

Ph.D. Dissertation

**A Study on the Spirituality of
John Calvin**

By

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California Union University

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This Dissertation attached hereto entitled
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Declaration

I hereby declare that the following Dissertation is based on the results of research carried out by me; that the Dissertation is my own composition; and that it has not previously been presented for a higher degree. The research was carried out in Graduate School of Theology, California Union University, California under the direction of the Professor Dr. Paul E. Kauffman, Ph.D.

Ji-Ho Kim

May, 1998.

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Ji-Ho Kim

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Abbreviation

- Comm *Commentaries* Trans, & ed, Joseph Haroutunian and Louise P. Smith.
Library of Christian Classics Vol. XXIII, Philadelphia, 1958.
- Inst *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Trans, John Allen, 2 Vols, 8th
Revised ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1949.
- OC *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*. Eds. G. Baum, E.
Cunitz, E. Reuss, et. al. 59 Vols., Corpus Reformationum, Brunswig,
1863-1900
- OS *Johannis Calvini Opera Selecta*, Ed. P. Barth, W. Niesel, 5, Vols,
Monachii in Aedibu. Chr. Kaiser. 1926-1936.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In 1909, on the four hundredth anniversary of Calvin's birth, Benjamin B. Warfield, the well-known Princeton scholar, called John Calvin "The Theologian of the Holy Spirit." He argued that the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit was a gift from Calvin to the church.¹ While Warfield did not recognize adequately other contributions made in the long pneumatological traditions of both Eastern and Western churches, he was correct in identifying Calvin's crucial place within the Western tradition.

But, In Spite of, very few researches have been written on the "Spirituality of John Calvin"² This is surprising when one considers how much attention Calvin himself devoted to this motif.

Indeed, Calvin's life's work can be interpreted as an effort to formulate an authentic spirituality, that is to say, a *modus vivendi* of life in the Spirit, based on the revealed Word of God, lived out in the context of the church of God, and directed

¹Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "John Calvin the Theologian," in his *Calvin and Augustine* (ed. Samuel G. Craig; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956) 484-85.

²Among the better studies devoted to this theme are two books by Wilhelm Kolffhaus: *Die Seelsorge Johannes Calvins* (Neukirchen: Moers, 1941); *Vom Christlichen Leben nach Johannes Calvin* (Neukirchen: Moers, 1949). In English, see Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959); Lucien Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974). Cf. also John H. Leith, "A Study of John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life" (Yale Univ. Ph.D., Dissertation, 1949).

toward the praise and glory of God: *solī deo gloria!* In Calvin's view every person is implanted with a "seed of religion," (*semen religionis*) a "sense of divinity" (*sensus divinitatis*) which inevitably issues in either piety, which consists of love mingled with reverence for God, or in idolatry, the production and adoration of false gods. According to Calvin, the human is by nature a worshipping being, *homo religiosus*. The problem of human existence is that this immense appetite for the divine has been tragically misdirected, turned in on itself, satiated with transient goods. To redirect and redeem fallen humanity, God became man in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Yet so "long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us"³

This is the point in the *Institutes* where Calvin began to unfold how believers "come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits." All of Book 3 is a marvelous treatise on the Christian life in which Calvin elaborated successively on the following topics: the work of the Holy Spirit, faith and regeneration, repentance, self-denial, crossbearing, meditation on the future life, justification, sanctification, Christian freedom, prayer, election, and the final resurrection. It is impossible to treat all of these important doctrines.

I shall focus on three of them, Justification, sanctification and piety. These three themes are not often viewed synoptically. But, I am Convinced that each is very close to the heart of John Calvin's Spirituality.

³*Inst.*, 3.1.1

Chapter II

John Calvin and Sixteenth Century Spirituality

Calvin's practical teaching on the spiritual life has received little explicit attention within Protestant scholarship.⁴ William J. Bouwsma suggests that this is due in part to the widespread notion that Calvin was chiefly a systematic and dogmatic theologian.⁵ However, Calvin's systematic style and theological skills should not obscure the fact that he wrote as a pastor. With a forcefulness that few modern writers have matched, he presents a clear and practical exposition of the biblical doctrine of mortification which lies at the heart of his spirituality. Calvin was deeply troubled by destructive rituals of the institutionalized spirituality of his day. He felt that the medieval practices of penance and good works undermined the peace, assurance, and security of the believer by placing conditions upon God's forgiveness.

For while they require three things for repentance—compunction of heart,

⁴Specific works on Calvin's spirituality include John H. Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*(Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), which provides a helpful overview to Calvin's teaching; Lucien Joseph Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin*(Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1974), which places Calvin in the context of sixteenth-century spirituality; and Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*(Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), which is the most comprehensive.

⁵William J. Bouwsma, "The Spirituality of John Calvin," in *Christian Spirituality. High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt(New York: Crossroad, 1987), 333.

confession of mouth, and satisfaction of works—at the same time they teach that these things are necessary to attain forgiveness of sins If forgiveness of sins depends upon these conditions which they attach to it, nothing is more miserable or deplorable for us.⁶

He was also distressed by the harmful practice of auricular confession. Describing it in terms of spiritual bulimia, he states,

Not only are they emboldened throughout the year to sin; but freed from the necessity of confession for the rest of the year, they never sigh unto God, they never return to their senses, but heap up sins upon sins until they vomit all of them up at once, as they suppose. When, moreover, they have disgorged them, they seem to themselves unburdened of their load, and feel that they have ... made God forgetful when they have made the priest their confidant.⁷

Against these practices, Calvin defines genuine repentance as “the true turning of our life to God, a turning that ... consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit.”⁸ It is significant that, for Calvin, the doctrine of mortification lay at the heart of the solution to the artificial penance and false spirituality advocated by the medieval Church. Hence, his exposition of this doctrine arose not from a mere academic concern to systematically define and delineate some obscure theological concept. To the contrary, he sought to direct his generation back to a true

⁶*Inst.*, 3.4.2

⁷*Inst.*, 3.4.19

⁸*Inst.*, 3.3.5

godliness through a fresh exposition of the biblical teaching on mortification. In fact his concern to promote genuine spirituality overshadows all that he wrote in his *Institutes*. He begins the work with this purpose statement in his preface to King Francis I of France: "My purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to a true godliness."⁹

Calvin's concern for "true godliness" (*veram pietatem*) was not an isolated phenomenon in the early part of the sixteenth century, but a manifestation of a widespread interest in bringing reform to the shallow spirituality rampant in the medieval Church. Two sixteenth-century movements, which sought a more personal spirituality based upon a deeper Knowledge of God, provide the religious milieu of Calvin's doctrine of mortification. Lane warns that studies which seek to determine influences upon Calvin, while "historically the most interesting," are often "the hardest and the least conclusive."¹⁰ Lucien J. Richard further warns that "the search for the antecedents and individuality."¹¹ With these cautions in mind, it is my purpose to provide an overview of the *Devotio Moderna* and French humanism which appear to be the most predominant influences upon Calvin's spirituality.

I) John Calvin and *Devotio Moderna*

A number of scholars argue that a devotional movement known as the *Devotio*

⁹*Inst.*, Prefatory Address, paragraph I.

¹⁰Anthony N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Use of the Fathers and the Medievals," *Calvin Theological Journal* 16 (1981): 149. He cautions against the use of literary parallels to determine influence because, apart from other evidence, the most striking parallels could arise from independently reached conclusions.

¹¹Lucien Joseph Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1974), p. 3.

Moderna had an influence upon John Calvin's doctrine of the Christian life.¹² This movement, closely associated with "The Brethren of the Common Life,"¹³ originated under the leadership of Gerard Groote (1340-84)¹⁴ who gathered a mixed following of layman and clergy for the purpose of a contemplative life and founded houses throughout the German lands and the Spanish Netherlands. Although not hostile to the outward ceremonies of the medieval Church (e.g., the Holy Mass, the Rosary, et al.), the *Devotio Moderna* demanded an exceptionally intense and personal spirituality through "stressing the inner devout life."¹⁵ In order to prevent the external rituals the Church from becoming too formalistic, this group practiced an inner devotion which sought a personal relationship with Christ through meditation on his humanity and passion and the imitation

¹²K. Reuter, *Das Gründverständnis der Theologie Calvins*(Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-Verlag, 1963), 37; Albert Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance: A History of the Devotio Moderna* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformed Press, 1924), 28; and Kenneth A. Strand, "John Calvin and the Brethren of the Common Life," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13 (Spring 1975): 78.

¹³E. J. Jacob, "The Brethren of the Common Life," *Bulletin of the John Ryland Library* 24 (1940): 37-58; Albert Hyma, *The Brethren of the Common Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950); William Spoelhof, "Concepts of Religious Nonconformity and Religious toleration as developed by the Brethren of the Common Life in the Netherlands, 1374-1489"(Ph.D. dis., University of Michigan, 1946), and Strand, "Calvin and the Brethren of the Common Life," 78.

¹⁴G. Epiney-Burgard, *Gerard Grote (1340-1384) et les débuts de la Dévotion Moderne*(Wiesbaden, Germany: n.p., 1970), and Th. van Zijl, *Gerard Groote, Ascetic and Reformer*. *Studies in Medieval History*, vol. 18(Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1963).

¹⁵R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion: Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1968), 237-38.

of him in everyday life.¹⁶ This new emphasis resulted, according to Lucien J. Richard, in a growing independence from "the clergy in their function as guides and rulers, weakening in fact the direct influence of the priest."¹⁷

With its focus upon a personal relationship to God, this individualistic style of spirituality was a dramatic change from the institutional spirituality mediated through the ritualistic practices of the Church. Summarizing the influence of the *Devotio Moderna* upon the spirituality of the early sixteenth century, Richard concludes:

From the *Devotio Moderna*, [the sixteenth century] inherited its lay and democratic characteristics: its desire for a simple Christian way of life, its Christocentric thrust, its persistent emphasis on the inner life and its opposition to external practices; its preoccupation with a constant ascent from the visible to the invisible; its fundamental concern with self-knowledge; its neglect of the mediative role of the Church in the spiritual life accompanied by an explicit acceptance of the authority of the church; its individualism and constant quest for immediacy with God through the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

In these ways the *Devotio Moderna* helped to rekindle and individualistic style of spirituality which John Calvin reflected in his teaching and writings. The influence of this movement upon Calvin can be observed in several ways.

First of all, several scholars indicated that Calvin was influenced by the *Devotio Moderna* through Thomas à Kempis(1380-1471).¹⁹ Since Thomas à Kempis is the best

¹⁶For a concise overview of the spirituality of the *Devotio Moderna* see John Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings*(New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 25-35.

¹⁷Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin*, 34.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁹Quirinus Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism*. 2d ed.

known writer on the contemplative life of the *Devotio Moderna*, Calvin's familiarity with his work, *The Imitation of Christ*, would be particularly significant.²⁰ The importance of this work, according to Richard, is the fact that it served as a channel through which Augustinian and Bernardian spiritualities influenced the sixteenth century.²¹

Richard provides a helpful summary of the main principles of Thomas's teaching on spirituality.²² First and foremost, Thomas considered the imitation of the life and

(Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968), 21; Albert Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance*, 284; and Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 191.

²⁰Post. *The Modern Devotion*, 521-36 and Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin*, 21-30. Note that the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* has been the object of extensive discussion, although most scholars believe it to be Thomas à Kempis.

²¹Richard, 21. Augustines' influence upon Calvin is unquestionable in light of his many favorable citations in the *Institutes* (see author and source index in Calvin *Institutes*, 2:1594-1601). Several scholars have also discussed Calvin's use of Bernard of Clairvaux (Anthony N. S. Lane, "Calvin's sources of St Bernard," *Archiv fuer Reformationsgeschichte* 67 [1976]: 253-283; Jill Raitt, "Calvin's use of Bernard of Clairvaux." *Archiv fuer Reformationsgeschichte* 72 [1981]: 98-121; and W. Stanford Reid, "Bernard of Clairvaux in the Thought of John Calvin," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41[1978]: 127-45). However, according to Jill Raitt, the forty-one citations of Bernard in the his *Institutes* are limited to issues relating to "the bondage of the will, justification by faith, and predestination" (Raitt, "Calvin's use of Bernard," 118). Furthermore, W. Stanford Reid observes the Calvin "could not agree with Bernard's views on monasticism and monastic asceticism" (Reid, "Clairvaux in the thought of John Calvin," 143. Cf. Calvin *Institutes* 3.10.1.). Hence, it is not surprising that he included no citations of Bernard in his section specifically on the practice of mortification(i.e., Calvin *Institutes* 3. 6-10.).

²²In this section I am indebted to Richard's summary in *The Spirituality of John Calvin*, 21-25.

passion of Christ to be the path toward spiritual purity. "If you desire to be purified from your vices and to progress in the exercise of virtue, love the life and passion of Christ, whom the Father sent in the world as an example of all virtues."²³ Thomas sets forth Christ as man's primary pattern for self-mortification. "There is no other way to life and to true inward peace save the way of the holy cross, and of daily mortification."²⁴ This daily mortification requires several important elements. The first is a realistic knowledge of one's self through an inward look. "Keep your eye upon yourself in the first place, and especially admonish yourself in preference to admonishing all your friends."²⁵ This self-examination was rooted in Thomas's recognition of the depravity of human nature.²⁶ The second is self-denial that requires the stripping away of all selfishness and the end of all reliance upon the temporal things of this life. "Rare indeed is a man so spiritual as to strip himself of all things. And who shall find a man so truly poor in spirit as to be free from every creature?"²⁷ Only when the heart is purified through spiritual poverty can effective contemplation of God begin. "Be pure and free within, unentangled with any creature. You must bring to God a clean and open heart if you wish to taste and to see how sweet the Lord is."²⁸ The third element is Thomas's

²³Thomas à Kempis, *Thomas Hemerkem a Kempis Opera Omnia*, ed. M. I. Pohl (Fribourg, Switzerland: n.p., 1902-1922), 5:3.

²⁴Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Aloysius Croft and Harry F. Bolton (Milwaukee, Wis.: Bruce Publishing Co., 1962), 2:12.

²⁵Ibid., 1:21.

²⁶Ibid., 1:22, 3:55.

²⁷Ibid., 2:11.

²⁸Ibid., 2:8.

belief in the need for God's transforming grace without which man can do nothing. "Lord, how urgently I need Your grace if I am to undertake, carry out and perfect and good work! Without it, I can achieve nothing; but in You and by the power of Your grace, all things are possible."²⁹ This leads to a radical humility which acknowledges one's complete dependance upon God. "He who attributes any good to himself hinders God's grace from coming to his heart, for the grace of the Holy Spirit seeks always from coming to his heart, for the grace of the Holy Spirit seeks always the humble heart."³⁰

Like Thomas, Calvin stresses the need for mortification due to human depravity,³¹ the aim of mortification to be conformed to the image of Christ³² and the means of mortification through self-denial³³ and cross-bearing.³⁴ Recognizing these "very close similarities between à Kempis and Calvin when each speaks either of cross-bearing or self-denial," Wallace concludes that Calvin's teaching on the Christian life appears to be "influenced by Thomas à Kempis's work *On the Imitation of Christ*."³⁵

Second, Kenneth A. Strand establishes a historical connection between Calvin and

²⁹Ibid., 3:55.

³⁰Ibid., 3:42.

³¹*Inst.*, 2.1.8.

³²*Inst.*, 2.1.8.

³³*Inst.*, 3.7.1-10; *Comm. on 2 Corinthians* 4:10.

³⁴*Inst.*, 3.8.1-11.

³⁵Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation*, 191. See also Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin*, 21-30 and J. F. G. Goeters, "Thomas von Kempen und Johannes Calvin," in *Thomas von Kempen* (Kempten, Germany: Thomas, 1971).

the *Devotio Moderna* by way of his relationship to the Brethren of the Common Life. Strand presents evidence that Calvin "came in touch with... the Brethren" directly through his education at the College of Montaigu in Paris and indirectly through his contact with Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (who used the latinized name-Faber Stapulensis)³⁶ and his association with Johann Sturm and Martin Bucer in Strassburg.³⁷ From 1524 to 1528 Calvin spent time at the Collège of Montaigu studying under Noel Bèda. Strand points out that Bèda, in turn, had been a star pupil of John Standonck, who had studied under the Brethren of the Common Life in Gouda. Standonck's dissemination of "Brethren" ideals at Montaigu is evident not only in his reorganization of the college's regulations, "which in many respects paralleled the emphases of the Brethren Houses," but also in his provision of "a library containing writings of pioneer leaders of the *Devotio Moderna*."³⁸

Hence, Calvin would have become acquainted with the principles of the *Devotio Moderna* through the organizational scheme of the college as well as its library.³⁹ Strand

³⁶Kenneth A. Strand, "John Calvin and the Brethren of the Common Life," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13 (Spring 1975), 67.

³⁷Kenneth A. Strand, "John Calvin and the Brethren of the Common Life: The Role of Strassburg." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 15(Spring 1977): 43-50.

³⁸Kenneth A. Strand, "John Calvin and the Brethren of the Common Life," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13(Spring 1975), 72.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 72-73. Strand supports his conclusion by the strong impact of Montaigu's reform program and its library on Ignatius Loyola who arrived at the school immediately following Calvin's departure. It appears that in preparing his *Spiritual Exercises*. Loyola was strongly influenced by Gerard Zerbolt's *Spiritual Ascensions*, as well as by other works of the *Devotio Moderna* available in the library of Montaigu.

also attempts to demonstrate that Calvin was indirectly influenced by the *Devotio Moderna* via Lefèvre and Bucer. By first demonstrating Lefèvre's connection to the Brethren of the Common Life through his visit to one of their houses in Cologne and his association with several individuals linked to the Brethren, Strand makes great significance of Calvin's visit with Lefèvre in 1534.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Strand argues that during Calvin's stay in Strassburg (1538-41), he also encountered *Devotio Moderna* ideals through Johann Sturm(1507-89), who was educated at a school of the Brethren of the Common Life, and Martin Bucer (1491-1551), who was in turn deeply influenced by Wessel Gansfort, a close associate of the Brethren, and Hinne Rode, the rector of the Brethren school in Utrecht.⁴¹

In conclusion, a case may be made that the *Devotio Moderna*, by way of Thomas à Kempis and the college of Montaigu, had a role in molding Calvin's views on the Christian life. However, it is important to remember that the *Devotio Moderna* was always a movement within the medieval Church and therefore, upheld many doctrines opposed to Calvin's theological reform. Nevertheless, the historical connections with the Brethren of the Common Life and literary parallels indicate that Calvin's approach to spirituality and his emphasis upon mortification through self-denial and cross-bearing were influenced in some degree by the *Devotio Moderna*.

II) John Calvin and Humanism

⁴⁰Kenneth A. Strand, "John Calvin and the Brethren of the Common Life: The Role of Strassburg," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 15 (Spring 1977): 43-50.

⁴¹Keeneth A. Strand, "John Calvin and the Brethren of the Common Life," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13 (Spring 1975), 75-75.

Richard's claim that "Calvin stood squarely in the intellectual tradition of early French Humanism,"⁴² is widely accepted today, as evidenced by numerous studies discussing the extent of humanistic influence upon Calvin's doctrine, theological method, and hermeneutics.⁴³ Richard and Bouwsma each provide studies which are particularly important to our study because they both seek to show the specific impact of humanism upon Calvin's spirituality.⁴⁴ Richard describes French humanism as "a fusion of classical humanism with evangelical piety"⁴⁵ because out of it evolved a positive program for both religious reform and a reorientation of theological study. While it is nearly impossible to account for all the currents of thoughts and ideas converging into the humanism of sixteenth-century France, Richard shows how Francesco Petrarch (1304-74) and Jean Gerson(1363-1429) were instrumental in introducing a more interior and personal spirituality into French humanism. Richard summarizes,

⁴²Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin*, 3.

⁴³William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 113-27; Josef. Bohatec, *Budè und Calvin: Studien zur Gedankenwelt des französischenn Frühhumanismus*(Grax, Austrai: Hermann Bohlaus, 1950); Idem, "Calvin's et l'humanisme," *Revue Historique* 183 (1938): 207-41; Idem, "Calvin et l'humanisme," *Revue Historique* 184(1939): 71-104; Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism*; Stphen R. Spencer, "Reformed Scholasticism in Medieval Perspective: Thomas Aquinas and Francois Turretini on the Incarnation" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1988), 81-89; and Wendel, *Calvin*, 27-37.

⁴⁴Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin*, 48-93; and William J. Bouwsma, "The Spirituality of John Calvin," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed., Jill Raitt(New York: Crossroad, 1987), 318-33.

⁴⁵Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin*, 48.

From Gerson the French Humanists inherited a greater preoccupation with and concern for the more contemplative aspect of the spiritual life. Petrarch bequeathed some important epistemological elements concerning the theological process and the knowledge of God.⁴⁶

Another influence on the spirituality of the French Renaissance came from Desiderius Erasmus(1469-1536) who sought to cleanse and purify the Church through the application of humanistic scholarship to the Christian faith. According to Richard, Erasmus criticized the theology "taught by the over-speculative, hair-splitting scholastics" because it was completely irrelevant to the pursuit of holy living.⁴⁷ Erasmus advocated instead a spirituality of the inner life of the spirit which focused upon a more personal relationship between the individual and God. In his *Enchiridion Militis Chritiani*, Erasmus introduced his "Philosophy of Christ" (*philosophia Christi*) with a comprehensive guide to Christian piety which sought to unify theology and spirituality. The *Enchiridion* advocated a "method of living which might help you achieve a character acceptable to Christ."⁴⁸ Erasmus promoted the democratization of the spiritual life by attacking the idea propagated by the institutional spirituality of the Church that a holy life was more within the reach of monks than laymen.

It is a hard thing indeed and known to a very few men, even of monks, to die to sin, to die to carnal desires, to die to this world. And yet this is the

⁴⁶Ibid., 56.

⁴⁷Ibid., 61-62.

⁴⁸Desiderius Erasmus, *The Enchiridion of Erasmus*, trans. Raymond Himilick (Bloomington, Ind.:n.p., 1963), 37.

common profession of all Christians. Either we must perish or we must without exception take this road to salvation whether we be kings or poor ploughmen. For as it falls not to every man's lot to achieve perfect imitation of Christ, yet all must toil hand and foot to ascend thither. He has a good part of Christian piety who with a sure mind desires to be a Christian.⁴⁹

Thus, according to Erasmus, the spiritual life was not only for priests and monks but for everyone. This contributed to a lay piety that stressed each man's direct communion with God. Richard highlights the crucial aspects of Erasmus's spirituality in the following helpful summary:

Erasmus' spirituality consisted in the imitation of Christ, but not essentially in imitation of the Christ of history. The Christ in Spirit, the mystery which vivifies, was the subject of imitation. It is according to the Spirit that Christ is born in us, *nascitur in nobis*, in that we must imitate him in crucifying in us the man according to the flesh.... This revealed mystery was a gift, a grace, and a historical and trans-historical reality. It was also a call and an invitation to participate substantially in an incorporation in Christ, in order to live according to the spirit of Christ. This spirit of Christ was opposed to the flesh and changed all reality. Only faith makes this transformation possible and the very power of the spirit fostered a continual and newness of growth. On earth this growth was never finished and sanctification was always in process.⁵⁰

Erasmus's aim was to provide a "Christian Philosophy" firmly rooted in Scripture from which everyone, especially laymen, could benefit. His concern to develop a theology based upon the Bible is clearly reflected in his emphasis upon a thorough knowledge of the biblical languages and the publication of his critical edition of the Greek New

⁴⁹Ibid., 37.

⁵⁰Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin*, 60.

Testament(1516). Hence, Erasmus's "Philosophy of Christ"(Philosophia Christi) brought about a needed synthesis between theology and spirituality.⁵¹

Calvin's spirituality reflects the influence of Erasmus and other humanists, according to Bouwsma, by the concerns he shared with them regarding (1) the serious weakness of merely intellectual knowledge of God without the experience and practice of knowing him personally,⁵² (2) the human condition of total dependence upon God due both to God's transcendence and human fallenness,⁵³ (3) the resulting need for divine initiative to cross the gulfdividing God from man,⁵⁴ and (4) the interpretation of the Christian life as a ceaseless struggle with the powers of evil within both the self and the world.⁵⁵ In addition, perhaps the greatest evidence of humanistic influence upon Calvin may be seen in his deep commitment to a biblical understanding of the spiritual life. Like Erasmus, Calvin sought to discover the theological foundation and practical guidelines for holy living through the application of Erasmus's exegetical method upon the Bible.⁵⁶ In this way, Calvin, too, wished to united theology with spirituality. Hence, Calvin's desire to base his doctrine of spirituality upon the original sources(*ad fontes*) places him squarely in the tradition of French humanism.

⁵¹Ibid., 66.

⁵²Bouwsma, "The Spirituality of John Calvin" 320-23.

⁵³Ibid., 326.

⁵⁴Ibid., 219.

⁵⁵Ibid., 331.

⁵⁶Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait*, 117-19. Contrary to Parker's emphasis on the differences between the hermeneutics of Calvin and Erasmus (T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971], 62-68), bouwsma identifies a number of ways Calvin exhibits his commitment to the hermeneutics of humanism(113-27).

Chapter III

John Calvin and True Piety(Pietas)

In his first *Catechism* (published in French in 1537 and in Latin in 1538), John Calvin defined the untranslatable word *pietas*, which for him was the shorthand symbol for his whole understanding and practice of Christian faith and life:

True piety does not consist in a fear which willingly indeed flees God's judgment, but since it cannot escape is terrified. True piety consists rather in a sincere feeling which loves God as Father as much as it fears and reverences Him as Lord, embraces His righteousness, and dreads offending Him worse than death. And whoever have been endowed with this piety dare not fashion out of their own rashness any God for themselves. RATHER, they seek from Him the knowledge of the true God, and conceive Him just as He shows and declares Himself to be.⁵⁷

Calvin more succinctly defined *pietas* in the *Institutes* as "that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces."⁵⁸ Besides *pietas* he set *religio* - "faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law."⁵⁹ Note

⁵⁷*Catechism*, 1538, 2.

⁵⁸*Inst.*, 1.2.1.

⁵⁹*Inst.*, 1.2.2.

that in these definitions of *pietas* and *religio*, a number of other basic terms are interlaced: *faith, fear, reverence, love, knowledge*. One might diagram their interrelationship as in table I.

To grasp the full amplitude of *pietas*, let us examine a few of the many references to the word scattered throughout Calvin's commentaries and other writings. In the *Commentary on the Psalms*(119:78fl.) he taught that the true nature of *pietas* is seen in the two marks of believers: (1) honor, the obedience rendered to God as Father; (2) fear, the service done God as Lord.⁶⁰ Distinct from this is the unbeliever's fear, which rests not on faith (*fides*) but on unfaith (*diffidentia*).⁶¹ Knowledge also enters largely into the concept of *pietas*. In the *Commentary on Jeremiah* (10:25) Calvin spoke of knowledge of God(*cognitio Dei*) as the beginning of *pietas*. Calling on God's name (*invocatio*) is the fruit of the knowledge of God and is evidence of *pietas*.⁶² In the *Institutes* Calvin spoke of the first step toward *pietas* as "to know that God is a father to us."⁶³ Elsewhere he asserted that there is no *pietas* without true instruction, as the name *disciples* indicates.⁶⁴ True religion and worship of God," he said, "arise out of faith, so that no one duly serves God save him who has been educated in His school."⁶⁵

⁶⁰*Commentary on the Psalms* (Ps. 119:78f.), *OC*, 32:249;cf. *Inst.* 3.2.26.

⁶¹*Inst.* 3.2.27.

⁶²*Commentary on Jeremiah* (Jer. 10:25), *OC*, 38:96.

⁶³*Inst.* 2.6.4.

⁶⁴*Commentary on Acts* (Acts 18:22), *OC*, 48:435.

⁶⁵*Commentary on the Psalms* (Ps. 119:78f.), *OC*, 32:249.

Calvin also related piety and love (*caritas*). In *Praelectiones in Ezekiel* (18:5) he spoke of *pietas* as the root of *caritas*.⁶⁶ *Pietas* means the fear of reverence of God; but we also fear God when we live justly among our brethren.⁶⁷ This relationship between our reverential attitude toward God and our attitude toward neighbor is further developed in a sermon on Deuteronomy 5:16.

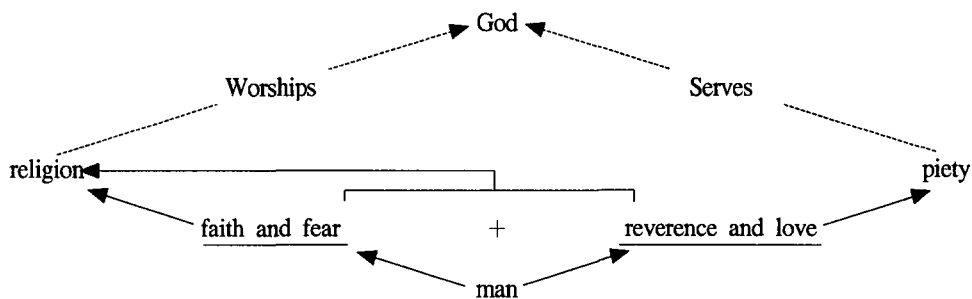


Table I. Interrelationships of piety and religion

And this is why the heathen have applied this word *pietas* to the honor we render to father, mother, and all those in authority over us. *Pietas*, properly speaking, is the reverence we owe to God: but the pagans, although they were poor blind folk, recognized that God not only wills to be served in His majesty, but when we obey the persons who rule over us, in sum, He wills to prove our obedience at this point. And thus, inasmuch as fathers and mothers, magistrates, and all those who have authority, are lieutenants of God and represent His person, it is certain that if one show them contempt and reject

⁶⁶*Lectures on Ezekiel* (Ezek. 18:5), *OC*, 32:249.

⁶⁷See renderings of *Hāsîd*, *mansuetus*, etc., where piety is related to the kindness of man (Ps. 16:10. etc.).

them, that it is like declaring that one does not want to obey God at all.⁶⁸

Yet Calvin places *pietas* higher than *caritas*, for God towers over man; still, "believers seriously testify, by honoring mutual righteousness among themselves, that they honor God."⁶⁹

The connection between the pagan and Christian notions of *pietas* is pursued further in the *Commentary on John*. Here Calvin admitted "that some grains of *pietas* were ever scattered throughout the world" but "that by God, through the hand of philosophers and profane writers, were sowed the excellent sentiments to be found in their writings."⁷⁰ Aratus' couplet quoted by Paul (who spoke to infidels and those ignorant of true *pietas*) is "the testimony of a poet who confessed a knowledge engraved by nature upon men's minds."⁷¹

That Calvin's youthful classical studies had laid the groundwork for this classical as well as Christian understanding of the word *pietas* is clear from his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, published in 1532 when Calvin was twenty-two years of age. In explaining the Senecan phrase "nor the piety of his children," Calvin drew together what we may assume were the chief classical texts that were mingled, after his conversion, with scriptural and patristic uses to shape the word in his thought. Note that among the pagan classical writers is to be found a quotation from

⁶⁸*Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Deut. 5:16), *OC*, 26:312.

⁶⁹*Ibid.* This is the habitual twofold division (God and man) that Calvin applied to the Decalogue (*Inst.*, 2.8.11) and Lord's prayer (3.20.35)

⁷⁰*Comm. on John* 4:36; *OC* 47:96.

⁷¹*Comm. on Acts* 17:28; *OC* 48:417.

Augustine's *City of God*. Here are Calvin's words:

Cicero, *Pro Plancio* (33.80): *What is piety, if not a benevolent gratitude to one's parents?* Quintilian (5.10.12): *Just as those things that are admitted by the general consent of mankind, such as that there are gods, and that piety is to be shown to parents.* Yet in order that my readers may understand what piety really is, I shall append Cicero's words from the *Topics* (23.90): *Equity is also said to have three parts: one pertains to the gods in heave, the second to the spirits of the departed, in third to men. The fist is called "piety," the second "sanctity," the third "justice" or "equity."* Thus far Cicero. But since parents are for us so speak in the place of the gods, to them is diverted what Augustine hints at (*De civitate Dei*, 10.1.3): *Piety, properly speaking, is commonly understood as worship of God, which the Greeks call eusebeia. Yet this eusebeia is said to be exercised by wasy of obligation toward parents also.* But we also use the term when we wish to express a particularly forceful love. Cicero(*Ep. Fam.*, 1.9.1): *I was very much pleased with your letter, which made me realized that you fully appreciate my piety toward you; for why should I say "my good will" whenever the term "piety" itself, most solemm and sacred as it is, does not seem to me impressive enough to describe my obligation to you?*⁷²

As this collection of classical passages indicates, the words *pius* and *pietas* in classical Latin refereed first to the relationshi of children to their parents.⁷³ In the

⁷²*Comm. Seneca, De Clementia*, 226-29.

⁷³Compare Justinian's comment: "For the power of the father ought to consist in piety, not cruelty" (*Digest* 48.9.5.); cited by Calvin in *Comm. Sen. De*

Roman family of the paterfamilias and the materfamilias, children were expected to fear, honor, obey, and love their parents. Pietas bespoke the mutual love and care between parents and their offspring.

The state was, after all (as Aristotle described it in his *Politics*),⁷⁴ but the extension of the family. The king or emperor was the pater patriae, the father of his country.⁷⁵ Parricide, in Roman eyes the most horrendous crime of which human beings are capable, and subject to the cruelest and most unusual punishment of all, was extended to assassination of the ruler, as the parent of all.⁷⁶ Pietas, then, in the larger sense, summarized all the feelings of loyalty, love of country, and self-sacrifice for the common good that marked Roman citizenship.

The early Christians, whose supreme Ruler and Father was God, without divesting the word pietas of its familial and national meaning, carried the word to a higher use. For them the whole complex of relationships between God the Father and his earthly children was summed up in this one word. For Calvin, then, there is in the word the classical overshine of filial obedience. Pietas bespeaks the walk of us adopted children of God the Father, adopted brothers and sisters of Christ the Son.

So far we have dealt mainly with the "inner" meaning of pietas. It also had an external meaning for Calvin. In *On The Harmony of the Gospels* (Matt. 12:7 and parallels) he argued, with our Lord, that certain types of manual labor were permitted

Clem., 254-57.

⁷⁴1.3-13 (1253 bl-1260 bw5); cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.11 (1160 cl). Note is from Calvin, *Comm. Sen. De Clem.*, 170f.

⁷⁵Calvin, *Comm. Sen. De Clem.*, 263-39.

⁷⁶Calvin, *Comm. Sen. De Clem.*, 263-39.

on the Sabbath - those connected with the worship of God - and spoke of the officia pietatis, which we might render "religious duties." In the same passage Calvin suggested the modern hypocritical connotation of piety, speaking of the "hypocrites who pretend pietas by outward signs and grievously pervert it by sticking in carnal worship alone."⁷⁷

Calvin's meaning will emerge more clearly as we seek out the scriptural basis of his concept of *pietas*. The New Testament word uniformly rendered by the Latin *pietas* is ευσέβεια. It is found almost exclusively in the pastoral and general Epistles, appearing elsewhere in the New Testament only at Acts 3:12. Of the fifteen references in the former, the *Revised Standard Version* translates all but three as "godliness." The word is used in the *Septuagint* to denote "the duty which man owes to God-piety, godliness, religion."⁷⁸ In the *Septuagint* the word is chiefly found in the *Apocrypha*.

I) piety reflected in John Calvin's Life

If this, then, is what piety meant for Calvin, we will certainly find in the accounts of his conversion, however meager, help in understanding how this concept was shaped in his own life.

Much ink has been spilled in discussion and speculation on the date, circumstances, and character of Calvin's decision to accept the Reformation faith. I have dealt with the shape of his conversion in my translation of the *Institution* of

⁷⁷OC, 45:324f.; cf. *Inst.* 1.4.4, where Calvin contrasts true and false *pietas*.

⁷⁸Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 326.

1536.⁷⁹ Classic accounts of conversion usually cite some verse of Scripture as triggering the change. Augustine's experience of "*Tolle, Lege!*" ("Take up and read!") in the garden near Milan led him through Romans 13:13f. to Bishop Ambrose and Christian baptism. Luther was captivated by Romans 1:17. We have no such definite information on the specific Scripture that brought about Calvin's change of heart. A close study of the evidence has, however, led me to suggest that is very probably was Romans 1:18-25. More specifically the text may well have been Romans 1:21 ("for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened" RSV).⁸⁰

The central themes of Calvin's piety are the honoring of God and being thankful to him; they are interwoven in the recital of his conversion in the preface to the *Cosmmentary on the Psalms*⁸¹ and in the account of the Reformed Christian's confession before God's judgment seat in Calvin's *Reply to Cardinal Sadolet*.⁸²

Calvin's newfound faith is early expressed in his preface to the French translation of the New Testament made by his cousin Pierre Robert (Olivétan).⁸³ Almost contemporaneous with this are the early pages of chapter 1, "On the Law," of

⁷⁹See *Inst.* 1536aa, xviff.; *Inst.* 1536b, xxviff.

⁸⁰*Inst.* 1536a, xviif.; *Inst.* 1536b, xxvi-xxvii.

⁸¹See *Piety* 1978, ch. 1.

⁸²See *Inst.* 1536a, xxiiiiff.; *Inst.* 1536b, xxxiiff. T. H. L. Parker rejected this passage from Calvin's *Reply to Cardinal Sadolet* as a "source." See *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 162.

⁸³Introduction, *Inst.* 1536a, xxivf.; *Inst.* 1536b, xxxivff.

the 1536 Institution. I call this in chapter 2 "The Kernel of Calvin's Faith."

It is the intolerable contrast between God's absolute perfection and man's fallenness that initiated Calvin's religious quest. Like Augustine, he saw no instant perfection succeeding the event of conversion - however "subita"⁸⁴ It seemed; there is rather a growth into the Christian life to a perfection beyond death - all the gracious gift of God in Christ. So he begins this "kernel" account of faith with the two knowledges: of God's glory, justice, mercy, and gentleness; and of fallen man's ignorance, iniquity, impotence, death, and judgment. In the third place, we are shown the law - the written law of the Old Testament and the inwardly written law of conscience - a God's first effort to bridge the gulf between Creator and created. The law is for us a mirror in which to discern and contemplate our sin and curse. It leads us to the impasse of being called to glorify, honor, and love our Lord and Father, but unable to perform these duties. Therefore we deserve the curse, judgment - eternal death. This was indeed the sequence of Calvin's experience, or more accurately, it was the shape which in retrospect he gave his experience in the light of the pauline - Augustinian tradition and which he generalized in his teaching.

But the impasse, through God's mercy, is breached; another way is opened to us. It is forgiveness of sins through Christ; Calvin's "kernel," in its fourth and final section, comes back once more to the knowledge of ourselves, of our poverty and ruin. The lesson of this knowledge is that we learn to humble ourselves, cast ourselves before God, seek his mercy. Thus will Christ, our leader, the only Way to reach the Father, bring us into eternal blessedness. Our peity, then, is our pathway, in grace,

⁸⁴The word *subita* ("sudden, unexpected") has spawned a considerable literaturer. For discussion, see *Piety* 1978, ch. 1, line 257 (note).

from estrangement to reunion with our Creator. It is the way of suffering but also of joy.

Thus Calvin's conversion took a lifetime to be worked out. We cannot here summarize that brief but crowded life. But we can look at several episodes in it that will explain why he believed in the third use of the law - its pedagogical use as tutor to converted Christians - and denominated it the law's chief use.⁸⁵ His life will also exemplify his teaching on calling, that the Christian must, like a sentry, stand guard at his post while he lives.⁸⁶

First, look at how Calvin was called to his initial ministry in Geneva. His initial vision of the Christian life (like Augustine's) was that of a retired, contemplative, intellectual study of the faith. William Farel, that hotheaded pioneer of the French-language Reformation who was spurned in his invitation to Calvin to work with him in Geneva, a city that had just chosen the Reformed faith, had recourse to imprecation and threat: "You are following," he thundered at Calvin, "your own wishes and I declare, in the name of God Almighty, that if you do not assist us in this work of the Lord, the Lord will punish you for seeking your own interest rather than his."⁸⁷

And so, against his will, Calvin took up the task at Geneva as at the invitation of God himself. After Calvin's banishment in 1538 from Geneva, Bucer used the same threat to persuade him to assume pastoral and teaching duties at Strasbourg.⁸⁸

⁸⁵Calvin called the law the perfect guide to all duties of piety and love (*Inst.* 2.8.51).

⁸⁶Cf. *Inst.*, 3.9.4; 3.10.6.

⁸⁷Beza, *Vita Calvini*, in OC, 21:215.41ff.; ET by Henry Beveridge in *John Calvin, Tracts and Treatises*, 1:xxix.

⁸⁸See *Piety 1978*, ch. 1, line 445 (note)

Calvin was subsequently importuned from his happy pastoral relationship with a tiny French congregation in Strasbourg to return to Geneva.⁸⁹ It must be said that the Strasbourg sojourn was crucial in working out pastorally, practically, and liturgically the full meaning of pietas. In his study of the sufferings of the patriarchs, Calvin mirrored his own *tolerantia crucis*: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the rest, David included, withstood terrible hardships, pain, suffering, because they were on pilgrimage. The hope that was to come fed them on their journey.⁹⁰ This, too, was the secret of Calvin's triumphant struggle against the overwhelming odds that faced him and his world. This, too, kept alive his feeble body, taxed as it constantly was beyond its strength. This, too, enabled him to maintain a ceaseless literary output of the highest order and one so decisive for posterity.

II) Piety in John Calvin's View of the Christian Life

We have endeavored to define pietas in Calvin's own words and his own acts. Let us now turn to the principles of pietas as he worked them out in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In doing this, it will be necessary to examine more fully the transition years (1538-41) of the Strasbourg exile, which we have just now lightly sketched.

The portion of Calvin's *Institutes* on which we would like to concentrate our attention at this time comprises, in the final Latin edition of that book printed in the author's lifetime (1559), chapters 6-10 of book III.⁹¹ One may search in vain the pages

⁸⁹See *Piety* 1978, ch. 1, line 469 (note).

⁹⁰*Inst.* 2.10f.

⁹¹Translated in *Piety* 1978, ch. 3.

of the first edition of that work (1536) for any-section corresponding to this one on the Christian life.⁹² Actually(with some subsequent additions) it dates from 1539, the year of the second Latin edition, and remained in all editions from 1539 to 1554 the final chapter of the *Institutes*. Why was such an important subject so belatedly treated by Calvin?

The clue to the answer lies, I believe, in a comparison of what Calvin wrote before he went to Strasbourg in 1538 and what he wrote after that date. On the one hand, examine the Institution of 1536, the Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and Worship of January 1537.⁹³ and the Confession and Catechism of the Church of Geneva of 1537-38.⁹⁴ On the other hand, examine the *Institutes* of 1539 (in which he placed the treatise "On the Christian Life"); his Several Psalms and Songs Set for Singing, also of 1539,⁹⁵ and his 1540 *Commentary on Romans*. Add to these the literary output immediately following his return to Geneva from Strasbourg in 1541-that is, the Draft *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1541, The Form of Prayers of 1542, and the third Latin edition of the *Institutes* (1543). What does a comparison show?⁹⁶ We see a real growth in Calvin the churchman, in his grasp of the practical

⁹²Section at 3.8. 1ff. of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* is hinted at in the 1536 edition. See *Inst. 1536a*, 55; *Inst. 1536b*, 40-41.

⁹³See John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, ed. and trans. by J. K. S. Reid, *Library of Christian Classics(LCC)*, 22 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 47-55.

⁹⁴See "Letter" in *Catechism 1538*, viiff.

⁹⁵See *Piety 1978*, ch. 6.

⁹⁶Cf. Ford Lewis Battles, "Against Luxury and License in Geneva," 186ff.; see ch. 9 herein.

problems both of individual Christians and of the church as the society of Christians. All of these works are directed to the perfecting either of the Christian life or of the liturgical and disciplinary functioning of the church. Together they mark the significant changes that were later to be incorporated into Books III and IV of the 1559 *Institutes*.⁹⁷ Both the *Institution* of 1536 and the Catechism of 1537-38 were cast in the traditional catechetical mold: Decalogue, Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, sacraments. In Geneva the efforts to enforce acceptance of the Confession and Catechism of 1537-38, household by household, and oversight of morals, district by district, ended in failure and banishment from the city for both Farel and Calvin, as we have seen, in April 1538. What had gone wrong? Let us quickly review the facts.

On Sunday, 21 May 1536, the General Council of Geneva had unanimously voted by a show of hands to abolish the Mass and other papal ceremonies and abuses, images, and idols, and had sworn with God's help to live in the holy gospel law and Word of God.⁹⁸ The duly appointed Reforming pastors, William Farel and John Calvin, had taken their city fathers at their word and had planned literally to transform the city into a gospel community that had its true center in the Lord's Table. This was not to be, however. The public documents of 1536-37, as a consequence, underwent (after Calvin's Strasbourg sojourn) a clarification of disciplinary procedures and a development of church polity in those of 1541-43. The *Institutes* of 1539 shows a greater maturity and fullness in its understanding of the formation of the individual Christian than does the *Institution* of 1536. Similarly, the next edition, that of 1543,

⁹⁷Robert Bendetto, *Interpreting John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 296.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 296.

quite surpasses both the first and the second editions in its grasp of ecclesiology. Calvin indeed learned from experience, both in the first two years in Geneva and in the three-year interim in Strasbourg under Martin Bucer's tutelage.

We may infer that the short treatise "On the Christian Life"⁹⁹ is in a sense the firstfruits of Calvin's reflection on his 1536-38 failure. He realized, it would seem, that catechetical statements on such topics as faith, repentance, justification, regeneration, election, and related heads of doctrine-however clearly stated-would not suffice to transform men's hearts, even though their minds might give intellectual assent to the new faith. A deeper reflection on the christological foundations of the Christian life, particularly as they had been set forth by the apostle Paul, was called for. This short treatise supplied the lack we have noted in the 1536 *Institution* and the *Catechism* of 1537-38.

We must, however, slightly qualify this judgment. The 1536 *Institution* contains certain short blank spaces in the text as printed, called *alinea*, at which points-in later editions-expansions of materials were made. This fact seems to bear out what Calvin himself says of his progress through the various editions of the *Institutes*, as he speaks to the reader in 1559: "I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth."¹⁰⁰ Also, the *Catechism* of 1537-38, while largely an epitome of the prior edition of the *Institution*, does presage important changes to come in the *Institutes* of 1539.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹See *Piety* 1978, ch. 3.

¹⁰⁰*Inst.*, 3.

¹⁰¹See *Catechism 1538* (p. x) and the comparative table at the end of that volume.

What, then, does the short treatise "On the Christian Life" tell us about Calvin's continuing pilgrimage of faith?

First, we see further reflection on the contrast between the philosophers and Scripture.¹⁰² Calvin had, in his conversion, already rejected the Greek and Latin authors as moral guides. Here the contrast between them becomes sharper and more detailed. But some vestiges of their influence still remain. This can be illustrated by his attitude here expressed toward Stoicism. Rejected are Stoic notions of fate and of the passionless "wise man" and Stoic strictures against pity. We might here note in passing that even before his conversion Calvin had begun to show such an attitude, as his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, which we previously quoted, reveals. But the Stoics' call to follow God, their insistence that we are born to help one another, and their preaching of moderation and frugality.¹⁰³ are sufficiently close to Calvin's Christian piety to remain a part of his moral teaching.

Second, since penning his first great theological essay of 1536, Calvin had come to know the early Church Fathers, both Greek and Latin, far better. The homilies of a Basil or of a Chrysostom or the writings of a Cyprian or an Ambrose filled in gaps in his pastoral knowledge. Most important of all, Augustine brought him to a deeper understanding of Paul.¹⁰⁴ He was therefore in a position in the spring of 1539,

¹⁰²Cf. *Inst.* 1.15.8. The crucial place of man's Fall, not understood by the philosophers, was recognized by Calvin in his understanding of the soul in its present state (1.15.6-8; this is apparent mainly in the 1559 edition but to some extent in the 1539 edition), a reflection of Calvin's conversion insight.

¹⁰³On Calvin's teaching on frugality and its relation to the "blue laws" of Geneva, see Battles, "Against Luxury and License in Geneva," 182ff.

¹⁰⁴Referring to the Tenth Commandment, Calvin said, "It was Augustine who first opened the way for me to understand this commandment" (*Inst.* 2.8.50).

after five months as pastor of the French congregation in Strasbourg and a brief visit with Bucer to Frankfurt, to write this portion of his forthcoming second Latin edition of the *Institutes*. On 12 May Calvin began to lecture on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians¹⁰⁵ On 16 October he dedicated his shortly-to-be-published *Commentary on Romans* to the Basil Savant Simon Grynaeus. This concentration on Pauline studies is reflected in the treatise "On the Christian Life." Not only is it steeped in Paul's thought; Calvin's very purpose smacks of Paul's way of working in the churches: "to show some order whereby the Christian man may be led and directed to order his life aright." This is Calvin's announced intention.

The treatise "On the Christian Life" is a marvel of brevity. After a call to the holiness that God demands of his children, a holiness deep within the heart, Calvin began to describe the lifelong process of growth into Christian perfection in and through Christ.¹⁰⁶ Here Calvin was consciously standing on a middle ground between the two-tiered Roman Catholic notion of the Christian life.¹⁰⁷ and the instant perfection he rightly or wrongly inferred from the teaching of the Anabaptist.¹⁰⁸

He then moved on to describe the christological pattern as it unfolds inwardly

¹⁰⁵Cf. *Piety* 1978. ch. 3, lin3 558 (note)

¹⁰⁶See *Piety* 1978, ch. 3, lines 1-280.

¹⁰⁷In his *Reply to Cardinal Sadolet* (1539) Calvin confessed that his own Christian nurture (under the Romanism into which he had been born) was quite inadequate for right worship, hope of salvation, or duties of the Christian life. See *Inst. 1536a*, xixf. But ch. note 26. above.

¹⁰⁸See *Inst. 1536a*, 375f. (note on lie 34, p. 152); *Inst. 1536a*, xixf. But cf. note 26, above.

in the heart - "Denial of Self."¹⁰⁹ The same following of Christ is then traced in the outward life as the "Bearing of the Cross."¹¹⁰

suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits, that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits [it] to be marred or ruined by neglect. Moreover, that this economy, and this diligence, with respect to those good things which God has given us to enjoy, may flourish among us; let every one regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.¹¹¹

Calvin believed, too, as we have said, in gradual growth in the Christian life. Does not the very writing of this section illustrate his own growth, not to be complete until his death in 1564?

How may we sum up, for our own use, Calvin's teaching on pietas, on Christian discipleship? From Calvin's experience, as we have just reviewed it, and from our own experience of trying to live the Christian life in these times, we may infer a few general principles that may assist us in our search of a style of living

¹⁰⁹See *Piety 1978*, ch. 3, lines 281-905.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, lines 906-1505.

¹¹¹*Comm on Genesis* [on Gen. 2:15], trans. by John King, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847-1850), 1:125.

commensurate with the gospel.

1. One cannot really understand a particular Christian's view of discipleship apart from his times and apart from his own distinctive experience of Christ.

2. Also, certain tacit assumptions that we make in our daily living must be identified, and at least momentarily set aside, if we are to understand a classic theologians' teaching: for example, (1) the myth of human self-sufficiency and of scientific-technological supremacy; (2) the treatment of God as a shadowy concept, not very important for daily life; (3) the notion of the Scriptures as a human book, rather like other books; (4) the rejection of an afterlife and the concentration of all human attention and effort on the present life; (5) the emphasis on the production of goods and the notion of human beings as consuming animals; and (6) the view of humans as creatures whose wants are to be satisfied.

3. Conversely, to understand Calvin's view of Christian discipleship, we must for the moment open our minds to certain basic assumptions that he makes: (1) humanity's total dependence on God; (2) nature being ours to use and enjoy, but with moderation and accountability; (3) God's providential care; (4) the contrast between philosophers and Scripture; (5) the afterlife being not only the goal of the present life, but its nourishment in hope; (6) all goods as the gifts of God's kindness to us; and (7) the account we will at the end render to God of their use.