Christianity and Humanism.* Grand Rapids: 1968.
- Breen, Quirinus. *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931.
- Briggs, Charles F. *The Body Broken: Medieval Europe 1300-1520.* New York: Routledge, 2011. Peter Fraenkel. London: The Centenary Press: 1946 [1934]. [15-64]
- Brunner, Emil. *Natural Theology.* Translated by Peter Fraenkel. London: Geoffrey Bles: Centenary, 1946.
- Brunner, Emil. *The Misunderstanding of the Church.* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953.
- Bucer, Martin. *Concerning the True Care of Souls.* Translated by Martin Beale. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009.
- Bucer, Martin. *De Regno Christi.* Translated by Wilhelm Pauck. *Melanchthon and Bucer.* Edited by Wilhelm Pauck. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1969.
- Burnett, Amy Nelson. "A Tale of Three Churches: Parishes and Pastors in Basel, Strasbourg and Geneva." *Calvin and the Company of Pastors: Papers Presented*

at the 14th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society May 22-24, 2003. Edited by David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2004. [95-124]

- Burnett, Amy Nelson. *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline*. Kirksville, Mo: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1994.
- Cameron, Euan. Editor. *Early Modern Europe: An Oxford History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Cameron, Euan. Editor. *The Sixteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Cargill Thompson, W.D. J. *The Political Thought of Martin Luther*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1984.
- Caswell, R. N. "Calvin's View of Ecclesiastical Discipline." *John Calvin: A Collection of Essays*. Edited by G. E. Duffield. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966. [210-226]
- Cavanaugh, William T. *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Chenevière, Marc-Edouard. *La pensée politique de Calvin*. Geneva and Paris: Labor and Fides, 1937. Excerpt of pp 181-190 reprinted in Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?* Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970. [11-15]
- Chenevière, Marc. "Did Calvin Advocate Theocracy?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 9 (1937): 160-168. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [108-117]
- Chung, Paul (Sueng Hoon). *Spirituality and Social Ethics in John Calvin: A Pneumatological Perspective*. New York: University Press of America, 2000.
- Clark, R. S. "Calvin on the *Lex Naturalis*." *Stulos Theological Journal* 6:1-2 (May-November 1998): 1-22.
- Cochrane, Arthur C. "Natural Law in Calvin." *Church-State Relations in Ecumenical Perspective*. Edited by E. A. Smith. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1966. [176-217]
- Coleman, Janet. "Property and Poverty." *Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought: c. 350-c.1450*. Edited by J. H. Burns. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. [607-648]
- Cottret, Bernard. *Calvin: A Biography*. Translated by M. Wallace McDonald. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000 [1995].
- Dandeleit, Thomas. "Creating a Protestant Constantine: Martin Bucer's *De Regno Christi* and the Foundations of English Imperial Political Theology." *Politics and Reformations: Communities, Politics, Nations, and Empires: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady, Jr.* Edited by Christopher Ocker, et. al. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

[539-550]

- Davis, Kenneth R. "No Discipline, No Church: An Anabaptist Contribution To the Reformed Tradition." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13 (1982): 43-58.
- De Greef, Wulfert. *The Writings of John Calvin, Expanded Edition: An Introductory Guide*. Translated by Lyle D. Bierma. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.
- De Gruchy, John W. *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- De Lagarde, Georges. *Recherches Sur L'esprit Politique de la Réforme*. Paris: A. an dJ. Picard and Cie, 1926. Excerpt of 66.453-455 in Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?* Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970. [8]
- Demura, Akira. "Calvin's and Oecolampadius' Concept of Church Discipline." *Calvinus Ecclesiae Genevesis Custos*. Edited by Wilhelm Neuser. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984. [187-189]
- Demura, Akira. *Church Discipline According to Johannes Oecolampadius in the Setting of His Life and Thought*. PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1964.
- Demura, Akira. "From Zwingli to Calvin: A Comparative Study of Zwingli's *Elenchus* and Calvin's *Briève Instruction*." *Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte*. Edited by Alfred Schindler and Hans Stickelberger. Bern: Peter Lang, 2001. [87-99]
- Deppermann, Klaus. "Schwenckfeld and Leo Jud on the Advantages and Disadvantages of the State Church." *Schwenckfeld and Early Schwenckfeldianism: Papers Presented at the Colloquium on Schwenckfeld and the Schwenckfelders September 17-22, 1984*. Edited by Peter C. Erb. Pennsburg, PA: Schwenckfelder Library, 1986. [211-236]
- De Ridder, Richard R. "John Calvin's Views on Discipline: A Comparison of the *Institution* of 1536 and the *Institutes* of 1559." *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 223-230.
- De Roover, Jakob, and S. N. Balagangadhara. "John Locke, Christian Liberty, and the Predicament of Liberal Toleration." *Political Theory* 36:4 (2008): 523-549.
- De Toqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. Translated by George Lawrence. Edited by J. P. Mayer. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.
- Dooyeweerd Herman. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought: The Necessary Presuppositions of Philosophy*. 4 volumes. Translated by David H. Freeman and William S. Young. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953-1958.
- Douglass, Jane Dempsey. "Calvin's Relation to Social and Economic Change." *Church and Society* 74 (1984): 75-81.

- Douglass, Jane Dempsey. "Christian Freedom: What Calvin Learned at the School of Women." *Church History* 53 (June 1984): 155-173.
- Douglass, Jane Dempsey. *Women, Freedom and Calvin*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985.
- Doumergue, Émile. *Jean Calvin, Les Hommes et Les Choses de Son Temps*. Volume 5. Lausanne: Georges Bridel and Company, 1917. [Excerpts of 440, 450-453, 611-614, 701-706 in Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?* Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970. [1-7]
- Dowey, Edward A. "Calvin on Church and State." *Reformed and Presbyterian World* 24 (1957): 244-252. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [118-126]
- Dowey, Edward A. *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.
- Ellul, Jacques. *The Theological Foundations of Law*. Translated by Marguerite Wieser. New York: Doubleday, 1960.
- Elwood, Christopher. *The Body Broken: The Calvinist Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-Century France*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Estep, William R. *The Anabaptist Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1975 [1963].
- Estes, James M. "Erastus, Melanchthon, and the Office of Christian Magistrate." *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 18 (1998): 21-39.
- Estes, James M. "Officium principis christiani: Erasmus and the Origins of the Protestant State Church." *Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte* 83 (1992): 49-72.
- Estes, James M. *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon 1518-1559*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Estes, James M. "The Role of Godly Magistrates in the Church: Melanchthon as Luther's Interpreter and Collaborator." *Church History* 67.3 (September 1988): 463-483.
- Estes, James M. "Whether Secular Government Has the Right to Wield the Sword in Matters of Faith: An Anonymous Defense of Religious Toleration From Sixteenth-Century Nurnberg." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49.1 (January 1975): 22-37.
- Fast, Heinold and John H. Yoder. "How to Deal with Anabaptists: An Unpublished Letter of Heinrich Bullinger." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 33.2 (April 1959): 83-95.
- Finnis, John. *Natural Law and Natural Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

- Flaming, Darlene K. "The Apostolic and Pastoral Office: Theory and Practice in Calvin's Geneva." *Calvin and the Company of Pastors: Papers Presented at the 14th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society May 22-24, 2003*. Edited by David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2004. [149-172]
- Foster, Herbert D. "Calvin and His Followers Championed Representative Government." *Calvin and Calvinism*. Edited by Robert M. Kingdon et al. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1970. [36-45]
- Foster, Herbert Darling. "Calvin's Programme for a Puritan State in Geneva, 1536-1541." *Harvard Theological Review* 1 (1908): 391-434. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [63-107]
- Friedman, Jerome. *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy*. Geneva: Droz, 1978.
- Friedmann, Robert. *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998 [Herald Press, 1973].
- Fuchs, Eric. "Calvin's Ethics." *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society*. Edited by Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Smallmann. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. [145-158]
- Ganoczy, Alexandre. *The Young Calvin*. Translated by David Foxgrover and Wade Provo. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987 [1966].
- Gatis, G. Joseph. "The Political Theory of John Calvin." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (October-December 1996): 449-467.
- George, Timothy. "Calvin's *Psychopannychia*: Another Look." *In Honor of John Calvin, 1509-1564*. Edited by E.J. Furcha. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1987. [297-329]
- Godfrey, W. Robert. "Calvin and Theonomy." *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. Edited by William S. Barker et al. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990. [298-312]
- Gordon, Bruce. *Calvin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Gordon, Bruce. "Calvin and the Swiss Reformed Churches." *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620*. Edited by Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke, and Gillian Lewis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. [64-81]
- Gordon, Bruce. *The Swiss Reformation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Gordon, Bruce. "Toleration in the Early Swiss Reformation: the art and politics of Niklaus Manuel of Berne." *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*. Edited by Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. [128-144]

- Grabill, Stephen J. *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Graham, W. Fred. "Church and Society: The Difficulty of Sheathing Swords." *Readings in Calvin's Theology*. Edited by Donald McKim. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984. [275-290]
- Graham, W. Fred. "Calvin and the Political Order: An Analysis of the Three Explanatory Studies." *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin*. Edited by Robert V. Schnucker. Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1988. [51-61]
- Graham, W. Fred. *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact*. Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1971.
- Gregory, Eric. *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Greschat, Martin. *Martin Bucer: A Reformer and His Times*. Translated by Stephen E. Buckwalter. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 2004 [1990].
- Greschat, Martin. "The Relation Between Church and Civil Community in Bucer's Reforming Work." *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community*. Edited by D. F. Wright. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. [17-31]
- Guggisberg, Hans R. *Sebastian Castellio, 1515-1563: Humanist and Defender of Religious Toleration in a Confessional Age*. Translated and Edited by Bruce Gordon. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003.
- Guggisberg, Hans R. "Tolerance and Intolerance in Sixteenth-Century Basle." Edited by Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. [145-163]
- Gutierrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973.
- Haas, Gene. "Calvin, Natural Law, and the Two Kingdoms." *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*. Edited by Ryan G. McIlhenny. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2012. [33-63]
- Haas, Guenther. *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997.
- Haas, Guenther. "Calvin's Ethics." *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*. Edited by Donald K. McKim. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. [93-105]
- Haas, Guenther. "Calvin, the Church and Ethics." in *Calvin and the Church*. Papers Presented at the 13th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, May 24-26, 2001. Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2002.
- Hall, Basil. "Martin Bucer in England." *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community*. Edited by D. F. Wright. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

- Hammann, Gottfried. *Entre la Secte et la Cite: Le Projet d'Eglise du Réformateur Martin Bucer*. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1984.
- Hancock, Ralph C. *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Hancock, Ralph C. "Religion and the Limits of Limited Government." *Review of Politics* 50 (Fall 1988): 682-703.
- Harbison, E. Harris. "The Idea of Utility in John Calvin." *Christianity and History*. Princeton, 1964. [249-270]
- Harms, Frederik A.V. *In God's Custody: The Church, A History of Divine Protection: A Study of John Calvin's Ecclesiology Based on his Commentary on the Minor Prophets*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. "The Church and Liberal Democracy." *A Community of Character*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981. [72-86]
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Edited by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Heckel, Johannes. *Lex Charitatis: A Juristic Disquisition on Law in the Theology of Martin Luther*. Translated and Edited by Gottfried G. Krodel. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010 [1973].
- Heller, Henry. *The Conquest of Poverty: The Calvinist Revolt in Sixteenth Century France*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986.
- Helm, Paul. *Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Helm, Paul. "Calvin and Natural Law." *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 2 (1984): 5-22.
- Helm, Paul. *Calvin at the Centre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Helm, Paul. *John Calvin's Ideas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Hesselink, I. John. "Calvin on the Kingdom of Christ." *Religion Without Ulterior Motive*. Edited by E. A. J. G. Van Der Borght. Leiden: Brill, 2006. [139-158]
- Hesselink, I. John. *Calvin's Concept of the Law*. Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992.
- Hillar, Marian and Claire S. Allen. *Michael Servetus: Intellectual Giant, Humanist, and Martyr*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002.

- Hillar, Marian. *The Case of Michael Servetus (1511-1553): The Turning Point in the Struggle for Freedom of Conscience*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.
- Hoekema, Anthony. "Calvin's Doctrine of the Covenant of Grace." *Reformed Review* 15 (1962): 1-12.
- Hoekema, Anthony. "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching." *Calvin Theological Journal* 2 (1967): 133-161.
- Holder, R. Ward. "Calvin's Exegetical Understanding of the Office of Pastor." *Calvin and the Company of Pastors: Papers Presented at the 14th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society May 22-24, 2003*. Edited by David Foxgrover; Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2004. [179-209]
- Holtrop, Philip C. *The Bolsec Controversy on Predestination, from 1551-1555*. 2 Volumes. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1993.
- Holwerda, David E. "Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision." in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*. Edited by Donald K. McKim. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984. [311-342]
- Hopfl, Harro. Editor and Translator. *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Hopfl, Harro. *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Hopfl, Harro. "The Ideal of *Aristocratia Politiae Vicina* in the Calvinist Political Tradition." *Calvin and His Influence, 1509-2009*. Edited by Irena Backus and Philip Benedict. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. [46-66]
- Hudson, Winthrop S. "Democratic Freedom and Religious Faith in the Reformed Tradition," *Church History* 15 (1946): 177-194. Reprinted as "Calvin a Source of Resistance Theory, and Therefore of Democracy." *Calvin and Calvinism*. Edited by Robert M. Kingdon et al. Lexington, MA: Heath, 1970. [15-24]
- Hunt, R. N. Carew. "Calvin's Theory of Church and State." *Church Quarterly Review* 108 (1929): 56-71. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [2-18]
- Hunter, James Davison. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Innes, William C. *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva*. Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1983.
- Jackson, Timothy P. *Political Agape*, forthcoming.

- Jackson, Timothy P. *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Jackson, Timothy P. "The Return of the Prodigal? Liberal Theory and Religious Pluralism." *Religion in Contemporary Liberalism*. Edited by Paul J. Weitman. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997. [182-217]
- Jackson, Timothy P. "To Bedlam and Part Way Back: John Rawls and Christian Justice." *Faith and Philosophy* 8:4 (October, 1991): 423-447.
- Jeffreys, Derek S. "It's a Miracle of God That There Is Any Common Weal Among Us': Unfaithfulness and Disorder in John Calvin's Political Thought." *The Review of Politics* (2000): 107-129.
- Jeon, Jeong Koo. "Calvin and the Two Kingdoms: Calvin's Political Philosophy in Light of Contemporary Discussion." *Westminster Theological Journal* 72.2 (Fall, 2010): 299-320.
- John of Paris. *On Royal and Papal Power*. Translated by J. A. Watt. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1971.
- Johnson, Merwin S. "Calvin's Ethical Legacy." *The Legacy of John Calvin*. Edited by David Foxgrover. Grand Rapids: CRC, 2000. [63-83]
- Jürgen-Goertz, Hans. *The Anabaptists*. Translated by Trevor Johnson. New York: Routledge, 1996 [1980].
- Kaufman, Peter I. *Redeeming Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Kayanan, Eric. "The Case of Michael Servetus." *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 8 (1992): 117-146.
- Keddie, Gordon J. "Calvin on Civil Government." *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 32 (1981): 65-67. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [43-56]
- Keen, Ralph. "The Limits and Power of Obedience in the Later Calvin." *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 252-276.
- Kingdon, Robert M. *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Kingdon, Robert M. "A New View of Calvin in the Light of the Registers of the Geneva Consistory." *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex: Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion*. Edited by Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong. Kirksville, Mo: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1997. [21-33]
- Kingdom, Robert M. "Anticlericalism in the Registers of the Geneva Consistory, 1542-1564," in *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe/* Edited by Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman. Leiden: Brill, 1993.

- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvinism and Democracy: Some Political Implications of Debates on French Reformed Church Government, 1562-1572." *American Historical Review* 69 (1964): 393-401.
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvin and the Family: The Work of the Consistory in Geneva." *Pacific Theological Review* 17 (1984): 5-18.
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvin and the Establishment of Consistory Discipline in Geneva: The Institution and the Men Who Directed It." *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 10 (1990): 158-172.
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvin and the Government of Geneva." *Calvinus Ecclesiae Genevesis Custos*. Edited by Wilhelm Neuser. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984. [49-67]
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvin and 'Presbytery': the Geneva Company of Pastors." *Pacific Theological Review* 18 (1985): 43-55.
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvinism and Resistance Theory, 1550-1580." *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*. Edited by J.H. Burns and Mark Goldie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. [193-218]
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvin and Social Welfare." *Calvin Theological Journal* 17.2 (1982): 212-230.
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvin's Ideas about the Diaconate: Social or Theological in Origin?" *Piety, Politics and Ethics: Reformation Studies in Honor of George Wolfgang Forell*. Edited by Carter Lindberg. Kirksville, Mo: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1984. [167-180]
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvin's Last Years." *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research, Princeton, August 20-24, 2002*. Edited by Herman J. Selderhuis. Geneva: Droz, 2004. [179-188]
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Calvin's Socio-Political Legacy: Collective Government, Resistance to Tyranny, Discipline." *The Legacy of John Calvin*. Edited by David Foxgrover. Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2000.
- Kingdon, Robert M. *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France 1555-1563*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2007 [1956].
- Kingdon, Robert M. *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement 1564-1572*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967.
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Social Control and Political Control in Calvin's Geneva," *Archiv for Reformation History*. Special Volume: 1993. [521-532]
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva." *The American Historical Review* 76.1 (February, 1971): 50-69.

- Kingdon, Robert M. "The First Expression of Theodore Beza's Political Ideas." *Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte* 46.1 (1955): 88-100.
- Kingdon, Robert M. "The Deacons of the Reformed Church in Calvin's Geneva." *Melanges D'Histoire Du XVIIe Siecle*. Edited by Henri Meylan. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970. [81-90]
- Kingdon, Robert M. "The Geneva Consistory in the Time of Calvin." *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620*. Edited by Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke, and Gillian Lewis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. [pp 21-34]
- Kingdon, Robert M. *The Political Thought of Peter Martyr Vermigli: Selected Texts and Commentary*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1980.
- Kingdon, Robert M. "Was the Protestant Reformation a Revolution? The Case of Geneva." *Transition and Revolution: Problems and Issues of European Renaissance and Reformation History*. Edited by Robert M. Kingdon. Minneapolis: University of Wisconsin, 1974. [53-76] (Also in *Studies in Church History* 12 (1975): 203-22.)
- Kirby, Torrance. "A Reformed Culture of Persuasion: John Calvin's 'Two Kingdoms' and the Theological Origins of the Public Sphere." *Calvin@500: Theology, History, and Practice*. Edited by Richard R. Topping and John A. Vissers. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, forthcoming. [52-66]
- Kirby, Torrance. "Peter Martyr Vermigli and Pope Boniface VIII: the Difference Between Civil and Ecclesiastical Power." *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the European Reformations*. Edited by Frank A. James III. Leiden: Brill, 2004. [291-304]
- Kirby, W. J. Torrance. *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Kirby, W. J. Torrance. *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Klaassen, Walter. *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1981.
- Klassen, William. "The Limits of Political Authority As Seen By Pilgram Marpeck." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 56.4 (October 1982): 342-364.
- Klempa, William. "Calvin on Natural Law." *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*. Edited by Timothy George. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. [72-95]
- Knecht, R.J. *The French Wars of Religion 1559-1598*. Second Edition. New York: Longman, 1996 [1989].
- Kraynak, Robert P. *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

- Kreider, Robert S. "The Anabaptists and the Civil Authorities of Strasbourg, 1525-1555." *Church History* 24.2 (June 1955), 99-118.
- Kuiper, Herman. *Calvin on Common Grace*. Grand Rapids: Smutter, 1928.
- Kuyper, Abraham. *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*. Edited by James D. Bratt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Kuyper, Abraham. *Lectures on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931.
- Lane, Anthony N. S. "The City of God: Church and State in Geneva." *God and Caesar*. London: British Evangelical Council, 1973. [42-53] Reprinted in *Calvin's Ecclesiology: Sacraments and Deacons*. Edited by Richard D. Gamble. New York: Garland Publishing, 1992. [140-151]
- Lang, August. "The Reformation and Natural Law." *Calvin and the Reformation: Four Studies*. Translated by J. Gresham Machen. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909. [56-98]
- Larson, Mark J. *Calvin's Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory, The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009.
- Larson, Mark J. "John Calvin and Genevan Presbyterianism." *Westminster Theological Journal* 60 (1998): 43-69.
- Lewis, Gillian. "The Geneva Academy." *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620*. Edited by Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke, and Gillian Lewis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. [pp 35-63]
- Lillback, Peter Alan. "The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Linder, Robert D. "John Calvin, Pierre Viret and the State." *Calvin and the State*. Edited by Peter De Klerk. Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1993. [171-185]
- Linder, Robert Dean. *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1964.
- Littell, Franklin. "What Butzer Debated with the Anabaptists at Marburg: A Document of 1538." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (1962): 256-276.
- Little, David. "Calvin and the Prospects for a Christian Theory of Natural Law." *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics*. Edited by Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey. New York: Scribner's 1968. [175-198]
- Little, David. "Max Weber Revisited." *Harvard Theological Review* 59 (1966): 415-428.
- Little, David. "Reformed Faith and Religious Liberty." *Church and Society* 76 (May-June 1986): 5-28.
- Little, David. *Religion, Order, and Law*. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

- Lloyd, H. A. "Calvin and the Duty of Guardians to Resist." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 (1981): 65-67. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [57-60]
- Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*. Edited by Ian Shapiro. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. 55 Volumes. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, et. al. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-.
- Luther, Martin. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. Second Edition. Edited by Timothy F. Lull; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Luther, Martin. *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*. Translated by John Dillenberger. New York: Anchor Books, 1961.
- Maag, Karin. *Seminary or University?: The Genevan Academy and Reformed Higher Education, 1560-1620*. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1995.
- MacCulloch, Diarmaid. *The Reformation: A History*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- MacIntyre, Alisdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Third Edition. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- Manetsch, Scott M. *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536-1609*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Manetsch, Scott M. "Holy Terror or Pastoral Care: Church Discipline in Calvin's Geneva, 1542-1596." *Calvin: Saint or Sinner?* Edited by Herman Selderhuis. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010. [283-306]
- Manetsch, Scott M. *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572-1598*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- Margolf, Diane C. "Calvin and Church Discipline: Penance, Apology, and Reconciliation." *John Calvin, Myth and Reality: Images and Impact of Geneva's Reformer*. Edited by Amy Nelson Burnett. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011. [53-66]
- Marty, Martin. *The Public Church: Mainline-Evangelical-Catholic*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981.
- Maruyama, Tadataka. *The Ecclesiology of Theodore Beza: The Reform of the True Church*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978.
- McCoy, Charles S. and J. Wayne Baker. *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991.
- McGrade, Arthur Stephen. *The Political Thought of William of Ockham*. London:

Cambridge University, 1974.

- McKee, Elsie Anne. "Calvin and His Colleagues as Pastors: Some New Insights into the Collegial Ministry of Word and Sacraments." *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research, Princeton, August 20-24, 2002*. Edited by Herman J. Selderhuis. Geneva: Droz, 2004. [9-42]
- McKee, Elsie Anne. *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin's Theology*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988.
- McKee, Elsie Anne. *John Calvin On the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984.
- McLaughlin, R. Emmet. *Caspar Schwenckfeld, Reluctant Radical: His Life to 1540*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- McNeill, John T. "Calvin and Civil Government." *Readings in Calvin's Theology*. Edited by Donald McKim. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984. [260-274]
- McNeill, John T. "John Calvin: Doctor Ecclesiae." *Readings in Calvin's Theology*. Edited by Donald K. McKim. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984. [11-20]
- McNeill, John T. "John Calvin on Civil Government." *Calvinism and the Political Order*. Edited by George L. Hunt. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965. [23-45]
- McNeill, John T. "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers." *Journal of Religion* 26 (1946): 168-182.
- McNeill, John T. "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought." *Church History* 18 (September 1949): 153-171.
- McNeill, John T. *The History and Character of Calvinism*. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Mentzer, Raymond A. "Acting on Calvin's Ideas: The Church in France." *Calvin and the Church*. Edited by David Foxgrover. Grand Rapids: CRC, 2002. [29-41]
- Mercier, Charles. "L'esprit de Calvin et la démocratie." *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* (1934), 50-53. Reprinted in Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?* Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970. [9-10]
- Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Miles, Margaret R. "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*." *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 303-323.
- Milner, Benjamin, Jr. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*. Leiden: Brill, 1970.
- Moeller, Bernd. *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*. Philadelphia:

- Fortress Press, 1972.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *Ethics of Hope*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012 [2010].
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993 [1975].
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974 [1973].
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Politics of Discipleship and Discipleship in Politics: Jurgen Moltmann Lectures in Dialogue with Mennonite Scholars*. Edited by Willard M. Swartley. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books: 2006.
- Monter, E. William. *Calvin's Geneva*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1967.
- Monter, E. William. "Crime and Punishment in Calvin's Geneva, 1562." *Archive for Reformation History* 64 (1973): 281-287.
- Monter, E. William. *Studies in Genevan Government (1536-1605)*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1964.
- Monter, E. William. "The Consistory of Geneva, 1559-1569," in *Renaissance, Reformation, Resurgence*. Edited by Peter De Klerk. Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1976. [63-84]
- Monter, E. William. "Heresy Executions in Reformation Europe, 1520-1565." Edited by Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. [48-64]
- Monter, E. William. *Studies in Genevan Government (1536-1605)*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1964.
- Mühling, Andreas. "Heinrich Bullinger as Church Politician." *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575*. Edited by Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004. [243-253]
- Muller, Richard A. "Calvin, Beza, and the Exegetical History of Romans 13:1-7." *The Identity of Geneva: The Christian Commonwealth, 1564-1864*. Edited by John B. Roney and Martin I. Klauber. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998. [39-56]
- Muller, Richard A. "Christ in the Eschaton: Calvin and Moltmann on the Duration of the *Munus Regium*." *Harvard Theological Review* 74.1 (1981): 31-59.
- Muller, Richard A. "The Hermeneutic of Promise and Fulfillment in Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament Prophecies of the Kingdom." *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*. Edited by David C. Steinmetz. Durham and London: Duke University

- Press, 1990. [68-82]
- Muller, Richard A. *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Munday, Paul. "John Calvin and Anabaptists on War." *Brethren Life and Thought* 23 (1978): 239-247.
- Naphy, William G. *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994.
- Naphy, William G. "Calvin's Church in Geneva: Constructed or Gathered? Local or Foreign? French or Swiss?" *Calvin and His Influence, 1509-2009*. Edited by Irena Backus and Philip Benedict. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. [102-118]
- Naphy, William G. "Church and State in Calvin's Geneva." *Calvin and the Church*. Edited by David Foxgrover. Grand Rapids: CRC, 2002. [13-28]
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001 [1951].
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*. 2 Volumes. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941-1943.
- Niesel, Wilhelm. *The Theology of Calvin*. Translated by Harold Knight. London: Methuen, 1956.
- Nijenhuis, W. *Ecclesia Reformata: Studies on the Reformation*. Leiden: Brill, 1994.
- Nullens, Patrick. "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Third Way of Christian Social Engagement." *European Journal of Theology* 20:1 (2011): 60-69.
- Oakley, Francis. "Christian Obedience and Authority, 1520-1550." *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*. Edited by J.H. Burns and Mark Goldie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. [159-192]
- Oberman, Heiko A. "The 'Extra' Dimension in the Theology of Calvin." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21 (1970): 43-64.
- Oberman, Heiko. *John Calvin and the Reformation of the Refugees*. Geneva: Droz, 2009.
- O'Donovan, Oliver and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan. Editors. *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

- O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Ways of Judgment*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- O'Donovan, Oliver. *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Olson, Jeannine E. "Calvin and Social-Ethical Issues." *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*. Edited by Donald K. McKim. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Olson, Jeannine E. *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse française*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989.
- Olson, Jeannine E. "Calvin as Pastor-Administrator During the Reformation in Geneva." *Pacific Theological Review* 14 (1981): 10-17.
- Olson, Jeannine E. *One Ministry, Many Roles: Deacons and Deaconesses through the Centuries*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1992.
- Olson, Jeannine E. "Social Welfare and the Transformation of Polity in Geneva." *The Identity of Geneva: The Christian Commonwealth, 1564-1864*. Edited by John B. Roney and Martin I. Klauber. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998. [155-168]
- Osterhaven, M. Eugene. "Calvin on the Covenant." *Readings in Calvin's Theology*. Edited by Donald McKim. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984. [89-106]
- Osterhaven, Eugene. *The Faith of the Church: A Reformed Perspective on its Historical Development*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982. [162-193]
- Ozment, Steven E. *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Ozment, Steven E. *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.
- Parker, T.H.L. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Study in the Theology of John Calvin*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959 [1952].
- Partee, Charles. *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977.
- Partee, Charles. "Calvin, Calvinism, and Philosophy: A Prolusion." *Reformed Review* 33 (1980): 129-135.
- Partee, Charles. "The Soul in Plato, Platonism, and Calvin." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (1969): 278-295.
- Pater, Calvin Augustine. *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- Pattison, Bonnie L. *Poverty in the Theology of John Calvin*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock

Publishers, 2006.

- Pennington, Kenneth. *Pope and Bishops: The Papal Monarchy in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.
- Perry, John. *The Pretenses of Loyalty: Locke, Liberal Theory, and American Political Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Perry, Michael. *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Pettegree, Andrew Pettegree. "Michael Servetus and the Limits of Tolerance." *History Today* 40 (1990): 40-45.
- Pettegree, Andrew. *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Pettegree, Andrew. *The French Book and the European Book World*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Pettegree, Andrew. Editor. *The Reformation of the Parishes: The Ministry and the Reformation in Town and Country*. Manchester, 1993.
- Pitkin, Barbara. "Calvin's Reception of Paul." *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation*. Edited by R. Ward Holder. Leiden: Brill, 2009. [267-296]
- Pont, Adrianus D. "Citizen's Oath and Formulated Confession: Confession of Faith in Calvin's Congregation." *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*. Edited by Wilhelm H. Neuser. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. [237-239]
- Potter, George Richard. "Church and State, 1528: A Letter from Zwingli to Ambrosius Blarer (4 May 1528)." *Occasional Papers of the American Society for Reformation Research* 1 (December, 1977): 108-124.
- Potter, Mary Lane. "The 'Whole Office of the Law' in the Theology of John Calvin." *Journal of Law and Religion* 3 (1985): 117-139.
- Prins, Richard. "The Image of God in Adam and the Restoration of Man in Jesus Christ: A Study in John Calvin." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 25 (1972): 32-44.
- Pryor, C. Scott. "God's Bridle: John Calvin's Application of Natural Law." *Journal of Law and Religion* 22.1 (2006-2007): 225-254.
- Quistorp, Heinrich. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*. Translated by Harold Knight. London: Lutterworth Press, 1955.
- Ramsey, Paul. *Basic Christian Ethics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.
- Ramsey, Paul. *Who Speaks for the Church?* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

- Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Reid, J. K. S. "Diakonia in the Thought of Calvin." *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on his 80th Birthday*. Edited by James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966.
- Reid, W. Stanford. "Calvin's Geneva: A Missionary Centre." *The Reformed Theological Review* 42.3 (September-December, 1983): 65-73.
- Reid, W. Stanford. "Jean Calvin: The Father of Capitalism?" *Themelios* 8 (1983): 19-25. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [199-206]
- Reid, W. Stanford. "John Calvin, Early Critic of Capitalism: An Alternative Interpretation." *Reformed Theological Review* 43-44 (1984-1985): 74-81, 9-12. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [158-170]
- Richard, Luicen. *The Spirituality of John Calvin*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974.
- Runia, Klaas. "The Kingdom of God in the Bible, in History, and Today." *European Journal of Theology* 1:1 (1992): 37-47.
- Sanders, Thomas G. *Protestant Concepts of Church and State*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.
- Schulze, Ludi. *Calvin and "Social Ethics": His Views on Property, Interest and Usury*. 1985.
- Schulze, L. F. "Calvin on Interest and Property – Some Aspects of His Socio-Economic View." *Our Reformational Tradition*. South Africa: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1984. [217-230] Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [185-198]
- Schreiner, Susan E. "Calvin's Use of Natural Law." *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics and Natural Law*. Edited by Michael Cromartie. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. [51-76]
- Schreiner, Susan E. "Creation and Providence." *The Calvin Handbook*. Edited by Herman J. Selderhuis. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009. [267-275]
- Schreiner, Susan E. *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995.
- Schulze, L. F. "Calvin on Interest and Property – Some Aspects of His Socio-Economic

- View." *Our Reformational Tradition*. South Africa: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1984. [217-230] Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [185-198]
- Selinger, Suzanne. *Calvin Against Himself: An Inquiry in Intellectual History*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984.
- Singer, C. Gregg. "Calvin and the Social Order; or, Calvin as a Social and Economic Statesman." *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet*. Edited by Jacob T. Hoogstra. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959. [227-241] Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [143-157]
- Smith, William K. *Calvin's Ethics of War: A Documentary Study*. Annapolis: Academic Fellowship, 1972.
- Spykman, Gordon J. "Sphere-Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition." *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*. Edited by David E. Holwerda. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976. [163-208]
- Stayer, James M. *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991.
- Skinner, Quentin. *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume 2: The Age of Reformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Stackhouse, Max L. *Creeds, Society, and Human Rights: A Study in Three Cultures*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.
- Stein, Peter. "Calvin and the Duty of Guardians to Resist: A Comment." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32 (1981): 69-70. Reprinted in *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992. [61-62]
- Steinmetz, David C. "Calvin as an Interpreter of Genesis." *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*. Edited by Wilhelm Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong. Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth-Century Journal Publishers, 1997. [53-66]
- Steinmetz, David C. *Calvin in Context*. Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Stephens, W. P. *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Stevenson, William R., Jr. "Calvin and Political Issues." *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*. Edited by Donald K. McKim. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. [173-187]
- Stevenson, William R., Jr. *Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press,

1999.

- Stout, Jeffrey. *Democracy and Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Strohm, Christoph. "Calvin and Religious Tolerance." *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society*. Edited by Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Smallmann. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Strohm, Christoph. "Methodology in Discussion of 'Calvin and Calvinism.'" *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research, Princeton, August 20-24, 2002*. Edited by Herman J. Selderhuis. Geneva: Droz, 2004.
- Sunshine, Glenn S. "Discipline as a Third Mark of the Church: Three Views." *Calvin Theological Journal* 33:2 (1998): 469-480.
- Sunshine, Glenn S. "Geneva Meets Rome: The Development of the French Reformed Diaconate." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26 (1995): 329-346.
- Sunshine, Glenn S. "Reformed Theology and the Origins of Synodical Polity: Calvin, Beza and the Gallican Confession." *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*. Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 22. Edited by Fred Graham. Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1994. [141-158]
- Sunshine, Glenn S. *Reforming French Protestantism: The Development of Huguenot Ecclesiastical Institutions, 1557-1572*. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2003.
- Sutherland, N. M. "Calvinism and the Conspiracy of Amboise." *History* 47:160 (1962): 111-138.
- Tawney, R. H. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. New York: Mentor Books, 1926.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Templin, J. Alton. "The Individual and Society in the Thought of Calvin." *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (November 1988): 161-177.
- Theron, P.F. "The Kingdom of God and the Theology of Calvin: Response to the Paper by Prof. J. H. Van Wyk." *In die Skriflig* 35.2 (2001): 207-213.
- Thompson, John L. "The Exegesis of Paul and Women in the 16th Century." *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation*. Edited by R. Ward Holder. Leiden: Brill, 2009. [501-540]
- Thompson, John Lee. *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of John Calvin, His Predecessors and His Contemporaries*. Geneva: Droz, 1992.

- Thompson, John Lee. "Patriarchs, Polygamy and Private Resistance: John Calvin and Others on Breaking God's Rules." *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 25/1 (1994): 3-28.
- Thompson, John Lee. "The Immoralities of the Patriarchs in the History of Exegesis: A Reappraisal of Calvin's Position." *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991): 9-46.
- Thomson, John A. F. *Popes and Princes 1417-1517: Politics and Polity in the Late Medieval Church*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1980.
- Tierney, Brian. *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955.
- Tierney, Brian. *Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Ages*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972.
- Tierney, Brian. *The Crisis of Church and State 1050-1300*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.
- Tipton, Steven M. *Public Pulpits: Methodists and Mainline Churches in the Moral Argument of Public Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Tipton, Steven M. "Social Differentiation and Moral Pluralism." *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity, and Self*. Edited by Richard Madsen, et. al. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Tonkin, John. *The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.
- Torrance, James B. "The Concept of Federal Theology – Was Calvin a Federal Theologian?" *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*. Edited by Wilhelm H. Neuser. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. [15-40]
- Torrance, Thomas F. *Kingdom and Church: Study in the Theology of the Reformation*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956.
- Torrance, Thomas F. "The Eldership in the Reformed Church." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984): 503-518.
- Troeltsch, Ernst. *Protestantism and Progress*. Translated by William Montgomery. New York: Putnam's, 1912. Reprinted Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.
- Troeltsch, Ernst. *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. Translated by Olive Wyon. Two Volumes. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992 [1912].
- Uprichard, R. E. H. "The Eldership in Martin Bucer and John Calvin." *The Evangelical Quarterly* 61.1 (January, 1989): 21-37.
- Valeri, Mark. "Religion, Discipline, and the Economy in Calvin's Geneva." *SCJ* 28 (1997):123-142.

- Van Der Borght, Eduardus. *Theology of Ministry: A Reformed Contribution to an Ecumenical Dialogue*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- VanDrunen, David. "Medieval Natural Law and the Reformation: A Comparison of Aquinas and Calvin." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80 (2006): 77-98.
- VanDrunen, David. *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010.
- VanDrunen, David. "Natural Law, Custom, and Common Law in the Theology of Aquinas and Calvin." *University of British Columbia Law Review* 33 (2000): 699-717.
- Van't Spijker, Willem. "Bucer's Influence on Calvin: Church and Community." *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community*. Edited by D. F. Wright. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. [32-44]
- Van't Spijker, Willem. *Calvin: A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought*. Translated by Lyle D. Bierma. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Van't Spijker, Willem. "Calvin's Friendship with Martin Bucer: Did It Make Calvin a Calvinist?" *Calvin Studies Society Papers, 1995, 1997: Calvin and Spirituality, Calvin and His Contemporaries*. Edited by David Foxgrover. Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 1998. [169-186]
- Van't Spijker, Willem. *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*. Translated by John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Van't Spijker, Willem. "The Kingdom of Christ According to Bucer and Calvin." *Calvin and the State*. Edited by Peter De Klerk. Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1993. [109-132]
- Van Wyk, I.W.C. "The Political Responsibility of the Church: On the Necessity and Boundaries of the Theory of the Two Kingdoms." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 61.3 (September, 2005): 647-682.
- Van Wyk, J.H. "John Calvin on the Kingdom of God and Eschatology." *In die Skriflig* 35.2 (2001): 191-205.
- Venema, Cornel. "The Restoration of All Things to Proper Order: An Assessment of the 'Two Kingdoms/Natural Law' Interpretation of Calvin's Public Theology." *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*. Edited by Ryan G. McIlhenny. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2012. [3-32]
- Verhey, Allen. "Natural Law in Aquinas and Calvin." *God and the Good: Essay in Honor of Henry Stob*. Edited by Clifton Orlebeke and Lewis Smedes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975. [80-92]

- Wallace, Ronald S. *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation: A Study of Calvin as Social Reformer, Churchman, Pastor and Theologian*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988.
- Wallace, Ronald S. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959.
- Walton, Robert C. *Zwingli's Theocracy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967.
- Walzer, Michael. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. Basic Books, 1983.
- Walzer, Michael. *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Watt, J.A. "Spiritual and Temporal Powers." *Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought: c. 350-c.1450*. Edited by J. H. Burns. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. [367-423]
- Watt, Jeffrey R. "The Marriage Laws Calvin Drafted for Geneva." *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*. Edited by Wilhelm H. Neuser. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. [245-255]
- Watt, Jeffrey R. "Women and the Consistory in Calvin's Geneva." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1983): 429-439.
- Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Edited by C. Mills and Charles Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons. New York: Scribner's 1958.
- Wendel, François. *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*. Translated by Philip Mairet. London: Collins, 1963 [1950].
- White, Robert. "Oil and Vinegar: Calvin on Church Discipline." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985): 25-40.
- White, R. "Castellio Against Calvin: The Turk in the Toleration Controversy of the Sixteenth Century." *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 46.3 (1984): 573-586.
- Whitford, David. "Cura Religionis or Two Kingdoms." *Church History* 73 (2004): 41-62.
- Whitford, David M. "Robbing Paul to Pay Peter: The Reception of Paul in Sixteenth Century Political Theology." *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation*. Edited by R. Ward Holder. Leiden: Brill, 2009. [575-606]
- Wilcox, Peter. "The Progress of the Kingdom of Christ' in Calvin's Exposition of the Prophets." *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*. Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1997. [315-322]

- Willis, E. David. *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology*. Leiden: Brill, 1966.
- Willis-Watkins, David. "Calvin's Prophetic Reinterpretation of Kingship." *Probing the Reformed Tradition*. Edited by Elsie Anne McKee and Brian Armstrong. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989. [116-134]
- Witte, John, Jr. *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Witte, John, Jr. "Moderate Religious Liberty in the Theology of John Calvin." *Calvin Theological Journal* 31 (November 1996): 359-403.
- Witte, John, Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon. *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Witte, John, Jr. *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Wolin, Sheldon S. *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*. Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Justice in Love*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. "The Wounds of God: Calvin's Theology of Social Injustice." *Reformed Journal* 37.6 (June 1987): 14-22.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Woolley, Paul. "Calvin and Toleration." *The Heritage of John Calvin*. Edited by John H. Bratt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973. [137-157]
- Wright, William John. *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Yoder, John Howard. *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Yoder, John Howard. *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*. Edited by Glen Stassen et. al. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009.
- Zwingli, Huldrych. *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*. Volume 2. Edited by Dikran Y. Hadidian.

Translated by H. Wayne Pipkin. Allison Park, Pa: Pickwick Publications, 1984.