ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Degree          Ph.D.                   Date  October 1958
Title of Thesis The Understanding of Sin and Responsibility in the Teaching
               of John Calvin

The understanding of sin and responsibility in Calvin differs radically from concepts later dominant in Reformed theology and in moral philosophy. In federal theology the covenant of works determines man's duty and culpability. Created into an order of justice and moral law, man is or is supposed to be an autonomous creature who through his power, will, and ability lives by righteous works of merit. This is his responsibility. In this light sin is legal transgression, a failure to provide perfect moral works. This theology is linked with the parallel concept in Kantian ethics where responsibility is defined with reference to man's freedom and ability, and where culpability lies in moral failure.

Calvin's teaching stands over against these ego-centric concepts, for Calvin begins with a divine order of grace. God as father cares for man; he assumes this responsibility. Man as son is to accept and acknowledge this care. Man is responsible as he responds to and participates in grace. Man is not independent, but dependent; he has no ability of his own, but is enabled and bound by grace in all things. He is responsible as he in fidelity, trust, obedience, love, and gratitude, allows another to be responsible for him. But in sin man - Adam and humanity - disdains God's grace, as he strives to raise himself up in independence of grace and in dependence on his own ability. In infidelity, unbelief, disobedience, concupiscent self-will, and ingratitude, he disgraces himself. He disorders and inverts the divine order of grace. The notion that man is or ought to be responsible to God on the basis of his own works is the essence of sin. As God does not give up his fatherhood or the end of his creation, but continues to offer his grace to men in nature and gives it again in law and gospel, man's culpability lies essentially in his free and voluntary rejection of grace. This involves an antinomy, for while man can resist God's grace and is culpable for so doing, he is not and is not supposed to be free and able to accept grace, but is to rely even in his acceptance upon the grace which enables him.

(over)
With regard to responsibility, predestination, and original sin, Calvin teaches that the apparent conflicts here cannot always be rationally resolved. We are not to employ the more formal and rigid development of logical argument which characterized later Reformed thought, but have to acquiesce in truths of a partly irrational nature, and make place for human responsibility alongside our concepts of man's total depravity at birth and of God's predestination. Thus into his concept of an immutable providence of God, Calvin incorporates dynamic concepts, the importance of which has often been overlooked. At the same time, under the influence of repudiation and the bias of polemic or systematic treatment, he sometimes allows these concepts to deteriorate so that he makes errors he has warned against and prejudices the seriousness of his own concept of sin and responsibility.
THE UNDERSTANDING OF SIN AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE TEACHING OF JOHN CALVIN

presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy at the University of Edinburgh

by Holmes Rolston, III

October 1958
I entered into this study hoping at once to find something central to the Christian faith and my Reformed tradition, and something that would challenge me to deepen my grasp of the tenets of the faith. I selected the understanding of sin and responsibility in the teaching of John Calvin, a major concept in one of the intellectual giants of the faith. Often since I have felt myself dwarfed by both the doctrine and the man I had undertaken to study, and many questions remain unanswered, but the study has been even more rewarding than I had anticipated. I found that I had to re-think many of the central issues in Christianity, and above all come to an understanding of the grace of God deeper than I had previously known.

Some limits had to be set from the beginning. I have tried to set forth Calvin's understanding of sin and of human responsibility, developing each in the light of the other. Within the bounds set by the study, sin is conceived as sin against God, rather than against our fellow man; and responsibility is responsibility to God, rather than to our neighbor. The study is principally an exposition of what Calvin had to say. The aim is to present Calvin's concepts as they are most dynamic, and at the same time give place to his strong emphasis on providence. Where his thought, under the shadow of double predestination, hardens and deteriorates into frozen, rigid concepts, I have tried to set over against this a wealth of other and sometimes little known concepts where Calvin is more flexible. In this way an attempt is made to balance up the contradictory or seemingly contradictory elements in his thought. I have tried also to recognize the places where Calvin admits that he is unable to put into logical form what seems to be the content of Scripture, where he feels that we must set side by side
things apparently contradictory.

Following the example and advice of my advisor, Dr. T. F. Torrance, the thesis contains Calvin's teaching in the main in his own words. Extensive citations are arranged to let Calvin speak for himself. Following the suggestion of Dr. John McIntyre, I have incorporated an introductory chapter to deal with the influences on Calvin's thought of the Calvinism and moral philosophy which followed him. This procedure sets the stage for the main body of the study, and allows there an intensive and unrestricted examination of Calvin's own thought. An almost exclusive use of the primary sources has proved peculiarly useful in the study of Calvin, for on the one hand his very depth of thought has lent itself to considerable interpretation, and on the other many of his insights have been strangely lost in the course of the centuries. The Institutes is here recognized as Calvin's definitive systematic treatise, but I have incorporated much material from his commentaries. The sermons - virtually unknown to the English speaking world since the generation after Calvin's death - have proved peculiarly useful in revealing thought where Calvin ranges outside the boundaries imposed by a systematic bias and yet sticks close to Scripture.

Although I have worked from the original texts in Latin and French and depend finally upon them, I am deeply indebted to the translators who have gone before me. Where existing translations were adequate I have used these. A list of these works is included in the bibliography. To erase archaisms, to render the original more faithfully, or to bring out similar language in various passages formerly translated independently, I have altered these as needed, almost to the extent of re-translation at times. Where no translation exists, I have resorted to making my
own. The Ioannis Calvini Opera in the Corpus Reformatorum, edited by G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss, (Brunswick, 1869-96) has been my definitive text.

Because of the way citations are integrated into the text, I have departed from the more customary procedure of blocking off longer quotations in single spaced indented paragraphs. For the same reason I have altered the strict usage demanding an ellipsis where the quotation is not the beginning of a sentence in the original, though where this might cause misunderstanding the ellipsis is included. The original Middle French spelling and accenting is retained, with modern spelling also given in some cases. To avoid excessive underlining, in some cases words that would normally be italicized are not underlined. This is the case where Latin or French is obviously set off as such, in the frequently repeated references in the notes to the commentaries, and in some Latin works and abbreviations (ibid., etc., et al., cf.) now long standard in English. Where good usage permits alternatives, the shorter spelling and simpler punctuation is used. Abbreviations should be self-explanatory. (CR = Corpus Reformatorum; E.T. = English Translation; et seqq. = that and all the following editions of that work)

Calvin used St. Paul in his sermons, and Paul in his Latin works; this is retained. In the introductory part, quotations follow the original even where spelling and punctuation differ from my own style.

To Dr. T. F. Torrance and Dr. John McIntyre, who with patient counsel and guidance have led me through Calvin’s thought, I offer my deepest appreciation. To Dr. J. A. Lamb and the staff of the New College Library, who have made available a collection of Calvin’s works unsurpassed in the English libraries, I must gratefully say that without your help the study would have been impossible.
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Selected Bibliography
PART I: THE PROBLEMS

Recent years have seen a renewed interest in Calvin. From years of reaction to Calvin's position, we have so markedly returned to Reformation and Reformed theology that it may justly be said that we have witnessed its restatement. Prevailing schools of thought now review the teaching of Calvin with respect and seriousness, while not many years ago this was too often presented only in caricature, or as a position over against which was to be set a modern reaction. Certainly Calvin has always been respected in some areas of the church. But only in the last generation have he and his fellow Reformers come again to dominate the theological scene. The interest here has primarily been stimulated by Barth and Brunner, whose avowed intent has been to restate the Reformed position, and whose works are permeated with their indebtedness to Calvin. Barth writes: 'In the general rediscovery of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the profile of Calvin, who was its greatest teacher, became for many once more impressive.'\(^1\) The impact on recent theology of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* and of the several widely circulated works of Brunner has been only an index of the significance of this return to Calvin. Following from this have arisen a number of particular studies in Calvin's theology, characterized by intensive study of the primary sources, in an effort to be true to Calvin and to free his position from much that has proved to be the addition of later philosophical thought.

From earlier studies which sought to explain Calvin in terms of the thought of his age and generation, of his French and Latin mind, or of his psychological structures and disposition,\(^2\) Calvin study has turned

2. See Wilhelm Mieser, *The Theology of Calvin* (London, 1956), 9ff, for a summary of these works.
to accept Calvin's work as an effort to bear witness to the Word of God, as a theology determined by its object, and to concern itself with the particular doctrines of Calvin, and the overall way in which Calvin strives to point man to God and to confront man with the Word of God.

This fresh approach was pioneered by Wilhelm Niesel in 1938 in his work Die Theologie Calvins (recently published in English as The Theology of Calvin) and has been followed by a number of concentrated studies of individual doctrines. Examples of these are: Calvin's Doctrine of Man by T.F. Torrance, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God by T.H.L. Parker, and Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament by Ronald S. Wallace.

Upon witnessing a resurgence of Calvin's theology, it would be the impression of many that while Calvin might have much to contribute to the doctrines of the faith, yet surely the least promising area of investigation would be that of sin and responsibility. Calvin's extreme and controversial position ought rather to be by-passed than to be investigated as a useful witness to the Biblical teaching. Here Calvin ought to be abandoned in favor of a more moderate view. But such an impression is not justified. It seems now appropriate to examine from the original sources what is the teaching of Calvin on sin and man's responsibility, searching for a depth of serious thought that will point us back to the Biblical understanding. This must be done critically, for there are doubtless elements that need to be rejected, and sympathetically, allowing Calvin to speak for himself, and searching for insights forgotten across the centuries, or so buried under later interpretation as to be of little value.

As an introduction to such a study, we sketch in this first part the

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1. Also may be mentioned: Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things by Heinrich Quistorp, Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ by J.F. Jansen, and Christ in our Place (The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation) by Paul van Buren. A recent dissertation on Calvin's Conception of the Christian Life by Ronald S. Wallace is unpublished. See the bibliography for details of publication.
problems out of which such a thesis arises. It will be helpful to portray as a background certain aspects of the Calvinist position which need reconsideration and which generate this study. Problems arise along theological and philosophical lines.

A. Calvinist thought in the theological situation

1. Problems arising from the covenant of works

Three characteristically problematic areas of the traditional Reformed position need again to be considered to regain Calvin's real position. The first of these deals with federal theology. Reformed theology has long been dominated by what the Westminster Confession of Faith defines as the **covenant of works** and the **covenant of grace**. This concept appeared among continental theologians in the two generations after Calvin. It developed through the earlier concepts of a 'covenant of nature' and a 'covenant of grace,' found in Ursinus,¹ to be given systematic form in Coccejus.² It is properly a 'covenant of works' and a 'covenant of grace' in such men as Polanus, (who preceded Coccejus) Heidegger, Witsius, and others.³ It found ready acceptance in Scottish theology, for example in Robert Rollock or David Dickson,⁴ in English Puritanism, for example in William Ames,⁵ and in American Reformed theology.⁶ Rollock, probably the

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3. Amandus Polanus, *Syntagga Theologiae Christianae* (Hanover, 1625), VI, 1ff.; J.H. Heidegger, *Corpus Theologiae* (Zurich, 1700), IX, 1ff.
4. Herman Witsius, *De Economia Noedarum Dei cum Hominibus* (Utrecht, 1694), I, ii, 1ff.; II, i, 1ff.; II, ii, 1ff.; et al.; and see the bibliography. Many of these older works now not easily obtained, or not translated, are quoted in the source book by Heinrich Hegge, *Reformed Dogmatics*, set out and illustrated from the sources, E.T. by C.T. Thomson (London, 1950). Some of the translations in this chapter are from this work.

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earliest federal theologian in British theology, entitles a division of a major theological work: 'Of the Word of God, or of God’s Two Covenants, both that of works and that of grace,'\(^1\) This dualism of covenants was given confessional status for the first time in the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647,\(^2\) (although it had appeared earlier in the Irish Articles)\(^3\) and in this form it thereafter prevailed in Reformed thought.\(^4\)

In the beginning God made with Adam a covenant of works. 'The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect personal obedience.'\(^5\) The covenant of works is God’s pact with Adam in his integrity, as the head of the whole human race, by which God requiring of man the perfect obedience of the law of works promised him if obedient eternal life in heaven, but threatened him if he transgressed with eternal death.'\(^6\) It is therefore a covenant based on the divine law. It was the moral law which was first revealed to Adam in his innocence and to which he was bound. The moral law remains the basis of our obligation to God.

'The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding every one to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity, and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul, and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man; promising life upon the fulfilling,

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1. Rollock, op. cit., I, 25
2. Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. VII
5. Westminster Confession, chap. VII, sec. II
and threatening death upon the breach of it. ¹

This is a covenant of works, the emphasis on the works of man being all the greater when set in opposition to the later covenant of grace. It promises a reward to man, if he earns it by his own good works. The covenant of works, it is true, is set within the framework of a 'condescension on God's part, ² yet it is seen as a real pact between God and man whereby eternal life is promised as a reward to the perfectly obedient man. And man is given at the first the will and power or ability to accomplish this obedience. 'Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which is good and well pleasing to God.'³ It is by his own works that he was at the first to live.

Over against this first and general covenant of works there stands a second covenant, a covenant of grace, made after the fall, where God freely gives by grace what he had before promised on condition of man's perfect obedience. While Heppe maintains that there is an 'essentially universalistic bias upon which the covenant of grace rests,' ⁴ it was characteristically narrowed to include the elect. 'Man by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant (of works), the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: whereby he freely offereth to sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.'⁵

This is originally a covenant made between God and Christ for the

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1. 'Larger Catechism,' question 93, cf. question 92
3. ibid., chap. IX, sec. II. See Edward D. Morris, Theology of the Westminster Symbols (Columbus, Ohio, 1906), 298ff.
4. Heppe, op. cit., 371
5. Westminster Confession, chap. VII, sec. III
elect. 'The contracting parties are indicated, on the one hand God, on
the other Christ, and the convention ratified between the two.' Man
was sometimes included as a 'third party.' More loosely it was seen
as a covenant of God with elect sinners. 'The covenant of grace is an
agreement between God and the elect sinner, God declaring his free good
pleasure anent the free giving of eternal salvation and all the covenanted
blessings pertaining thereto, through and because of Christ the Mediator.

In the thought of some this was a triple covenant scheme: a covenant of
redemption (between the Father and Son in eternity), of works (between
God and Adam), and of grace (between God and man through Christ).

The important thing is that the whole understanding of divine grace
to man had to be worked out as a second covenant which was introduced
with the failure of the covenant of works. God demonstrated his grace to
man only after man had demonstrated himself unwilling and unable to
provide his own works. Reformed thought did at times recognize that Adam
needed and received some 'aid of grace.' Adam 'had not sufficient
strength not to be in need of God's further grace and help in order not
to sin.' Nor were these works exclusively thought of as works of merit.
Rollock could call them pledges of thankfulness. But federal theology
could not take these influences seriously enough to offset the emphasis
on works. The overall conception was that God did not come to primal man
in a relationship of grace, for man did not yet need that grace but stood
by his works. J. Macpherson teaches bluntly: 'By the creature's own

1. Witsius, op. cit., II, i, 5; P. Burman, Synopsis Theologiae (Amster-
dam, 1699), II, 15, 2; Heidegger, op. cit., II, 12
2. Heppe, op. cit., 383
3. Witsius, op. cit., II, i, 5
4. See Bruggink, op. cit., 96; G.D. Henderson, 'The Idea of the Covenant
in Scotland,' in The Evangelical Quarterly, XXVII (January, 1955), 2-14;
Dickson, op. cit., 55-188
5. Heppe, op. cit., 246; Coecius, Summa de Foed., II, 56; Heidegger, op.
cit., IX, 51
6. Peter van Mastricht, Theoretico-practica Theologia, new edition
(Utrecht and Amsterdam, 1725), III, ix, 337
7. Bruggink, op. cit., 95
natural strength is the covenant to be fulfilled. Grace may have been shown in the condescension that entered into a covenant, but the covenant in its terms is not of grace but of works. ¹

From this first covenant we learn the nature of man in the beginning and in its light we understand the nature man now has. Hodge has a section of his Systematic Theology entitled the 'Perpetuity of the Covenant of Works.' ² The covenant of works is not abrogated: in so far as the natural relation of God to man was incorporated into it. ³ The fact that a new covenant has been introduced does not negate this concept of what was man's primal nature and what is his sin. Man may be saved by the grace of God, but he is saved because he could not and cannot save himself by his own fulfilment of the covenant of works. Grace is a remedy and second resort. Originally and ideally man was to have lived in a relationship to God where he by his works justified his own existence. Hodge admits that if man could fulfill the covenant of works he could now be saved this way, though of course this is impossible for man to do.⁴

So marked a characteristic of Calvinist theology did this dualism of covenants become that the central stream of the Reformed faith took its name from the Latin word for covenant, foedus, the federal theology, or covenant theology. It was 'one of the prime requisites of sound orthodoxy.' ⁵ The whole of Calvinist thought was remoulded into this system. Where it was recognized that the concept was not in Calvin, this was thought to be a positive development of his thought. Berkhof quotes with approval a criticism of Calvin for not having adequately formulated this concept.⁶

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2. Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (New York, 1883), vol. II, 122
3. L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1953), 218
4. Hodge, op. cit., 122
5. Brown, op. cit., 221
6. Berkhof, op. cit., 211
But this dualism of covenants is totally alien to the thought of Calvin and reverses much of his thought about man's primal relation to God. With Calvin it is from the very start the history of the covenant of grace. There is no mention of any covenant of works by which man ought ideally to live. Rather man ought to depend entirely and even in his innocence upon the grace of God. He does not think of himself as receiving life as a reward for his works, but only demonstrates his gratitude for God's constant blessing to him. When man sins and falls from grace, God extends his grace to restore man again to life. But this re-creation does not involve a new covenant of grace standing opposed to an old covenant of works.

This development of the covenant theology brought with it several marked changes which are of importance in our study. (a) It changed the concept of sin. Men are sinners because they have failed to fulfill the covenant of works. Heidegger writes that Adam 'broke God's universal law and the covenant made with him by God, rendering both himself and the entire human race...guilty of the death divinely threatened against the transgressor.' Man's sin is always seen against this covenant of works. Sin is seen in moral and legal terms. 'Adam sinned against the whole moral law.' The Westminster Confession speaks of sin as a 'transgression of the righteous law of God.' In the classic answer of the 'Shorter Catechism:' 'Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.' Wolleh sees sin as fundamentally ἀνομία. The same is true of Heidegger and Polanus. 'Sin is ἀνομία or discrepancy

2. Heidegger, op. cit., IX, 11
3. Heppe, op. cit., 303
4. Westminster Confession, chap. VI, sec. VI
5. 'Shorter Catechism,' question 14.
6. J. Wolleh, Christianae Theologiae Compendium (Basel, 1626), I, 9, 1.
from the law of God. The form or formal nature of sin is deformity, i.e. aberration from the divine law, \( \delta \nu \rho \omicron \mu \lambda \) . Accordingly sin is nothing but what is committed against the law of God. Hodge entitles a key section of his Systematic Theology: 'Sin is Related to the Law of God.' Berkhof asserts: 'Sin should always be defined in terms of man's relation to God and His will as expressed in the moral law.' Thus even where a second covenant is introduced, the concept of sin is measured by this first and perpetual law and covenant. Sin is man's failure to provide his own righteousness; he has not been obedient to the divine moral law, he has not from his side fulfilled the conditions of the first covenant. Man in his sin and in the face of the covenant of works can only be preoccupied with his own lack of good works.

In this Calvin's concept of sin has been so narrowed as to be changed. In the thought of Calvin, where man's primal relationship to God is not in terms of a covenant of works, but in terms of a dynamic relationship of grace, sin is seen as a rejection by man of the grace of God. Man has wanted to be free and independent and to care for himself. He has thus been self-willed and ungrateful. There is a way in which this involves disobedience and transgression of the law, but this finds place alongside Calvin's larger concepts of sin. It will be our purpose in this thesis to open up again these further and deeper ways in which Calvin describes man's root sin. This entails as well an examination of the relation of sin to the moral law as it appears in natural ethics, and in the Old Testament law.

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1. Heidegger, op. cit., X,4
2. Polanus, op. cit., VI,3
3. Hodge, op. cit., 182f
4. Berkhof, op. cit., 231
5. See especially Chap. II of the main section, p. 56ff.
(b) Because later Reformed theology failed to understand God's relationship to man as a dynamic relationship of grace, and man's sin as a breach of this relationship, it failed to give adequate significance to Calvin's concept of order and the effects of sin on this order. Insofar as sin was seen to disturb the divine order, it could only be interpreted as a lack of order, as a failure or want of conformity to an order set by divine moral law, and based on divine justice. God is a 'moral ruler' and governs by 'the principles of justice.' He therefore punishes transgression. Sin is \( \delta v \nu \zeta i a \) or discrepancy from the law of God, i.e. the failure of nature and of the actions in intelligent creatures, fighting with the law of God, and involving them in punishment in accordance with the order of divine righteousness. Order is concerned principally with law, morality, righteousness, and justice.

Against this must be set Calvin's concept of an order of grace reversed as man dis-graces himself in sin. The order of perfect dependence on the grace of God is dis-ordered as man turns to depend on himself. In this man is not only a sinner as he is immoral or fails to conform to law. It is not so much that he fails to provide his own righteousness, but that he takes the rectitude with which he was blessed and ascribes it to himself so as to make of it a curse. Having put little emphasis on the grace of God to man at creation, much of the Reformed tradition has not understood the character and effect of sin as that which robs man of God's grace to him. In this study we must develop again the concept of order and disorder in Calvin.

(c) This emphasis on the covenant of works has severed the knowledge of sin from the knowledge of the grace of God. If sin is not seen

1. Hodge, op. cit., 116f
2. Heidegger, op. cit., X, 4; Morris, op. cit., 514f
as a rejection of God's grace to man, but as a transgression of God's law, then it is quite possible to establish the fact of sin apart from the revelation of God's grace. Sin is to be seen in all its clarity in contradistinction to the divine moral law. From it we posit the knowledge of sin in an autonomous relation to the knowledge of grace. Nor is it necessary to have God's written Word to achieve this knowledge of sin, for God's law is written on the hearts of all men. 'Man is aware in his conscience that he is a transgressor against God's commandment and thereby guilty in God's sight.' By his natural knowledge of God he knows God...as the righteous judge of good and evil. Sin then has to be argued apologetically with the natural man and it is quite possible to reach some measure of agreement with the philosophers as to what is the sin of man. Wolleb is typical of Reformed theology when he makes sin transgression of the law and identifies the law broken by Adam with the Decalogue and the law of nature. Berkhof relates the demands of the covenant of works, the Decalogue, and the moral law of man's heart as in essence (though not in form) the same thing.

In this the position of Calvin has been modified. Sin has to be known in the light of God's grace to man at the first. As this grace is restored to us in Christ, we come fully to know our sins. There is of course a way in which we know our sins from the law, and Calvin makes frequent use of this principle. But we are to understand this as a method of pedagogy rather than as an autonomous way in which we know our sins. There is again a way in which men are given a sense of right and

1. Hodge, op. cit., 182f
2. Heppe, op. cit., 4ff, 262ff; Heidegger, op. cit., I, 7ff, IX, 12
3. F. Burmann, op. cit., IV, 3, 2; Morris, op. cit., 515. Barth traces the rise of this development, op. cit., 369f.
4. Wolleb, op. cit., I, 9, 1f.
5. Berkhof, op. cit., 216
wrong by their conscience. Yet we do not here really come to know what sin is, as we do not here know the grace of God. We must examine again Calvin's thought about the source of our knowledge of sin.¹

(a) The emphasis on the covenant of works has seriously altered Calvin's concept of responsibility and substituted a concept that is not only absent from Calvin but alien to his thought. It, as we later see, arises partly from the Renaissance, and partly from Cartesian ego-centricity. When the question now rises as to what is man's duty, the answer has to be stated in terms of works and moral obedience. This covenant 'exacts from all the condition of works, i.e. the perfect obedience of original holiness and righteousness which the Creator of due right demands of us.'²

'On his part man promised perfect obedience to God's requirements.'³ To federal theologians the covenant of works is 'the foundation of human responsibility.'⁴ Man's duty, his obligation, and his responsibility are thought of as that of producing works of the moral law. The federal system gave scope to the moral will and put upon man's own shoulders the responsibility for his fate. Man's responsibility is to justify himself by his works.

Responsibility is thus also defined in terms of the divine law and government of justice. The definition of the 'Larger Catechism': 'The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will,'⁵ is interpreted morally and legally. 'It is in the contemplation of such a law and of a government thus administered, that we gain some just conception of the nature and scope of human responsibility before God. The term, responsibility, simply implies the intrinsic and inevitable obligation of every soul to render proper obedience... It is, in other

¹. See Chap. I, p. 31ff. in the body of the thesis.
². R. Eglin, Tractatus Theologicus De Coena Domini et Pseudere Gratia
³. Heidegger, op. cit., IX, 15; Witsius, op. cit., I, ii, 1
⁴. Brown, op. cit., 223
⁵. 'Larger Catechism,' question 91
words, absolute amenability to the divine law, and to him who has enacted it as, in the language of the Confession, a rule of life for the reasonable creature. 1

It was abundantly realized that man could not now in his sinful condition fulfil his responsibility. The power, will, and ability were given him at the first, but he had lost these. This was the cause of the introduction of the covenant of grace. Nonetheless he had once been responsible on the basis of his own power or ability. 'Such responsibility implies the possession of power or ability to render obedience.' 2 And he is still held responsible on this basis. His real duty was and is to keep the law by his own strength and in this to fulfil his half of the covenant of works. He should then discharge his obligation to God and properly render account of works. If a covenant of grace follows a covenant of works, this in no way means that the moral law and covenant of works do not remain to remind men of their failure to produce works of morality by which they ought to have lived.

In the thought of Calvin, however, only in sin does man attempt to depend on his works. Man's responsibility to God now as in the beginning is not that of producing good works by which to justify his existence, but that of accepting and acknowledging the grace of God, of depending wholly on God. In this fidelity to trust in the goodness of God, he lives responsibly. It is as man is grateful to God that he is obedient and responsible. The whole concept of responsibility has to be wrought out in terms of man's dependence on God's grace to him. This of course results in moral obedience and good works. But these come only by way of gratitude and faithfulness and never as any attempt to discharge an

1. Morris, op. cit., 298f
2. Morris, op. cit., 299
obligation or to render a meritorious account of good works. We must in this study cut through this concept so foreign to Calvin of a man who is supposed to live by his own works and morality, and see how man is responsible to God as he depends on God's grace. Here in Calvin responsibility has a connotation largely unknown in the legalized and moralized thought of traditional Reformed theology, and of moral philosophy, especially since Kant.

(e) This concept of responsibility introduced by federal theology deprived man's culpability in nature of much of its meaning and gave primary emphasis to a type of moral guiltiness which had been for Calvin a real but secondary and auxiliary way to convince men of their guilt. Reformed theology continued, following Calvin, to argue the guiltiness of man in his sin on the basis of a manifestation of God in his works and a law of nature written on man's heart. But the argument developed. The moral law, which taught man his responsibility, was on man's conscience, and in a certain way presented the requirements of the covenant of works to all men. 'Man is enabled to recognize from his own consciousness this appointment of himself to a covenant with God resting upon perfect fulfilment of the divine will.' It may also be recognized naturally, that there is a covenant intervening between God and man. Man in nature knows his real responsibility to God - obeying the divine moral law written on their hearts. But as men did not and could not obey they were responsible and guilty. The culpability of man in nature is therefore seen chiefly as his failure to produce works of morality and righteousness.

While much of this argument is taken from Calvin, it has missed an
important element in his thinking. Calvin saw man's culpability and responsibility in nature primarily in terms of his thought about sin as man's despising the grace of God. God manifests in nature the whole of his perfections, including his grace and goodness, in such a way that if man would allow God to come to him he could be led to that dependence on God which issues in life and felicity. Man's primary guilt lies in the fact that he has ignored this self-manifestation of God in heaven and earth, and in his ignorance has rejected it and disdained God's grace. He is culpably ignorant. The significance of this aspect of man's culpability in nature has been often overlooked in later Reformed theology. Because sin is seen primarily as a transgression of the moral law, rather than as a wilful despising of the grace of God, the emphasis on man's culpability in nature is placed on his failure to produce the moral works required by the law written on his heart, rather than on his ungrateful failure to acknowledge God in his gracious self-declaration in nature. Certainly there is an important way in Calvin in which the natural man is responsible for his lack of virtue, and for his failure to abide by the natural moral law. But there is also and even more significantly this primary argument for man's responsibility in nature based on his rejection of God's gracious Word to him there. We must in this study turn again to the problem of man's culpability in nature. 1

2. Problems arising from original sin

The second area in which problems arise in the study of sin and responsibility is the strong and characteristic emphasis in Reformed theology on the sinfulness and depravity of man. In an effort to do justice to the Biblical emphasis on the sinfulness of man, Reformed theologians have followed Calvin to think of man as conceived in sin so as inevitably to live a life of sin. Adam and his posterity entered into a state of original sin where their power and inclination produced only

the sinful works of the flesh. This transmission of sin from one man to all his posterity has been developed in various ways. While Calvin cut short much of this discussion, asserting that it was by the divine ordination and ordering that all men were made sinners in Adam, and rejecting all further attempts to explain the transmission of sin, later theologians made elaborate attempts to arrive at a logical explanation as to how sin is transmitted by natural and physical means.

In this they returned to the Augustinian and Latin concept, which Calvin had largely omitted, of an inherited sinfulness passed from father to son by natural propagation. Heppe criticizes Calvin for not having based the propagation of sin on 'the natural unity between Adam and his posterity,' but simply relating it to 'a divine will and ordering by which it was ordained.' This concept was forced into rigid and logical forms to produce natural arguments for the propagation of sin and the resulting sinfulness of man. 'God thus imputes Adam's guilt to all his successors because of their natural connection with him.' This natural transmission involves a congenital and hereditary flaw in our nature. 'Sin is propagated because of a flaw in the instrument of primogeniture, through which we have all descended naturally.' The sinful nature of our first parents is propagated to all their children much as other physical and mental traits are genetically passed down by ordinary generation. 'From the defection of Adam's heirs in his loins immediately flows the corruption of actual human nature or inherent original sin, which by impure generation is propagated into human individuals.' In

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1. A good study of these is found in N.P. Williams, The Ideas of the Fall and of Original sin, (London, 1927).
2. Heppe, op. cit., 333
3. Ibid., 332
4. Polanus, op. cit., VI, 3
5. Heidegger, op. cit., X, 39
the words of the Westminster Confession: 'They (our first parents) being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.'

Critical reaction in theology and philosophy has been that so strongly is the sinfulness of man depicted by this concept that all responsibility of man for sin is immediately stifled. If sin is inherited and passed from father to son by ordinary generation, then man is no more responsible for his sin that he is for the other physical and mental characteristics which are his not by acquisition or environmental influence, but by inheritance from his mother's womb. 'An inability to do our duty, which is born with us, is to all intents and according to the established meaning of the word, natural. Call it moral or what you please, it is still a part of the nature which our Creator gave us, and to suppose that he punishes us for it, because it is an inability seated in the will, is just as absurd as to suppose him to punish us for weakness of sight or of a limb.' In the face of the arguments of the Calvinist theologians that man is sinful by birth and ordinary generation, and naturally unable to do his duty, many found little grounds remaining on which to found real culpability in sin. To do justice to the Biblical understanding of man's responsibility in his sin, theologians asserted man's freedom in his sin. Man was not bound inevitably to sin, but he sinned by constant choice and with the power to do otherwise. Starting with the necessity of some real human responsibility, they declared that this basic assumption logically requires the rejection of the theory of the total depravity of man.

1. Westminster Confession, chap. VI sec. III
2. 'The Moral Argument against Calvinism' in the Works of William E. Channing (Boston, 1849), vol. 1, 217ff
3. ibid.
It has been in turn the reply of conservative Calvinism that here human responsibility is affirmed in such a way as to give unsatisfactory expression to the fact of sin. If man is not so enslaved as to be deprived of all power to do good and if there remains in him some freedom of choice, then man is not really a sinner in the Biblical sense. Atonement is not so necessary as before, and the constant Biblical emphasis on the sin and need of every man has been replaced by a concept where man is basically good and has no need of redemption. Such has been the classic dilemma involved in the attempt to put into logical form the sinfulness of the nature of man and his responsibility in sin.

Has Calvin's position been adequately represented here? Certainly it is a characteristic emphasis in Calvin to assert that all the posterity of Adam enter into his state of sin in such a way as to sin inevitably and with all the powers of body, mind, and soul. At this point we can only state again the conviction of Calvin. Beyond this, however, it seems that in exchanging Calvin's concept of the transmission of sin from Adam to his posterity by the ordination of God, for a concept of the physical and natural propagation of sin by ordinary generation, the followers of Calvin have attempted to put into a logical and rational form that element of sinfulness in the life of mankind which Calvin had both tacitly and frankly admitted could not be adequately explained by such means. In further developing man's sinfulness along natural lines they did indeed prejudice any real culpability on the part of man. Calvin's line of solution is not without its peculiar difficulties, and we shall have to reject it in part. But nonetheless it is an attempt, as we shall show, to recognize from the start that there is an element in man's sinfulness and responsibility that defies rationality. For we have to do with a

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1. Hodge sketches these arguments, op. cit., 251ff.
secret will and ordination of God which we cannot understand or grasp; it is beyond us. This is an attempt to cut through the logical and natural theories of the propagation of sin by recognizing that we must simply start with the Biblical judgment that all are sinners. We must accept this and acquiesce in it.  

Having recognized the irrationality at this point, Calvin holds that we may then see how man is responsible because he sins not so much by deficiency or lack of natural ability as by the constant outworking of the choice of his sinful will. This has also to be understood in the light of the concept of sin not as a failure of man to live by the strong and good choice of his will, but as a continual rejection of offered grace. Here Calvin's constant emphasis on the fact that sin is transmitted to Adam's posterity by divine ordination, and yet that man in his sin cannot lay the blame on God but must assume the guilt himself is his attempt to put side by side the twin Biblical truths of man's sinfulness and of his responsibility. We must re-consider Calvin's attempt to incorporate into his teaching these contradictory elements, and his attempt to do justice to both truths not by rigorous or apologetic logic but by recognition of the fact that truths of an illogical and paradoxical nature have both to be included in the faith.

3. Problems arising from predestination

The third area in which theological problems arise in the study of sin and responsibility is in the Reformed emphasis on predestination. Following Calvin, the Reformed position has been that an over-ruling providence of God extends to all events. The whole of history is controlled by divine decrees, by a hidden counsel of God which has existed from all

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1. See the second division of Chap. II, p. 71ff.
time. 'The decree of God is the act of God, by which from eternity, according to His utterly free will, He has by an unchangeable counsel and purpose specified and resolved on the things that were to come into being outwith Himself in time, together with their causes, operations, and circumstances, and the manner in which they are bound to be made and exist, for proof of his glory.' This has meant that God predetermined not only the salvation of the elect, together with the whole course of their lives, but also the ruin of the reprobate, together with the history of their evil deeds. 'By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.' This even meant in some schools of thought that Christ's atoning death was not for all men but for a limited number, and it meant inevitably for all that God by the grace of his Spirit chose to redeem some from their sins, and that he withheld this same grace from others.

Reaction to such counsel of God has been along two lines. It is argued that this both makes God responsible for sin in a culpable way, and deprives man of all responsibility. The Reformed understanding of predestination prejudices the question of the nature of God. If God has not moved toward the salvation of all, but actively created some to eternal death, then he is not a God of mercy, but an arbitrary and unreasonable tyrant. In the minds of some the characteristic God of the Reformed faith is not a father but a

1. Heidegger, op. cit., V, 4
2. Westminster Confession, chap. III, sec. III and IV
3. E.g. Cocceius, Summa de Foed., V, 108ff; esp. 149; see Heppe, op. cit., 473ff.
4. Heppe, op. cit., 130ff; Leiden Synopsis, XXIV, 46; Heidegger, op. cit., V, 56
judge, not a good and loving God but a just and awful God. And if history is so determined in advance by divine decrees, then all that remains is blind fatalism. Man is no more to be held culpable for his sin than a machine obeying the instructions of its master. As no real freedom is his, so no real responsibility can be ascribed to him. As the ultimate author of the sinful deeds of man is God, so the culpability for sin has finally to be imputed to God.

Is the position of Calvin adequately represented here? It is certainly true that the Reformed position has developed from elements that are in Calvin's teaching. While the doctrine of election and reprobation have become more rigid and formal in later Reformed theology, Calvin did teach that in some sense God predestinated men both to life and to death, and that the hand and providence of God is in some sense instrumental in the sinful thoughts and actions of men. In this the difficulties of the later Reformed position are not solved by a return to the teaching of Calvin.

Here, however, an important element in the teaching of Calvin has been left out. Having affirmed the predestination of God, Calvin attempts to avoid the logical consequences for the sin and responsibility of men, and for the culpability and nature of God, by the use of several concepts that recognize that the logical consequences of the doctrine of predestination have to be limited. Assertions of the goodness of God and the responsibility of man have to be set side by side with God's providence. Calvin feels that so great is the irrationality here that we must posit two seemingly contradictory wills in God. If it may be doubted whether this is an adequate or Biblical line of solution, it is certainly by such a recognition of logical limitations involved that a solution is to be

obtained, rather than by a more rigorous and more formal development of logic.

Further and perhaps more useful concepts, which have not always been contained in later Reformed doctrine, are those of an accidental or adventitious effect of the will of God and of hidden and manifest causes of sin. Ursinus (who was not yet federal in theology) speaks of God causing 'per accidens' man's sin. There is a 'causa remota' and a 'causa propinqua' in sin.¹ But the ideas drop out later on. Yet Calvin had put great emphasis on these, for they served to balance and correct the rigor of his doctrine of predestination. Another useful concept is that of the degrees of election, whereby all are elected by the love of God but some are cut off through their own infidelity. We must examine again Calvin's attempt to solve the problems raised by predestination in the matter of sin and responsibility.²

Following this, it will be important to re-consider Calvin's concept of the wrath of God, of how man in his culpability is punished for his sin. Does Calvin, under the influence of his teaching about double predestination, substitute a God of wrath for a God of love, as has at times been charged? Or is he able by developing these concepts to limit the logical consequences of reprobation for the nature of God, and present God even in his judgment and vengeance as primarily a God of grace and love?³

B. Calvin's thought and moral philosophy

Conflicts arise between the position of Calvin on man's sin and responsibility and the general position of moral philosophy. In the body of

1. Z. Ursinus, Loci Theologici (1562) in Opera Theologicae (Heidelberg, 1612), 624.
2. See Chap. IV, p. 115ff.
this study we have to clarify Calvin's understanding of human responsibility and culpability, and set it over against that concept which obtains in philosophy. Many of the theological reactions we have just outlined appear again in the controversy between Calvinism and moral philosophy. This is particularly true in the matters of predestination and of the depravity of man. Where the objections of philosophy and theology are similar we will not return to these points. We must, however, consider the question of the responsibility of man in moral philosophy. As later Reformed theology, with its emphasis on the covenant of works, failed to appreciate Calvin's concepts of sin and responsibility, so, there has been in ethical thought a related concept of responsibility that has obscured Calvin's thought.

It is the general position of moral philosophy that responsibility must be defined so as to be commensurate with freedom. N. Hartmann writes: 'Responsibility, imputability, and the sense of guilt imply that man is free to do otherwise than he actually does. If man is not free in this sense, then his consciousness of responsibility and of guilt is a delusion.'\(^1\) The statement of S.H. Hodgson is typical: 'Without real freedom of choice there could be no real moral responsibility; and the sense of it, if it were still felt, would have, like the sense of freedom, to be classed as an illusion. The question, then, is one of the deepest significance for Ethic.'\(^2\) There must be no external or internal compulsion or constraint. The future has to be as yet undetermined by fate or predestination, or by present and past inherited or


environmental factors beyond the control of man. Facing a moral situation, man must have an equal or nearly equal choice, and the history to follow is to be really determined by his choice.

This freedom presupposes at once an ability or power on the part of man. Freedom here means the power of the will to choose one course of action, and to implement it, or on the other hand, to make a contrary choice, and to implement it. This is the teaching of the father of moral philosophy, Immanuel Kant. Man has an 'autonomous will.'\(^{1}\) Kant combines this 'autonomy of the will' with the idea of the 'categorical imperative' to form the two basic principles of his ethical system.\(^{2}\) He assumes man has the power of will to perform his duty. 'Kant, it is well known, goes so far as to say, that those Duties which are imperatively commanded by Conscience are never impossible, "Du kannst weil Du sollst."\(^{3}\) Thus ethics is always concerned with the power of the agent. A parallel concept is that of man's 'faculties.'\(^{4}\) Hartmann entitles a section of his Ethics: 'The Basic Ethical Capacity of a Person.'\(^{5}\)

This man who is responsible on the basis of his freedom and ability is confronted in life with an equal or nearly equal choice, having the possibility of doing good. Here, as its name indicates, moral philosophy is concerned with moral value. Man is supposed to produce works of morality. 'The fundamental idea in Morality is the idea of Value, in which the idea of "ought" is implicitly contained.'\(^{6}\) This concept derives in large degree from the same source as does the idea of the autonomy of the

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1. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* in the *Critique of Practical Reason, and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy* (Chicaco, 1949), p77
3. Hodgson, op. cit., p6
5. Hartmann, op. cit., p61
6. Rashdall, op. cit., p37
will, the influence of Kant. 'To Kant the performance of duty is not merely "right"; it is the highest "good" of the agent.' 'Goodness of conduct possesses a higher worth than anything else in the world.'¹ There is an 'imperative'² for man to answer with the good.

Here moral philosophy uses the language of obligation and of duty, of accountability, and of responsibility. 'It is our duty to produce the greatest possible good.'³ With the idea of duty is thus connected that of a debt due or owing to some one, as well as that of obedience to the command of a superior, and both ideas are expressed in common by the term ought, as applied to actions which are right, or due, or morally fitting to be performed.'⁴ Thus man is independently accountable as he makes a choice for the good or for the bad. He does good or he does bad. Prior to his decision he is presented with a situation where he may create good, where history is as yet indeterminate and without form, where he may as it were manufacture good out of the raw materials of history set before him. By the strong choice of his autonomous will he makes good out of that which is not yet good but contains the possibility of good.

Finally we notice that in ethics responsibility involves rewards and punishments. This, says J. Martineau, is a 'fundamental ethical fact:' 'Wherever approbation falls, there we cannot help recognizing merit; where disapprobation, demerit.'⁵ If a man does good, if he creates virtue out of what is not yet virtue, he is to be praised or rewarded. It is a question of 'the rewards of Conscience, when its

¹ ibid., 107
² Kant, op. cit., 72
³ Rashdall, op. cit., 222
⁴ Hodgson, op. cit., 99; Martineau, op. cit., 96ff; Hartmann, op. cit., 154ff.
⁵ Martineau, op. cit., 17, 75ff.
commands are obeyed and its duties performed. Or perhaps the rewards of society, or a divine being are involved. And if man does evil, if he creates vice out of that which is not yet vice, he is blameworthy and culpable. There is 'regret', 'remorse', and a 'sense of failure.' Here man may be punished by society or by the outworking of the moral power in the universe. In this way man is always responsible or answerable. If he is praised for his virtue, he is responsible for it. To him is owed the credit and merit. He has made good. If he is blamed for his failure, he is responsible. Thus responsibility is defined with man as a center of reference, defined in terms of man's freedom, his power and ability, his merit and demerit, and his reward and punishment.

This concept of responsibility can be reduced in essence to the concept of responsibility found in later Reformed theology. Covenant theology is linked with Kantian ethics. It is assumed that man does or ought to have something of his own from his side, that he is able or is ideally supposed to be able to perform certain good deeds of virtue, and stand or fall on his own merits. Whether the disciples of Calvin and the moral philosophers agreed about the extent to which man could actually perform his duty is of secondary importance. They both start from similar presuppositions concerning the ability and freedom of man. And moreover, this concept of responsibility is one which has become paramount in relatively recent years. In its simplest form, it is a natural and easily grasped idea and has, in the language of duty and accountability, been present across the centuries. But in the development of the Cartesian concept of knowledge, where man subjectively by his knowing creates and gives form and shape to certain formless entities presented to him,

1. Hodgson, op. cit., 113
2. ibid., 112
and in the development of ethics in the Kantian and post-Kantian period, where man creates good out of the materials of history, this concept of responsibility has matured. Indeed, the word responsibility is late and has issued from the recent development of this thought.

It is our problem in this study to cut through these notions of responsibility to examine Calvin's concept. We must project the present problem back into Calvin and clarify his position in regard to later developments at several points. (a) It is necessary to recognize that the starting point of Calvin differs from that of moral philosophy. It is important to abandon presuppositions about man's freedom and begin, as Calvin does, not with man but with God. Over against the basic assumption of ethics that responsibility is co-relative with freedom, and that man's ability is the motivating force behind all good, must be set Calvin's basic assumption that this motivating force is the grace of God. Goodness and virtue are present in the world only through grace. Man participates in these, but is not responsible for them. Even the responsibility of man must be seen with God's grace as the center of focus. We must begin with and work from the grace of God. Only by a recognition and appreciation of the fact that such is Calvin's conviction can we regain his orientation with regard to responsibility.

(b) We can then recover Calvin's understanding of the ability of man. From this starting point, Calvin teaches that man is a creature who is given to reflect or image this goodness of God. He is not then one who is given to accept the good wrought through him and in him by his Lord. His is not the active part of making good for himself and earning praise or reward, but the passive part of allowing another to set forth his glory in him. Responsibility is conceived so that there need be no autonomous or independent power of the will to determine what was before
undetermined. Over against the philosophical insistence that man is responsible as he is able to do good is to be set Calvin’s insistence that man is responsible only as he depends on the grace of another, acknowledging that he is unable to do anything alone and through his own strength. While ethical thought found it necessary to assume for man a power of the will, it is Calvin’s insight that the man who depends on grace needs no independent ability or strength of the will. Man’s ascribing to himself an autonomous ability by which he works his own good is his primary sin. ¹

(a) Calvin differs from ethics with respect to the freedom of man. Having developed responsibility relative to the grace of God, Calvin allows room for freedom. Man’s freedom is not to be understood with man as the center of reference, but again our viewpoint is the grace of God. Man’s freedom is not to be interpreted in terms of independence or self-reliance; rather man finds Christian liberty in binding himself to service and dependence on God. Against the assertion of moral philosophy that man is and ought to be free to determine good is to be set Calvin’s conviction that man is not free and was not created to be free in that sense. His desire for freedom is his sin. ²

In what sense then is man free? Man is so placed in relation to the grace of God that while he is not free to accept God’s grace, he is yet free to reject it. If he accepts the grace of God, he may not assume responsibility for it. He is not free to do this, for he is created to dependence. He must depend even in his acceptance upon grace. But on the other hand he is free to reject grace. While there are elements

in Calvin's thought that prejudice even this freedom, we shall attempt to show that in Calvin man can if he will reject the grace of God. It is with this antinomy that Calvin understands man's freedom.¹

(a) This difference in the concept of responsibility influences the matter of man's culpability. In the tradition of ethics, there is blame only where this morally responsible agent defaults to choose the wrong. Culpability is therefore seen in terms of moral failure. Man has not by his own strength and will produced deeds of value and merit. It is noteworthy that the concept of blame which obtains here bears a definite relationship to the notion of guilt in covenant theology. There sin is viewed in the light of a covenant of works. Sin is man's failure to produce these legal works. Man is culpable for not having created moral righteousness. If Calvinist theologians and moral philosophers differed radically as to what ability and freedom man did in point of fact have, they did not differ in substance as to what ability and freedom man ought to have had and employed. So the two were in essential agreement as to the nature or type of culpability in question. Culpability lies in man's failure to create the virtuous and good.

It is not surprising therefore that Calvin's concept of culpability has not been grasped by moral philosophy, as it was not by federal theology. With those who start from the ethical viewpoint it has seemed absurd to maintain culpability where neither ability nor freedom exists. To correct this misunderstanding, it is important to see the way in which for Calvin culpability can exist apart from either the type of ability or the type of freedom prerequisite to the philosophical position. While man is not free and able by his own will to choose the good -

for it is God's grace which determines the good, and only by binding himself to dependence on it is man enabled to do good - man is allowed the freedom to reject by the choice of his will the grace of God. He is culpable because he has freely disdained God's care. Yet he is not responsible if he accepts God's goodness, for he is not able to do this. Here he rests on grace. In this study we must clarify the way in which through this antinomy Calvin develops his concept of culpability.

Having set out these various problems which call forth a re-study of Calvin's understanding of sin and responsibility, we must now let him speak for himself. We trace out in the systematic and exegetical writings of Calvin the lines of solution which we have indicated he would take. To develop his thought along lines that are natural to him, we follow where possible an internal outline suggested by the elements of Calvin's thought, rather than the external outline of this introductory chapter.

PART II: SIN AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE TEACHING OF CALVIN

I. The Source and Purpose of our Knowledge of Sin

A. The knowledge of sin as derived from the knowledge of God

In the thought of Calvin, from the very start, all religious knowledge is grounded in the Word of God. 'The right knowledge of God is a wisdom which far surpasses the comprehension of man's understanding; therefore no one is able to attain it except through the secret revelation of the Spirit.' This is doubly significant in our religious knowledge, in the knowledge of God and in the knowledge of man. Primarily in this assertion Calvin is concerned to establish the fundamental axiom of Christianity that man does not seek out and find God, on the contrary God seeks out man and finds him. But a secondary and equally valid axiom arises from the same truth. Man does not even know himself as an essentially religious being until God encounters him with that truth. 'It is plain that no man can arrive at the true knowledge of himself without having first contemplated the divine character and then descended to the consideration of his own.' The religious situation of man is properly to be examined only in the light of revelation. He can only know himself as he is given of God to know himself.

1. The light of the Lord (lux Domini)

This means, in this study, that our knowledge of sin is rooted in our knowledge of God. A first article of belief with Calvin is that man's predicament cannot be known apart from God. 'It is necessary that the Word of God illuminate us and we must be led by it to judge what is good or evil.'

'It is only the light of the Lord which can open our eyes that they may see

1. Com. on Heb. 8.11, CR 55.104; Com. on John 1.9, CR 47.9; II.2.20, CR 2.201
2. I.13.22, CR 2.107; Com. on Phil. 1.29, CR 52.21f
3. I.1.2, CR 2.32. Com. on I Cor. 12.1, CR 49.496f
4. Ser. on II Tim. 3.10-13, CR 51.259. Ser. on Gal. 1.8-9, CR 50.317; 1st Ser. on Gen. 15.6, CR 23.697ff
the corruption which lurks in our flesh. 'Apart from this light of God our sin will be unknown. 'The consciences of men are in a torpid state and are not touched with any feeling of dissatisfaction on account of their sins so long as they are enveloped in the darkness of ignorance.' 'But the Word of God penetrates even to the farthest recesses of the mind and by introducing as it were a light dispels darkness and drives away that deadly torpor.' 'We must not judge of works in any other way than by bringing them to the light of the gospel because our reason is wholly blind.' Thus the knowledge of sin is derived from the knowledge of God.

a. The standard (regula) of the Lord

Otherwise as men we have no adequate standard of judgment. 'God wishes that we conduct by his Word our examination to see whether we live in his fear or not. If a man intends to test a piece of coin for alloy, he will either take a touchstone, or cast it into the fire. Now we have no other thing by which to examine our lives and to sound our hearts except that we go to God's commandments.' With no clearly established criterion man inevitably reduces his understanding within very comfortable limits. 'Although a man should sound and examine himself ever so deep, yet it is not possible that he should attain to the knowledge of the hundredth part of his evil. There is no one save God alone who can be the judge of it.' The Lord is 'the only standard' (regula) of judgment. From our natural proneness to hypocrisy we are delighted with what is least defiled as exceedingly pure while we confine our reflections within the limits of human corruption.

We judge that to be white which is but whitish or brown. Into this

2. Com. on I Cor. 14.24, CR 49.257. Ser. on I Tim. 1.18-19, CR 53.102; Com. on Heb. 4.12, CR 55.52; Com. on Is. 32.5, CR 36.545
3. Com. on John 3.21, CR 47.68. Com. on Eph. 5.13, CR 51.218
4. Ser. on Tit. 1.15-16, CR 54.491
5. Ser. on Gal. 3.7-9, CR 50.491
6. I.1.2, CR 2.32. Ser. on Deut. 4.3-6, CR 26.121
relative situation God introduces his will for man, erected by absolute standards of judgment, and to which we ought to conform, whereupon for the first time man can really see the difference between right and wrong. ¹

'Only the will of God can guide us, it is the only standard (reigle = règle) by which we can say, This is worthless, or that is good.' ²

b. God's will for man

Calvin's constant reference here to the will of God as the rule by which to measure sin needs carefully to be set in the larger context of his thinking about what this will is. Calvin is thinking of course of God's purity and majesty, of God's law and commandments. We know our sin as we see here how we fall short. This is the simplest way of thinking of it.

But there is danger in oversimplification. This will is in a larger and more important sense God's will for man as God's destiny and design for man, God's intention for his creature. Frequently Calvin will demand that we compare ourselves with God to measure our sin. 'Man is never sufficiently affected with a knowledge of his own meanness until he has compared himself with the divine majesty.' ³ More specifically, however, the standard of the Lord is the destiny into which God has created man, God's will for man. It is here that sin is seen in the light of God's will as a will for grace to man and not simply as a will which is law and commandment. When man falls from his high calling, sin enters and the measure of sin is the difference between man as God has willed for him to live in grace and man as he has re-established himself.

God's will for man is seen on two occasions: in the wonderful state of blessedness at creation, and after the fall in redemption and restoration to this same destiny in the grace of Christ. First we must understand sin in

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1. II.1.3, CR 2.177f. Com. on Eph. 5.12, CR 51.218; Ser. on Gal. 3.19-20, CR 50.542; Com. on Rom. 12.2, CR 49.236
2. Ser. on Eph. 5.8-11, CR 51.692
3. I.1.3, CR 2.32
the light of the grace displayed to man in creation that we may understand how great the excellence of our nature would have been if it had retained its integrity, and secondly we contemplate our miserable condition since the fall of Adam. Only in the light of man's primal origin is the meaning of a failure to achieve this destiny to be understood. Before we proceed to the miserable condition in which man is now involved, it is necessary to understand the state in which he was first created. Sin presupposes the fact that God intended something else for man. When we have come to this conclusion, that our life in this world is a gift of the divine clemency, which, as we owe to him, we ought to remember with gratitude, it will then be time for us to descend to a consideration of its most miserable condition. Only when we know what man's duty was and is can we evaluate his inability to perform it. The definition of death - 'under the name of death is comprehended all those miseries in which Adam involved himself by his defection' - 'is to be sought from its opposite; we must, I say, remember from what kind of life man fell.'

But we do not separate man's origin from his destiny in Christ. God's will for man, if once seen in creation, is forgotten there by man in his sin, and only when re-asserted in Christ is it clear again how far man stands from it. We do not understand man's primal state save as we see it again in the grace at redemption. When God re-fashions us we see the nature of our first creation. Here we are thrown forward to redemption to learn there what is the grace in creation (though Calvin holds the grace displayed in regeneration as superior to that manifested in creation).

1. II.1.1, CR 2.175f; II.1.3, CR 2.178
3. III.9.3, CR 2.525
4. Com. on Gen. 2.16, CR 23.45
5. Com. on Ezek. 18.32, CR 40.456; Com. on Gen. 3.19, CR 23.75; Com. on I Cor. 15.45, CR 49.558f; I.15.4, CR 2.138
6. ibid., Com. on Ezek. 18.32, CR 40.456; Com. on Gen. 1.26, CR 23.36
fact of evil can properly be perceived only where this good is known as a standard by which to judge, but this good can only be known in faith.

2. The light of nature (lumen naturae)

There are two implications which follow from Calvin's basic assumption of the direct relationship between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of sin that we now discuss. Each is at an opposite end of the pole from the other. There is implied, to begin with, that where there is no knowledge of God there is no knowledge of sin. In a world where God is unknown, sin must be unknown. Secondly, we must assume that only where our knowledge of God is at its zenith do we have a full knowledge of sin. How far does Calvin develop these implications?

a. The semi-dead knowledge of sin (semimortua peocati cognitio)

If the Christian doctrine of evil is to be revealed and not empirically derived, are we then to proscribe from the faith any knowledge of sin apart from revelation? Calvin's answer is a qualified no. 'Where the knowledge of God is not, there darkness, error, vanity, destitution of light and life prevail. These things, however, do not render it impossible that the ungodly should be conscious of doing wrong when they sin, know that their judge is in heaven, and feel an executioner within them.' To attach the knowledge of sin to the knowledge of God does not mean that there is no sense of right and wrong in the natural world. There is, maintains Calvin, 'a cold and semi-dead knowledge of sin which is inherent in the minds of men.'

A theology of sin based on the knowledge of God does not of necessity eliminate the possibility of a natural instinct of divine origin which convicts man of his evil deeds. Calvin speaks frequently of the Gentiles' 'sense of sin.' The Gentiles have 'by their deeds declared themselves to

1. Com. on I Pet. 1.14, CR 55.222
2. Com. on Gen. 3.7, CR 25.64...frigida et semimortua peocati cognitio qualis ingenita est mentibus hominum.
3. II.2.22, CR 2.203. Com. on Rom. 7.15, CR 49.129
have some rule of righteousness. 1 The distinction between good and evil is engraven on their consciences. 2 There is a universal judgment in man to discriminate between good and evil. 3 Calvin prefers to speak of this pagan knowledge of sin in the relative terms of good and bad rather than in the absolute concepts of righteousness and unrighteousness, though he does do this.

To admit this natural perception of evil does not reverse the fundamental truth that a knowledge of evil is derived from the knowledge of God. It comes from the grace of the Son of God. 4 In this way we may loosely say that every man has a type of knowledge of God, though as Calvin comes to define the knowledge of God in more explicit terms he must modify this to assert that such knowledge of God as the Gentile has is by ultimate Christian standards not true knowledge but false knowledge. 'Mankind make proficiency in the universal school of nature so far as to be affected with some perception of deity.' 5 'The first general knowledge of God remains in them.' 6

Apart from his illumination in gospel and law the light of God shines through in the light of nature to give a type of knowledge of good and evil. There always remains the 'light of nature.' (naturae lumen) 7 'The soul of man is irradiated with a beam of divine light (divina lux) so that it is never wholly destitute of some little flame, or at least of a spark of it.' 8 Man has an innate persuasion of a moral order, of allegiance to political and social authorities, of duty to family, state, and self. He has a sense of justice. But this knowledge, though immanent and arising from the light

1. Com. on Rom. 2.14, CR 49.37
2. Com. on John 1.5, CR 47.6
3. II. 2.21, CR 2.204
4. Com. on John 1.5, CR 47.7; Com. on I Cor. 2.14, CR 49.344
5. Com. on I Cor. 1.21, CR 49.326
6. Com. on Acts 17.28, CR 48.417
7. II. 2.24, CR 2.205
8. II. 2.19, CR 2.201
of nature, is in a way divine. 'As often then as the secret compunction of conscience invites us to reflect on our sins, let us remember that God himself is speaking within us. For that interior sense by which we are convicted of sin is the peculiar judgment seat of God, where he exercises his jurisdiction.'¹ It is 'a divine instinct.'² Thus we retain the principle that a knowledge of sin is based on a knowledge of the divine.

b. Natural ignorance of sin

But we must not mistake Calvin to mean that our sin is really known to us by the light of nature apart from revelation, for it is this misconception that has in the past severed the knowledge of sin from the knowledge of grace and led to dogmatic procedure that Calvin does not use. In the most fundamental sense the natural man has no knowledge of his sin. We must, if speaking strictly, say that the natural man has no true knowledge of God. And so in the light of Christ at a more profound level this moral consciousness of the light of nature is discovered to be not light at all but only the false appearance of light. 'Out of Christ there is not even a spark of true light. There may be some appearance of brightness, but it resembles lightning, which only dazzles the eyes.'³ The light which is in man revealed to be darkness. If we are talking about what the Christian really means by sin, then we must say that no Gentile has ever taken an initial step in its comprehension.⁴ This is because, as we see more thoroughly later, sin is not so much immorality as concupiscence and ingratitude, things unknown to the natural man.⁵ Only 'by way of concession' in an impropriety of speech can man be said to see anything. At a deeper level he is yet blind and asleep in sin.⁶

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¹. Com. on Gen. 4.9, CR 23.91. Com. on Eph. 4.19, CR 51.206; II.2.12, CR 2.195f
². Com. on Rom. 2.3, CR 49.32. Com. on Gen. 3.11, CR 23.67
³. Com. on John 8.12, CR 47.192
⁴. Com. on Matt. 6.22, CR 4.297
⁵. II.2.24, CR 2.205; Com. on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.205; on Rom. 7.7, CR 49.123f
⁶. Ser. on Eph. 4.17-19, CR 51.596f
We cannot then sever our understanding of sin from its source in God's revelation. We do not establish a doctrine of sin in apologetic, in the moral terms of the wisdom of the natural man. Philosophers will either praise the excellence of man, or the more acute will see both good and bad in him. But original sin is a fact inaccessible to the natural man. The corruption of our nature was unknown to the philosophers, who in other respects were sufficiently, and more than sufficiently acute. Total depravity becomes a statement of faith, not a theory or philosophy derived from an observation of the world and held by Christians in common with other acute observers.

3. The light of the gospel (lux evangelii)

We consider now the respective roles of gospel and law in the manifestation of sin. Calvin speaks of 'the light of the gospel' (lux evangelii) rising to disclose sins, and of sins 'brought to light by the law.' The death of Christ is a 'mirror' in which is depicted to us our sin, yet also the law is a 'mirror' in which we behold our iniquity. But what are we to say of the content of each disclosure? If the brightness of the divine light is more fully displayed in Christ than in the law, is sin here seen more clearly? Do we see our iniquity more clearly reflected in the mirror of Christ, or is the mirror of the law equally adequate for reflection of sin? To pose the question in contemporary language: To what extent is the knowledge of sin based in Christology and developed from this point?

a. The office of Christ (officium Christi)

The obvious implication from Calvin's attachment of the knowledge of sin to the knowledge of God is that only when Christ comes are we really able to see ourselves. But how far does Calvin follow this through? It is

1. II.1.2, CR 2.177; Com. on Is. 32.5, CR 36.541
2. Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.62. Ser. on Eph. 2.3-6, CR 51.367; I.15.7, CR 2.142
3. Com. on Luke 2.35, CR 45.94; Com. on John 3.21, CR 47.68
4. II.7.6, CR 2.257
5. Com. on John 19.17, CR 47.414; II.7.7, CR 2.258
Calvin's position that only when our knowledge of God is at its zenith in the knowledge of grace do we have the last word on sin. Structurally in the Institutes Calvin might have made this clearer. The doctrine of sin comes in Book II, loosely his Christology (representing the second article of the Creed). But within the book the order is chronological. We begin with the fall, the occasion of redemption, and then follow the history of redemption under the one covenant in Christ, as prefigured in the Abrahamic covenant, in the giving of the law, and then as fulfilled in Christ.¹ This chronological development need not mean, however, that we know all about the fall before the coming of the covenant of grace, or that there is not a progressive knowledge of sin as the divine light becomes clearer.

There can be no question of the fact that in Calvin's thought Christ does unveil the sin that is in the human heart. 'Let us note that our Lord Jesus Christ in condemning the whole world, by showing that none can be saved but by the free goodness of God the Father,' 'brings not sin, for we have that in us already, but makes it known and brings it to the fore to the end that we should be convicted of it.'² 'Christ, by his light, discloses every artifice, and unmasks hypocrisy. Therefore to him is rightly ascribed the office of laying open the secrets of the heart.'³ Here the light of the Lord shines forth in the light of the gospel to open our eyes that they may see the corruption that lurks in the flesh.

Further, Calvin does express the idea that in this light of the gospel we have a more thorough revelation of sin than the world knew before Christ's coming. When the light of the gospel arises there is a disclosure of the affections of the heart which had previously been concealed. The lurking places of human dissimulation easily remain hidden till Christ comes.⁴

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¹. See ad loc.
². Ser. on Gal. 2.17-18, CR 50.432; II.3.1, CR 2.210; Com. on John 7.7; CR 47.166; on John 3.19f., CR 47.67f.; on Rom. 6.2, CR 49.117
⁴. ibid.; Com. on Is. 32.5, CR 36.545; on Phil. 3.7, CR 52.47
In terms of our study of the roles of grace and law in the doctrine of sin, this means that Christ reveals sin in a way that the law does not. On occasion Calvin makes this quite explicit: 'We must always return to this principle which we have treated, namely, that in the gospel we are completely stripped of all the goodness and virtue which we thought ourselves to have, and that God makes us so ashamed that we are obliged to come to him as quite confounded. Because although God sets our cursedness before us in the law, yet we perceive it not so well there as in the gospel.'

We have then, as Calvin thinks along these lines, in Christ a revelation of sin which is clearer and more distinct than that of the law.

Calvin discusses the point in Hebrews 4.12, where the Word of God is as a two-edged sword which 'examines the whole soul of man, for it searches his thoughts and scrutinizes his will with all its desires.' But 'is this Word to be understood of the law or of the gospel?' he asks. In part of both, but especially of the gospel. 'As it is Christ's office (officium Christi) to uncover and bring to light the thoughts from the recesses of the heart, this he does for the most part by the gospel.'

God now manifests sin by the gospel, as he did formerly by the law.

b. The work of Christ as the mirror (speculum) of sin

The role of Christ in revealing sin assumes the form of an argument from the contrary. We best tell man's sin from the magnitude of the divine action required to replace man in grace. 'We are exhorted to start recognizing and examining our sins when the death and passion of our Lord Jesus is put before us.' 'The more that God has shown himself generous in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the more we should feel from our side what an enormity it is that we are enemies to him and fight against his

1. Ser. on Gal. 3.1-3, CR 50.465f. Car combien qu'en la Loy Dieu nous propose nostre malediction, si est-ce que nous ne l'apercevons pas ainsi qu'en l'Evangile.
2. Com. on Heb. 4.12, CR 55.52. ...id per evangelium magna ex parte efficit.
3. Com. on Ezek. 18.23, CR 40.445
righteousness and defy him to attack us.' 'By his grievous afflictions 
he has testified to us on the one hand his infinite goodness and the love 
he bears us, but on the other we must contemplate what our iniquities deserve 
in the sight of God.' Nowhere in the writings of Calvin is this idea so 
frequently and so clearly expressed as throughout the Sermons on Isaiah 53.

By the cost of divine forgiveness the depth of human guilt may be measured. 
The ultimate rule for the measure of sin is the measure of grace.

If God had to crucify his only son to cope with human sin, then no 
cheaper price could be paid. Here finally the desperate depths of iniquity 
are revealed. At the cross, 'either God tortured his son capriciously, or 
else he is showing us the enormity of our sins and what we have deserved.'

Here must be measured his wrath against sin. 'Certainly we must be stupid 
beyond measure if we do not plainly see in this mirror (speculum) with what 
abhorrence God regards sin; and we are harder than stones if we do not 
tremble at such a judgment as this.' From this we come to know more fully 
the enormity of sin.

This development of the doctrine of sin appears in a great many contexts. 
Each time there is a demonstration of God's work of grace for us or in us and 
from this there is drawn the conclusion of our complete sinfulness. The 
exhibition of his work in us discovers the nature of our necessity. 'If 
the death of Christ is our redemption; then we were captives; if it is 
satisfaction, we were debtors; if it is atonement, we were guilty; if it is 
cleansing, we were unclean.' All to a man need his grace, it follows that 
they are slaves of sin and are destitute of true righteousness.'

1. Ser. on Is. 53.7-8, CR 35.644
2. Ser. on Is. 53.8-10, CR 35.649
3. See e.g. Ser. on Is. 52.13-53.1, CR 35.600f; on 53.1-4, CR 35.618f; 
on 53.4-6, CR 35.625; on 53.9-10, CR 35.655, et al.
4. Ser. on Is. 53.9-10, CR 35.651
5. Com. on John 19.17, CR 47.414
6. Com. on John 12.27, CR 47.291
7. II.3.6, CR 2.215; II.2.20, CR 2.301; Com. on Ezek. 11.19f, CR 40.242ff
8. Com. on Gal. 2.21, CR 50.200f
9. Com. on Matt. 1.21, CR 45.65. Com. on Eph. 2.8ff, CR 51.165ff
We encounter as an extension of this notion the concept of the work of Christ as bringing the wickedness of man into previously unknown maturity. If he is rejected when God confronts man in his fulness in Christ, there is man's sin called forth at its depth. A flood of evils burst forth after the preaching of the gospel because the world's ingratitude had arrived 'at its highest point.' The more fully that God does communicate with us in Christ, the more does our ungodliness grow and break out into open contumacy. Never is man's sin so great as when he rejects and crucifies the Christ; it is only as men stand against the light of Christ that the depths of iniquity can flourish. This means, in its corollary for our inquiry into the knowledge of sin, that only in Christ's light can we formulate an understanding of the final seriousness of sin.

4. The light of the law (lux legis)

The light of the gospel best and most properly uncovers sin. Here, however, a problem arises. Calvin can, on other occasions, apparently abandon the position he has established above to assume one where the roles of the law and the gospel in bringing us to an awareness of sin are rather different. Is Calvin here inconsistent and does he fail to relate the knowledge of sin to the knowledge of grace?

a. The office of the law (legis officium)

Calvin here assigns to the law the peculiar office of revealing sin and therefore man's complete wretchedness before God - a role which is played in contradistinction to that of the gospel, which brings salvation and redemption to men thus slain by the law. '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

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1. Com. on Joel 2.90f, CR 42.572. Ser. on Is. 52.13-53.1, CR 35.606
2. Com. on Acts 2.20, CR 48.34f
The difficulty here is that as Calvin develops this position it leads him to assertions regarding the source of our awareness of sin that stand in disjunction with Christ's office of laying bare the secrets of the heart. Not only is man's cognizance of sin removed from its definitive statement in the doctrine of grace to an equally definitive statement in the doctrine of the law, but it is denied that the light of the gospel plays any effective role in the revelation of sin. 'It is not the gospel which has condemned me, it is not the gospel that has showed me my filthiness, to make me ashamed of it; it is not the gospel that has bereft me of all hope of salvation, but it is the law which has showed me that I am dead, that I am damnable before God, that I am damned and lost. This comes from nowhere else than from the law.' Such a position is not totally in harmony with Calvin's earlier remarks that by the gospel our Lord shows us our sin and makes us ashamed. Here the law is employed as a weapon for conviction of sin independently of Christ, and from such use of the law a full statement of the doctrine of sin is derived apart from Christ. From this position Calvin develops the basis of the knowledge of sin as almost wholly in the law. It is the great revealer of sin, here men face the fact of their iniquity.

b. The law as the mirror (speculum) of sin

Man's sin is seen here as illuminated by the unequivocal demand of God for absolute perfection. The source of our awareness of sin is not the work and revelation of Christ, but a previously revealed, or at least previously apprehended, knowledge of God's righteousness apart from grace. If the law reveals God in shadow in some respects, it is not lacking here and reveals quite adequately what God expects and requires of man. Thus the

1. Com. on II Cor. 3.7, CR 50.42.
2. Ser. on Gal. 2.17-18, CR 50.434. II.7.6, CR 2.257, 'The Use of the Law' in Com. on Harm. of the Pent., CR 24.725ff
3. Ser. on Gal. 3.1-3, CR 50.465f, supra
4. Com. on Rom. 3.27, CR 49.65; on Rom. 7.11, CR 49.126
5. Com. on Matt. 5.21, CR 45.174; Inst. of 1536, ch. I, pag. 46ff, CR 1.29f
law is like a mirror in which we behold first our impotence, secondly our iniquity which proceeds from it, and lastly the consequence of both, our obnoxiousness to the curse, just as a mirror represents to us the spots on our face.'

When he has so developed this position Calvin becomes wary of assigning to Christ the office of revealing sin. Christ does do it, but it is not properly his office. Commenting on Gal. 2.17: 'Is Christ then an agent of sin?' he seems a bit perturbed about this relation; although he notes the fact that Christ 'discovers the sin which lay concealed,' he further comments that the law ought really to be the source of our awareness of sin, and we should not need to turn to Christ for this. The 'direct reply' to the point is 'that we must not ascribe to Christ that which is properly the work of the law.' (proprium est opus legis) When Christ says that his Spirit will convict the world of sin, (John 16.8) Calvin is reluctant to say that it is the office of the gospel to reveal sin. We are concerned here with the demonstration of sin by the doctrine of the gospel, but there is an element of impropriety here. 'It is undoubtedly the peculiar office of the law to summon consciences to the judgment seat of God and to strike them with terror; but the gospel cannot be preached in a proper manner till it lead men from sin to righteousness and from death to life, and therefore it is necessary to borrow from the law that first clause of which Christ spoke.'

1. II.7.7, CR 2.258
2. Com. on Gal. 2.19, CR 50.197f
3. Com. on John 16.8ff, CR 47.358f
4. II.11.5, CR 2.333
requirements, whereupon man is terror struck with his own helplessness and in
desperation for a way out turns for refuge to Christ. In this process the
source of the knowledge of sin becomes the law; grace only provides the way
of salvation and stands in sharp contrast to the death-dealing law. But com-
ing to know oneself in this fashion, first as a helpless sinner and secondly
as saved by Christ, Calvin seems to regard not so much as intrinsically and
theoretically necessary but rather an expedient operating procedure demanded
by the practical and external aspects of the situation.

That this is so Calvin reveals as he explains why the law was added four
hundred years after the covenant of grace with Abraham. Was the covenant
promise in Abraham weak, was the law added to save? No, Calvin replies, the
law was added to bring men to the knowledge of their sins; a thing, moreover,
which the covenant of grace ought to have done, but which on account of men's
stubbornness, it had not done. The law 'was added to make men know that God
has rightly condemned them all, and that they could not have any release but
would be continually tormented with such alarm that they would always be in
despair, until they should rest themselves in the promise. Now if it is alleged
that the promise ought previously to have performed that function, the answer
and solution is easy. For although God in offering himself to be our Savior
does thereby show that we are all damned until he has pity on us, yet we can-
not be helped as is requisite until he scares us. By his promise he calls us
gently and after a fatherly manner. It is true that this ought to make us
perceive our miseries and be sorry for them, but we are so fast asleep in our
sins that we never think about them unless we are forced. Although then, after
God gave the promise to men they should have had occasion to lament their sins,
to the end that they might rest themselves wholly upon the grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ, yet they did it not at all until God had struck them as with many
blows of a hammer, which he has done by the law.'

1. Ser. on Gal. 3.19-20, CR 50.537
The significant point here is that Calvin acknowledges that our sinfulness ought to be perceived as a deduction from God's act of grace, yet the law is of a necessary practical value. When God on his part establishes the covenant of grace, here is an occasion for man to lament his sin; his stubbornness, however, is such that he will not. God has to hit him over the head, as it were with the sledge hammer of the law, to knock into him some sense and awaken a perception of sin.

This pedagogy of the law has permeated Calvin's thought because of his conviction that sin is so deeply rooted that only by violent and rough handling does man awaken. This is the orientation from which he operates as he expounds the use of the law. Perhaps he allows it to extend beyond such pedagogy to influence his system of doctrine. Whereas he notes that man ought to take cognizance of his sin when God introduces the covenant of grace, and whereas he asserts that the measure of this grace is the measure of sin, yet simpler process - first to make a man aware of his sin by confrontation with God's unequivocal demand of perfection and secondly to communicate to him redemptive grace - takes large place in his thought. The multi-dimensional orientation, where man knows sin to a slight extent in the light of nature, where he comes to fuller knowledge by contrast with the revelation of the law of God, and where he can plumb the depths of sin only with the measure of the grace of Christ, is reduced consciously or unconsciously to a two-dimensional orientation, where man sound asleep in his sin is suddenly and decisively confronted in the law with God's majesty and jerked into a thorough awareness of his sin. Nor does Calvin always return to point out the unique word about man's sin that God speaks in the fulness of his revelation in Christ.
B. The redemptive purpose of the knowledge of sin

We turn now to the purpose of formulating a doctrine of sin and its implications for our procedure. If a task in Christian theology is to devote our efforts to the truth about sin, we must do so only with an end in view. Further, our approach and treatment of the fact of sin is to be governed by our intent. What is our purpose and what are its implications?

1. The end and tendency of the knowledge of sin

We examine sin not as an end in itself, but that an awareness of human failure and inability may point us away from ourselves and lead us to the only source of life. The knowledge of sin ought not make us despair, or be spiteful, or angry at God, or to excuse ourselves as being unable to do otherwise, but it ought to lead us to him as Savior. So severe and unqualified are Calvin's denunciations of man in his sin that it may well seem that he is motivated by vehement pessimism or even a dislike of the human race. And Calvin may occasionally be guilty of depicting man's sinfulness in a vacuum so as to lose sight of his goal. But the end has been clearly stated.

'We hear the language God uses: that in man there is no goodness, no understanding of truth, that he is so corrupted through sin that all the light which we suppose ourselves to have is but pure ignorance, that all our desires are rebellious toward God, that we are so dull as not to understand what is profitable for our salvation, rather we draw completely backward. Let us then plainly talk about these things, because God has taught them to us. But at the same time let us understand to what end we must apply this doctrine.'

'The end is that knowing themselves to be men, that is, poor creatures who can do no good, and knowing that this ought not serve to make them careless so that they say, I can do nothing, let God work what he will - knowing this, we are to flee to him for refuge, knowing that it is his proper office to remedy our vices and our faults.'

1. Ser. on Deut. 29.5-8, CR 28.506. Ser. on Deut. 32.44-47, CR 29.81f
God's pointing out man's sin is the first step in bringing him to salvation. 'God makes manifest to mankind their great misery in order that they may betake themselves to him, he wounds that he may cure, and slays that he may give life.' We make men 'look at themselves more closely in order that all may be led to this knowledge of sins by which we shall be led to repentance and consequently to the grace of God.'

'The more severe God is when he chastises us, makes us know our sins, and sets before us his wrath, the more clearly he testifies how precious and dear to him is our salvation.'

'If God insists upon extorting a confession from us, he acts rather as a physician than as a judge.' We are not then to be pessimistic in our knowledge of sin, as has often been characteristic of the Reformed outlook, but to know that the very knowledge of our sin is the first step to redemption.

Where this redemptive movement does not begin to take place, sin is not yet really known, for to know sin is to turn from it to obedience and submission to God's will. The man who has not so turned does not yet fully know his sin. Calvin does not develop in just what way this is so, but he affirms its truth. 'It cannot be but that a sinner, conscious of evil and knowing that he suffers justly, will humbly and thankfully submit to the will of God. Therefore when men perversely clamor or murmur against God, it is certain that they have not as yet been made sensible of their sins. I allow indeed that many feel guilty who struggle against God, and fiercely resist his hand as much as they can, and also blaspheme his name when he chastises them; but they are not yet touched with the true feeling of repentance so as

1. Com. on Ezek. 18.23, CR 40.445. Ser. on I Tim. 2.3-5, CR 53.153; Ser. on Deut. 9.6-7, CR 26.657; on Deut. 4.19-24, CR 26.166; Ser. on Gal. 3.3-5, CR 50.475; Ser. on Job 19.1-12, CR 34.93ff.
3. Com. on Zeph. 2.1f, CR 44.28f
4. Com. on Gen. 3.14, CR 23.68f
to be displeased with themselves.' 'They seem then to be convicted sufficiently to acknowledge their guilt and to assent as it were to the justice of God's judgment, but they do not really know their sins so as to be displeased with themselves on account of their sins.' 'These two things are united together by an indissoluble knot: to be cognizant of sin, and to submit patiently to the will of the Judge when he inflicts punishment.'

Thus far from being morbid in his doctrine of sin, Calvin asserts that those who are embittered by the knowledge of sin do not yet really know their sin. If a knowledge of sin is not so oriented as to achieve a purpose of redemption it is not a real knowledge of sin at all.

When we establish the source of our knowledge of sin to be reflexive of our knowledge of God and yet formulate this doctrine to point man out of himself and to the grace of Christ, we must recognize an essentially circular relationship, lest we confuse source and purpose. If the light of Christ reveals to us most clearly our sin, our sin in turn reinforces our blindness and our need of the light of Christ. There is here involved a reciprocal relation. But Calvin's ultimate purpose in establishing the fact of sin is not to found upon it the knowledge of grace as the only possible remedy - as has often been the argument of later theologians. Rather it is to use this knowledge to implement our comprehension and understanding of grace.

Recognizing this we may readily see that while Calvin's basic dogmatic argument is a deduction from God's work in us to man's need, from grace to sin, yet a reversed argument is permissible and proper once within the faith, if used for a progressive appreciation of God's grace. 'We never estimate aright his kindness toward us till we have been led to view, on the other side, the unhappy condition in which we formerly

1. Com. on Micah 7.9, CR 43,413f
2. This is the theme of the Ser. on Eph. 2.1-9, CR 51,349ff.
were without Christ.' 1 If we do not perceive our wretchedness and need we shall never understand how desirable is that remedy which Christ has brought to us. 2 The whole circular argument is sketched in a sermon on Isaiah 53. We become aware of our sins in the passion of Christ and use this awareness in turn to help us accept the grace of Christ. 'We are exhorted here to start recognizing and examining our sins when the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ is put before us.' The greater the grace of God to us in Christ, the more enormous our sins are seen to be. But 'when we have known our sins and why the inestimable grace of God is preached to us we shall surely be touched with repentance.' 'We shall never be able to feel to the quick what profit the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ has brought to us unless we are pricked inwardly with horror for our sins.' 3

3. The way of expression (loquitio) of the fact of sin

If we are governed by our purpose in the formulation and presentation of the knowledge of sin, there are correlative factors that must be taken into account. It is important to note these as Calvin has been accused of being unduly harsh in his portrayal of sin. Where this is so, we must understand the intent and method he uses. In representing sin to man, our condition before God ought to be 'expressed according to the weakness of our capacity.' (pro captus nostri infirmitate) 4 There are two weaknesses with which Calvin is here concerned. So deep is man in his sin that he has fallen into a unique stubbornness. We must recognize a congenital tendency to be obstinate, a factor which is doubtless part of his sin, yet one needing special recognition. 'Besides the evil that is

1. Arg. to Com. on Eph., CR 51.141. Com. on Ps. 144.3, CR 32.408
2. Com. on Is. 53.6, CR 32.258ff. Com. on I Cor. 6.11, CR 49.394; Ser. on Matt. 26.36-39, CR 46.833ff; on I Tim. 1.12-13, CR 53.69
3. Ser. on Is. 53.7-8, CR 35.636ff. Ser. on Eph. 4.17-19, CR 51.595ff
4. II.16.3, CR 2.369
in us, there is also a hardness and obstinacy such that God is obliged to
awaken us just as by force, that we may have some consciousness of our
vices to be displeased with ourselves.\textsuperscript{1} 'Such is the obstinacy of many
that they will never listen to Christ until they have been subdued by
violence.'\textsuperscript{2} We so nourish ourselves in vice that we must be drawn to
acknowledgment of our sins by force.\textsuperscript{3}

But there is another type of stubbornness into which man is prone to
fall, a weakness of man at the other extreme. A man is not able long to
endure where he finds himself without hope, but will collapse into despair.
'Unless there remains a hope of forgiveness, the terror of punishment
hardens men's hearts with obstinacy.'\textsuperscript{4} If man is unable to come to an
awareness of his sins short of rough and violent handling, it is equally
true that he cannot survive an undue amount of such energetic treatment.
Calvin expresses the difference by saying that if the human heart must
be 'softened' by a clear portrayal of Christ's revelation of his sins, yet
it must not be 'broken down.'\textsuperscript{5} 'Despair hurls us into madness and then
hardens our hearts by abandoned obstinacy.'\textsuperscript{6} Coupling the redemptive
purpose from which we must never deviate in a doctrine of sin together with
these two weaknesses prevalent in the capacity of man, there are implications
obvious yet highly significant in understanding Calvin's exposition of sin.
There from this originate 'ways of expression' (loquitiones; loguitio, a mode
of expression)\textsuperscript{7} or principles of accommodation to man's capacity.

a. The knowledge of sin 'in rough fashion' (d'une façon aspre)

Calvin says it may be necessary to drive man to fear with hopelessness
that having done this we may lift him up with the grace of Christ. Scripture,

\textsuperscript{1} Ser. on Eph. 5.11-14, CR 51.706. Com. on Is. 52.37-319
\textsuperscript{2} Com. on John 4.16, CR 47.83. Com. on Ezek. 13.22f, CR 40.296ff
\textsuperscript{3} Ser. on Gal. 5.19-23, CR 51.33. Com. on Rom. 2.8, CR 49.14
\textsuperscript{4} Com. on Acts 3.17, CR 48.69f
\textsuperscript{5} Com. on John 7.46, CR 47.185
\textsuperscript{6} Com. on Ezek. 18.22, CR 40.444. III.3.15, CR 2.446
\textsuperscript{7} II.16.2, CR 2.368
employs 'ways of expression of this kind' for they 'are accommodated to our capacity that we may better understand how miserable and calamitous our condition is out of Christ.'

'God's faithful servants often inspire terror, though only when necessary. For they cannot otherwise subdue those who exult in their lusts, and they cannot bring them to obedience unless they overcome them with fear. Therefore even true prophets and evangelists cause pain; as Paul says, If I have caused you sorrow I do not repent of it, for so I ought to do, for there is a salutary grief.'

(II Cor. 7.8)

We bring men to the knowledge of sin 'in rough fashion.'

(d'une façon aspre)

If the oil of Christ has no flavor, it ought to be mixed with wine to sharpen its taste. To profit in the school of Christ our hardness must be broken as the earth is prepared and softened by the plowshare.

b. The knowledge of sin 'tempered with sweetness' (cum dulcore temperata)

On the other hand Calvin is at pains to limit and balance this principle of accommodation with a reciprocal one, drawn again from the capacity of man. The importance of this in Calvin has not always been recognized. We must never dissever the sinfulness of man from the grace of God. 'Sorrow for sin is necessary, if it is not perpetual. I advise you sometimes to quit the anxious and painful recollection of your ways, to arise to an agreeable and serene remembrance of divine blessings. Let us mingle honey with wormwood that its salutary bitterness may restore our health when it shall be drunk tempered with immixed sweetness (cum immisto dulcore temperata) and if you reflect on your own meanness, reflect also on the goodness of the Lord.'

In representing to men their sins we must

1. II.16.2f., CR 2.368ff. Com. on Is. 52.17, CR 37.319
2. Com. on Ezek. 13.22f., CR 40.297. Com. on Hos. 6.5, CR 42.327f
4. Com. on John 4.16, CR 47.83; Ser. on Job 5.17-18, CR 53.257ff
5. III.3.15, CR 2.446. Calvin quotes Bernard. Com. on Is. 52.17, CR 37.319; on Hos. 2.2, CR 42.223; on Micah 4.1f, CR 43.339; on 5.1f, CR 43.364; on Joel 2.12f, CR 42.541ff; on Jonah 3.5, CR 43.251f
'mix sweetness with the harshness.'

There are two methods of acknowledging sin, one which tends to despair, torment, and obstinacy, and another which tends to salvation and is built on the hope of pardon. We follow the latter. By ignorance of this 'principle' we 'make long discourses about the fear of God, only by keeping poor souls in perplexity and doubt to build without a foundation.' We say that God is angry in such a way as not to be forgetful of his mercy. Fear ought to terminate in humility and depart not from the hope of pardon lest the sinner be wearied with excessive dread. 'Let us remember that some limit must be observed that we may not be overwhelmed in sorrow, for to nothing are terrified consciences more liable than to fall into despair.'

Here again Calvin warns against enunciating a doctrine of depravity outside a context of grace. This may be temporarily and pedagogically necessary, yet it is neither the ultimate logical position of Christianity, nor can it be an unqualified operating procedure if we are to establish our purpose in formulating a doctrine of evil. 'No one could even for a moment continue patient in a state of misery, except he entertained the hope of being delivered, and promised to himself a happy escape. These two things then ought not to be separated, and cannot be: the acknowledgment of our sins, which will humble us before God, and the knowledge of his goodness, and a firm assurance as to our salvation. For God has testified that he will be ever propitious to us, however much he may punish us for our sins, and that he will remember mercy, as Habbakkuk says, in the midst of his wrath. (Hab, 3.2) It would not then be sufficient for us to feel our evils, except the consolation which proceeds from the promise of grace be added.'

1. Ser. on Gal. 4.11-14, CR 50.610; Ser. on Gal. 5.7-10, CR 50.691
2. Com. on Ps. 32.5, CR 31.319ff; Ser. on Deut. 28.2-8, CR 28.370
3. Com. on Ps. 103.4, CR 32.75ff; Com. on Micah 7.18, CR 43.428ff.
4. III.3.15, CR 2.446; Com. on I Cor. 11.32, CR 49.495
5. Com. on Micah 7.9, CR 43.414; Com. on Jer. 4.27, CR 37.599; on Gen. 3.19, CR 23.76; on Rom. 11.9, CR 49.221ff; on Ps. 19.10, CR 31.203
It is Calvin's lesson for theology that the knowledge of sin is to come from and point toward the knowledge of grace. Our doctrine of sin must be Christologically centered in both source and purpose. Calvin's thought about the source and purpose of our knowledge of sin begins with the fact that we can realize our sins only in the light of the Lord. The will of God reveals sin. Theology may begin here, and this is a point of common agreement. But if our theology of sin is to be rightly oriented it must immediately move on to recognize that this light of the Lord shines brightest in Christ and that it is only in Christ that we finally know our sins. God's will is law and commandment, but it is far more. It is a will for grace and we know this in Christ. Sin can be known in its final form only as theology contrasts it with the state of grace. Reformed theology has not always done this, but has formulated a doctrine of sin apart from the light of Christ, by using the light of nature or the light of the law, by using God's holiness and majesty, or his perfection and absolute righteousness. But that doctrine of sin which is truly centered in Christology recognizes as well as this that sin is a corollary of the knowledge of grace.

There are two tendencies which constantly threaten to off-center this knowledge of sin from its Christological basis. The first of these is the attempt to found a doctrine of sin on the light of nature. This results in a concept of sin developed in the moral terms of the natural man, in an apologetic attempt to find a common denominator where Christian and philosopher can begin together. It is Calvin's emphasis here that while this moral consciousness is to be accepted and employed as a divine instinct, it is nonetheless to be recognized that there is not in this
any final knowledge of what sin is. Theology must allow the revelation of the Word of God to uncover sin, for here is sin seen as a concupiscence and ingratitude which infinitely surpasses any immorality known to the natural man.

In the second tendency which would sever the knowledge of sin from its basis in the grace of Christ we find Calvin himself involved in a struggle. He teaches that sin must be seen as more than the failure to conform to the law, it must be measured by the grace of Christ to us. Theology must not build up a knowledge of sin under the bare word of the law, but must constantly derive its knowledge of sin from that of grace. Yet although such is Calvin's lesson for theology, he himself does not always follow his better insights. On these occasions we must follow in the direction in which Calvin points rather than that in which he goes. It is incorrect simply to convict man of his sin with the sheer majesty and command of God as revealed in the law. Knowledge of sin entirely from the law in this way is true knowledge yet knowledge only in part. It will seem impossible or inhuman and only embitter. If the law remains for pedagogy, it does not remain as a systematic basis for the doctrine of sin. With the coming of grace, sin must be known in contrast to a God who was and is gracious, and whose very grace is the measure of sin. It is because man was created to grace and is returned to grace that we know he is a sinner. Theology cannot afford to remove its knowledge of sin from a basis in the knowledge of the grace of Christ.
II. The Nature and Propagation of Sin

Calvin's understanding of sin is an expansion of the assertion: 'He (Adam) ruined his posterity by his defection, which has perverted the whole order of nature in heaven and earth.' So we develop it here, turning our attention first to the nature of this defection, and then (in the second part of this chapter) to the way in which Adam ruined his posterity by this defection. The following chapter examines the way in which sin perverts all of God's order for man and creation.

A. The root defection (radix defectio) and source (fons) of sin

How does Calvin reduce man's apostasy to a fundamental sin on which the whole complicated superstructure of sin rests? This is what Calvin calls the 'root of the defection,' (radix defectio) or source (fons) or cause (causa) of sin, by which he means both the perverse movement which led Adam to introduce sin into our creation and the basic or primary sin. We may thus equate it with the primal or original sin (peccatum originale) of man. We are 'trained in the same school of original sin' as was Adam. This root defection is described by Calvin from various viewpoints. In tracing these concepts we notice how Calvin's concept of sin is a broader and a different one than that which conceives of sin as the failure to conform to the law of God, or as moral rebellion. We see here how in Calvin's thought this type of transgression is included along with and brought under the larger concept of sin as man's unfaithful and self-willed rejection of the grace and goodness of God.

1. Infidelity (infidelitas)

Calvin's most specific and most direct answer to the inquiry about the root defection is infidelity. (infidelitas) The nature of this infidelity

1. II.1.5, CR 2.179. Genus suum pessumbedit sua defectione qui totum naturae ordinem pervertit in coelo et in terra.
2. Com. on Gen. 3.12, CR 23.67
is important. Man was not faithful to know God and to reverence him, to trust wholly in him, to acknowledge him gratefully as his maker and Lord. Emphasis here is on his unfaithful rejection of the grace and goodness of God as he turned elsewhere to look for greater security and happiness. Adam fell through faithlessness. 'Since it must have been a detestable crime that was so severely punished by God, we must consider the nature (species) of Adam's sin, which kindled the dreadful flame of divine wrath against the whole race.' Infidelity was the root of the defection.\footnote{Infidelitas radix defectionis fuit.}

But from this sprang ambition, pride, and ingratitude, since Adam by coveting more than was granted, offered an indignity to the divine goodness, which had so greatly enriched him.\footnote{II.1.4, CR 2.178f}

What was the sin of them both? 'First the woman is led away from the Word of God by the wiles of Satan through infidelity.' (per infidelitatem) 'Therefore infidelity was the root of the defection, just as faith alone unites us to God.'\footnote{Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.60f}

All sins flow from our parents exalting themselves against the honor and excellence conferred on them. So Adam was not faithful 'to claim nothing for his own' and 'depend wholly upon the Son of God' and 'not seek life anywhere but in him,' rather he attempted to 'rely on his own prudence.'\footnote{Com. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.39}

He did not want to confide in God, but wanted to have something of his own which might have resided in himself and not in God.\footnote{II.2.10, CR 2.193f}

Adam's root sin of infidelity is as well the root sin of mankind at this day in his rebellion against God. 'Certainly infidelity ... is the source and mother of all stubbornness.'\footnote{Com. on Eph. 2.2, CR 51.162. Certe infidelitas...est fons et mater omnis pervicaciae. Com. on John 16.9, CR 47.359f}

Man has not been faithful to trust in God's goodness, 'but having trusted such a great excellence of his nature and having forgotten from whom it came and by whom it subsisted,
man strove to raise himself up apart from the Lord. 1 And in this infidelity men have ever since refused to depend on God, to receive all from him and so yield due honor and glory to him as his obedient and faithful children. Rather they have wished to be independent, to have inner strength of their own, to be self-confident and not to be bothered with confiding in God. 'Whenever our minds are pestered with this cupidity to desire to have something of our own, which may reside in ourselves rather than in God, we may know that this idea is suggested by the same counsellor who excited in our first parents the desire of resembling gods, knowing good and evil.' 2 But Isaiah invites men 'to confidence (fiducia) in God, which is the remedy that ought to be employed against all evils, as on the other hand, all evils arise from unbelief (incredulitas) and distrust.' (diffidentia) 3

2. Disobedience (inobedientia)

Though most frequently selecting infidelity as the root sin, Calvin can as well speak of disobedience (inobedientia) as the root defection, or the initial and primary sin which has been transferred from Adam to all mankind. Here Calvin rightly includes that facet of sin which often became the sole category of thought about the nature of sin in later Reformed thought. And in attempting to follow through Calvin's wider concepts for the root defection, we must not obscure the fact that sin as disobedience and rebellion against the law of God is one - but only one - of the ways of defining sin.

Adam's sin was disobedience. In the assertion: 'He ruined himself by his defection, which has perverted the whole order of nature in heaven and earth,' 4 Calvin can as easily say that he 'ruined himself by his disobedience.' 5

1. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 4.
2. II.2.10, CR 2.193f. Com. on Zeph. 3.12f, CR 44.66f; on John 16.9, CR 47.59f
3. Com. on Is. 57.13, CR 37.315, Com. on Ex. 17.2, CR 24.176
4. II.1.5, CR 2.179
5. II.12.3, CR 2.341
The tree of knowledge was a 'test of obedience' and 'it is evident that the fall commenced in disobedience.'¹ It was 'by the disobedience of Adam that sin entered the world.'² This disobedience must be understood as a fundamental transgression of the law of God where Adam overthrew all order and desired to occupy a place in creation which he had not been given. It is not then a simple matter of infringement or violation but of the whole rejection of God's law of creation, complete and unqualified rebellion against God's government. Adam would not submit to the divine government and he was not content with his dependent condition, but wanted something higher - independence, or self-sufficiency. He did not want to be a subject as he had been created to be; he wanted to be his own law-giver, to occupy for himself the place of God, and so depend on himself, and be subject to no one. He did not keep himself obedient but coveted a higher position which did not belong to him.³ 'The cause of the ruin of Adam was that he wished to raise himself up more than was lawful for him, he wished to be wiser than God, who had not so permitted him.'⁴

We may generalize that mankind stands in need of redemption because he has 'ruined himself by his disobedience.'⁵ This is clear by comparison with the work of Christ. Righteousness now comes through the obedience of Christ to us who in our disobedience could not attain to it. 'It was necessary that man's disobedience against God should be purged from the nature of man.'⁶ Obedience is the essence of righteousness, the 'mother and guardian' or 'the origin of all virtues,'⁷ but 'by nature we are rebellious, our affections draw us contrary to his will.'⁸ 'The natural disposition of men such as it

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1. II.1.4, CR.178f. Initium ruinae appearae fuisse inobedientiam.
2. Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.61. Com. on Gen. 3.11, CR 23.67
3. Ser. on I Tim. 2.12-14, CR 53.214; Com. on Deut. 18.9, CR 24.266
4. Ser. on Eph. 1.13-14, CR 51.305
6. Genevan Catechism, French, 1541, 7 Sunday, CR 9.25
7. II.8.5, CR 2.270. Ser. on I Tim. 1.14-15, CR 53.84
8. Ser. on Deut. 4.1-2, CR 26.98
is before it is renewed by the Spirit of God' is such that men are 'foolish' and 'disobedient' and always 'go astray.' This is 'the nature of unbelief' and from this proceed all the fruits of sin.¹ 'The source of all evils' among men is 'their revolt from God.'² Isaiah describes, in terms of rebellious Israel, 'what is the nature of men before the Lord anticipates them by his mercy,' and this is 'the nature of that rebellion, namely that the people walk after their own thoughts. Nothing is more displeasing to God than for men to be δυσθεώμενος (self-willed), that is, devoted to their own inclinations.'³

3. Unbelief (incredulitas)

Having noted already the significant position which unbelief takes in Calvin's notion of infidelity, it is not surprising to find that on frequent occasions Calvin designates the primal sin to be unbelief, (incredulitas) Rather than using the term root defection, Calvin here more often speaks of the fountain or source, (fons) the origin (origo) or cause (causa) of all our evils. Adam was prompted to sin by his incredulity. He doubts that the life which God has chosen for him is the true life of felicity and wonders if perhaps a life of his own choosing would not yield greater happiness and more security. Satan's first move is to call into doubt that which is non-reasonable and therefore to lead our first parents to question the rightness or desirability of God's rule and order for them. 'He wished to inject into the woman a doubt which might induce her not to believe (credo) that to be the Word of God for which a plausible reason did not appear.'⁴ Calvin seems to feel that sin which did not spring from some unbelief or doubt would have been impossible, as it is unthinkable that Adam and Eve should resist God unless they first doubted either his goodness to them - thinking perhaps to find a higher goodness in their

1. Com. on Tit. 3,3, CR 52.427
2. Com. on Is. 1.4, CR 36.32. Com. on Deut. 13.9, CR 24.266
3. Com. on Is. 65.2, CR 37.417f. (cf. II Pet. 2.10)
4. Com. on Gen. 3.11, CR 23.57
own strength - or his power to punish them. 'For never would they have dared to resist God unless they had first been incredulous of his Word.'

Only when a belief in God's Word has been left behind does it occur to man to break his ties to God.

In singling out unbelief as the first of Adam's perverse affections, we are only emphasising one aspect of what Calvin includes under infidelity, as we have already seen. Adam's unbelief gives rise immediately and necessarily to unfaithfulness; he in incredulity doubts God's goodness to him and in infidelity turns elsewhere to look for strength and happiness, and these two are both included in Calvin's infidelitas. As belief or faith gives immediate and inseparable rise to a fidelity which leads us to turn to him alone and so be united to him - and these are both included in fides - so the sin of Adam was an unbelief which led to infidelity. This is infidelitas. And in it Adam overthrew the law and order of God to prove his inobedientia.

Adam's sin in us is depicted in terms of unbelief. In this we emphasize the nature of the primal sin as mankind inherits it from Adam, and we may specifically call it unbelief. (incredulitas) Here Calvin distinguishes more clearly between unbelief (incredulitas) and infidelity (infidelitas) though the two are inseparably related and inevitably overlap.

'Unbelief is the source and cause of all evils.' Peter says that 'unbelief is the fountain of all our evils.' 'Unbelief not only hinders men from being delivered from the condemnation of death, but is the source and cause (fons et causa) of all our evils.' Man will not believe, accept, and come to trust in God and so be faithful to him. This is his unbelief. It rises from an innate persuasion that man must be independent and self-

1. Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.60
2. ibid.
3. Com. on John 8.24, CR 47.197. ...incredulitatem malorum omnium fontem ac causam esse... Com. on Ps. 32.6, CR 31.321
5. Com. on John 15.22, CR 47.351
sufficient, that he must believe in his own strength. But it in turn
gives rise to this same persuasion and fosters his self-will. In this
movement man is cut off from a right relation to God, he cannot receive
and live in his grace as he ought to do. If we believe we seek what we
need from God's gratuitous goodness, but the unbelieving try to secure
themselves. ¹ We cannot receive the blessings which God would give to
us because of our unbelief. 'And therefore let us note that men never
deprive themselves of the blessings of God except through their own
distrust.' (defiance) ² 'This is the source of all evils: that we are not
fully convinced that in God is everything that can be desired for our
salvation.' ³ 'All evils arise from unbelief (incredulitas) and distrust.' ⁴

Israel's chief sin was unbelief. The 'principal' thing in which
Israel erred is 'that it did not put its trust (fiducia) in God. This
also is the cause and origin of all superstitions, for if men felt assured
that God alone is enough for them, they would not follow here and there
their own inventions. We from this see that unbelief (incredulitas) is
not only the mother of all the evil deeds by which men wilfully wrong
and injure one another, but that it is also the cause of all superstitions.' ⁵

4. Concupiscence (concupiscencia)

Calvin denotes the root failure of man to be concupiscence. (concupiscencia)
By this he means again to describe the perverse, depraved motion all mankind
have inherited from Adam, this time with emphasis on the self-willed and
selfish aspects of man's continual revolt from God. Concupiscence is
basically self-love and so is the opposite of the love of God. In his Word
and law God has required of man a grateful and selfless love in all heart,

¹. Com. on Hab. 2.4, CR 43.529
². Ser. on Deut. 2.8-23, CR 26.27
³. Com. on Is. 10.21, CR 36.226
⁴. Com. on Is. 57.13, CR 37.315
⁵. Com. on Zeph. 3.1f, CR 44.48. Com. on Heb. 3.17, CR 55.44; on Jude 5,
   CR 55.491
body, and soul; in this man would have been faithful and obedient and would have reached his highest state of blessedness, but man in his concupiscence has loved himself and sought out his own felicity. Here Calvin continues, in the language of his thinking about unbelief as the sin of sins, to employ the ideas of a fountain or source of all evils, and returns as well, in the language of his exposition of infidelity as the primary sin, to the notion of a root of sin. Concupiscence is the fountain (fons) and root (radix) of all our sin.

Adam's sin was concupiscence. Adam 'is tempted by his own concupiscence' (concupiscentia) and 'not otherwise than knowingly and willingly set himself as a rebel against God.'¹ So it is with his wife. It was 'the poison of concupiscence' that affected Eve.² With us concupiscence is the inverting and corrupting power that makes sin of our whole life. 'Concupiscence is not 'just any kind of evil affection, but that which is the fountain of all evil affections.'³ (appetitum omnium fons) All depraved desires root in concupiscence.⁴ In short, we may not improperly define original sin as concupiscence if we understand that man is of himself nothing else but concupiscence.⁵ 'Paul gives the appellation of sin to this, from which all sins proceed, to concupiscence.'⁶ And Peter points out the primal sin by the name concupiscence.⁶

What do we mean by concupiscence as the original sin? A complicating factor here is the fact that the word concupiscence is used in various ways. Calvin directs himself in particular to the doubly complicating factor that Roman Catholic tradition behind him had held that concupiscence was the sin of Adam, and from this the sin of man, but had meant by that a very

1. Com. on Gen. 3.12, CR 23.67
2. Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.59
3. Com. on James 1.15, CR 55.390f. Com. on Ex. 20.17, CR 24.717f; on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.205
4. II.1.8, CR 2.183. Inst. of 1539 (et sequ.) ch. II, pag. 21, CR 1.311
6. Com. on II Pet. 1.4, CR 55.44.7. Ser. on Deut. 28.1-2, CR 26.348
different thing. Some held, for example, that Eve's concupiscence was lusting with intemperate appetite, and Adam's concupiscence was allowing himself to be seduced by Eve. Such suggestions Calvin rejects roundly. 1 Concupiscentia may mean several things, Calvin notes in a discussion of 'lust' in I John 2.16. It may mean the whole depraved nature of man. Calvin rejects such an interpretation in this context, but clearly uses it elsewhere, as we have seen above. 2 Or it may mean, as Calvin thinks it does in I John 2.16, a grosser lust a cupiditas, e.g. 'the cupiditas of the eyes,' 'libidinous looks as well as the vanity which delights in pomp and empty splendor,' etc. From concupiscence as the root defection there arise in us these several lusts: 'Various concupisences, (concupiscentias) all of which are adverse to God, bear rule in us.' 3 As men desire felicity they generally turn to the more sensuous and physical delights and so concupiscence as man's self-love and desire to be happy usually degenerates into lust. Calvin may then use the word to mean a gross or crass lust. 4

But in all this we cannot lose sight of a secret and more fundamental form of concupiscence. All of the Greek and pagan virtues - justice, uprightness, moderation, prudence, fidelity, and temperance - are rejected because natural man does not know concupiscence. 5 (We examine this later in the discussion of ethics.) The keeping of the law, if done in self-will, may be concupiscent (as we will also see later in the discussion of the law). The law alone 'indeed bridles our external actions, but does not in the least restrain the fury of our concupiscence.' 6 We may 'agree with the law of God in regard to the mere outward actions' 7 but be inwardly concupiscent. Man may come to covet or desire salvation out of selfish and self-willed

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1. Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.61f. II. 1.4, CR 2.178
2. Com. on James 1.15, CR 55.390f; on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.205; on II Pet. 1.4, CR 55.44; II. 1.8, CR 2.183; III. 3.10f, CR 2.44f
3. Com. on I John 2.16, CR 55.319f
4. Com. on II Pet. 2.10, CR 55.464
5. Com. on Mark 10.21, CR 45.540, and see later.
6. Com. on Rom. 7.6, CR 49.123
7. Com. on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.205. Com. on Ex. 20.17, CR 24.717
motives. There is a *concupiscentia* which does not flow out immoderately, but which keeps the letter of the law and is zealous for the serving of God.

What we mean by concupiscence is well illustrated in the tenth commandment. Covetousness, in Biblical usage, is at times but not always synonymous with concupiscence. Paul's reference in Romans 7.7: 'I should not have known what concupiscence is if the law had not said, Thou shalt not lust,' (non concupisces) is to concupiscence as this primal sin. 'Paul under this word contains the whole law;' this summarizes all that the law forbids. Concupiscence is here whatever is not of a motion compatible with loving the Lord in all body, soul, mind, and heart, or loving the neighbor as oneself. In this way, understanding covetousness very broadly to mean concupiscence, we may refer back to the tenth commandment as God's commandment to search out the perversity of man and to 'require integrity' of him. Concupiscence is the opposite of conforming our life to the will of God, it is the * disorder*) which enters when man does not depend on the will of God. Concupiscence is the will (voluntas) which is intemperate, unreasonable, and perverted.

We learn what concupiscence is from Paul, for he was ignorant of sin until he recognized what was meant by the word *concupiscence*. Paul had formally and sincerely so he thought kept the law. He was irreproachable before men, yet the chief of sinners in a literal way because he most of all believed himself to have life, he thought that he was righteous before God on account of his works and did not desire mercy. Paul's trouble was that 'being puffed up with confidence (confidentia) in his righteousness, he expected salvation by his works.' So we understand by concupiscence any

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1. Ser. on Deut. 5.21, CR 26.371ff
2. Com. on Rom. 7.7, CR 49.124 Ser. on Deut. 5.21, CR 26.371ff, esp. 382
3. Com. on Rom. 7.7, CR 49.124
4. Responsio contra Figlium de Libero Arbitrio, CR 9.362
5. I.15.6, CR 2.142. Com. on I Pet. 4.2, CR 55.271
6. Com. on Ex. 20.17, CR 24.719. Ser. on Gal. 2.17-18, CR 50.436; Com. on Ps. 119.36f, CR 32.230
affection that is not directed toward the selfless and grateful love of God. It is a question not of an external but of an internal obedience. Concupiscence is man's primal sin of refusing to love God and living in self-love, of resting on his own strength and virtue rather than on the strength and goodness of God. In this way \( \phi i \lambda \alpha u T' \alpha \) (self-love) blinds us so much as to be the mother of all iniquities.\(^1\) But \( h e \) who has denied himself has cut out the root of all evils.\(^3\)

More rarely, yet often significantly, Calvin can call the cause of sin simply the lusts of the flesh. 'Sin dwells in us... because its cause is the depraved lust (cupiditas) of our flesh.'\(^4\) On these occasions cupiditas is nearly synonymous with \textit{concupiscentia}.\(^5\) Lust (cupiditas) is the opposite of devotion and obedience to God.\(^6\)

5. Ingratitude (ingratitudo)

Calvin can view man's primal sin from an all embracing viewpoint as ingratitude. (ingratitudo) Sin is here seen in the light of the bountiful and unlimited blessings which God wills to bestow on man, but which man has cut off through his refusal to accept and to depend on them, turning to his own devices to seek greater happiness. In this way man's most fundamental sin is ingratitude. If man had been grateful, he would faithfully, obediently, and with selfless love of God have lived as God willed; but man was ungrateful. This is the source (source) or fountain, or the seed (semen) from which sin arises. Adam's sin was his unthankfulness. He was created in an earthly paradise which produced for him all the good things that he wished. He bore the image of God and was as the angels of heaven, he might have dwelled here in felicity. But when God had thus dealt so gently

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1. Cf. II Tim. 3.2
2. Com. on Deut. 6.5, CR 24.72f. Com. on II Tim. 3.2, CR 52.377
3. Inst. of 1536, ch. I, pag. 93, CR 1.52
4. Com. on Rom. 7.7, CR 49.123
5. Com. on Ezek. 18.22, CR 40.144f; on I John 2.16, CR 55.319f
6. Com. on Rom. 7.8, CR 49.124f; on Is. 57.17, CR 37.318f; Ser. on Eph. 4.20-24, CR 51.611f
with him, when God had thus enriched him with his gifts 'Adam could not abide that, and by his ingratitude he alienated himself from God.'

'God was not niggardly in his blessings, but poured them out bountifully, just as he who is the fountain of all liberality. He showed himself more than liberal toward mankind in the person of Adam. But we lost those blessings, God had to curtail his blessings which he had given us, because Adam through his ingratitude became corrupted.'

'On account of his ingratitude (ingratitudo) man has been hurled from the summit of glory to the abyss of ignominy.'

Man has ever since repeated this ingratitude of Adam. Though all have not had the felicity of Adam, yet all have had blessings in abundance enough to evoke from them an expression of gratitude, and all have been ungrateful. 'All mankind from the beginning of the world' are to be condemned 'for ingratitude.'

'The nature of man contains the seed (semen) of all evils.' 'Thus Paul in Roman 1 piles up many different kinds of vices and crimes which arise out of the ignorance of God and that ingratitude of which he had shown all unbelievers to be guilty.' This is 'the source of the evil' by which men turn from God: 'that men are ungrateful and forget God.' It is this fundamental sin that cuts off the gifts of God to us. 'Since God is by nature disposed to acts of kindness, nothing but our ingratitude and enmity hinders us from receiving the goodness which he freely offers to all.'

This is 'the filthy ingratitude of men, seeing they all enjoy the common life, not to consider to what end God has given them life' nor 'to remember the creator of heaven and earth, whose good things they devour.'

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1. Ser. on Deut. 28.46-50, CR 28.44.3f
2. Ser. on Job 3.2-10, CR 33.1/4
3. II.2.1, CR 2.186. Inst. of 1539 (et seqq.), ch. II, pag. 19, CR 1.308
4. Arg. to Com. on Rom., CR 49.1
5. Com. on 1 Cor. 6.11, CR 49.394
6. Ser. on Deut. 8.10-14, CR 26.394
7. Com. on Is. 1.19, CR 36.46f
They have revolted to break the order of nature and fallen away from God the Father in whom all concord depends.¹ The fountain (source) from which idolatry springs is the ingratitude and malice of men, and idolatry in its turn is the root and source of all evils.² So Calvin makes constant reference to 'the blessings which we have lost through our ingratitude.'³

Here then is summed up in the most comprehensive way all that is included in the other more specific terms we have used to describe the sin of sins. Infidelity, disobedience, unbelief, concupiscence—these taken together simply mean that man ungratefully chose to reject, to be unfaithful, to disobey, to disbelieve, to be concupiscent and self-willed, and thus to destroy the life that God had chosen for him to live, that through our ingratitude we have alienated ourselves from God and the life in paradise for which we were created.⁴

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2. Ser. on Deut. 5.1-7, CR 26.252; Com. on Is. 27.9, CR 36.456; on 65.7, CR 37.421
3. Ser. on I Tim. 2.12-14, CR 53.215; on Job 5.19-27, CR 33.276
4. Calvin can on a few occasions speak of the cause or the root of sin in further terms. He puts less weight on these and can often as well say that there are inadequate categories with which to depict the primal sin.

Following Augustine, Calvin notes in the Com. on II Cor.: 'The poison of pride (superbia) 'unquestionably was the cause (causa) of man's ruin,' 'it by nature inhabits us with pertinacity, and is so deeply rooted that it is extremely difficult to extirpate it.' (Com. on II Cor. 12.7, CR 50.140) 'Pride is more displeasing to God than all other sins.' (1st Ser. on Gen. 15.6, CR 23.699) 'Pride is the mother of all violence.' (Com. on Ps. 73.6, CR 31.677) 'The worst and deepest rooted vice in our nature is pride (orgueil) and presumption (presumption = presumptiousness, or self-conceit), when we will and desire to be something in ourselves.' (Ser. on Gal. 3.7-9, CR 50.490). This fits well into Calvin's total picture of the root sin of man and there is no inconsistency. But in his definitive discussion in the Institutes Calvin clearly rejects pride as an inadequate description of the root sin. 'Augustine indeed, properly observes that pride (superbia) was the first of all evils; because if ambition had not elated man beyond what was lawful and right, he might have continued in his honorable situation. But we may obtain a more complete definition from the nature of the temptation' depicted in Genesis, and this more complete definition is 'disobedience' or 'infidelity.' (II.14, CR 2.17df)

'Avarice' (avaritia), according to Paul's witness in I Tim. 6.10, may loosely be said to be 'the root of all evils.' (Com. on Ps. 119.36f, CR 32.230 Com. on Ex. 23.8, CR 24.666) This is done through 'sycophantia' (Com. on Is. 57.17, CR 37.318), a figure of speech where a part is taken for the whole. In this way it is the same as covetousness, or concupiscence. (ibid.) But Calvin is clear in his exegesis of I Tim. 6.10 that avarice is an inadequate description of the central sin. 'He (Paul) does not mean that all the sins (over)
Calvin's insights into the sin of man are unusually clear and well integrated. He is to be credited with seeing sin in its broad dimensions by choosing a number of fluid concepts which revolve around his single great Biblical insight of sin as man's dis-gracing himself in self-will. From this point he works with several concepts which each include a facet of this self-will and disgrace. He does not cast his whole concept of sin into any rigorous or intensively systematic form, but develops it by regarding the root defection in a large number of overlapping ways. He is aware that to include all that is comprehended by sin under one category of thought would inevitably miss much of its significance.

Calvin's concept of sin follows consistently from his dynamic concept of man as a creature upon whom God has bestowed his grace. We will study this in detail in the chapter on order. Yet we may already note how in each of his ways of thinking about sin—infidelity, disobedience, concupiscence and self-love, and ingratitude—Calvin keeps in constant focus the breaking of this original relationship of grace. Sin has to

which men commit proceed from avarice.' (Ser. on I Tim. 6.9-11, CR 53.585. Com. on I Tim. 6.10, GR 52.327)

'Folly (stultitia) is the root of all wickedness' as men are cut off from the only light of the Lord which can lead them to 'integrity.' (Com. on Ps. 14.2, CR 31.137) 'Integrity is the chief of all virtues, and in like manner hypocrisy is the mother of all vices;' (Com. on Is. 10.6, CR 36.215) 'Ignorance' (ignorantia) is the source (fons) of all evils,' as 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' (Com. on Is. 27.11, CR 36.458) 'Depravity is the fountain of all vices.' (De Scandalis, CR 8.37) 'Here we are shown what is the source of all evils: that is, our withdrawing from him who is the fountain of all righteousness.' (Ser. on Job 34.26-29, CR 35.181. Com. on Jer. 1.16, CR 37.489f)

Jeremiah shows here what is the source of all evils: they had cast aside every knowledge and every thought of God. We indeed know that when God is really known, his fear must necessarily influence our hearts, and the knowledge of God begets reverence and a regard for religion. It is indeed true that God is some¬what known by the ungodly and the wicked, and that they have some notions respecting him, but it is no more than an empty knowledge. When indeed we are fully persuaded that God is the judge of the world and when we have also a knowledge of his goodness and paternal favor, we necessarily fear him and spontaneously and willingly worship and serve him. Ignorance of God then is a kind of madness which carries men headlong into every sort of impiety.' (Com. on Jer. 9.3, CR 38.28)
be set opposite the love of God as man's refusal to be loved by God and his desire to love himself. Theology will do well to listen to Calvin as he constantly interprets sin in the light of the grace of God. Our thought about the nature of sin has to recognize that sin is essentially that movement on the part of man where man by ascribing independence to himself cuts off the grace of God to him.

The primary tendency which has threatened to obscure this concept of sin is that concept which does not see sin as opposed to the grace of God but regards sin in the simpler terms of a moral transgression of or want of conformity unto the law of God. In the introductory chapter we sketched the way in which this concept took large place in later Reformed thought and, through the Westminster Confession of Faith, came to dominate the thought of the English-speaking Reformed churches. It had also been characteristic of medieval scholastic theology before Calvin to interpret sin in moral and legal terms. But Calvin broke away from this simpler analysis. While Calvin sees full place for sin as disobedience to the law, he yet subordinates this to ways of thinking of sin as set opposite the grace of God. Here in particular Calvin's concepts of the primal sin as man's distrust of God's grace, and as man's infidelity in turning from complete dependence on God's goodness can serve to correct and balance this notion. Above all Calvin's notion of the primal sin as essentially ingratitude ought to be restored to the categories of thought of contemporary theology.
B. The propagation (propagatio) of sin

We find ourselves in a world where sin has invaded and permeated the human race. 'The dominion of sin, from the time of its subjection of the first man, not only extends over the whole race, but also exclusively possesses every soul.'¹ For an explanation Calvin looks, in accordance with the Bible, to the first sin of Adam. In the compact statement that we have taken as the core of his understanding of sin, Calvin asserts that Adam's sin has become the ruin of the world: 'He ruined his posterity by his defection, which has perverted the whole order of nature in heaven and earth.'² We now expand the way in which sin has extended from Adam so that it is propagated to all and as a result has proved the ruin and destruction of mankind.

1. The fall of Adam (Adae lapsus)

Calvin accepted the Biblical story of the fall as literal history, as did his contemporaries, and he does not discuss any other possibilities. But with appropriate changes the modern mind may accept his thought, for beyond this he saw it as history divinely recorded for us because it is significant for our understanding of sin. It is what is taught by this story that is important. He thus elicits doctrine from the various details of the story and centers his understanding of this aspect of sin upon it, adding other passages of Scripture where they are helpful. We must here attempt to analyze the truths about sin that Calvin saw contained in the Genesis accounts and the ways he incorporated these into his doctrine.

Above all, it is necessary to remember, as Calvin constantly points out, that we have here even after our attempts at systematization, doctrine in story form and that for this reason the categories of natural logic cannot be pressed upon it. There are then certain facets of the concept which reveal

¹ II.2.1, CR 2.185
² II.1.5, CR 2.179
to us the character of sin, but other points at which investigation is only a curiosity which leads man into difficulties.

Calvin holds that the events of the Genesis narrative point toward a divine ordination where sin is propagated from one man to all. God has ordered things this way. Only with such an assumption can it be understood. Calvin also at times speaks of a will, a wish, or a desire on the part of God that all men be made sinners in Adam. But the way in which Calvin regards this divine ordination is important, as there are assumptions that we can and cannot make from it. In this sense it is not as many of the other volitions of God, but a secret or hidden judgment revealed to us for a single and specific purpose. We examine here the part of this divine ordination in the propagation of sin, noticing in particular the usage that Calvin makes of it and the conclusions that he feels are proper and improper to draw from it.

a. Adam as our father and representative

In his sin Adam stood as our father and as our representative. 'God did not adorn Adam with the gifts of the Spirit so that he sustained as it were a private character, (privatus homo) but he conferred on his person all that he wished to be common to the whole human race.'^1 'We were all enclosed (enclore) in his person, according to the will of God.'^2 God so ordained things that in Adam the gifts conferred on the first man should be preserved or lost both for himself and for all his posterity. A divine judgment is involved. ^3 So 'if Adam had stood upright, (integer) all men would have in a similar manner stood in their integrity.'^4 But Adam fell, and by the order of God all fell with him. 'The Lord deposited with Adam the endowments he chose to confer on the human nature, and therefore when he lost the favors he had received, he lost them not only for himself, but for us all.'^5 It is

1. Com. on Ps. 51.5, CR 31.51f. II. 1.5f, CR 2.179f
4. Com. on Mal. 1.2ff, CR 44.405. Com. on Gen. 3.17, CR 23.72f
5. II. 1.7, CR 2.181. Ser. on Eph. 2.1-5, CR 51.356
'by the ordination of God' (Dei ordinatio)\textsuperscript{1} that he gave and took away in Adam and made him determinative for the whole human race. 'Whatever Adam lost we also lost by the fall, because he was not created for his own self alone, but in his person God showed that would be the condition of the human race. For this reason after he had been spoiled of the excellent gifts by which he was adorned, all his posterity were reduced to the same want and misery.'\textsuperscript{2} He suffered not alone but involved all his posterity with him and plunged them into the same sinful state.\textsuperscript{3}

It is important to recognize that Calvin will not debate the rightness of this, but realizes that it is not a logical concept. He maintains that this secret judgment of God is not to be measured by the canons of logic. This is not a truth which is obvious to all, but is a truth of faith. 'We must not here dispute by natural reason to know whether it is so or not. We must know that it was the will of God to give our first father that which he would have us to have, and when he took it from him, we were put in the same ruin and confusion with him. Then let us accept this judgment of God, let us stop there, and let us not believe our own understanding and imagination.'\textsuperscript{4} Indeed, it does not comport with natural reason, or the laws of earthly justice, that it should be this way.\textsuperscript{5} This is a fact which cannot be observed by the philosophers. Experience may lend secondary support, once Scripture has revealed it, but primarily it is a truth of faith. Ultimately there is an acquiescence involved. 'Since, however, none but God alone is a proper judge in this cause, we must acquiesce (acquiesco) in the sentence which he has pronounced in the Scripture.'\textsuperscript{6}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.62. Com. on John 3.6, CR 47.57
\item \textsuperscript{2} Com. on Ezek. 11.19f, CR 40.242ff. Com. on I Cor. 15.45, CR 49.558
\item \textsuperscript{3} II.1.5, CR 2.179
\item \textsuperscript{4} Ser. on Job 14.1-4, CR 33.661
\item \textsuperscript{5} Ser. on Deut. 24.14-18, CR 28.191f
\item \textsuperscript{6} Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.62. Ser. on I Tim. 2.12-14, CR 53.213ff
\end{itemize}
When God curses a whole race for the sin of one man, he is not subject to the laws of natural justice, or the earthly rule he would have us to follow. \(^1\) We are not able to see why, but he knows why and we must reverence in all humility these judgments so strange which tempt us to argue with him. We are too weak and too rude to understand. \(^2\) It is true that this will seem strange to many fanciful persons who may wish to constrain God to their measure and who are so rash that when the judgments of God surpass their earthly reason they soon condemn him for being evil and cruel. But nonetheless St. Paul would have us to acquiesce in this fact that God has shut up all in sin. \(^3\) He could indeed have worked things so that only Adam himself fell and so that no others would have ruined themselves in his person. But he did not wish to do so. If someone asks why the evil has spread out abroad, is it not because God wished it so? We must here restrain ourselves as though bridled or imprisoned, and receive the teaching just as St. Paul has pronounced it. \(^4\)

b. The propagation of Adam's sin

Because God has ordered things so that the condition Adam chose should be that of the human race thereafter, his sinfulness is transmitted to us. \(^5\) 'There is a universal propagation (propagatio) of sin and damnation throughout the seed of Adam.' \(^6\) 'Adam therefore corrupted himself in such a manner that the contagion has been communicated from him to all his offspring.' \(^7\) 'From a putrified root therefore, have sprung putrid branches which have transmitted their putrescence to remoter ramifications. For the children were so vitiated in their parent that they became contagious to their descendants; there was in Adam such a spring of corruption that it is transfused from parents to children in a perpetual stream.' \(^8\)

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1. Ser. on Deut. 28.14-18, CR 28.190ff
2. ibid., 191ff. Ser. on Deut. 28.46-51, CR 28.443ff
3. Ser. on Gal. 3.21-25, CR 50.548
4. Com. on I Cor. 7.14, CR 49.412
5. II.1.5, CR 2.179. Com. on I Cor. 15.45, CR 49.553ff
Calvin has now cut short all attempts at an explanation of the propagation of Adam's sin and attributed it to the ordination of God. Sin is propagated because God wished it so. Apart from an understanding of the limited way in which Calvin here conceives of a secret judgment of God, he would appear to be involving himself only further in extricable difficulties as he rejects all logical attempts at a solution. This propagation of sin does not depend on natural processes and so there is no need to develop elaborate concepts to explain how sin is transmitted. Calvin's particular reference is to the concept of the soul's descent ex traduce, by traduction, or transmission from Adam, rather than its proceeding immediately from God. But the propagation of sin is not really hereditary, if we speak in the strictest terms. Instead of saying, therefore, that each of us inherits vice and corruption from his parents, it would be more correct to say that we are all alike corrupted in Adam alone, because immediately after his revolt God took away from human nature what he had bestowed upon it.

It is not a natural transmission, but a divine one. However, we may traditionally speak of the propagation of sin as being 'hereditary,' but we must know that sin is transmitted not by natural processes, but because God had made Adam our father and representative and appointed him to determine our fate. Nor is it merely a matter of the imitation of Adam's sin by his descendants. Calvin is combating here the heresy of the Pelagians and the Celestians. It is true that we all participate in Adam's sin, but we do not imitate him in the sense that we enter the world with a nature such as the one with which Adam was created, or from this state degenerate into a sinful condition.

The final and irrevocable argument which demonstrates the universal propagation of Adam's sin to us is to be found in Jesus Christ. Natural
reason will not provide an explanation for the universal propagation of Adam's sin, but we learn this fact from the coming of Christ. It is the work of Christ to reveal the sin that is in mankind. Paul's argument in Romans 5 left an ineradicable impression on Calvin. The propagation of sin is explained by a comparison between Adam and Christ. As by one man sin entered the world, so by the grace of Christ life and righteousness have been restored to us. If we only understand here that the sin of Adam was propagated by imitation, we should have also to say that we receive no other advantage from the righteousness of Christ than the proposal of an example for imitation. But the righteousness of Christ is ours by communication, and it is equally evident that sin and death were introduced by Adam in the same manner in which they were abolished by Christ. 1

2. Original sin (peccatum originale)

Such is Calvin's understanding of the fall and the divine judgment underlying it by which sin is propagated to all mankind. We may now proceed to examine the use that Calvin makes of this as he puts this teaching into dogmatic form. We see here how such is the nature of this particular judgment of God that we learn from it certain things about sin yet must reject other assertions that might seem equally as logical. The principal doctrine that arises from the Genesis accounts is that of original sin. This misery in which we find ourselves as children of Adam is termed 'original sin.' It has been 'entailed by Adam upon the whole human family.' 2

'He suffered not alone, but involved all his posterity with him and plunged them into the same miseries. This is that hereditary corruption which the fathers call original sin.' (peccatum originale) 3 'Original sin therefore appears to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused through all parts of the soul, rendering us obnoxious to the divine wrath,' 4

1. Com. on Rom. 5.12ff, CR 49.95ff; II.1.6, CR 2.131f; II.2.12, CR 2.195f. But there are points at which we cannot press this comparison. This is particularly true in the matter of responsibility, as we later see.
2. Com. on Ps. 51.7, CR 31.515
3. II.1.5, CR 2.179f. Ser. on Deut. 10.1-8, CR 27.7f
and producing in us those works which the Scripture calls works of the flesh.' "This depravity never ceases in us, but is perpetually producing new fruits, which we have before described, like the emission of flame and sparks from a heated furnace, or the stream of water from a never-failing spring."¹

a. The universality of sin

The concept of the fall of Adam and of original sin explains and teaches the universality of sin in the world and demonstrates that all are in need of redemption. 'The stain of original sin cleaves to the whole human family without exception."² Sin was communicated from the first man to all his posterity and so every descendant from the impure source is born infected with the contagion of sin. 'All without a single exception are polluted as soon as they exist.' "Adam was not only the progenitor, but as it were the root of mankind, and therefore all the race were necessarily vitiated in him."³ 'In the Psalms (14.2f) it is said that God has looked and not found one single man who was not corrupt in his wickedness. That certainly also refers to the virtuous and those who are most highly and especially esteemed, as well as to the most debauched. It is said that they have all turned aside and that even to the last individual there is none found who is not entirely corrupt before God. Holy Scripture is full of this teaching; and St. Paul shows it plainly enough in the third chapter of Romans, when he quotes all those passages from the Psalms and the prophets which say that men are deprived and that their throat is a sepulchre. When all that has been said, St. Paul adds that all men are included, without any exception, until God has changed them and renewed them by his Holy Spirit."⁴

b. The totality of sin

This concept of the fall of Adam and of original sin explains and

1. II.1.8, CR 2.182f. Inst. of 1536, ch. IV, pag. 29, CR 1.112f
2. Com. on Ps. 58.3, CR 31.560. II.1.5, CR 2.179f
3. II.1.6, CR 2.180f. Inst. of 1536, (et seq.) ch. II, pag. 19, CR 1.310
4. Ser. on Is. 53.4-6, CR 35.652. Com. on Eph. 2.3, CR 51.162
teaches the totality of sin in the life of each man and demonstrates that the whole man is in need of redemption. The dominion of sin not only extends over the whole race but also exclusively possesses every soul.¹ Men's 'proper nourishment is sin, and there is not so much as one drop of goodness to be found in them, and to be short just as the body draws its sustenance from meat and drink, so also men have no other substance in them than sin. All is corrupted."² 'We have no adequate idea of the dominion of sin unless we conceive of it as extending to every part of the soul, and acknowledge that both the mind and heart of man have become completely corrupt."³ 'No part of us is sound, the mind is smitten with blindness and infected with innumerable errors, vile lusts of other diseases equally fatal reign there, and all the senses burst forth with many vices.' 'Corruption does not reside in one part only but pervades the whole soul and each of its faculties."⁴

By the sin of Adam all our faculties are corrupted and faulty, our reason, intelligence, will, and judgment. They are wholly perverted by Adam's turning away from God because they were not Adam's except insofar as he was formed in the image of God and when he was separated from his creator, who is the fountain of all goodness, he could not but be deprived of all the graces God had bestowed upon him.⁵ He was stripped of his righteousness. Now to whatever part of man we turn our eyes, it is impossible to see anything that is not impure, profane, and abominable to God. The intellect is blinded and always contrary to the wisdom of God; the will is full of corrupt affections; and the bodily strength tends furiously toward iniquity.

¹. II.2.1, CR 2.185. Com. on Ps. 5.2ff, CR 31.70ff
². Ser. on Job 15.11-16, CR 33.728. Ser. on Eph. 2.3-5, CR 51.361ff
³. Com. on Ps. 51.5, CR 31.513. Ser. on Is. 53.4-6, CR 35.632ff
⁴. Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.62. Ser. on Eph. 2.1-5, CR 51.349ff
⁵. Ser. on Deut. 29.1-4, CR 28.488ff
⁶. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 4
Calvin here resists all efforts to limit or qualify this totality of the sinfulness of man. While he makes place for a natural ethics and for natural religion, as we will later see, he so does this as to include both within the totality of sin. All of the work of man is in the direction of iniquity. In this Calvin has had to break not only with the philosophical tradition, but also with most of the ecclesiastical tradition behind him.¹

Not just some but all of the faculties of body and soul move toward sin. Nor do we think of this sin of man as being only a static condition where he lacks the original good. Man moves dynamically toward evil. Original sin is not simply a privation of original righteousness which man ought to possess, but a nature so fertile in all evils that it cannot remain inactive.²

'There is neither thought nor affection in us which does not tend to evil; all is rebellious toward God and the rule of his righteousness.'³

By these two emphases and in the language that is available to him, Calvin is trying to say that when man - Adam and humanity - sinned, man estranged himself from God by rejecting the life which God had chosen for him, and selecting a life of rebellion and independence which God must unalterably oppose. There is an 'estrangement' (alienatio)⁴ between God and man. Mankind in the world today is 'trained in the same school of original sin'⁵ as was Adam. He lives in infidelity as Adam did. He like Adam does not trust in and depend on God's goodness, but turns to his own strength. Man lives in disobedience as did Adam. He lives in incredulity and unbelief in the fatherhood of God. He lives in self-will, in love of self, and concupiscence as did Adam. And he lives in ingratitude as did his father Adam. In this act man has at once brought God over against him as his judge and alienated his own being from God. God, who was to

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1. II.2.3f, CR 2.157ff
2. II.1.8, CR 2.183. Com. on Ps. 119.37, CR 32.320
3. Ser. on Eph. 2.1-5, CR 51.351
4. Com. on Ps. 33.12, CR 31.331
5. Com. on Gen. 3.12, CR 23.67
be man's father, is now man's judge. While he has not given up his fatherhood, as we shall see again and again throughout this study, yet nonetheless he must be a judge toward the creature who has set himself against God. 'All the children of Adam are enemies of God by reason of the corruption that is in them. It is true that God loves them as his creatures, but yet he must hate them inasmuch as they are perverse and given to all evil.' And on the other side, by his act of sin man has irrevocably alienated himself into a situation where his will is not God-ward but self-ward, it is a will that can only go from alienation to alienation. All of the human race is begotten in this situation.

c. God and the corruption of man

This concept of the fall of Adam and the propagation of his sin to us removes all ground of contention against God and rather teaches us that God is good in his original intention for us. Mankind may only attribute his misery to himself. The way in which Calvin can assert this, having just before developed a concept where sin is transmitted to us by God's secret ordination, is interesting and indeed baffling to those who would press him hard for logical explanations. Calvin is not reducing the whole concept to its logical ends, however, but eliciting doctrine from the Genesis accounts. It here seems to him - and it is indeed a major truth in the Genesis narrative - that we are taught that the state of sin is not one which God intended for man but which man brought on himself. Working in such a way Calvin can immediately turn around and dismiss those who turn to this ordination of God as an excuse by pointing them not to this judgment but to Adam's sin which introduced it.

'When we speak of man and of that which is in him, it is not a question of the work of God. For Adam was created quite other than we are today. We are fallen from the state in which God set Adam and all mankind

1. Ser. on Deut. 33.1-3, CR 29.115
in his person.' 1 'We were not created to the end that death should have dominion over us. That has come upon us through our father Adam inasmuch as we are all culpable in him.' 2 'Now let us dismiss those who dare to charge God with their corruption, because we say that men are naturally corrupt. They err in seeking for the work of God in their own pollution, whereas they should rather seek it in the nature of Adam while yet innocent and uncorrupted. Our perdition therefore proceeds from the sinfulness of the flesh, not from God; it being only a consequence of our degenerating from our primitive condition.' Therefore let us remember that our ruin must be imputed to the corruption of our nature in order that we may not bring accusation against God himself, the author of nature.' 3 

Our nature was occasioned by sin, it is derived from an extraneous cause, and it is clear that the misery of man must be ascribed solely to himself, since he was favored with rectitude by the divine goodness, but has fallen into servitude through his own folly. 4

God made man good, it is accidental 5 that he fell. 'We say therefore that man is corrupted by a natural depravity, but which did not originate from nature. We deny that it proceeded from nature to signify that it is rather an adventitious quality (adventitium qualitas) which is man's by accident (accido) than a substantial property originally innate.' 6 In the fall story, 'the object is briefly to narrate the corruption of human nature, to teach us that Adam was not created to those multiplied miseries under which all his posterity suffer, but that he fell into them by his own fault. In reflecting on the number and nature of those evils to which they are obnoxious men will often be unable to restrain themselves from raging and murmuring against God, whom they rashly

1. Ser. on Job 14:1-4, CR 33.660
2. ibid., 662. Ser. on Job 15:11-16, CR 33.729f
3. II. 1.10, CR 2.184. 1.15.1, CR 2.134f; Com. on Ps. 51.5f, CR 31.513f
4. ibid. Com. on Eph. 2.3, CR 51.162
5. This vital distinction in Calvin is examined in detail in Chapter IV.
6. II. 1.11, CR 2.184f
censure for the just punishment of their sin.' What other reason is there for this than that they do not refer the miserable and ruined state under which we languish back to the sin of Adam as they ought? But what is far worse, they fling back upon God the charge of being the cause of all the inward vices of the mind, (such as its horrible blindness, contumacy against God, wicked desires, and violent propensities to evil) as if the whole perverseness of our disposition had not been accidental (accidentale) \(^1\) But we ought to attribute this to Adam and not throw the fault on God. \(^2\)

Nor, if it is accidental that man fell, may the question of God's decree be raised, for we consider here the will of God and his proper intent in the formation of the world. The mystery of predestination or of a secret decree has no place here. 'Let no one murmur that God might have made a better provision for our safety by preventing the fall of Adam. For such an objection ought to be abominated as too presumptuously curious by all pious minds.' \(^3\) The fall of man is, it is true, hidden away in a secret decree \(^4\) and there are some aspects of the problem we cannot solve without recourse to God's secret judgments. This is particularly true in the matter of the transfer of Adam's sin to us all. But in this matter of God's responsibility for the fall of man we do not emphasize the secret decree of God. We only turn to the open and unrevealed will of God and understand that Adam's sin was against the will of God, and that man must assume full responsibility for it.

Thus it does not lessen for Calvin the heinousness of Adam's sin to know that it was decreed by God. It does not mean that his sin was pleasing

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1. Com. on Gen. 3:1, CR 23.54f
2. Com. on Ezek. 11.19f, CR 40.242f. Ser. on Job 15.11-16, CR 33.729f
3. III.1.10, CR 2.104. 1.15.8, CR 2.143
4. The first man fell because God thought it was fit. (expedient) Now as to why he thought it fit we know nothing. Yet it is certain that he has not decided thus unless because he says that it would advance the glory of his name.' 'Man then falls according as it has been ordained of God, but he falls by his own vice.' (Institution of the Christian Religion, French ed. of 1551, CR 14.379) Nearly the same passage occurs in III.23.8, CR 2.705; Inst. of 1539 (et seqq.) ch. VIII, pag. 251, CR 1.871. Cf. The Secret Providence of God, (E.T. by Cole) 280f.
to God; it does not make Adam any less responsible. "When I say, however, that Adam did not fall without the ordination and will of God, I do not so take it as if sin had ever been pleasing to him, or as if he simply wished that the precept which he had given should be violated. So far as the fall of Adam was the subversion of equity and of well-constituted order, so far as it was contumacy against the divine law-giver, and the transgression of rightness, certainly it was against the will of God."1 'Although by the eternal providence of God man has been created for that state of misery in which he is, yet notwithstanding he has derived the cause of that misery from himself, and not from God.'2

d. Inherited and individual culpability

The concept of the fall of Adam and of original sin does not provide a wholly logical or adequate answer to the question about the individual responsibility of man in his sin. Rather we answer this question with a different emphasis. We have already seen that Calvin is abundantly aware that we are not able to put the concept of the fall into a logically consistent form. The fall was accidental, the nature which man has is his by accident,3 we are not then able to understand by logic its origin. It is true at once that there is a secret decree of God by which Adam sinned and fell, and yet at the same time that in the revealed will of God in his Word we are taught that he does not will, cause, or create sin, that sin is not pleasing to him.4 The manifest cause of Adam's fall was his own rebellion; the secret decree of God is a hidden cause to which we do not turn.5

Again it is true that there is a secret judgment by which Adam's sinful nature is transferred to all, and yet in his Word we learn that God is not the author of sin, or of corrupt human nature, therefore our corrupt

1. Com. on Gen. 3:1, CR 23.55. Com. on Gen. 3:7, CR 23.63f
3. II.1.11, CR 2.184; Com. on Gen. 3:1, CR 23.54, etc.
4. ibid.,
nature is not to be ascribed to him. And such a secret decree is, Calvin frankly teaches, incompatible with natural reason, and with the canons of earthly justice. It is repugnant to the processes of natural reason; we must believe it, for we are not able to understand it; we must acquiesce in the judgment of Scripture. The manifest cause of each man's sin is his own sinful nature which expresses itself in rebellion and disobedience; the secret judgment of God by which he is born inclined to sin is a hidden cause to which we do not turn in the matter of culpability.

From this we are to understand that in the matter of responsibility we are not to ask, By what secret judgment of God did we receive our sinful nature? In what way is he responsible for our original sin? Rather we ask, With our sinful nature, in what way do we act freely and responsibly? We do not attempt by God's secret judgment to understand our culpability, or, when our logic fails, to mitigate our guilt by saying that we have been loaded with the guilt of another. Calvin's opponents constantly charged here that if Adam's sin is transferred to the whole world by a divine ordination or will of this sort, and we are laden with his sin, then we are not rightly to be held responsible for our having a sinful nature, and from this not responsible for the sins that rise from it. 'We perish through the fault of another.' Calvin always countered such objections with what might seem an inappropriate argument which assumes the point at issue: that man, now that he has a sinful nature, is guilty for his sin because he now sins not by constraint but voluntarily and wilfully, doing what he is by nature inclined to do. So, for instance, Calvin is faced with this objection: 'If men could employ themselves to the good, and at the same time made no account of it but

1. Ser. on Job 15.11-16, CR 33.730 et al.
2. Ser. on Deut. 24.14-16, CR 28.191f
3. Com. on Gen. 3.6, CR 23.62. Ser. on Gal. 3.21-25, CR 50.548
4. Reply in the case of Troillet, CR 14.379f; III.23.8, CR 2.705
5. Com. on Ezek. 18.1f, CR 40.424f
6. Ser. on Job 14.1-4, CR 33.656f
gave themselves to evil, it is true that they should rightly be held culpable. But if they can only do evil, why should God judge them? To which his answer is: 'They are not constrained by force; they are under subjection indeed, but it is voluntary.'

This is an important truth and we examine it presently. But such arguments must have exasperated those opponents who pressed him hard for logical answers at this point and they may have felt that he had sidestepped their charge, for Calvin has not answered the question, How is it right that we have a sinful nature? but only argued that from within our sinful nature we are free to sin. Are we really to understand though that Calvin simply begs the question by arguing at cross purposes, or is naively inconsistent? Hardly, for we have already seen that he freely admits and teaches that the way in which we come to have a sinful nature not only is beyond our comprehension but is repugnant to our logic and reason. Calvin's meaning is rather that while we look to the concept of a divine ordination to see a reason for the solidarity of man in sin, yet when we ask questions about individual responsibility we recognize that the fall concept is inadequate. We think not of transmitted guilt, but of personal guilt. We look for a way in which from within this sin man can be given responsibility.

The concept of original sin does explain our universal sinfulness and alienation from God, but it must be used with the reservation that what might appear logically from this to be the case in the matter of guilt - that we perish ultimately because another's guilt is transferred unjustly to us - is not the case, however illogical it may be to deny it. Certainly to press the concept of Adam as our representative and to develop our responsibility along these lines would provide an inadequate notion of

1. Ser. on Eph. 2.3-6, CR 51.367
2. Com. on Ezek. 18.1f, CR 40.421f; Com. on Rom. 5.17, CR 49.100; Com. on Ps. 51.3, CR 31.513f; II.1.8, CR 2.182f
responsibility. But we do not press this point, for this is not the teaching of Scripture. This would on the one hand make God the author of sin, and on the other relieve us of responsibility and make us nonchalant or spiteful. 'By Adam's sin we are not condemned through imputation alone, as though we were punished only for the sin of another; but we suffer his punishment because we also ourselves are guilty; for as our nature is vitiated in him, it is regarded by God as having committed sin.' Calvin will not develop the concept of the fall so as to qualify the responsibility of man in his sin. It must be limited so as to allow room for human responsibility in sin. 'When we consider the perishing of the whole human race, it is said with truth that we perish through another's fault; but it is added at the same time that everyone perishes through his own iniquity.' To see the responsibility of man in his sin we must add to any notion of a transfer of Adam's sin to us the fact of our own sinfulness. We do not ask how we got our sinful nature, we do not look to the fall to see our responsibility - useful and necessary though this concept may be to depict the universal sinfulness of man - but we look to our own wilful and malicious sin and see how we are responsible now that we have a sinful nature. We join with this fact of the fall the fact of the fault of each individual. 'But now from the time in which we were corrupted in Adam, we do not bear the punishment of another's offense, but we are guilty by our own fault.'

e. Compulsion and freedom in sin

If we acquiesce in the concept of a secret judgment of God whereby Adam's sinful nature is transferred to us, then we may work out with some logical consistency a way in which man is free and responsible from within his sinful nature. Though we cannot understand with our logic the question,
How are we responsible for our having a sinful nature? - for this is bound up in the secret judgment of God, yet we can answer the question, Now that we have a sinful nature, how are we responsible for the sins rising from it? Human nature is alienated and estranged from God by original sin, it is a nature which in self-will can only go from alienation to alienation, but this does not mean to say that the alienated and estranged being which is ours by original sin is a being under compulsion. Man has freedom, but in his freedom his perverse will means that every thing that he does in his self-will takes him away from God. 1 'We shall reply in vain, I cannot help what I do, my nature was corrupted in this way in Adam, and I was there made destitute of all power to aspire to the good. When we have well argued our cause, it is certain that we will remain in our condemnation. Why? Because the evil comes from us. Is it not enough for a man to be his own witness without others drawing up a process against him, or bearing testimony against him? When a men enters into himself, although he is a slave of sin, and is wholly steeped in iniquity, and is not able to aspire to the good in any way, yet it is of his own movement and of his free will, as they say, that he is always drawn toward the evil. He is not at all forced to it. It is true that it is not possible for him to do good, yet nevertheless the sin which he commits proceeds from nowhere else than of his own inclination. He wished it so.' 2 Men do have a will. It is not a constrained will but a will which acts from inner necessity. There is in this no compulsion or constraint. 'Man, having been corrupted by his fall, sins voluntarily, not with reluctance or constraint;

1. 'If compulsion (coactio) is opposed to freedom, I confess that the will (arbitrium) is free; I will constantly affirm it and regard as a heretic anyone who thinks otherwise. If, I say, it is called free in this sense; that it is not constrained or violently compelled by an external impulse, but spontaneously moves itself, then I will no longer dispute.' (Responsio contra Pighium de Libero Arbitrio, CR 9.279

(coactus) with the strongest propensity of depravity, not with violent coercion; (coactio) with the bias of his own passions, and not with external compulsion; (coactio) yet such is the depravity of his nature that he cannot be excited and biased to anything but what is evil. If this is true, there is no impropriety in affirming that he is under a necessity of sinning. ¹ We may illustrate here by the example of God, who is on the other hand under a necessity dictated by his own character of doing good, yet does it voluntarily. ²

We here sin from within our sinful nature in such a way as to participate in Adam's sinfulness. In this way man is responsible though he may not have started from a position of Adamic sinlessness. He proves even from within his sinful nature that he wills to sin. He repeats and makes himself an accomplice to the sin of Adam, though he does not have a sinless nature at the start. Man ignores and in his ignorance rejects the clear light of God in nature, law, and gospel spread forth for his benefit and by the love of God for all men. Wherever and whenever God breaks through in gifts to bless man, to hold his life suspended from utter anarchy and annihilation, to save him and restore him to life eternal, man in his sin and irresponsibility twists, distorts, and inverts the grace of God. This whole concept we will develop throughout the thesis and especially in the second part. But here in the matter of the fall we note (1) that Calvin does not employ the concept of the fall of Adam as our representative to understand our responsibility, rather he denies that we may press it to a logical conclusion and speak only or in the main of transferred guilt, and (2) that Calvin feels that though we are not born in Adam's state, yet within our state of sin we are given responsibility.

¹. II.3.5, GR 2.214. Reply in the case of Troillet, CR 14.579f. Calvin does not like the language of necessity, but his critics compel him to use it when he would rather state his case in different language.
². ibid.
We have tried here to view Calvin's understanding of the fall and of the propagation of Adam's sin as sympathetically as possible, understanding what he attempts to teach without becoming disturbed by controversial elements in his thought. The key to what are otherwise insurmountable problems in his concept of a divine ordination whereby all are made sinners in Adam is to be found in his clear recognition that we are here accepting what cannot be put into logical form and that we cannot draw from it the conclusions which apparently follow. In this hidden judgment God does not reveal himself as the author of sin nor does he deprive man of responsibility. Calvin labors to show that in this way he leaves with the deep wisdom of God what is otherwise without explanation. Apart from a recognition of this much of what Calvin has to say will seem to be contradictory and even meaningless to those who press Calvin on points he does not choose to develop. Because many who have read Calvin in the past have not taken seriously his warnings that those who would follow his concepts must acquiesce in this judgment of God despite the logical difficulties they have stumbled over his teaching and not been able to appreciate what he has had to say. Only when Calvin is read with the awareness that he does not feel it possible to be logical at all points can we listen to the positive side of his thought.

Calvin is to be credited with recognizing that all logical and natural theories of the transmission of sin lead only to unnecessary complexities and incorrect notions of what sin is. We must depict this propagation in spiritual terms. In this his insight was greater than those who preceded him or who followed him with explanations of a philosophical, metaphysical, or pseudo-scientific type. The propagation of sin to all mankind, the universality and totality of sin is a fact which can only be established from within the Christian faith and it cannot even there be established without by-passing and in a certain sense perhaps offending our human ability
to reason through the subject. The fact that every man comes into the world with a sinful nature which is his at birth is a fact that is at once thrust upon us and yet enigmatic in every attempt at analysis. It is this fact which Calvin attempts to embrace in his concept of a divine ordination by which sin is propagated to all.

Having said this, however, we may seriously question whether Calvin's attempt to rest the matter in a secret ordination of God is one which modern theology ought to follow. These difficulties are doubled as Calvin includes the notion of God's will, wish, desire, or even decree into this ordination. Though Calvin may be read and appreciated, as we have attempted to do, are his patterns of thought here to be recommended for our presentation of the problem of sin? Is his concept one demanded in the way that Calvin states it by the Biblical narratives? Surely Calvin's larger truths about man's total and universal alienation from God are to be retained and we ought to see this as a spiritual rather than a natural thing, yet nonetheless his specific concept of sin as propagated by divine ordination becomes so unwieldy as to raise more problems than it answers and offend more than it explains. An ordination of God whereby all men are made sinners at birth because of Adam's sin, will always produce a sense of frustration in the struggle with a sinful nature. It will prejudice the seriousness with which we regard man's culpability. Theology will do better to search for other more Biblical concepts to understand the propagation of sin, incorporating Calvin's insight that the whole thing cannot be put into logical form, and yet stopping short of his notion of a divine desire, will, or ordination by which sin is spread abroad. Here it may be possible to interpret and adjust this ordination or judgment of God so as to remove from it the notions of God's will which are usually associated with it. We may indeed recognize that even the transmission of sin must be not without the deep counsel of God and that there is in some way represented by man's miserable estate a judgment of God on all the race, yet our knowledge must be here suspended rather than attributing to God the order or wish which propagates sin.
III. The Character and Effect of Sin

The whole concept of order as established by God's grace is very important in Calvin; on it is carried much of his thought and from this standpoint much of his theology may be worked out. We here interpret the manner in which evil maintains itself in creation against this background. Calvin chooses this notion to analyze how sin exists as an inversion of the good, rather than as a lack of the good or as an entity with its own separate existence. This explains how evil is able to gain existence and perpetuate itself in a world where all things are created good. From the compact assertion: 'He (Adam) ruined his posterity by his defection, which has perverted the whole order of nature in heaven and earth,'\(^1\) we expand now the way in which God's order is inverted by this root defection. Following his procedure outlined in the chapter on the source of the knowledge of sin, we see how Calvin begins with the character of the good existence at creation and from this develops his concept of sin and evil.

A. The order of creation (creationis ordo)

The will or purpose of God was incorporated into the universe at creation. All things are ordered not only according to divine intention, but according to the movement of God's grace in creation and purpose in redemption. 'He has arranged things in a most exquisite order.'\(^2\) This includes the universe, the creature, and especially man. This Calvin calls the order of creation (creationis ordo) or the pure order of nature, (naturae ordo) an order which gives to the creature and particularly to man his destiny and his reason for existence. In this order man lives in rectitude (rectitudo, rectitude, droiture) or integrity (integritas).\(^3\) The meaning and character of existence is cast into these terms of order.

1. II.1.5, CR 2.179
2. Com. on Rom. 1.21, CR 49.24.
3. Com. on Gen. 1-3, passim, CR 23.13ff; on Rom. 1-2, CR 49.7ff; et al.
4. Com. on Ps. 8.5, CR 31.92f
Men ought to follow 'the law of their creation' (creationis suae lex) and live in the 'genuine order.'

This is the pure order of nature. A confusing point here is that after the inversion of order in sin, there remains printed wholly within the sinful order an image or a relic of the pure order, a moral, social, economic, and physical order which in some outward respects resembles this primal order. God yet extends to man some blessings; the sun, moon, stars, and seasons follow their course, the earth brings forth fruit with its thorns, and God holds society in check sufficiently to prevent its self-annihilation. Men live in a society ordered in some degree and have notions of justice and equity. This too Calvin calls the order of nature and appropriately so, for it reflects and is derived from the pure and original order of creation. Yet it is wrought out entirely within a fallen world and a perverted order. This relationship we work out in a later chapter on sin and ethics. Here we note that there are two ways in which Calvin can use the term order of nature: first, to describe the primal order of creation which God now wills to maintain but which is only maintained in part in his church; and secondly, to describe the existing physical, moral, and social order in part now followed the world over (though men often depart from this too). Calvin can distinguish between the order of nature and the course (cursus) of nature, a distinction which reflects this difference.

What was the nature of this primal order and rectitude? What does Calvin mean by integrity? It is important here to get back into the thought of Calvin because much of the wealth of this concept has been neglected by those who followed after Calvin. Where the concept of order has been used, it has been in the main construed as an order of

1. 1.3.3, CR 2.38. Inst. of 1539 (et seqq.) ch. I, pag. 4f, CR 1.286
2. II.6.1, CR 2.247. Ser. on Eph. 5.11-14, CR 51.695; on Deut. 5.21, CR 26.378
3. I.5.7, CR 2.46; Inst. of 1539 (et seqq.) ch. I, pag. 6f, CR 1.287f;
   Com. on Jer. 5.25, CR 37.636
justice and righteousness, an order based on divine law. Man would have fulfilled God's order had he abided by God's law, but he has broken God's order in unlawful disobedience. Calvin certainly does not overlook this important way of thinking of order, yet he subordinates it to the larger concept of an order of grace. Existence in such an ordered creation involves a twofold relationship between God and man.

1. God's grace toward man

On the one side God has given and continues to will to give to man a good world. 'In the very order of creation the paternal solicitude of God for man is conspicuous, because he furnished the world with all things needful, and even with an immense profusion of wealth before he formed man. Thus man was rich before he was born.' God is to be a father to man. All the creation is for man's benefit and designed to bring him to felicity. 'Generally the whole order (ordo) of this world is arranged and established for the purpose of conducing to the comfort of men.' But 'the integrity of order (ordinis integritas) which God had established in the world at the beginning is now thrown into confusion.' The earth and all things were given to mankind that they might use them and by them recognize God as their father. Unless this is done the whole order of nature is inverted. These bounteous gifts were of two kinds: natural gifts, man's mental and physical faculties, the comforts of life, good, shelter, an ordered society, etc., and supernatural or spiritual gifts, faith and righteousness to lead man to eternal felicity. They were given in the order of nature as man received the blessing of God and was led by it up to know him.

We are not to think of this as a static creation, but now as in the beginning it is given its existence by the 'continual action' (continu

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1. Com. on Gen. 1.26, CR 23.27. Ser. on II Tim. 2.25-26, CR 54.215
2. Com. on Ps. 8.6, CR 31.94. Com. on Ps. 96.10, CR 32.41
3. Com. on Ps. 115.17, CR 32.192. Ser. on Job 3.2-10, CR 33.144
4. II.2.12, CR 2.196
actus)\textsuperscript{1} of God. God 'inspires all creatures with life,' and they live by 'continued inspiration.' Creation 'subsists only by a secret virtue derived from God.' This is especially true of man.\textsuperscript{2} God must continually be our father.\textsuperscript{3} If our souls live, this virtue is not of their own nature but is a borrowed property and only as it pleases God to maintain our souls by his power do they have a being and subsist. We hold our life from God and everything else as well is given us by his pure grace.\textsuperscript{4} 'Communication with God sustained the life of Adam.'\textsuperscript{5} We are preserved by God's continual 'visitation' of his life and grace.\textsuperscript{6} We must then understand the mode of existence, or the being of the creature, and especially of man, as a form of dynamic existence grounded in God's continual communication of his own graciousness. Man 'can claim nothing for himself.' 'Man lives not by his own power, but by the kindness of God alone; and that life is not, as they commonly speak, an intrinsic good but proceeds from God.'\textsuperscript{7}

2. Man's acknowledgment toward God

The second aspect of this twofold process of life in integrity is man's response. Inserted into this environment of free gifts from God, man is expected to respond in fidelity to depend on God alone, in obedience to him, in belief in his goodness and solicitude, in a motion away from self and toward God, and in gratitude. He faithfully, obediently, and thankfully acknowledges the gifts and so returns glory to the God who so graciously maintains his existence. 'At first man was formed in the image and resemblance of God in order that man might admire his author in the adornments with which he had been nobly vested by God and honor him with proper

\textsuperscript{1} Com. on Rom. 4.21, CR 49.85; on Gen. 2.2, CR 23.31f
\textsuperscript{2} Com. on Ps. 104.29, CR 32.95f. Com. on John 1.1-13, CR 47.1ff
\textsuperscript{3} Ser. on Job 10.7-15, CR 33.483f; on Job 35.8-11, CR 35.229ff
\textsuperscript{4} Ser. on I Tim. 1.17-19, CR 53.92; on 6.15-16, CR 53.621ff; Com
\textsuperscript{5} Com. on Gen. 3.22, CR 23.79. Communicatio cum Deo Adae vivifica erat.
\textsuperscript{6} Com. on Job 10.7-15, CR 33.483f
\textsuperscript{7} Com. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.38f. Com. on Acts 17.28, CR 48.416f; on Rom. 11.36, CR 49.232; Ser. on I Tim. 6.15-16, CR 53.621f
gratitude.'  The Latin gratitudo here is an interesting change in Calvin's own translation of the French of 1537 in the Instruction in Faith, which read reconnaissance, acknowledgment. Man is to honor God with proper acknowledgment, that is, proper gratitude.

'If we do not begin with this point: calling upon our God, it is to pervert all order. So then let us learn that the principal exercise and study that the faithful ought to have in this world is to run to their God and, while acknowledging that he is the fountain of all blessings, seek it in him.' Our expression of gratitude in which we confess that for all things we are bound to him is what God requires of us. This insures the lawful use of his gifts. We pay homage to him as every minute we make acknowledgment to him for the blessings we have received. 'This is the way we are to regulate our life, that is, in the first place to recognize that it is of God, and then that we understand that for all the blessings that we have we are bound to him.'

'According as God continues to bless us, ought there not for this reason to be a correspondence from our side (correspondance de nostre costa) so that we with perseverance pay homage to him for all his blessings.' Man is correspondent to God. From year to year, month to month, day to day, and hour to hour, we must be careful to acknowledge his graces and affirm that we are wholly his, that we hold all from him, and that it is impossible for us to discharge our duty. For he makes us partakers of his grace on condition that we acknowledge that all proceeds from him. 'God, in bestowing all good things upon us, reserves nothing for himself, except an expression of gratitude for them.' When God has of his own accord conferred upon

1. Instruction in Faith, 1538, sec. 4, Com. on II Cor. 4.15, CR 50.57
2. Ser. on Job 22.23-30, CR 34.328. Ser. on Deut. 22.9-11, CR 28.35ff
3. Com. on Ps. 104.31, CR 32.96. Com. on John 5.13, CR 47.108
4. Ser. on Eph. 6.10-12, CR 51.822
5. Ser. on Eph. 5.18-21, CR 51.727
6. Ser. on Eph. 1.19-23, CR 51.34+. Com. on Zeoh. 3.14f, CR 44.59
7. Com. on Ps. 115.16, CR 32.190. Com. on I Tim. 4.3, CR 52.296
us his favor, he immediately requires from us *reciprocal gratitude.*

Adam's obedience to God was wrought out as he participated in God. Life consists in a 'participation of God,' effected on man's part as he acknowledges God, to whose beneficence he is to be thankful. Adam was admonished that he could claim nothing for himself as if it were his own, in order that he might depend wholly on the Son of God, and might not seek life anywhere but in him. He at the time when he possessed his life in safety had it only as deposited in the Word of God, and could not otherwise retain it than by acknowledging that it was received from him. This is the proper order of creation, of integrity, and rectitude, that God continuously and graciously gives and man replies and acknowledges this existence to set forth the glory of God by continual fidelity, obedience, belief, love of God, and gratitude. 'We are created to this end: to love our God. Why are we in the world? Why does God keep us here? Is not the reason that he would have some homage of us, and that inasmuch as we are his creatures, we ought to look toward him and he ought to be the scope of our life? If it is not so, what order (ordre) will there be?' 'It is an extreme confusion and reversal of all order if men do not worship their God nor submit themselves to him.' If we do not 'consider how God has always governed and how he has shown himself father to us, are we not guilty of having perverted the whole order of nature?'

We must point out, in interpreting Calvin here, the concentration and stress on the grace of God involved in this notion of order. The part given to man is one reflexive of God's grace. His responsibility, as we will later bring out more thoroughly, is wrought out in response to God's grace. Already then Calvin has departed from the concept of God's order as

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1. Com. on II Cor. 7.1, CR 50.83. Com. on John 1.4, CR 47.5
2. II. 2.1, CR 2.186; I. 3.3, CR 2.38
3. Com. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.39
4. Ser. on Deut. 30.15-20, CR 28.586f
5. Ser. on Deut. 32.5-7, CR 28.682
primarily a moral or legal order where man must present himself just or righteous before a God of justice, and placed such an order under the higher order of grace. To be sure, God is just requiring righteousness, and sin is a breach of his law, but what is paramount is that God is gracious and requires acknowledgment of his grace, and sin is man's refusal to do this. It is this concept of sin, which is more fundamental even than sin as unrighteousness, to which we now turn, for it is here that Calvin's insights are greatest.

B. The inverted order of creation (eversus creationis ordo)

Into this pattern of proper existence we must now inject the root defection of man and see what form the pattern takes. Calvin's whole understanding here centers in the inverted order of creation. (inversus, or eversus creationis ordo) Sin has disordered the divine order of grace. Men ought to live for no other purpose than glorifying God. 'The whole order of nature would be preposterously everted unless the God who is the beginning of all things is the end also.' Yet this has happened. 'The whole order of nature was inverted by the sin of man.' All the evil in our world, whatever its form or manifestation, 'has its origin in the defection of the first man, by which the whole order of creation was everted.'

We ought to see testimonies of God's wonderful wisdom and power in this world, for he has placed us here to contemplate these things. But when we do not understand we pervert all. 'It is an extreme confusion and reversal of all order (ordre) if men do not worship their God nor submit themselves to him.' What more monstrous disorder can be conceived of than exists where the Creator himself is not acknowledged? Particularly

1. Com. on Rom. 11.36, CR 27.232. Com. on Jer. 4.23ff, CR 37.596
2. Com. on Gen. 3.19, CR 23.75. Ser. on Eph. 5.11-14, CR 51.695
5. Com. on Ps. 96.10, CR 32.41. Com. on I Cor. 15.28, CR 49.549; Ser. on Eph. 6.5-9, CR 51.798; II.1.5, CR 2.179
the order of grace is broken when men do not receive the whole of their felicity as a gift of grace, but ascribe it in any part to some endeavor of their own. The order that he instituted at the creation of the world is troubled when he does not deal with us as a father. What is involved from the side of God and from the side of man in this inversion of order?

1. God's unchanged will for grace toward man.

We consider first what takes place from the side of God when man reverses the order which was established by him. It is Calvin's fundamental position here that sin does not change God. God's eternal purpose, as determined by his will, is the same regardless of the action of man. 'The celestial creator himself, however corrupted man may be, still keeps in view the end of his original creation.' Let us remember that 'although we have for a time annihilated as much as is in us the graces of God, yet all the while he on his side (de son cost5) does not wish that they should perish but he wishes to make them prosper.' Because the Lord will not loose in us that which is his own, he yet discovers something that his goodness may love. For notwithstanding that we are sinners through our own fault, yet we are still his creatures; notwithstanding that we have brought death upon ourselves, yet he had created us for life. God beholds his image in man, he sees his own work and he then can take no pleasure in defacing his own glory. This is a basic position. Only so long as God maintains his original purpose can we still say that man is perverse.

a. The natural gifts from the side of God

We see this in the natural blessings given now in part to all, and through the eyes of faith, perceivable as present to confront us in the

1. Com. on Jer. 17.5f, CR 38.265
2. Ser. on Job 5.17-18, CR 33.259
3. Com. on Gen. 9.6, CR 23.147. Deinde ipsum coelestem fictorem, utcunque corruptus sit homo, finem tamen primae creationis habere ante oculos.
4. Ser. on Gal. 3.3-5, CR 50.475f
5. II.16.3, CR 2.369
6. Ser. on Job 10.7-15, CR 33.481
same degree as ever. God continues to give man his existence. 'He con-
descends to preserve those who spite him and those who behave as mad beasts
and run away from him and will in no way be subject to his protection.'¹
God not only maintains and preserves but he blesses all men. The paternal
love of God breaks through to those who unworthily restrict it. 'The
universal race of mankind is a testimony, particularly, that the benefits
of God never cease, in which he shows himself to be our father.'² Further,
if it were not for the barrier of sin, God's original goodness would
yet be showered upon us. The creation as given from the side of God yet
remains perfect. 'Although the blessing of God is never seen pure and
transparent as it appeared to man in his innocence, yet if what remains
behind be considered in itself, David truly and properly exclaims, The
whole earth is full of the mercy of the Lord.'³ The evils in it only
arise as sin inverts the God-given order.

In the order of nature God manifests himself to set before men his
glory and gives according to his infinite goodness more than men require.
But if men hunger or mourn, 'I answer that this happens contrary to the
order of nature: namely when the Lord on account of the sins of men
closes his hand. For the liberality of God would constantly flow to us
of its own accord,' 'except that the obstacles of our sins shut it off.'⁴
God from his side would maintain the order of creation in its entirety, he
does not will to alter it, but by our sins we exclude ourselves from it
in major part.⁵ His paternal solicitude in the order of creation is con-
spicuous. 'Yet that he frequently keeps his hand as if closed is to be
imputed to our sins.'⁶ If from our side we see the hand of God closed,

1. Ser. on I Tim. 4:9-11, CR 53.400. Com. on Ps. 104:29, CR 32.95f
2. Com. on Acts 14:17, CR 43.329. Ser. on Gal. 1:3-5, CR 50.287
3. Com. on Gen. 3:17, CR 23.73. I.14.3, CR 2.119
6. Com. on Gen. 1:26, CR 23.27. Ser. on Deut. 32:5-7, CR 28.675f
this is to be ascribed not to a change in him or to any alteration on his part of the order of creation, but it is caused by our sins.

To ascribe any infelicity among men to sin and not to the order God would maintain does not mean, on the other hand, that God is not an active agent in sending natural evils upon man - storms, famines, wars, pests, sickness - to punish them for their sins. But though God punishes and curses, these things happen contrary to the order of nature that he for his part would have to exist as he is obliged to transform himself to expostulate with the ingratitude of man. These are 'accidental evils' brought on as God is constrained to punish man's subversion of his order.

These two things are then both true: that God is not without a testimony as to his beneficence, for he gives rain, he gives suitable seasons, he renders the earth fruitful so as to supply us with food; and also that heaven and earth are often in great disorder, that many things happen unseasonably, as though God had no care for us, because we provoke him by our sins, and thus confound and subvert the order of nature. These two things then ought to be viewed as connected together, for in the ordinary course of nature we may see the inconceivable bounty of God toward mankind, but as to accidental evils, the cause ought to be recognized, even this: because we do not allow God to govern the world in a regular and consistent order.

b. The spiritual gifts from the side of God

In addition to the natural gifts there were bestowed upon Adam spiritual gifts which were sufficient for eternal felicity. These spiritual gifts were given as God gave himself and the knowledge of himself to man in this order. 'The legitimate order was assuredly this: that man by contemplating the wisdom of God in his works, by the light of the understanding furnished him by nature, might arrive at an acquaintance

1. Com. on Amos 3.3ff, CR 43.42ff; Com. on Ezek. 14.14ff, CR 40.316ff
2. Ser. on Deut. 5.8-10, CR 26.268; Com. on Hag. 1.10f, CR 44.93
3. Com. on Jer. 5.25, CR 37.636
1. It is Calvin's assertion that these spiritual gifts have been entirely removed from fallen man, yet this statement is to be seen in its larger context as far as the concept of order is concerned. From the side of God Calvin emphasizes that no change has occurred in the revelation in the sun, stars, and objective order of nature in and through which these gifts were to be given. It is then owing to man's perversity and not to God's revocation of his primal order that these gifts are no longer communicated to man.

God's glories are still conspicuous on every side. Coming to know God in nature was the right order, but more, Calvin notes that it would still today be the preferable order were it possible. 'We certainly ought to be taught by the wonderful wisdom of God apparent in the heights and depths of the world.' 2 The original order remains. Nothing of God's self-communication, or his gift of himself in nature has been rescinded. 'We must seek and consider God in his works.' 'Certainly all these should abundantly teach us all of such a God as it is necessary to know, if we in our coarseness were not blind to such a great light.' 3 Today as in the beginning an objective knowledge of God in creation invites us to acknowledge him and to confidence in him. 4 In all his creatures he points us heavenward and causes us to taste his fatherly love that we may know he has reserved a better heritage for us as his children. 'He wishes to certify how great is his care for us in order that we learn to entrust ourselves wholly to him and to rest there.' 5 'God has ordered his created things for our service, these ought to be a help to guide us to him so that we should be the more incited to love him because he shows himself a good and loving father to us.' 'It is as though he should set up

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1. Com. on I Cor. 1.21, CR 49.326  
2. Ser. on Is. 53.1-4, CR 35.610. 1.5.1, CR 2.41  
3. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 3. Com. on Ps. 19.1ff, CR 31.194ff  
4. I.14.21ff, CR 2.132ff; Com. on Ps. 65.10, CR 31.609  
5. Ser. on Gal. 3.15-18, CR 50.530. Com. on I Cor. 1.21, CR 49.326
a ladder for us, or make stairs to come up on.' God from his side and on his part maintains the original order and gives to man all the aids which should be necessary for the inheritance of the good life.

Calvin's emphasis on the completeness and potential adequacy of this self-declaration of God written in the heavens presents problems in the matter of the atonement. This knowledge was all Adam needed, but more could we perceive it, it is all we would need to know. Aside from the question of past sin and apart from the necessity of atonement, this declaration of his goodness, if perceived, would be as adequate for us as for Adam. But Calvin does not stop here. We could learn about 'his mercy which endures our iniquities with such a great kindliness in order to amendment.' 'Displayed both in heaven and earth' are 'clemency, goodness, mercy, justice, judgment, and truth.' Psalm 145 'contains such an accurate summary of all his perfections that nothing seems to be omitted. And yet it contains nothing but what may be known from a contemplation of the creatures;' specifically it teaches us of his 'mercy, in which alone consists all our salvation.' 'As regards the ungodly, although God shows them his long suffering patience, they are incapable of perceiving pardon.' But God does show them his forbearance.

How can mercy and pardon be written from all time in the representation of God in the heavens when there has been no atonement, for it is impossible that God should have mercy on us until Christ has borne our sins.

Presumably (1) in a way similar to that in which forgiveness is promised in the Old Testament. Here mercy is given proleptically on the basis of atonement later to come. Could we see the fatherhood of God we would be led to all that a father does - that a father would give his son for the

1. Ser. on Deut. 4.19-24, GR 26.162. Ser. on Deut. 30.5-7, CR 28.675ff
2. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 3
3. I.10.2, CR 2.72f.
4. Com. on Ps. 145.8, GR 32.415
5. Ser. on Is. 53.4-6, CR 35.62f.
salvation of the world. Or: (2) there is a further and very interesting
line of solution that Calvin suggests but does not develop. Atonement
takes place not to enable God to forgive, but to enable man seriously
to recognize the forgiveness which God stood ready to impart apart from
atonement. It is necessary to do it this way because of our ignorance.
On account of our blindness to him in the heavens 'he has changed his
method' and sent his Son to become a curse for us. If God pardoned us
apart from Christ's intercession we should think nothing of it. But when
we see the atonement we come to our senses. 'God might have redeemed us
by a single word or by a mere act of his will if he had not thought it
better to do otherwise for our own benefit,' and so he worked atonement
'not sparing his own well-beloved Son' to impress us with his love.
Only in this way is man re-created to be a child of God. But in the case
of man's full perception of the forgiveness of God written in the heavens
that re-creation for which Christ is sent would have already happened. God
would have redeemed us in another way, perhaps by divine fiat.

It is only our perversity and unbelief here, as is constantly the case,
which cuts off our inheritance of the eternal life and all the blessings
which God would impart to us. 'Unbelief blocks God from approaching us,
and keeps as it were his hand shut.' Not that the power of God is bound
by the inclination of man, but because, as far as is in them, the obstacle
of their malice shuts off that power, and they are unworthy that it should
be laid open to them.' As often as he withdraws his hand so as not to
assist unbelievers, this is done for this reason: that they, shut up within
the narrow limits of their infidelity, do not allow it to enter. 'God
deals very bountifully with the unbelieving, but they are blind, and

1. Com. on I John 4.10, CR 55.353f
2. Ser. on Is. 53.1-2, CR 35.610f
3. Ser. on Is. 53.4-6, CR 35.625f
4. Com. on John 15.13, CR 47.344f
5. Ser. on Gal. 1.3-5, CR 50.293
6. Com. on John 11.40, CR 47.268. Com. on Jer. 5.25, CR 37.645f
therefore he pours forth his grace without any benefit, as though he rained on flint or on arid rocks. However bountifully then God bestows his grace on the unbelieving, they yet render his favor useless, for they are like stones."¹ 'For since God is by nature disposed to acts of kindness, nothing but our ingratitude and enmity hinders us from receiving that goodness which he freely offers to all.'²

A troublesome point here is that Calvin can also employ the Augustinian notion of God's withdrawing the spiritual gifts after the fall, and can so state it as to question whether God still wishes or wills to give to man the grace he has forfeited. 'Man since his fall has been deprived of the gifts of grace on which salvation depends.'³ To punish man, God takes away the hope of salvation. But taken in the larger context of his thought it is clear that this withdrawal of man's spiritual gifts does not mean for Calvin that God on his part no longer wills to be gracious to man in the order he once established. God has been obliged to punish man, yet this is not what God wants for man; creation objectively is still so ordered as to lead men to God and impart them eternal life. God has not removed his gifts so much as man has on account of his sin cut himself off from them. God withdraws his gifts because men shut up in their infidelity do not allow him to enter. Yet the whole apparatus through which these gifts were to be administered, the revelation in nature, remains in its entirety and continues to invite man to a knowledge of God's fatherly care; it always points him heavenward. The gifts may be said to remain in this objective sense, though they never reach subjectivity in sinful men. In this sense God continues still to give himself to man in nature and so to impart the spiritual gifts. They may properly be said to be withdrawn only in the sense that they no longer are subjectively realized.

1. Com. on Zech. 12.10, CR 44.335
2. Com. on Is. 1.19, CR 36.46f. Com. on Ps. 102.10, CR 32.65
3. II.5.19, CR 2.247. II.1.12, CR 2.195
c. God's renewed gifts in special revelation

That God has not deserted his order for man's life becomes again clear as he redeems man and re-establishes him in the original order of grace. This redemptive movement from the side of God begins right at the curse in the garden of Eden. ¹ His grace superabounds to establish the covenant of grace, he sends his Son to die for all men. Here we have the decisive revelation that God still wills that men should live in the love of God, as was the order of man's life in the beginning. 'For God, viewed in himself, loved us before the creation of the world, and redeemed us, and for no other reason than because he continually loved us.'²

'Although he saw that we were so wretched, that we on account of sin were a race lost and damned, yet nevertheless he had pity on the human race, and did not wish that it utterly perish. Thus you see how God loved us still when we became fallen in the person of Adam, and when we became totally corrupted.' ³ 'He never ceased to have some regard for us, and to extend his pity so far that he would not have us to abide in our destruction; he was not even content to declare this by word of mouth, but also he has given us a visible pledge, that is, his own Son has answered for it.' ³ 'Christ brought life because the heavenly Father loves the human race and wishes that it should not perish.'⁴

The redemption reveals that God has always willed to be gracious, and still wills to be gracious and that he is not finally going to let sin stand in his way. Here we see again why we limit the extent to which we think of the spiritual gifts of God to man as having been withdrawn. Calvin does not have in mind a permanent revocation of man's spiritual gifts so much as a temporary suspension, effected by the agency of God, but because man's sin has shut off communication in nature. When God can

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¹. Com. on Gen. 3.19, CR 23.76
². Com. on II Cor. 13.14, CR 50.154
³. Ser. on Gal. 1.3-5, CR 50.292
⁴. Com. on John 3.16, CR 47.64
no longer give eternal life to man there, God does not break the order but re-affirms it a new way as he enters history in his redemptive covenant wrought for all mankind. 'Whereas the Lord invites us to himself by means of the creatures with no effect,' he has added, as was necessary, a new remedy or rather a new aid to assist our inept capacity. 1 2 'As the whole world gained nothing in instruction from the fact that God had exhibited his wisdom in the creatures, he then resorted to another method for instructing man.' 2

The broadest significance of God's refusal to let go his original plan for man's existence is that God would have all men re-established in the life which he has set out for them, and so would have all men to be saved. God has created man to be gracious to him, he then wills that all men return from their sin and receive his grace. But when Calvin has worked out his concept of order to this point he comes into conflict with his own ideas of predestination and this presents one of the most serious problems in his thought. We have reserved an analysis of the methods he uses to harmonize these conflicting notions to the following chapter. Here we only note that from the point of view of his concept of order, Calvin must assert that God's will is for all men to be saved. 'He is affected with fatherly love toward the whole human race since he created and formed it, for if a workman loves his work because he recognizes in it the fruits of his industry, so when God has manifested his power and goodness in the formation of men he must certainly embrace them with affection.' Our salvation must be precious in his sight. 'All souls are mine, he says. I have formed all, and am the creator of all, and so I am affected with fatherly love toward all, and they shall rather feel my clemency, from the least to the greatest, than experience too much rigor and severity.' 3

1. Arg. to Com. on Gen. 23.10
2. Ser. on Is. 53.1-4, CR 35.610
3. Com. on Ezek. 18.1f, CR 40.424. Ser. on Job 10.7-15, CR 33.479ff
2. Man's failure to acknowledge God and inversion of order

When man sins God does not from his side will to alter his order. Yet man's ingratitude - his infidelity, his disobedience, his unbelief, his concupiscence - so alters this order as to invert it. What does Calvin mean by this? We have just seen that sin does not alter God's half of the existence relationship insofar as his will and fatherly action toward us is concerned. Yet when man breaks his complementary response, there occurs the inversion of the order of creation. God must at once confront man with his gifts and cut them off on account of his sins. God who was to be and remains from his side man's father is in point of fact and from the side of man brought over against man as judge.

'Though all God's benefits ought to raise us up to heaven, serving as kinds of vehicles, they are carried off through our wickedness to a contrary end, and are made intervening obstacles between us and God.' God's blessings become impediments 'through accident' (per accidens) as we turn them to an end contrary to what he has designed. Our Lord despoils us of his benefits because 'we corrupt them by our abuse. We know indeed that whatever God has put into our hands is desirable, we see the usefulness of it; but at the same time instead of using it devoutly with thanksgiving, every man wishes to make it serve his own lust. Now when God sees that his blessing is so turned to our harm, and that we employ it for quite the opposite purpose from what he had intended, he deprives us of it.'

'He will not have his graces so to be scorned and disdained.' Here the character of sin is thought of as such that while God continues to confront man with the gifts of grace and stands ready to bestow them, yet in sin these gifts are cut off, and in the part which does break through to man inverted or turned into their opposite so that what is given as good at the hand of God proves evil in the hand of man, and thus effectively closes

1. Com. on Micah 5.10f, CR 43.380f
2. Ser. on Deut. 16.18-19, CR 27.411. Com. on Lam. 1.7, CR 39.515
the hand of God to us. As it appears in creation, sin is essentially inverted good. God's gifts do not change, but man changes them.

The blessings turn into curses, Calvin frequently says, by which he means that the gift, which was given as an aid to righteousness, that man might set himself to doing good, becomes at the hand of man an aid to evil as he takes these gifts to further his unrighteousness, as he sins by employing the gifts of God. As man refuses to acknowledge in response to God the gifts of grace, but rather arrogates them to his own use, they are transmuted to evil. 'We disguise God's truth and convert it into a lie, or else so paint it over that it is put quite out of its own nature.' All the graces that were bestowed on us become as many records to make us guilty before God, and so long as we continue in our nature, we do but abuse the benefits which we have received and apply them to evil. And so you see that always our confusion increases by all the gifts which God has bestowed upon us. Our perversity turns upside down all the heavenly truth which otherwise shines so clearly in God's works. Ever since Adam sinned good has been turned into evil. God's blessing is turned into the occasion or instrument of our destruction. 'All those things which have a native tendency to produce our happiness are cursed and so become so many causes of our destruction.'

This means first that God at times transforms the rejected or abused gift into a physical evil. So the order of nature goes awry, the sun which ought to bring only pleasing warmth for growth brings parched lands and deserts, the gentle rain becomes a storm, fertile land becomes barren, the law becomes a task-master of death, or Christ as a rock of refuge and safety is changed into a rock where men dash themselves to bits as they grow full in iniquity. But it means further that men take the gifts of God and

1. Ser. on Job 33.1-7, CR 35.41ff. Com. on I Tim. 4.5, CR 52.297
2. Ser. on Job 1.2-5, CR 33.39. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 3
3. Com. on Ps. 69.22, CR 31.647. Com. on Rom. 11.9, CR 49.217
4. Com. on Acts 9.5, CR 48.201; Com. on I Pet. 2.8f, CR 55.238f; Ser. on Eph. 2.19-22, CR 51.436f; Ser. on Deut. 2.8-23, CR 26.27
convert them into spiritual evil. Man from his side manufactures sin out of these gifts which God breaks through to him. Evil is thus produced from good by the work of man. Sin is wrought as good is transformed into evil, then God must resist in man what he gave to him as a good gift. In his Commentary on Ezekiel, Calvin elaborates on this way in which man transforms good into evil to bring sin into the world. The figurative 'beauty' of the Hebrew nation is pertinent to all God's gifts of grace to man. 'This passage then is worthy of observation, where God reproves his ancient people for trusting in their beauty; because the figure signifies that they drew their material for pride from the gifts which ought rather to lead them to piety; for the gifts which we receive from God's hand ought to be invitations to gratitude, but we are puffed up by pride and luxury, so that we profane God's gifts in which his glory ought to shine forth.'

'God gives all things abundantly and upbraids not, as James says (1:5), that is, if we acknowledge that we owe all things to him, and thus devote and consecrate ourselves in obedience to his glory with the blessings which he has bestowed upon us. But when God sees us impiously burying and profaning his gifts, and through trusting in them growing insolent, it is not surprising if he reproves us beyond what is customary.

'Therefore we see that God assumes as it were another character when he ex postulates with us concerning our ingratitude, because he willingly acknowledges his gifts in us, and receives them as if they were our own, as we call that break ours by which he nourishes us, although it is compelled to change its nature as far as we are concerned. It always remains the same in itself, but I speak of its external form. God therefore as it were trans-figures himself, so as to reprove his own gifts, conferred for the purpose of glorifying in him only.'

1. Com. on Ezek. 16.15, CR 40.348. Com. on Hos. 12.27, CR 42.472
Israel applies also to the whole world. By their ingratitude men prevent all the goodness which the Lord has bestowed on them from reaching maturity, for we abuse his blessings and corrupt them by our perversity. ¹ If man seeks to prostitute God's gifts for his selfish ends, they turn to sin and evil for him. God will not suffer contempt of his order but as long as man spurns his offered grace or takes it to employ it for evil, then by this action this grace is converted into evil. 'If we derive no advantage from God's benefits, he employs this method of punishing our carelessness: that we are made worse by them.' 'We bring it about that those things which of their own nature and from the ordination of God ought to be salutary are changed into things without profit.' ²

This is true of the natural gifts. Sin inverts God's bounteous shower of natural blessings upon man so that in large part they are cut off, though his liberality stands ever ready to break through to man. Yet in part the gifts continue to break through and be communicated to man. Here however with each gift man sins and thus each gift becomes a curse to him. God sheds his temporal benefits upon unbelievers. Yet 'the blessings turn to their harm because they are foul and unclean and defile God's benefits in handling them. It is necessary then that the order of nature be perverted this way. For inasmuch as the wicked are full of filth and uncleanness, they can touch nothing of God's benefits without perverting them and corrupting them; they must necessarily turn to their condemnation.' ³ 'Let us enter into this general confession: that since we are so sinful as to pervert all good, we ought to detest the sin which dwells in us, which indeed reigns in us until our Lord has changed us. For if we are left in our first nature how will it be with us? Not only will we be wholly contrary to the will and righteousness of God, but also we must convert and turn into

1. Com. on Is. 28.4, GR 36.464. Ser. on Gal. 6.2-5, CR 51.73
2. Com. on I Cor. 11.17, CR 49.480. Com. on Rom. 13.3, CR 49.250
3. Ser. on Deut. 7.11-15, CR 26.541f. Ser. on Eph. 3.2-4.2, CR 51.504; on Job 1.2-5, CR 33.39; on Deut. 24.1-6, CR 28.159
an obstacle and a hindrance whatever is in itself good, holy, and honorable, and which has been instituted for our welfare. ¹

Sin inverts God's invitation in the order of creation, and man sins as he understands it in a perverse sense, or understands it not at all. 'God has ordered his creatures for our service, and these ought to be a help to guide us to him so that we should be more incited to love him because he shows himself a good and loving father to us, yet we take occasion at this to stumble. It is as though he should set up a ladder for us, or make stairs to come up on, and we happen to hurt ourselves bumping against it. Stairs are made to help us, but if a man happens to fling himself against the stairs, he may happen to break his leg and hurt himself, and he shall rather be hindered than helped by them. So it is with us. God wishes to draw us to him by his creatures, and we happen to fling ourselves against them rashly and as it were in spite.' ² 'In all things and by every means he causes us now to taste his fatherly love with the intent that we might be confirmed in that which he declares to us in the gospel, to know that he has reserved a better heritage for us, as for children whom he has adopted. All the creatures then ought to point us heavenward. Yet in fact we put everything in reverse, because we apply the creatures of God to our own lust in such a way that we are held down here below. In short, as many helps as God has given us to draw us to himself, these are to us so many hindrances to hold us back in this world.' ³

So also God's gift to us of himself in law or gospel, if received only in sin, is converted by us into an occasion of further sin and so to our destruction. Regardless of how God declares himself to man and thus endeavors to grant man the spiritual benefits which he has ordained from the beginning, still man makes from all God's approaches to him yet greater sin, and so brings only condemnation upon himself. The law is

¹ Ser. on Deut. 24.1-6, CR 28.159f. Ser. on I Tim. 4.1-5, CR 53.362
² Ser. on Deut. 4.19-24, CR 26.162. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 3
³ Ser. on Gal. 3.15-18, CR 50.530. Com. on Luke 17.19, CR 45.424
inverted by sin from life to death. 'The commandment which was ordained to life is found to be death.' By our wickedness the law is turned to our destruction, and that is contrary to its own nature. Sin converts the goodness of the law, inverting it to our destruction. Through our malice the law decays into our ruin. Here sin is fabricated out of the goodness of the law.

Finally the grace of God at its very zenith in the gospel, if man resists it, is taken by him and made into an occasion for the greatest sin of all. Sin here converts the ultimate blessing of God into the ultimate of evil acts, and so out of the gospel arises the final sin which destroys man. The gospel is inverted to destruction. 'The reprobate must perish...because by their own malice they turn to their own destruction all that is offered them, however salutary it may be.' The reprobate through their own fault turn life to death. The gospel would be to all the power of God to salvation, but as many persons no sooner hear it than their impiety openly breaks out and provokes against them more and more the wrath of God, to such persons its savor must be deadly. They 'turn the only medicine of salvation into a venom.' The ingratitude of man causes it to turn into death for them. This is more than a simple rejection of the gospel that saves. It is an inversion of it, taking this opportunity for obtaining righteousness and making it into the greatest sin. So men's desperate wickedness not only extinguishes the precious gifts of God, and turns them to their destruction, but makes it to have been better for them that they had never tasted the goodness of God. The supreme gift becomes, by the function of man's sin, his final death. 'The gospel is unto them the savor of death unto death.'
We have here attempted in some detail to set forth and interpret Calvin's concept of order and the disorder introduced by sin because it stands in contrast to the notion often prevalent in Reformed theology and is a position which theology would do well to consider. In the chapters which have gone before we have seen how Calvin keeps in constant focus the grace of God as he expounds sin. We can see now in larger detail the fundamental reason for this. It is because the order God wills is an order of grace that we must always see sin as man's disgracing himself and dis-ordering the divine order of grace.

This is clearest by contrast with the position over against which Calvin here establishes himself, a position which has been characteristic of the Reformed faith. The original order is conceived as a moral order of justice and righteousness. It is God's law by which all things are ordered. As man kept the law of God he would have been just and righteous and the universe would have been ordered. This moral order is broken by sin, which is thought of primarily as unrighteousness, rebellion, disobedience, and immorality. God in his holiness and justice requires punishment because his moral order has been transgressed and there is an alienation between God and man. Into this enmity enters Christ as the Son of God who reconciles God and man by satisfying the old order of justice and who introduces a new order of grace. Thus there are two orders - a primal order of justice which determines the scheme of things and a subsequent order of grace which has been added consequently to the sin of man. This order of grace was not then the original order but is God's new way of dealing with sinners. Nor is it an order which pertains to all mankind, but only to those whom God has chosen for eternal life. This position is admirably reflected in the concept of two covenants, which we sketched in the introductory chapter. A covenant of works is founded on the concept of God's order as an order of
justice and righteousness. When man in his sin breaks this moral order, God at once in his justice requires punishment from man and in his mercy redeems him by founding a new covenant of grace, fulfilled in Christ who graciously sheds his blood to satisfy God's justice and introduces the new order. Order is then conceived of in two ways; an order of justice, which must ever be satisfied, followed by an order of grace, where God himself through his Son satisfies his justice by his grace.

It would be radically wrong to pretend that Calvin stands opposite this position at every point, for such is his breadth of thought that he includes perhaps the most of these ideas. And indeed to be true to Scripture he could not overlook these ways of thought. Certainly the concept of a just and moral God requiring righteousness is a major one with Calvin. And Christ does indeed satisfy God's justice as he dies for us. Yet none-theless Calvin's position must be frequently and fundamentally contrasted with the position sketched above. Calvin has seen that the governing Biblical way of thought is that it is from the very beginning an order of grace. The law is to be sure that of a moral order but a moral order contained within a universe where the governing motion is that of God's dynamic outpouring of his blessing and grace. Man is moral in love and gratitude because God is gracious. Sin is infidelity to depend on this grace; it is distrust and ingratitude; only from this and subsequently is it immorality and unlawful unrighteousness. There is a state of alienation between God and man, as God in his justice and holiness opposes sin, but this is set within the larger and governing framework where God still moves continuously to be gracious to man and to invite man heavenward in nature, law, and gospel. This fundamental order remains unchanged; God still wills to be gracious over and above the alienation between God and man, but man in his infidelity, distrust, and ingratitude alienated himself from God. God offers all men pardon and forgiveness out of his grace.
written in the very revelation in nature, but man is incapable of receiving it. We have seen that Calvin even says that God who always stood ready to forgive might have redeemed us another way by an act of his will, but thought it better for our ignorance to send his Son. Nor is there for one moment any hint of a new type of covenant necessary when God redeems us. No moral covenant of works need be followed by a covenant of grace, for grace has from the beginning been the prevailing characteristic of order. There is no order of grace wrought for a few while the many are damned in an order of justice, but a universal redemption wrought for all mankind, as God moves to re-establish the first order with superabounding grace. This is not a new covenant required by sin but the old covenant breaking through the sin of man in a new way.

It may thus be seen how it is vital to return to Calvin's concept of sin as the disorder of this divine order of grace. Behind the concept of sin as immorality or disobedience to the law, as a moral breach of the covenant of works, must be set the concept of sin as that reality which interrupts God's grace to man and which gains its existence by inverting and corrupting the good. Sin is not the static state of unrighteousness but the dynamic perversion of grace. It is not the absence of the good, the lack of law and order, but a corrupting of the good which is parasitic upon it. Missing the concept of order as an order of grace, the disciples of Calvin have missed much of the significance of this way of interpreting the character and effect of sin. A primal order of grace has not been the reigning principle for the interpretation of evil. But sin is to be seen as an erroneous or aberrant use of the gift of grace in Calvin's thought. It is then only an accidental or adventitious reality. It maintains its reality and existence by the fact that such is the grace of God that upon the defection of man the grace continues to confront man and in part break through to him, but every good gift of God is turned into a curse and made evil. Along such lines as these theology must again interpret the sin of man.
IV. Sin and the Providence of God

We turn now to the relation between the existence of sin and divine providence, for a serious problem rises out of Calvin's concepts here. Calvin emphasizes God's providential care as well as this gracious order which he has established and which he from his side yet wills to maintain but which contrary to his will men reverse and shut off. How do we understand the existence of sin in a world where 'he perpetually and regularly prosecutes what he has forseen, approved, and decreed from eternity'? The problem is twofold. On the one hand, in the providence of God, how do we avoid ascribing part of the blame to him, and on the other, how do we make room for human responsibility and guilt? It is unfortunate that Calvin's controversial thought on predestination obscures many of his better insights about sin and grace, yet in the minds of many his views on reprobation have written a large looming question mark over all that he has to say about divine grace or the seriousness of sin. And we shall now find that the shadow of double predestination does indeed fall across his thought so that Calvin himself cannot always be true to his most Scriptural insights. Calvin's Biblical scholarship is betrayed by his logical and polemic theology.

Nonetheless there are in Calvin concepts that serve to correct the apparent and real inconsistencies involved. Without entering into his whole concept of providence, we must attempt to show that despite a rather serious tendency to do so his thought here is not intended to qualify - at least for the understanding of sin and grace - the truths that God wills the salvation of all men and that it is the fault of men and not of God that men do ruin themselves in sin. Calvin uses a series of four ideas to embody these truths by providing an explanation which in any final logical analysis is not an explanation at all but an admission that we cannot think the matter out to its end. These concepts are: the twofold will of God, the hidden and mani-

1. I.17.3, CR 2.166
fest causes of sin, the intrinsic and accidental effects of grace, and the
degrees of God's election. Reformed thought since Calvin has largely neg-
lected the importance in Calvin of these concepts because they were in part
obsured, being buried in little read portions of his sermons and commentaries,
because Calvin himself pressed in debate could undermine the seriousness of
his own concepts, or simply because later theologians put the doctrine of
predestination into a hardened logical form and so could not employ these
less logical distinctions. Nor will it be wise for theology today to follow
him at all points. But for us to appreciate Calvin's attitude toward man's
sin in God's providence it is necessary for us to see again the constant
way in which these concepts recur in his Biblical exegesis (though they are
not absent from his systematic Institutes) and the way in which Calvin
attempts a solution along these lines.

A. Sin as adverse to the will of God

1. God's will (voluntas) and secret counsel (arcanum consilium)

Calvin makes a distinction between the will (voluntas) of God and his
secret counsel (arcanum consilium), a distinction which for all its short-
comings he does use to protect for the understanding of sin the fact that
God wills a life in grace for sinners, and labors to restore them to it.
God wills that all men cease their sins and be saved, but this is not his
secret counsel. The counsel of God, as far as we can perceive it, is not
the same as his will. The will of God is to be appraised or formulated by
the external act of his revelation in his Word, and this will is that all
men be saved. But there is also a hidden counsel which predestinates some
to damnation. God assumes an anthropomorphic character to make himself
known in two wills, yet this reflects but one will at the heart of God.

Calvin explains this in his comment on Ezekiel 18.23-31. The prophet
affirms that 'God does not will the death of a sinner,' yet he 'does not
here speak of God's secret counsel.' 'If anyone objects again, This is making God act with duplicity, (duplex) the answer is ready, that God always wishes the same things though by different ways and in a manner inscrutable to us. Although therefore God's will is simple (simplex) yet great variety is involved in it as far as our senses are concerned.' 'We cannot certainly judge how God wishes all men to be saved, and yet has devoted all the reprobate to eternal destruction and wishes them to perish.' But we must note that God does put on a twofold character, (duplicos persona) for he here wishes to be taken at his Word. Now what are the contents of this Word? The law, the prophets, and the gospel. Here all are called to repentance, and the hope of salvation is promised them when they repent.' But 'meanwhile this will (voluntas) of God which he sets forth in his Word does not prevent him from decreeing (decerno) what he would do with every individual.¹

The major part of a sermon on I Timothy is devoted to an exposition of this concept. 'The Scripture does speak to us doubly (doublement) of the will of God. How so? Since God is not double, since there is no dissimulation at all in him, why is it that there is a double fashion of speaking about his will? It is because of our rudeness. For we know that God must transfigure himself in order to condescend to us.' Because we cannot comprehend his invisible majesty 'Scripture speaks to us of the will of God in two sorts, (la volonté de Dieu en deux sortes) not at all because this will is double but because he must accommodate himself to our weakness.' 'When the Scripture tells us that God has chosen such as it pleased him before the creation of the world, this is a secret counsel (conseil estroit) into which we cannot enter.' 'But there is besides that the will of God which is as it were open to us, such a will as he declares to us nevertheless just as often as his Word is preached to us.' 'From this we may judge that it

¹. Com. on Ezek. 16.23, CR 40.445f. Com. on II Pet. 3.9, CR 55.475f; Com. on Jonah 3.10, CR 43.261
is the will of God that all men should be saved. 'We see it as a matter quite out of all doubt that the will of God ought to be considered doubly, viewed according to our reach, not that it is double of itself... but because our infirmity requires God to condescend to us in this as well as in all the rest.'¹ In his Institutes Calvin writes: 'The will of God is neither repugnant to itself, nor subject to change, nor chargeable with pretending to dislike what it approves; but while it is uniform and simple, it wears to us the appearance of variety because the weakness of our understanding does not comprehend how the same thing may be in different respects both agreeable to his will and contrary to it.' 'In a wonderful and ineffable manner that is not done without his will which is yet contrary to his will.'²

It is then the will of God that no sin be committed in his creation, that all cease from their sin and return to him, for all are his creatures and he is affected with paternal solicitude for all.³ In this way God's will is that his purpose in creation be re-established. Consequently we pray for the salvation of all men and labor accordingly.⁴ And God's will has not been kept by man. He has thwarted God's order and government, and wrought confusion in the world.⁵ But there is as well the secret counsel of God. From this viewpoint there is no disorder in the world but all things are governed perfectly by his providence. 'God has indeed ever governed the world by his secret providence, as he still does govern it.'⁶ There are many events where God's will is in complete harmony with his decree. This is the case, for instance, in the forming of the covenant, the Exodus, the coming of Christ, or in the election and regeneration of sinners. There are many events - 'shipwrecks, famines, banishments, diseases, and disasters in...

¹ Ser. on I Tim. 2.3-5, CR 53.151-5, passim. Com. on Rom. 11.34, CR 49.231; Com. on Matt. 6.10, CR 45.197f; on Matt. 23.27, CR 45.541f
² I.18.3, CR 2.170f. III.20.43, CR 2.667f; III.24.15, CR 2.725; III.24.17, CR 2.727f; Ser. on Eph. 1.7-10, CR 51.291f; on 3.9-12, CR 51.464f
³ Com. on Jonah 4.10f, CR 43.287; on Is. 29.23, CR 36.503
⁴ Ser. on Eph. 6.18-19, CR 51.842; on Deut. 9.13-14, CR 26.683; on 2.24-27, CR 26.39; Com. on Jer. 15.1f, CR 38.205f; on Ps. 28.4, CR 31.203
⁵ Ser. on Eph. 5.15-18, CR 51.716, etc.
⁶ Com. on Micah 4.3, CR 43.344f. I.16.2ff, CR 2.145ff; I.17.13, CR 2.166
war' or other chance vicissitudes - where the harmony is not so readily seen, yet there is not necessarily any incompatibility. Nor is it difficult to see how God, while yet willing the welfare of man, may be constrained to send punishments on man to chastise and to prove him. In these things the will and the counsel of God need not be seriously differentiated.

In the case of the sinful thoughts and actions of man, however, the problem becomes more acute. Calvin says that the sinful deeds of men are decreed by God. God is 'the author' of events including robbery and murder. Further, God governs as well the 'designs and affections' of the impious, the 'deliberations and volitions of men.' 'Men can effect nothing but by the secret will of God and can deliberate on nothing but what he has previously decreed (decerno) and determines by his own secret direction.' An example worthy of note is that of the new kingdom under Jeroboam. 'The same thing was done and was not done by the Lord, but in a different way. God here expressly denies that Jeroboam was created king by him, on the other hand, by referring to sacred history it appears that Jeroboam was created king not by the suffrages of the people but by the command of God.' 'God, while he hates perfidy, yet righteously and with a different design decrees the defection.' A less drastic explanation for the inconsistency is simply that we have here reflected variant traditions. But the example is significant in showing how Calvin freely admits a logical breakdown.

Finally, the difference between God's will and decree is most marked as we affirm that the reprobate are damned by the counsel of God. The 'ruin of the wicked is ordained by his counsel.' 'The wicked themselves have been created for this very end, that they may perish.' So Calvin explains in the Commentary on Romans, recognizing elsewhere that this is not a pleasant

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2. I.18.4, CR 2.167f
3. I.18.1 and 4, CR 2.167 and 171; I.16.8, CR 2.151
5. I.18.4, CR 2.172
thought. 'To the common sense of mankind, the thought of such severity is horrifying.'\textsuperscript{1} But we are now standing in direct opposition to what Calvin has previously asserted in the same commentary to be the end of man. 'All men are born to this end: that they should worship him in righteousness and holiness.'\textsuperscript{2} Or more clearly elsewhere: 'God does not create men in vain, it is then no wonder that he wishes them to be saved.'\textsuperscript{3} We have here then to recognize that in the matter of the sin of man, and of his reprobation and ruin, there is a secret decree of God which is, as far as we can see, incompatible with his revealed will. The will of God does in the case of the sinful thoughts and actions of man wear to us the appearance of variety.

There are various ways we qualify this secret counsel to deny that God is chargeable with being the author of sin and yet make him the ultimate author of the deeds of the reprobate. Calvin has entitled a chapter in the \textit{Institutes}: 'God uses the agency of the impious and inclines their minds to execute his judgments, yet without the least stain of his perfect purity.'\textsuperscript{4} But though there are ways we attempt to see this, we can in the last analysis only recognize an apparent double will in God. There is as far as our capacity to comprehend is concerned, a logical breakdown so that what he decrees is not in accord with what he wills. Calvin can express this difference in several ways - usually, the difference between God's will and his secret counsel, frequently, in an apparent double will or manifold will, of the will of God in two sorts, or occasionally in the difference between his will and his precept,\textsuperscript{5} and this terminology is not rigidly adhered to - yet the distinction remains. Calvin is not willing to abandon either the fact that the providence of God extends to the sin of man, or the fact that his will is for righteousness and not for

\textsuperscript{1} Com. on Ps. 109.15, CR 32.151f
\textsuperscript{2} Com. on Rom. 2.23, CR 49.42
\textsuperscript{3} Com. on Jonah 4.10f, CR 43.278. Com. on Ps. 39.47, CR 31.328
\textsuperscript{5} II. 15.4, CR 2.171; \textit{The Secret Providence of God}, (F.T.) 29.
At times 'God intends that to be done, the doing of which he forbids.' Sin. We cannot understand this, we have only to recognize the limitations of our capacity. This seems to be Calvin's ultimate position.

We must notice, however, that Calvin can prejudice the seriousness with which he regards his own concept here. The difference between Calvin's handling of key texts here in exegesis, i.e. in his commentaries and sermons, and in controversy, i.e. in his polemic treatises, is rather marked. Without fail in exegesis he frankly admits and teaches that in this matter we must make the double distinction between God's will and his counsel, and that it is logically impossible for us to understand how the two can go together, although we do hold that these two reflect in an inexplicable way a single will in God. It is on these exegetical writings that we have depended most heavily in this presentation, though he is perhaps equally as willing to admit the logical breakdown in the Institutes. But pressed by his adversaries and in the heat of controversy Calvin erases the distinction and tries to find one will in God behind the apparent two, attempting to present a single will in a logical form. The distinction so paramount in his exegesis of Ezek. 18.23, Ezek. 18.32, II Pet. 3.9, or I Tim. 2.4 is totally absent from his discussion of these same texts in The Secret Providence of God. It does appear here and there across the book but Calvin makes every attempt to erase it. This 'appearance of difference' exists only 'to ignorant and inexperienced persons at first sight.' Has Calvin not here allowed his logic to outstrip his own better Biblical insights? Is he not, in attempting to put the whole thing into logical form, trying to do what he has elsewhere admitted is impossible? Interestingly, the passages clearest on the point in the Institutes (esp. I.18.3, and II.24.17)

1. I.18.3, CR 2.171
2. Com. on Ezek. 18.23 and 32, CR 40.445f and 458f; Com. on II Pet. 3.9, CR 55.495f; Ser. on I Tim. 2.3-5, CR 53.151f; Com. on I Tim. 2.4f, CR 52.268
3. I.18.3f, CR 2.170f; III.24.17, CR 2.727f, etc.
4. 275ff
5. 254, 255, 287, 290, 306ff
6. 306f
are without exception absent from all editions prior to 1559, and the pertinent exegetical writings tend to be late also. He died before he finished the *Commentary on Ezekiel* (published in 1563). The Sermons on *I Timothy* date from 1555. The earliest clear passage is in the *Commentary on II Peter* in 1551. But if Calvin saw more clearly in his later years that an ultimate reconciliation is impossible, this did not affect his attempt to do so in *The Secret Providence of God*, published in 1553.

Nonetheless, Calvin's frankest answer to the problem seems to be that we cannot avoid setting side by side the two Scriptural truths, that God's will is not for sin but for salvation, and secondly that he governs all events including men's sin, choosing one and rejecting another.

2. Responsibility for sin in the light of God's will and counsel

It should already be fairly clear in which direction Calvin's thought develops in the matter of culpability for sin. But it remains for us to see in more detail how Calvin makes room for human responsibility and denies that God is the responsible author of sin. In the matter of God's desire for the welfare of his children and of their sin against him, we must turn not to the maze of his hidden counsel, but to his Word. Calvin explains this in his detailed comment on the passage in Deut. 5.29, where God says with a sigh, 'Oh that they had such a mind as this always to fear me and keep my commandments.' God says, 'I surely wish that it might be so.' But it is in God's power and not in man's to bring this to pass. 'Why then does he seem to wish it in this passage?' 'God is showing here that he sends us his Word to the end that he might be joined with us, that we might be as well united with him, to the end that we might be his children and that he may show himself our father.' 'Now it is true...that this is not within our ability. God must give us the grace and he does not give it to all men. But it is not a question here of inquiring into the secret counsel of God as to why it is that he reforms some by his Holy Spirit and permits the
rest to err in accord with their corruption without at all drawing them back. We must not enter into that labyrinth. 1 Here however we must consider God's will as it is set before us in his Word, not as it is hidden in himself. 2 'It must suffice us that God wishes to render men inexcusable when he says, I surely wish that it might be so. It is as if he should say that after what have been taught by his Word we have no more excuse. God is not to be blamed if we are not saved.' 3

Again in Psalm 81.13, God exclaims, 'Oh that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!' But God could bring this to pass.

'Now what hinders God from bending and framing the hearts of all men equally in submission to him? Here modesty and sobriety must be observed that instead of presuming to intrude into his secret judgments, we may rest contented with the revelation he has made of his will in his Word.' We there learn that 'the grace of God would have continued to flow in an unbroken and uniform course had it not been interrupted by the perverseness and wickedness of the people.' 4 'It is therefore true that it is a special gift of God when a man aims at what is good, but it is equally true that it is their own wickedness that hinders the reprobate from applying their mind to it, and consequently that the whole blame of their obstinacy rests with themselves.' 5

As men who resist God are to turn to his will to see their guilt, so men in their sinful deeds are to regard his will in his Word and not his hidden providence. 'Therefore in our actions we ought to regard the will of God which is declared in his Word. God only requires of us conformity to his precepts. If we do anything contrary to them, it is not obedience but contumacy and transgression.' 6 'When the Lord reveals his will in the law, I must not ascend to his secret counsel which he intended should not be known to me, but must yield implicit obedience.' 7

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1. Ser. on Deut. 5.26-33, CR 26.42ff. Ser. on Deut. 10.1-8, CR 27.10
2. Com. on Deut. 5.23, CR 24.208
3. Ser. on Deut., ibid.
4. Com. on Ps. 81.13ff, CR 31.76ff. Ser. on I Tim. 2.3-5, CR 51.157
5. Com. on Is. 1.19, CR 36.47. Com. on Zeph. 3.6, CR 44.56
7. Com. on Is. 10.7, CR 36.216
Let us now see how God commands what is wrongly and foolishly done by men. Surely he does not command the ungodly to do what is wicked, for he would thus render them excusable. For where God's authority interposes, there can be no blame. But God is said to command whatever he has decreed according to his secret counsel. There are then two kinds of commands: one belongs to doctrine, and the other to the hidden judgments of God. The command of doctrine, so to speak, is an evident approbation which acquits men; for when one obeys God, it is enough that he has God as his authority, though he might be condemned by a hundred worlds. Let us then learn to be attentive to the commands of doctrine, by which we ought to regulate our life, for they make up the only true rule from which it is not right to depart. But God is said to command according to his secret decrees what he does not approve as far as men are concerned. So Shimei had a command to curse, and yet he was not exempt from blame; for it was not his purpose to obey God. Rather he thought that he had offended God no less than David. (II Sam. 16.5f) Then this distinction ought to be understood, that some things are commanded by God not that men may have it as a rule of action but when God executes his secret judgments by ways unknown to us.'

The supreme example of this is the crucifixion. While this was an evil deed, it is not done without the secret counsel of God. 'Many would reply, Why if that is so we would have to say that God is the cause of evil, and that the wicked should be excused.' But we must regard in the matter of guilt not his counsel but his will set forth in his Word. So the crucifixion of Christ was, as far as those who crucified him were concerned, against the will of God and they may not turn to his counsel for excuse. Yet all the while believers celebrate the wonderful counsel of God who had predetermined the death of Christ. We have here as in all the sins of men to say that the will of God 'wears to us the appearance of variety.'

1. Com. on Lam. 3.37f, CR 39.550ff
3. I.18.3, CR 2.170f
E. Sin as manifestly caused by man

1. The hidden (abscondita) and the manifest (evidens) causes

A second concept which Calvin uses in his understanding of the relation between the sin of man and the providence of God is that of the distinguishable difference in causes. In our salvation there is 'the chief cause or origin,' (summa causa vel origo): the love of God which redeems us. But in reprobation the chief cause is 'the evident cause (evidens) of condemnation, which is nearer (propinquior) to us in the corrupt nature of mankind.' In seeking 'the origin (origo) of their damnation,' man ought to select 'the corruption of nature, which is its true wellspring.' The 'ground (materia) of reprobation is man's sin and perversity.' There is a cause open and manifest in the sin of man. The proximate or nearer cause, the most obvious cause of sin and of reprobation is our own sinfulness.

Also in our salvation there is in addition to the chief cause: the love of God, a second and lesser though nearer cause: our faith. 'We see that the love of God holds first place as the chief cause or origin, and that faith in Christ follows as the second and nearer cause.' But the emphasis is to remain on the first cause. Also in reprobation there is a hidden (abscondita) and altogether incomprehensible cause in the predestination of God. 'I expressly state that there are two causes (deux causes): the one hidden in the eternal counsel of God, and the other manifest in the sin of man.' Thus in the case of sin, and therefore in the damnation of a sinner, there are two perceivable causes. There is the evident

1. II.17.2, CR 2.387. Ser. on Eph. 1.13-14, CR 51.295f
2. III.23.8, CR 2.705
3. III.23.9, CR 2.706
5. Com. on Rom. 9.11, CR 49.178
7. III.23.8, CR 2.705
cause or the nearer cause: man's sin, disobedience, and unbelief. But there is in addition the hidden cause of sin and reprobation: God's council. By contrast we have seen that a similar situation exists with regard to the believer; this time the manifest cause is God's election, and the hidden or second cause is man's faith. God is the evident cause in the matter of life and salvation, but man is the evident cause in the matter of sin and death.

2. Responsibility for sin and the hidden and manifest causes

As Calvin employs this concept to understand culpability in sin, the fact that the causes have been reversed assumes significance. There is here an imbalance which is not logical, but which is necessary if we are to be true to Scripture. In our salvation we emphasize the part of God, but when we contemplate the cause of our sinful actions we are to regard sin as manifestly and evidently caused by ourselves; we are not to pass over this and enter into a hidden cause in the secret decree of God. Calvin is quite unambiguous about this is his Reply in the case of Troillet: 'I teach that a man ought rather to search for the cause of his condemnation in his corrupt nature than in the predestination of God.' 'I expressly state that there are two causes: the one hidden in the eternal counsel of God, and the other manifest in the sin of man.' 'Here then, messieurs, is the very core of the whole question: I say that all the reprobate will be convicted of guilt by their own consciences and that thus their condemnation is righteous, and that they err in neglecting that which is quite evident to enter instead into the secret counsel of God which to us is inaccessible. At the same time the Scripture does indeed show us that God has predestined men to such ends as he chose them to reach. But as to why or how this is done we must remain ignorant, because it has not been revealed to us.' 'I say that it is perverse to pry into the secrets of God
to which we are unable to attain in order to search for the origin and condemnation of mankind, while passing over the corruption of their own nature from which it manifestly proceeds.  

Calvin also issues a similar warning in *The Secret Providence of God.* Throughout the treatise, however, the question may be raised whether Calvin does not so elaborate on the first cause as to do just what he says not to do - pass over the sin of man to search for the origin of condemnation in God. Calvin claims not when the point is raised, and seems to hold that there is an extent to which developing this hidden cause is necessary. Nonetheless, the principle is stated; we are to emphasize man's part in his sin and not the hidden providence of God. When he blinds the reprobate, it is sufficient for us to know that he has just causes for doing so, and it is groundless for men to murmur and to dispute with him, as if they sinned only by his impulse. Although the causes why they are blinded sometimes lie hidden in the secret counsel of God, yet there is not a man who is not reproved by his own conscience. And it is our duty to adore and admire the high mysteries of God which surpass our understanding. It is justly said that God's judgments are a profound abyss. (Ps. 36.6) It would certainly be highly perverse to involve God in a part of the guilt of the wicked, whenever he executes his judgments upon them.

'Therefore let us rather contemplate the evident (evidens) cause of condemnation, which is nearer to us in the corrupt nature of mankind, than search after a hidden (abscondita) and altogether incomprehensible one in the predestination of God.' Whatever we may say about the hidden cause of man's sin and consequent damnation, we are to remember that if we live in

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2. (E.T) 251
3. 246ff, 266, etc.
4. 254. Com. on Rom. 11.7, CR 49.216
5. Com. on Ps. 69.27, CR 31.649
6. III.23.8, CR 2.705. Inst. of 1539 (et seqq.), ch. VIII, pag. 252, CR 1.374
sin this is not to be originated in God. It is true that he is 'the first cause' of hardening, 'but as that counsel is hidden from us, we must not too eagerly search into it...but we ought to consider the cause which lies open before our eyes.'¹ 'We maintain that they act preposterously who, in seeking for the origin of their condemnation, direct their views to the secret recesses of the divine counsel and overlook the corruption of nature which is its true wellspring. The testimony God gives to his creation prevents their imputing it to him. For, although by the eternal providence of God men was created to that misery to which he is subject, yet the ground of it he has derived from himself, not from God; since he is ruined for no other reason than because he degenerated from the pure creation of God to vicious and impure depravity.'²

If men are damned by God, 'their perdition depends on the divine predestination in such a manner that the cause and ground of it are found in themselves.'³ 'It is clear that the ruin of man must be ascribed only to himself, since he was favored with rectitude by the divine goodness, but has fallen into vanity through his own folly.'⁴ Whatever this does to the logic of the argument, and regardless of the fact that Calvin may not always be true to his own better insight and may be guilty of putting aside the evident and obvious cause to elaborate on the hidden cause, it is clear that Calvin does not want to qualify man's culpability with the assertion that God plays any causal part in his sin. If man sins and continues in sin this must be ascribed to man as a contrary action against the will of God. Despite what we may have to say about a hidden cause in God's secret counsel, we have only to look to our sin as evidently and manifestly caused by our malicious nature and evidently and manifestly causing our damnation.

¹. Com. on Is. 6.10, CR 36.138
². III.23.9, CR 2.706
³. III.23.8, CR 2.705
⁴. II.1.10, CR 2.184
C. Sin as accidental in God's order

1. The proper (proprius) and accidental (accidentalis) effects of grace

Calvin makes it clear that God's will is always the will for salvation through his notion of a proper or essential (proprius) and an accidental (accidentalis) or adventitious (adventitus) effect of God's grace. The important way in which Calvin takes over this scholastic distinction and works it into his thought is often overlooked. In gospel, law, or nature, God's intent is to bless man, if man should be damned by these helps it does not come from them, but is accidental and comes from somewhere else. God ever moves toward man with grace, even when that is not the actual effect. Calvin constantly reminds us of this particularly in his commentaries and sermons on the gospels and New Testament books.

It is the purpose of God in sending his gospel to redeem the world from sin. 'The gospel is preached for salvation; this is what is proper (proprium) to it.'¹ 'That we are reconciled to God is proper to the gospel.'² 'It is properly (proprius) the power of God to salvation to all who believe.'³ 'The doctrine of the gospel has of its own nature power for edification, not for destruction.'⁴ God sent his Son because he loved the human race and does not wish that it should perish. 'It was not in vain that God sent his own Son to us. He came not to destroy; and therefore it follows that it is the peculiar office of the Son of God that all who believe may obtain salvation by him.'⁵ God is unwilling that we should die and so has appointed his Son to be our salvation. God's Word of itself is always 'the savor of life.' This is 'the nature of his Word,' and for this 'end' the gospel is preached.⁶ 'As often then as we come to hear God's Word, let us always have this before our eyes: that he wishes to bring us back to himself.'⁷

¹. Com. on II Cor. 2.15, CR 50.34. Com. on Matt. 16.19, CR 45.475
². Com. on John 3.17, CR 47.66. Com. on John 20.23, CR 47.442
³. Com. on II Cor. 10.9, CR 50.116f. Com. on Jer. 1.9f, CR 37.481f
⁴. Com. on John 3.16f, CR 47.65f. Com. on John 9.39, CR 47.233
⁵. Ser. on Deut. 2.24-29, CR 26.35ff. Com. on Is. 6.10, CR 32.137f
⁶. Ser. on Deut. 4.3-6, CR 26.116
It is as well God's proper intention in his law to draw us to himself, though the law alone can never reach this end. We must, however, remember that considered in itself and from the side of God the law was for man's benefit. Properly it should aid man. 'The law then because of us brings only wrath and death, but in itself, if we consider the teaching which is contained in it, certainly it brings a blessing. For if we were such as we ought to be, that is to say, if we had such an integrity in us that we were disposed to serve God, as our father Adam was created before the fall, the law would bring its blessing.'

The law is in itself (per se) not deadly. And again it is the proper intention of God's self-declaration in nature to make himself known and to lead man to felicity. This fact, which we have seen already, we here cast into the language of a proper and an accidental effect. The proper purpose of God in his self-communication in nature is our welfare. 'God has ordered his creatures for our service, these ought to be a help to guide us to him.' 'God wishes to draw us to him by his creatures.'

Yet the gospel does not always accomplish its true purpose, it may have an accidental effect. The gospel is appointed for loosing our bonds, but, as there are many who are guilty of rejecting the deliverance offered to them, the authority to bind is likewise granted to ministers of the gospel. 'It must be observed, however, that this does not belong to the nature of the gospel, but is accidental.' (accidentale) 'We must always therefore distinguish between the proper office of the gospel and the accidental, so to speak, which is to be imputed to the depravity of mankind.'

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1. Ser. on Deut. 11.26-32, CR 27.137ff
2. Com. on Rom. 7.11, CR 49.127
3. Ser. on Deut. 4.19-24, CR 26.162. Ser. on Gal. 3.15-18, CR 50.530
4. Com. on I Cor. 1.21, CR 49.326
5. Com. on Matt. 16.19, CR 45.475. Ser. on Eph. 2.16-19, CR 51.421
6. Com. on II Cor. 2.15, CR 50.34. Com. on Micah 2.7, CR 43.309f
are reconciled to God is proper to the gospel; that unbelievers are brought eternal death is certainly accidental. 'It is proper to the gospel that all are invited to salvation, but it is adventitious (adventitium) if it brings destruction to some.'

When Christ says that he is come to judgment, when he is called a stone of offense, when he is said to be set for the ruin of many, this is accidental, or may be said to be adventitious, for they who reject the grace offered in him deserve to find him the judge and punisher of such unworthy and base contempt. A clear instance of this is to be seen in the gospel. For though it is properly the power of God to salvation to all who believe, yet the ingratitude of many causes it to turn into death for them. 'Since Christ is by his own nature the light of the world, it is accidental that his coming should make some blind.'

The doctrine of the gospel has of its own nature power for edification, not for destruction. But if it destroys, this is from somewhere else (aliunde) i.e. out of the guilt of mankind in that they stumble at the stone which is ordained for them as a foundation. 'But we must certainly note that this does not belong to Christ properly and in himself, but rather it is accidental out of the malice of men.'

The gospel is in its own nature the power of God to salvation and an odor of life to life, but it is through accident an odor of death.'

The same is true of the law. 'It is accidental that the law as well as the gospel brings damnation to man.' This accidental property of the law is perpetual and inseparable, the law has no other effect is not illuminated by the grace of Christ, but this does not negate the fact that the proper nature of the law is salutary. 'The law is in itself not deadly,'
but this happens from somewhere else and is as if adventitious. It is accidental that the law wounds us fatally, as when an incurable disease is exacerbated the more by a healing remedy. And this distinction must be held with the self-communication of God in nature. 'God has ordered his creatures for our service, these ought to be a help to guide us to him.' Yet we take occasion at this to stumble. 'God wishes to draw us to him by his creatures, and we happen to fling ourselves against them rashly and as it were in spite.' The evils in nature are 'accidental evils' brought because we provoke him by our sins, and thus confound and subvert the order of nature. 'Through accident,' and 'through our wickedness and abuse we turn God's benefits to an end clean contrary to what he has designed.'

2. Responsibility and the proper and accidental effects of grace

It is obvious how this distinction is employed in Calvin's understanding of the roles of man and of God in sin. We are not to say that God is the cause of man's sin and of his ruin, because in everything that God does for man, in his blessings in the gospel and in the law, or in his gifts in nature, God proper intent is to aid man and secure his welfare. We must then say that man's sin is his own fault in that man has through accident turned God's grace to him into a harmful and noxious thing. 'The Word of God, as it brings life and salvation to man, is in its own nature gracious, and it cannot be either bitter, or hard, or grievous to the pious and good, for God unfolds in it the riches of his goodness.' 'God declares that he is gentle and kind, and that the character of his Word is the same provided that men are tractable, and do not through their perverseness extort from him anything else than what he of himself wishes.' But we by accident as it were turn the Word to our condemnation so that it becomes

1. Com. on Rom. 7:11, CR 49.127. Com. on Gal. 3:19, CR 50.215
2. Com. on Rom. 7:10, CR 49.126. 'The Use of the Law' in Com. on Harm. of Pent., CR 24.725ff; Com. on I Cor. 15:56, CR 49.563
4. Com. on Jer. 5:25, CR 37.636
5. Com. on Micah 5:10f, CR 43.380
to us what God did not intend for it to be. 'The fault is in us and ought to be imputed to us if the Word of God is not delightful to us.' 1 'For were it not that the reprobate through their own fault turn life into death, the gospel would be to all the power of salvation, but as many persons no sooner hear it than their impiety openly breaks out and provokes against them more and more the wrath of God, to such persons its savor must be deadly.' 2 If the gospel exercises not its proper but its accidental office, this 'is to be imputed to the depravity of mankind. It is because of this that life to them is turned into death.' 3 'The ingratitude of many causes it to turn into death for them.' Such blinding and hardening does not rise out of the nature of the Word, but is accidental and must be ascribed exclusively to the depravity of man. 'Ungodly men have no right to blame the Word for making them worse after having heard it. The whole blame lies on themselves in altogether refusing it admission, and we need not wonder if that which ought to have led them to salvation becomes the cause of their destruction.' 4

This is as well the case in the law. 'If we consider what we are in our perverse nature, which we have drawn from the sin of Adam, the law can only curse us. For when God shows us what our righteousness is, if we come to examine our life, we shall find that we have offended him in every point. We shall then despair. Yes, but this is not of the nature of the law, rather it is caused by the sinfulness which is in us, it is because we are perverse, all our affections are rebellious toward God, and strive only to follow our wicked lusts instead of obeying him. The law then because of us brings only wrath and death, but in itself if we consider the teaching which is contained in it, certainly it brings a blessing.' 'Our Lord says, Come to me and I will satisfy you with blessings, and we draw completely away

1. Com. on Micah 2.7, CR 43.309f. Com. on Jer. 23.24, CR 38.450f
2. Com. on Matt. 16.19, CR 45.475. Com. on Jer. 29.10, CR 38.501f
3. Com. on II Cor. 2.15, CR 50.34. Ser. on Deut. 30.15-20, CR 28.595
4. Com. on John 3.17, CR 47.66. De Scandalis, CR 8.10f
5. Com. on Is. 6.10, CR 36.137. Ser. on Deut. 11.26-32, CR 27.135f
from him. It does not then come from his teaching. Where does it come from? From us. Where is the fault to be found? Is it in the law? No, but in our own selves.1

Calvin at times, when influenced by his concept of God's immutable decree, can state this in such a way as to empty the distinction of much of its meaning and value. 'In the external preaching of the Word God invites all indiscriminately to come to him,' but to some 'he intends it as a savor of death and an occasion of heavier condemnation.'2 When God sends his Word through Ezekiel, 'God signifies that he has some other object in view than the salvation of men, namely the removal of all pretext for error, and the stripping off of every disguise of impiety.' 'We see the purpose of his sending his prophet: the people were then on the brink of complete destruction, but God wished to plunge them deeper into the lowest abyss.'3 But these harsh statements need to be taken in the larger context of his thought and Calvin is not unaware that here the proper use of God's Word has fallen into the background. We 'touch only one side of the teaching and omit the chief point' for 'why were the prophets called forth unless to collect the people for God?' 'God regards nothing as more important than uniting miserable men in the hope of eternal life. This is the chief end of the law and the gospel: that men being reconciled to God may worship him as a father.'4 So if we think more flexibly it remains accidental to God's purpose to curse.

Perhaps the best index of the seriousness with which Calvin does regard this accidental concept is the constant introduction of it into his exegesis, as we have already pointed out. Despite the influence on it of the concept of God's unchanging decree, Calvin would make it clear in this way that God's will is for salvation and not for sin and that it comes from man and not from God when his gifts do turn to curses.

1. Ser. on Deut. 11.26-32, CR 27.135ff
2. III.24.8, CR 2.718f
3. Com. on Ezek. 2.3ff, CR 40.62ff. Com. on Num. 21.21, CR 25.258
4. Com. on Ezek. 3.18, CR 40.91ff
D. Sin as an obstacle to the grace of God

A final concept by which Calvin understands responsibility for sin is that of the love of God shed on all but which falls on different men in different degrees. Men are elected by God or engrafted into the hope of eternal life in different ways. Except for those upon whom God bestows his Spirit the love of God is rejected, yet in each case the grace of God has been sufficient on the one hand to prohibit God's being charged with having deserted or failed his creatures, and on the other hand to render men chargeable with having so rejected an adequate love of God as to be without excuse. Because of the shadow of his concept of providence it has not always been recognized that Calvin does not strictly teach that grace is irresistible. On the contrary men do resist, hinder, and obstruct the blessing God would give them. It is then important to see here that Calvin constantly teaches that within the providence of God men do resist God's grace. God's election is annihilated by man.

1. The degrees (degrez) of the love of God

'We see three degrees (trois degrez) of the love which God has shown in our Lord Jesus Christ. The first is with regard to the redemption which was purchased for us in the person of him who gave himself to death for us, who became accursed to reconcile us to God his Father.' This first degree of love extends to all men because Christ has engrafted himself into all humanity. He died for all men. 'But there is a special love for those to whom the gospel is preached. This is that God testifies to them that he will make them partakers of the benefit that was purchased for them by the death and passion of his Son.' This second degree of love is a double bond, and an election that he has made of us. We must come to account if we reject it. This is 'the first degree of election.' (la premiere election en degré) It is a free election of God that we have his word and sacraments.2

1. Ser. on Deut. 4.36-38, CR 26.216
2. Ser. on Deut. 7.7-10, CR 26.522f
This first election of God arises from the relation between Abraham's sons in spirit and the unfaithful sons of the covenant. Calvin variously terms them the circumcised sons who broke covenant, 'Abraham's children in respect of the flesh' but 'not his children in spirit,'¹ the sons of Esau or Ishmael, the unfaithful posterity of Jacob,² or the children of Israel who were not of the remnant.³ These sons of Abraham were participants in God's general election, for he received his whole seed into covenant. But they were not all regenerated. 'This general election was then not efficacious in all.'⁴ Now while we recognize that the Spirit made the covenant efficacious in some, yet it is also true that God loved the others and invited them to him, and that their ingratitude rejected his grace. 'Others were elected in this way, that is, God offered to them the covenant of salvation, but yet through their ingratitude they caused God to reject them, and to disown them as children.'⁵

With the coming of the gospel, the generally elect become the baptized, in parallel to the circumcised, or those to whom the gospel is preached and the sacraments offered, in parallel to the offering of the covenant of grace,⁶ or all children of believers for a thousand generations, in parallel to the promise being given to the seed of Abraham, or more loosely the Gentiles as a whole engrafted into the stock of Jesse and adopted into the covenant, in parallel to the election of the Jewish race.⁷ The general election of God is now spread as far as the Word and the sacraments. The children of the faithful and all those upon whom the seed of the gospel has been sown 'have been grafted into the hope of life through God's election,' but these branches are 'cut off' if they are ungrateful and reject the Word.⁸

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¹ Ser. on Deut. 10.15-17, CR 27.46. Com. on Ezek. 16.21, CR 40.352
² ibid., Com. on Rom. 9.6, CR 49.175; on Hos. 12.3f, CR 42.454
³ ibid.
⁴ Com. on Hos. 12.3f, CR 42.454
⁵ ibid.
⁶ Ser. on Deut. 10.15-17, CR 27.47; on Deut. 4.36-38, CR 26.216
⁷ Com. on Ezek. 16.21, CR 40.354; on Is. 66.20, CR 37.451
⁸ Com. on Rom. 11.22, CR 49.224
This general adoption testifies that God wills that all men be saved. While his secret election renders the covenant efficacious only in some, yet there is a real way in which we must speak of all to whom the Word is addressed as being his people - 'the secret election of God did not flourish in them, yet they were God's people' - and of man's leaving the covenant through his own sin. Of those elected by God to the covenant of salvation 'the greater part is without the covenant through their own unbelief.' It is, to borrow from the previous concept, accidental that God's election is not always efficacious. 'God by his singular kindness honored those miserable ones by opening a way of approach for them to the hope of life and salvation by the outward testimonies of adoption. Then as to their being at the same time strangers, that was by accident (accido) through their own guilt.'

'God's election is as it were annihilated by us.' 'God forsakes us because we are perfidious and are covenant-breakers.'

The third love that God shows us is that we receive the gift of his Spirit to reform us in his image. From the point of view of the double election of God 'there is a second election. (seconde election) This is when each one of us recognizes that God has illuminated him by his Holy Spirit and that he has made us so to taste his Word that we by faith adhere to it, when he engraft us into the body of Jesus Christ so that we are taken and kept as his members.' These are engrafted into the hope of eternal life and are never cut off.

And in addition God declares his love to us in his self-declaration in nature. This assumes importance in the question of the responsibility of God and of man for sin. If God chooses to reveal himself to some in Scripture, he yet manifests himself to all in heaven and earth. 'He has ordered the world to be as a theatre in which we ought to contemplate his goodness,

1. Com. on Ezek. 16.21, CR 40.354
2. Ser. on Deut. 7.7-10, CR 26.254
3. Com. on Is. 63.8, CR 37.398
4. Ser. on Deut. 4.36-38, CR 26.216. Com. on Rom. 11.22, CR 49.224; on Rom. 9.6, CR 49.175
righteousness, power, and wisdom. ¹ In the very order of creation the paternal solicitude of God for man is conspicuous. ² Here he has shed his love on all men.

2. Responsibility for sin in the light of the love of God toward all

Against the concept of God's love which in some way reaches to all, man is to assume culpability for his sin and misery because he has cut off the love which God has shed upon him. It is man's fault and not the fault of God. This is true of all men. ³ It is true first among those to whom God has addressed his covenant and promised his grace. These include now all the Gentiles to whom he causes the Word to be preached and the sacraments offered, all those of the first degree of election. It is true in a lesser but parallel way among those to whom God would reveal himself in nature.

Within the covenant and according to the will that he sets before us in his Word, God would love us and bless us. But in as many ways as Calvin can speak of the primal sin of man, he can say that our sin has cut off God's goodness. Our infidelity and distrust, our unbelief, our ingratitude, our rebellion, our application of his goodness to our own lusts, has hindered him from exercising his love and liberality toward us. 'God would always be ready to relieve us by his goodness, or rather it would flow down upon us as from a never failing fountain, if our own ingratitude did not prevent or cut off its course.' ⁴ 'Our lusts...obstruct God's access to us so that his beneficence does not reach us.' ⁵ 'Whenever we are deprived of the sense of God's favor, the way has been closed up through our own fault. For God would ever be disposed willingly to show kindness, except that our contumacy and hardness stands in the way.' ⁶ 'As then the moisture of rain does not penetrate into stones, so the grace of God is spent in vain (frustra) and without advantage on the unbelieving.' ⁷

1. Ser. on Eph. 3.9-12, CR 5L459ff
3. Com. on Is. 59.2, CR 37.537
4. Com. on Ps. 40.11, CR 31.414. on Ps. 43.9, CR 31.478; on Ps. 65.3, CR 31.604
5. Com. on Jer. 5.25, CR 37.635f. Com. on Is. 27.5, CR 36.512
6. Com. on Hos. 2.14, CR 42.243. Ser. on Deut. 33.12-17, CR 29.158f
7. Com. on Hos. 6.4, CR 42.326. Com. on Ps. 138.8, CR 32.376
Such is Calvin's concept of an omnipotent God that students of his thought have not given serious attention to his concept of sin as obstructing God's power. And it does seem to be true that Calvin expounds this more often in his sermons and commentaries than in his systematic Institutes. Perhaps the bias of systematic treatment suppresses the wider range of his thought. Yet the concept is so frequent in his exegesis as to be a real emphasis. Interestingly enough it finds fullest expression in his Old Testament commentaries, and virtually dominates the Commentary on the Psalms. In a very real way God only performs toward us that which we expect or will rightly use. He is both hindered by our limited expectations and unwilling to bless us lest his blessing corrupt us all the more. 'The hand of God is indeed always open, but we are straitened and limited in our desires so that our own infidelity is no small hindrance to his liberality. And also, because our corrupt nature would immediately break forth into excess, God deals with us more sparingly; lest he might corrupt us by too great indulgence, he trains us to frugality by bestowing with a sparing hand what he was ready otherwise to lavish upon us in full abundance.'

Men have contracted desires which obstruct his beneficence. The blame is entirely ours because our capacity is not large enough to receive his blessings and our unbelief rejects the blessings which would spontaneously flow to us. 'From this it follows that the reason why God's blessings drop upon us in a sparing and slender manner is because our mouth is too narrow; and the reason why others are empty and famished is because they keep their mouth completely shut. The majority of mankind, either from distrust, or pride, or madness, refuse all the blessings which are offered them from heaven. Others, although they do not altogether reject them, yet with difficulty take in only a few small drops, because their faith is so straitened as to prevent their receiving an abundant supply.' We 'exclude God from obtaining access to us, and

1. Com. on Ps. 37.19, OR 31.375
refuse to give him a hearing when he is ready to enter into covenant with us.  

All this does not mean that God bestows the same grace on all men, for we began with the realization that God does for reasons unknown to us shed his love in different degrees. Yet it does mean nonetheless that we must think of man in sin as rejecting whatever grace God has bestowed upon him.

The movement of God’s Spirit by which some accept God’s grace is part of his secret counsel and not to be a source of excuse. We have seen this already. There is a way, however, in which we learn in God’s Word that he is ready to bestow his Spirit on all who will receive him. We must presuppose this as ‘Moses presupposes that God will shed out his Holy Spirit upon the people if they do not shut the door against him.’ God has promised: ‘I shall pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.’ This is fulfilled in Christ. ‘Nevertheless all do not receive him.’ ‘We resist him by our ingratitude and malice.’

So then we see that if men do not enjoy the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which God here declares that he will send upon his men-servants and maid-servants, it is not because he has changed his purpose, but we will not allow him to do us good, for when he draws near we draw away. He is not, then, the cause why we do not receive all his gifts, for the prophet says, God will pour out his Holy Spirit upon all flesh. It is that ‘we shut the door to his goodness, and in a manner of speaking will not permit him to use his natural disposition.’ Our ingratitude turns away the course of his goodness as if a man should obstruct the flowing of a river. In our sin we are not then to blame God’s providence, for we are taught in his Word that we continually resist the grace he would bestow on us. ‘All our miseries proceed from this one source: that by our sins we prevent the divine blessing from flowing down in a uniform course upon us.’

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1. Com. on Ps. 81.10f, CR 31.765f. Com. on Ps. 89.16, CR 31.758
2. Ser. on Deut. 32.44-47, CR 29.66. Com. on Ps. 115.12, CR 32.189
3. Ser. on Acts 2.13-17, CR 43.611
4. Ser. on Acts 2.16-21, CR 44.64ff
5. Ser. on Deut. 28.59-64, CR 28.468
6. Ser. on Deut. 31.17-21, CR 28.64.1
7. Com. on Ps. 25.13, CR 31.258
God's election of some might seem to mean that he is unconcerned for the rest. Here Calvin employs the concept of God's common love, shed on all men, as an affirmation of the fact that God for his part has not failed his creatures and does wish that they be saved. The revelation in nature is a demonstration of this love and God here maintains an order to draw us to him. Though he covenants with Israel, he does not cease to desire the welfare of others. Calvin discusses this at length in a sermon on Ephesians:

It does seem strange that God chooses to manifest his gospel to particular individuals rather than after the fall call all the world without exception. We recognise here a 'mystery.' 'If it is demanded why God delayed it for so long a time, men advance too far with such curiosity.' We do recall however that 'God's wisdom is as it were of varied sorts' and that another facet of his manifold wisdom is that it was to be 'the wisdom of man to inquire after the works of God.' 'This is also why he has ordered the world to be as a theatre in which we ought to contemplate his goodness, righteousness, power, and wisdom.' God provides for man here.  

Considering God's works in general we learn that 'if God declared himself, he did not allow, as much as in him lay, the world to perish.' God is not to blame, for he has wished to teach us in nature, but we are to blame for not listening.

Thus within God's providence man is culpable for having violated the order God would have and for shutting off God's grace. 'We obstruct God's access to us so that his beneficence does not reach us. We throw heaven and earth into confusion by our sins. Nor were we in right order as to our obedience to God, doubtless all the elements would be conformable, and we should thus observe in the world an angelic harmony.' But 'we provoke him by our sins, and thus confound and subvert the order of nature.' 'We do not allow God to govern the world in a regular and consistent order, but as far as we can we disturb and confound his providence.'

1. Ser. on Eph. 3.9-12, CR 51.461f and Ser. on Eph. 2.1-6, CR 51.442f
3. Com. on Jer. 5.25, CR 37.635. Ser. on Deut. 29.1-4, CR 28.494
Calvin then understands that the problem of the relation between sin and God's providence is not one which can be worked out in a logically consistent form throughout, but one that must be developed around the antinomy of two principles each of which is correctly drawn from Scripture: that God's control extends both to man's good and bad deeds, and that man and not God is culpable in sin. It has been our thesis here that those who have followed after Calvin have developed his concept of providence and predestination without giving equal emphasis to Calvin's balancing concepts which portray a dynamic relationship between God and man. To appreciate his wider thought we must portray alongside the overriding providence of God, sin as adverse to God's will, as evidently caused by man, as accidental in God's order and plan, and as a hindrance to the grace of God. At the same time we have had often to notice that Calvin questions his own position. Where we can trace variations in Calvin's thought he seems to have biased his Biblical exegesis under pressure due to polemic debate or rigid systematic treatment. The dynamic concepts of sin as accidentally turning God's grace to a curse, or as hindering and cutting off God's blessing are more freely developed in his sermons and commentaries than in his Institutes, and he is in his controversial treatises less inclined to admit the logical breakdown forced upon us in the matter of God's will toward sin.

It is then perhaps these concepts which Calvin used so constantly in his preaching and teaching that will prove helpful as theology searches for a solution to the question of sin and God's providential care. Calvin's concept of sin as a hindrance to God's grace is one which we have encountered in our study of the way sin is to be understood as that which disorders the divine order of grace. In terms of the present problem this means that we must develop our understanding around the antinomy that: on the one hand it is God's grace to which we ascribe the whole of our
salvation, including the acceptance from our side of this grace, and the whole of our deeds of righteousness. His providential care and not our strength is the cause of this. And on the other: it is our fault and sin if we refuse God's grace, reject his salvation, and live in unrighteousness. He is always responsible for our proper behavior but we are always responsible for our evil deeds. In this we must follow Calvin to admit that the grace of God can be resisted by man, though the assertion which stands in tension with this is equally true: that it is God and not man who must overcome this resistance. God's grace brings us to him, yet it is never a lack of this grace which keeps us away; it is our hindrance of it. This concept when applied to the doctrine of election is a useful one and theology may do well to develop Calvin's concept of a double election of God in further terms than did Calvin. God elects all men to whom this Word is directed, for he bestows his redeeming and electing grace upon them, yet some cut themselves off from this election through their ingratitude and infidelity.

We will also find it useful in the twentieth century to employ Calvin's concept of an intrinsic and accidental effect of God's grace. If this is not Biblical but scholastic language, it nonetheless helpfully reflects the truth that God always moves toward man in grace but that this grace through accident and by sin can become a curse to man. In God's providence he ordains for man's blessing in nature, law, and gospel, but we confound and disturb his providence. We have immediately made it clear that there is no ultimate logical explanation for this; it is an accident; it happens; we take occasion to stumble over the rock ordained as chief cornerstone in our salvation. And we have clearly asserted that it is never God's intent to harm but his will is always the will for grace and salvation. This or a similar concept worked out in more Biblical language will at once insure that
God's constant grace toward man is affirmed and man's dis-gracing sin confessed, and allow for our admission that we cannot think through the profound abyss of sin or of God's judgment on it. It may perhaps be useful also for theologians to heed Calvin's warning that God's part in sin is hidden in his secret judgments into which it is presumptuous and curious to inquire. Scripture directs our attention to the evident and manifest causes of sin in our own nature and assures us that such is God's predestination that when we sin the ground of it is derived from ourselves.

But if these concepts are useful to contemporary theology, it must be questioned whether theology is to retain Calvin's concept of a distinction between God's will and his secret counsel. Surely we can appreciate the tension between the Biblical truths that God's will is the will for the salvation of all men, and yet that all are not saved as he chooses one and not another. And it is by a recognition that we can neither forgo one truth nor minimize one to fit the other that we must approach the problem. To this extent Calvin's insight is useful and may be retained. Yet will it not be wiser to deal with the problem in a different way, or to suspend our judgment, rather than to put into serious doctrinal form such a frustrating and troublesome concept as a twofold will of God? This concept invites confusion and uncertainty and would ever tempt us to make Calvin's mistake of trying to present the two aspects in one logical form. Above all we must reject Calvin's teaching about a double predestination of God by which some are created to eternal damnation by the decree and hidden providence of God. This can, as history since the Reformation has proved, only continually prejudice both the grace of God and the seriousness of sin.
V. Sin and the Wrath (Judgment and Vengeance) of God

It has been our thesis that Calvin's concept of sin must be understood within the framework of God's order of grace. This means that when we see sin against the background of God's order of law, justice, and righteousness, it is to be done in such a way as to bring this valuable and vital concept under the larger concept of an order of grace. But traditional Reformed theology, as influenced by the duality of covenants, has only been able to follow the first order of law and justice with a second order of grace, thus at best setting the two side by side. By God's justice and by the first order and covenant we have merited God's wrath, but by God's grace and by the second order and covenant we have received his love. There has then been a tension between God's righteousness and his grace. But our examination of Calvin's concept of the wrath of God will further show how everything is to be brought under the order of grace, for in Calvin's thought even God's wrath and judgment is an act of his grace, the obverse of God's single redemptive movement. We must see here how Calvin so conceives of God's justice and judgment as to incorporate these into his concept of sin as man's disordering the divine order of grace.

The way in which God meets, resists, and prosecutes the creature who sets himself in opposition to God is dealt with by Calvin under the concept of the wrath of God, as by way of contrast God's relationship to those who trust him is one of love. 'What does he (Hosea) mean by the fury of God's wrath? Even the relation between his nature and our innate or natural sins.'

God, who was a father to man, now assumes the character of a judge. What is it that introduces this change in God? What is objectively behind the subjective change in God? For an answer we look to the judgment of God and see how God moves against the life of sin. Man senses God's resistance and perceives that God is angry. We may, following Calvin, separate the notion

1. Com. on Hos. 11.8f, CR 42.443
of the wrath of God into two further concepts. We mean (1) the judgment of God, or (2) the vengeance of God. Usually the wrath of God has reference to judgment, although in more particular contexts it has a narrower reference to vengeance.  

A. The judgment (iudicium) of God

We may use the word judgment in its common usage referring to the condemnation of the guilty, yet a whole notion of judgment must be extended and built around a larger work of God. There are two meanings: (1) the re-ordering of the world, and (2) condemnation and the distribution of just punishment.  

1. Judgment as a part of the restoration (restauration) of order

In Calvin's thought judgment must be seen as one of the two sides of God's restoration of the order set in the beginning. Here at the start Calvin relates God's judgment to his act of grace. 'It is the glory of our faith that God, the creator of the world, does not disregard or abandon the order which he himself at first established.' On the one side God resists those who have broken order. But the other side is a re-creation of man to the ordered life of grace. 'Adam by his fall had perverted and corrupted all order so that there was nothing but confusion in heaven and earth until everything was again repaired by Jesus Christ.' Thus God's restoration of order involves on the one side judgment on man's inversion of God's appointed order, and on the other redemption as God re-establishes man in Christ into life in grace. Taking judgment as part of this larger work of God, we are not to separate it from its obverse, for God suspends his judgment to make room for the equally important restoration of his primal gracious order of creation.

Within this restoration of order, God must forever be the enemy of sin. While he does not hate his creatures - and we shall abundantly see that he

1. Com. On I Thes. 2.16, CR 52.153; On Rom. 4.15, CR 49.78; on 12.19, CR 49.246; on Matt. 3.7, CR 45.117; on Eph. 2.3, CR 51.162; On Rom. 3.5, CR 49.50  
2. Com. On Rom. 1.18, CR 49.23; On I Thes. 2.16, CR 52.153; on 5.9, CR 52.170  
3. Com. On John 16.11, CR 47.360f; on John 12.31, CR 47.213  
4. Com. On Ps. 11.4, CR 31.123f  
5. Ser. On Eph. 2.9-12, CR 51.466
has not given up his paternal solicitude for them - yet he must abhor those who practice wickedness. 'God hates none without cause, nay, so far as men are the workmanship of God he embraces them with his fatherly love. But as nothing is more opposed to his nature than sin, he proclaims irreconcilable war with the wicked.'¹ As this war nears conclusion, God restores order in the judgment of wickedness. 'When he stretches forth his hand to execute the office of a judge, God restores all the troubles and confusions of the world.'² 'God knows how to bring all things into order and into a state of perfection, for it is said that at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he shall appear to judge the world, there will be the restoration of all things.'³ Calvin takes his widest notion of judgment in this first sense from an exegesis of the Hebrew, הָעֵשָׁה, mishpat.⁴ This concept is not only basic to Old Testament ideas of judgment, but it lies as well behind the New Testament Greek, κρίσις, so that its meaning is unintelligible otherwise.

The judgment of God means that he sets himself against the disorder introduced by sin and restores it to 'rectitude.'

Calvin also takes over the Greek word for disorder and employs it frequently in expounding what we mean by judgment. 'Judgment therefore is contrasted with what is confused and disordered, or to express it more concisely the antithesis is τῆς ἀτάσιας (disorder), or we might call it rectitude, (rectitudo) a sense which it often assumes in Scripture.'⁶ We hope for 'the well regulated state of things which will be seen when God by his judgment will restore to order those things which are now embroiled and confused.'⁷ He will rectify 'the present ἀτάσιαν.' 'For if God is the just judge of all the world, those things that are now confused must of necessity be restored to order. 'God will one day ascend the judgment seat that he may

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2. Com. on Ps. 10.15, CR 31.118. Com. on Ps. 96.10, CR 32.41
3. Ser. on Job 21-28-34, CR 34.259. Com. on John 12.31, CR 47.293f
4. Com. on Is. 45.1, CR 37.299f; on Ps. 78.15, CR 31.167f; on 96.10, CR 32.41
5. Com. on Matt. 12.18, CR 45.31f; Com. on John, passim, CR 47
6. Com. on John 16.11, CR 47.360f. Com. on Matt. 6.10, CR 45.199f
remedy the state of matters in the world, so as to bring them into a better condition. But it is God's work to judge the world, that is, to rectify it by his righteousness, and to reduce to the best order whatever there is in it out of order.

But another side of this restoration of order inseparable from the judgment by which God defeats wickedness is man's re-creation. So integrally are both related that Calvin calls this redemptive side also judgment. Judgment may refer particularly to God's vindication of his order as he administers justice and punishment to the wicked, but more broadly it includes the vindication of his order as he restores us to the life from which we fell. 'The word judgment cannot be understood simply to mean the punishment which is inflicted on unbelievers and on those who despise God, for it is made to include the grace of illumination.' There will be a blessed restoration of the world' to 'the order which was at the beginning, before man's apostasy produced the unhappy and melancholy change under which we groan,' before 'the ἀναστάσεως which has sprung from the sin of man.'

'The word judge denotes government, a very important part of which is that Christ imparts to us the gifts which he received from the Father, that he may live in us, and that we may live in him.'

We here recall what the order on earth ought to be, the divine order established by God in creation. Not 'calling upon our God' or 'acknowledging that he is the fountain of all blessing' 'is to pervert all order.' If men do not 'recognize God as their father,' 'the whole order of nature is inverted.' Life in the legitimate order was to be for man a dynamic existence grounded in God's continual outpouring of his own graciousness; and man in integrity and rectitude with a complementary response was to 'admire
God and to honor him with proper gratitude.' But in ingratitude — unfaithful, disobedient, incredulous of the order set by God, and self-willed in his revolt from it — man inverted the order and departed from it into deformity and chaos. 'This truly is ᾳταξία: not considering for what purpose we were made and regulating our life with a view to that end, for in this is life precisely ordered, when we live according to the prescription of God. Apart from this order there is nothing but confusion in human life.'

If then the restoration of order requires judgment toward the wicked, it also requires the re-creation of the wicked. And this is what God has done. There is a 'renewal' which was made when God restored those things which had fallen and were dissipated by the sin of Adam.'" The office of Christ was to gather all those things which were previously scattered. For Adam by his fall had perverted and corrupted all order so that there was nothing but confusion in heaven and earth until everything was repaired by Jesus Christ. Now then the restoration that has been made by our Lord Jesus Christ may well be referred to as a second creation, as though God in his coming had set the world which had been crazed into its former state.' God cannot acknowledge us for his children until his image is repaired in us. This is what is done by this new creation. For as Adam ruined us all and plunged us into the abyss of death, so we are created anew by God in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.'" 'Such an ἀνακαθαρσία (gathering together) as might bring us back to regular order has been made in Christ.'

A problem here rises for Calvin. Will this order where all recognize God as their father and acknowledge him as the fountain of all blessing ever be fully restored? No, for some are not saved and remain disobedient.

1. Instruction in Faith, 1538, sec. 3
2. Com. on II Thes. 3.6, CR 52.211. Com. on I John 2.16, CR 55.319
3. Ser. on Eph. 3.9-12, CR 51.466. Ser. on Eph. 1.7-10, CR 51.294f
4. Ser. on Eph. 4.23-26, CR 51.621. on Eph. 2.8-10, CR 51.380f
5. Com. on Eph. 1.10, CR 51.151
Do we then say that God will not or is unable to complete his restoration of order? Or must we say that God has never really intended to restore the order where all live in his grace, and that he does not desire that all become obedient to him? Calvin's solution here is born out of his twofold distinction between the will of God and his secret counsel. As we must speak of 'the will of God in two sorts,' the will revealed in his Word where he wills the salvation of all, and the incomprehensible will hidden in himself where he chooses some and rejects others, so 'the Scripture speaks of God's kingdom in two respects.' There is one way, following from the will of God revealed in his Word, in which restoration requires the willing obedience of all. This in point of fact happens only in the church. 'The peculiar government of God is that of his church only, where he by his Word and Spirit bends the hearts of men to obedience so that they follow him voluntarily and willingly.' As we pray and labor for the salvation of all, so we pray for the coming of God's kingdom and order in this way.

But there is another way, following from the secret counsel of God, in which a restoration of order need not involve the willing obedience of all, for it is not the counsel of God that things be this way. Indeed it is scarcely possible to speak of any restoration here, for there has never been any confusion. 'God has indeed ever governed the world by his secret providence, as he still does govern it.' There is to be, however, a final outworking of what God has in himself decreed, and this involves the destruction of the wicked. As we hold that the apparent double will in God reflects in an incomprehensible way a single will at the heart of God, so the kingdom of God ordered as we see it in two respects reflects a single order in God. But the limitations of our human capability will permit us to resolve the problem no further.

1. Ser. on I Tim. 2:3-5, CR 53.151ff, etc.
2. Com. on Micah 4:3, CR 43.344f
3. ibid.
2. Judgment as condemnation (damnatio)

From this point we may understand judgment as condemnation. If judgment in its widest sense is God's reaffirmation of proper order on earth, if God declares that he will have all men gathered together and united to him, this can only be an unqualified no toward the life which man has chosen, and as such condemnation. Here in this more restricted sense Calvin equates judgment with condemnation. (damnatio)¹ There is a real sense in which condemnation as the reciprocal event of redemption is a necessary part of judgment. But there is no tension here between God's judgment and his mercy because this judgment which condemns man springs from God's act of grace in restoring order. That God should condemn is proper for salvation, but, as we see now and will see more thoroughly in the discussion of vengeance, that God should have to execute and implement this judgment, at least in any final or irrevocable way, is neither his intention nor his will.

The judgment of God, Calvin often reminds us, is not to be severed from his love. The fact that we are not what God wants us to be necessitates his displeasure in what we are, that is, he can only be angry with those he loves. 'God does not indeed hate in us his own workmanship, that is, that he has made us men, but he hates our uncleanness, which has extinguished the light of his image.'² He has to condemn us because we are different from what he made us. 'How then should he not love mankind - those whom he has formed in his image and who approach nearest of all creatures to him and to his nature? Then inasmuch as God has created us, he receives us and avows us for his own. But insomuch as we are become corrupted and our nature is sinful, this is the cause of the hate of God, and the reason why we are enemies with him so that there is between him and us as it were a mortal combat.' But 'even when he hated us, he loved us. He hated us, as being different from what he had made us, but as our iniquity had not entirely

¹ Com. on John 3.17, CR 47.66; on 12.31, CR 47.293; on 12.47, CR 47.303
² Com. on Rom. 3.25, CR 49.62
destroyed his work in us, he could at the same time hate what we had done, and love that which he had made.' He loves us as his creatures whom he has made for grace, and because he loves us he is angry in judgment at our disorder.

Passing a judgment of condemnation in this positive sense is only the obverse of salvation. If God comes as Savior, this is judgment on the human situation. The offer of grace, as we have seen in the chapter on the source of our knowledge of sin, carries with it the condemnation of all men. 'It is said (in John 16.8) that the Spirit shall judge the world. In that place our Lord is discoursing upon the gospel, to show to what end it is to be reached. I will, he says, send forth my doctrine. And to what end? To judge the world. But the gospel is a message of grace and of fatherly loving kindness. God in it gives us his heart, and declares to us that he asks nothing but to bring us to salvation. Why then does he speak of condemnation? Because it is impossible for him to bring us to salvation unless we are first condemned.' In this way salvation on its shadow side is judgment. To preach the gospel is to pass judgment on the world. 'Christ says that the world hates him because he testifies of it that its works are evil. He means that it is not possible for the gospel rightly to be preached but that the whole world is summoned to the judgment seat of God, that flesh and blood may be so crushed and reduced to nothing.' 'If we agree with the judgment of Christ it will be necessary to acknowledge that the whole nature of man is sinful and wicked so that nothing right, or sincere, or good can come from it.'

Equally as significant as the fact that God wills the salvation of all is the fact that this salvation is no compromise affair, but an unqualified return to the rectitude for which men were created. 'The way must be

1. Ser. on Gal. 1.3-5, CR 50.290ff. Ser. on Eph. 1.7-10, CR 51.283; on 2.5-6, CR 51.364; Ser. on Ps. 92.9, CR 31.14; Ser. on Job 10.7-15, CR 33.400ff
2. Ser. on Deut. 31.22-30, CR 28.651
3. Com. on John 7.7, CR 47.166
noticed in which God wishes all men to be saved, namely when they turn themselves from their ways. God thus does not so wish all men to be saved as to renounce the difference between good and evil; but repentance, as we have said, must precede pardon. How then does God wish all men to be saved? By the Spirit's condemning the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. God's judgment means that his salvation is one where the difference between good and evil, between grace and sin, has in no way been renounced.

But if condemnation is necessary, it is necessary precisely because God does not wish that man abide in his condemnation. God condemns the world to save it. 'What the Scripture contains on repentance and the judgment of God ought wholly to be applied for this purpose: to induce us to return into favor with him.' God executes the office of a judge toward us, and although he condemns us as often as he punishes us, yet this is not a condemnation to the death, but he summons us before him to draw up a new process. This is a point which we ought to note well. When we feel any evil or grief, let us understand that we have offended God, but let us think at the same time that God still does not wish to execute a final sentence upon us, when he recalls us to him. Then to what end is it? Is it to condemn us without mercy? No, but he gives us this grace that we might be our own judges. He summons us to the end that each one should pass sentence on himself and of his own will, and thereupon ask forgiveness of God, that we should have refuge in his mercy.

Whenever God condemns us by his Word, let us know that he will be propitious to us, if touched with true repentance we flee to his mercy; for to effect this is the design of all his reproofs and threatenings. It may thus be seen how Calvin has brought the judgment of God under the love of God, for God judges as he presses toward the restoration of order and as he provides for the re-creation of man.

1. Com. on Ezek. 18.23, CR 40.445f
2. Com. on Jonah 3.10, CR 43.259
3. Ser. on Deut. 28.15-24, CR 28.391
4. Com. on Zeph. 2.1f, CR 44.29
3. Judgment and the righteousness (or justice) (iustitia) of God

It is important for us now to see how the righteousness of God is made part of this grace of God in the light of which we interpret sin. Working from his governing viewpoint of God's restoration of his primal order of grace, Calvin does not have the problems of a conflict between righteousness and grace in which later theologians found themselves precisely because God is righteous as he makes right - or rectifies, to use Calvin's word - his original order, that is, he is righteous as he destroys sin and as he imparts his grace. The righteousness of God has then two sides, as his restoration of order has two sides, God's resistance of those who reject his grace and his restoration of those who have fallen from grace. 'God then declares his righteousness in that he has reserved a judgment in which all things will be brought again to order and proper condition.' Man's punishment is the outworking of the justice of God. Calvin's Latin and French both contain but one word, iustitia or justice, where the English alternates between righteousness and justice. But if the order in the beginning was one where God was gracious to man, then God is also and nonetheless righteous as he imparts his grace.

The righteousness of God does demand a return to order, and from this condemnation on man and sin; but it does demand a return to an order of grace, and from this it is by his righteousness that God redeems and is gracious. 'The righteousness of God does not mean that by which he renders to every man his own, but the faithfulness which he observes toward his own people, when he cherishes, defends, and delivers them. From this there is an inestimable consolation which arises from learning that our salvation is so inseparably linked with the righteousness of God as to have the same stability which this does.' 'The Psalmist (in Ps. 71) connects this salvation with righteousness as the effect to the cause; for his confident
persuasion of obtaining salvation proceeds solely from reflecting that God is righteous (or just) and that he cannot deny himself.  

Calvin is then able on the one side, as theology before him and since him, to formulate a concept of God as punishing sin because he is righteous. He takes this vital concept and employs it to the fullest. If he had been asked to give a brief answer to the question, Why must sin be punished? the answer certainly would have been, Because God is the fountain of all righteousness. "God is in himself the fountain of all righteousness and he must necessarily hate all iniquity, unless we could suppose that he should deny himself."  

"God must hate us. We know that he is the fountain of all righteousness and that there is no agreement between him and iniquity." We hold it as a settled principle that the nature of God is righteous and that it is no more possible for him to turn aside from right and equity than it is for him to say that he will renounce his being and no longer be God."  

"It is God's work to judge the world, that is, to rectify it by his own righteousness. 'Since then he is by nature judge, it must be that he is just, for he cannot deny himself."

But it is also God's righteousness by which he saves and redeems us, by which he re-creates us to life in grace. If Reformed theology followed Calvin to think of God as in his righteousness punishing sin, it has strangely lost Calvin's balancing concept, which follows from the other side of God's rectifying his order: that God is righteous as he restores man to grace.

"It is because the righteousness of the Lord approaches to us that we on our part ought to draw near to him. The Lord calls himself righteous and declares that this is his righteousness, not because he keeps it shut up in himself, but because he pours it out on men." 'By God's righteousness is to be understood ...his grace toward the faithful.' "He designs to give an evidence of his  

1. Com. on Ps. 71.15, CR 31.558. Com. on Ps. 91.7, CR 32.4  
2. Com. on Ps. 97.10, CR 32.16. Com. on Ps. 1.5, CR 31.41  
3. Ser. on Job 33.18-25, CR 35.39. Com. on Jer. 9.23, CR 33.52f  
4. Ser. on Job 3.1-6, CR 33.372. III.12.1f, CR 2.553f  
5. Com. on Rom. 3.6, CR 49.50
righteousness in delivering us.' 'God has promised that our salvation will be the object of his care: from this he appears righteous whenever he delivers us from our troubles.' 'In a word, the righteousness and faithfulness of God mean the same thing.'

We here recall that God in his righteousness and judgment restores the order which was in the beginning. This was an order of pure grace. This means here that God is now once again no less righteous than before if his grace and righteousness superabound to pour forth righteousness and rectitude upon men so to restore him to the original life in grace. It is true that man has sinned and rejected God's grace. He in no way deserves God's righteousness, but neither would Adam in his integrity have deserved it. (We see this more thoroughly in the chapter on responsibility and the life in grace.) It is true that God's righteousness must press forward upon iniquity and annihilate it. God must and does punish man precisely because he is the fountain of all justice. But all this does not remove the fact that God is righteous as he defends the order he set, constantly protecting those creatures whom he created to lean upon him and trust in him for all good things, those with whom he covenants in Abraham and to whom he extends his blessings in Christ.

Calvin is very clear about this, particularly in the Old Testament commentaries where the context gives him ample place to develop his thought. It is a constantly recurring theme in the commentaries on the Psalms and prophets. 'By the righteousness of God, which he (the Psalmist) engages to celebrate, we are to understand his goodness, for this ascription as usually applied to God in the Scriptures does not so much denote the strictness with which he exacts vengeance as his faithfulness in fulfilling the promises and extending help to all who seek him in the hour of need.'

1. Com. on Micah 7.9, CR 43.415f. Com. on Ps. 5.8f, CR 31.69; on Ps. 7.17, CR 31.87; on Ps. 143.2, CR 32.400; Com. on Micah 6.5, CR 43.390
2. Com. on Ps. 51.14, CR 31.521
spreading the hand of his protection over them.¹ God is 'gracious because he is so ready to render assistance. From this source springs that righteousness which he displays for the protection of his people.'² From the communication of this righteousness we obtain salvation and life, and therefore wherever the righteousness of God is, it must be followed by praises and thanksgiving.³

It is then quite as proper to say that it is the righteousness of God which saves us, as it is to say that we are saved by grace. 'The righteousness of God, which is the source of salvation, does not consist in his recompensing men according to their works, but is the illustration of his mercy, grace, and faithfulness.' Salvation is...properly speaking the effect of righteousness.⁴ 'There is as it were an inseparable knot between God's righteousness and our salvation.'⁵ Calvin has perhaps seen this more clearly in his exegesis - and this may explain why it has been overlooked by later scholars - but the concept is present in the Institutes. We rejoice when we think of his righteousness. We preserve 'serene tranquility with regard to the divine judgment. We see how frequently and solicitously the Scripture exhorts us to render ascriptions of praise to God alone when it treats of righteousness. And indeed the Apostle (Paul) assures us that the design of the Lord in conferring righteousness upon us in Christ is to manifest his own righteousness. The nature of that manifestation he immediately subjoins: it is that he might be righteous (or just) and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus. (Rom. 3.26) The righteousness of God, we see, is not sufficiently illustrious unless he alone is esteemed righteous and communicates the grace of righteousness to the unworthy.'

'He has bestowed his grace on us in order to declare his righteousness.'⁶

1. Com. on Ps. 103.17, CR 32.82. Com. on Is. 51.5, CR 37.229
2. Com. on Ps. 116.5, CR 32.193f
3. Com. on Is. 24.16, CR 36.406
4. Com. on Ps. 98.1, CR 32.48
5. Ser. on Job 23.13-17, CR 34.362
6. III.13.1f. Inst. of 1539 (et seqg.) ch. VI, pag. 195, CR 1.752
This means that we are not to place the mercy of God over against his righteousness of judgment so that God does by his mercy what he could not by justice. There is a sense in which this is true, thinking of but the punitive side of righteousness. 'His goodness surmounts the rigor of his judgment, which is due us for our sins.'¹ 'He could destroy all the human race by his righteousness, but he has had pity on us.'² 'The judgment of condemnation is suspended over the whole world and nothing but mercy can bring relief.' 'Mercy itself in a manner triumphs, and alone reigns when the severity of judgment gives way.' 'The wrath of God in a manner yields to his mercy so that being relieved by the latter, they (the faithful) are not overwhelmed by the former.'³

But as it is by his righteousness that he restores order and redeems us so more broadly there is perfect harmony between his mercy and his righteousness. 'The righteousness of God is not to be taken according to what is commonly understood by it, and they speak incorrectly who represent God's righteousness as in opposition to his mercy. From this comes the common proverb, I appeal from justice (righteousness) to mercy. But the Scripture speaks otherwise, for righteousness is to be taken for that faithful protection of God by which he defends and preserves his own people.' 'When God declares that he does righteousness, he supplies us with a reason for confidence, for he thus promises to be the guardian of our salvation. Because, as I have said, his righteousness is not to render to everyone his just reward, but is to be extended further, and is to be taken for his faithfulness. As then God never forsakes his own people, but aids them in due time and restrains the wicked, he is on this account called righteous.'⁴ So Calvin denies that 'it is opposed to God's justice to pardon sinners when they repent.'⁵

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¹ Ser. on Job 10.18-22, CR 33.514
² Ser. on Deut. 4.36-38, CR 26.215
³ Com. on James 2.13, CR 55.402f
⁴ Com. on Jer. 9.23, CR 36.52f
⁵ Com. on Deut. 32.35, CR 25.373
4. Suspended judgment (judicium suspensum)

To insure that time be given for redemptive restoration, to make it possible for judgment to be properly redemptive, God suspends his judgment. God 'is long patient and does not quickly take vengeance. Though men are worthy to perish yet the Lord suspends his judgments.' (judicia suspendo)¹ The Lord tolerates (tolero) and strives with (discepto cum, certo cum) man.² This is the patience of God.³ Here is perhaps the place in which God's judgment and mercy are set against one another. Judgment is passed but not yet executed, and the reason for the delay is that God desires to give man 'time to repent' or 'space for repentance.'⁴ If God were to let fall his hand in judgment, as the order to which he has bound himself and to which he now moves in restoration would seem to necessitate that he do, if God were to withdraw the existence that he gave on condition of man's fidelity, then man would be immediately and completely annihilated because man has been unfaithful and ungrateful. But God does not for a time fully resist or prosecute, with the result that God continues to sustain in existence a being whom he has declared is not by all proper standards of judgment fit to remain in existence. God may punish, but only partly and in token of what is to come. There takes place 'the temporary suspension of vengeance.'⁵

Dealing with sinners God 'mitigates their punishment.' 'For if he were to deal strictly with their folly, they would fall down in complete confusion. He therefore gives space for repentance...that they may willingly acknowledge their faults.' For instance, before the flood for many years God 'suspended the punishment' in hope of repentance, but finally the world's iniquity reached a point where God was 'wearied out' - the point where the

¹. Com. on Amos 1.5f, CR 43.8; Com. on Amos 7.1f, CR 43.118f
². Com. on Hos. 12.10, CR 42.468; on II Pet. 2.9, CR 55.464; on Gen. 6.3, CR 23.118
³. Com. on Ezek. 12.21, CR 40.268
⁴. Com. on II Pet. 3.9, CR 55.475; Ser. on Deut. 4.27-31, CR 26.189
⁵. Com. on Hos. 11.8f, CR 42.446
world was beyond all hope of cure. 'As long as the Lord suspends punishment, he in a certain sense strives with men, especially if either by threats or by examples of gentle chastisement, he invites them to repentance.' But now as if wearied out, he declares that he has no mind to contend any longer. For after God by inviting the unbelievers to repentance had long striven with them, the deluge put an end to all controversy. ¹ In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah God had for a long time suspended punishment. ² This idea is again contained in Calvin's comment on the Noachian covenant. God says, 'I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.' Calvin explains that God seems to contradict (pugno) himself by declaring that the world ought to be destroyed and yet willing that there should be some society of men to inhabit the earth. He so moderates his judgment to hold nature in its course and so give space for repentance. ³

God has committed himself as it were to a twofold policy. He gives his word of judgment, yet at the same time he gives his promise of maintaining the external world, including man and his society, and in this to a certain extent seems to contradict himself. In maintaining his initial purpose of a gracious order of creation God is able to strive with man, to permeate the barrier of sin in a dual relation whereby is doubly reflected his initial purpose: on the one hand in a word of judgment, foreshadowed by partial punishment in that man no longer lives in a paradise, and on the other in a word of hope, for the fact that punishment is not yet total indicates that his grace intends to re-establish man within the original order. With a view toward drawing the sinner to return, God suspends his judgment to give space for repentance by maintaining man in his existence, by breaking through with natural blessings in part, by leaving a print of order even within the wreckage of sin.

¹. Com. on Gen. 6.3, CR 23.113
². Com. on Gen. 18.21, CR 23.260; Com. on Gen. 15.13, CR 23.192f
³. Com. on Gen. 8.21, CR 23.140
B. The vengeance (vindicta) of God

Calvin can now interpret God’s vengeance as the negative and accidental side of God’s re-ordering the world, although we shall have to notice that again predestination biases his thought. Apart from revenge or reparation, God executes judgment to vindicate his order. He presses upon the wicked; the sinner is given space to repent, but if he does not he will be slain in the very movement of God which repudiates chaos and deformity. Vengeance will be worked. Keeping in mind God’s larger purpose, however, we see that while the sinner will from his side and in fact be judged retributively, yet the action of God which judges him is redemptive. Thus judgment may in point of fact and issue be retributive, but from the side of God it rises out of God’s maintaining all rectitude.

1. Vengeance as adverse to the will of God

It is useful in interpreting Calvin to follow his use of the same series of concepts which he uses with regard to sin and the providence of God. As it is God’s will that all be saved, so we assert that it is not God’s will to execute vengeance. Jeremiah, speaking of 'God’s own nature,' says, 'that he does not cherish vengeance.' (vindicta) 'Nothing is more contrary to the nature of God.' God appears as unwilling to proceed to extreme rigor in punishing his people. Alas! I will now avenge myself on my enemies, he says by Isaiah. 'Alas! I must take vengeance on my adversaries. I would, however, willingly spare them were it possible. God is not indeed subject to grief or repentance, but his ineffable goodness cannot be otherwise expressed to us but by such mode of speaking.' 'It is like the conduct of an offended father who intends to punish his son, and yet desires to moderate his displeasure and to blend some indulgence with rigor.' We know that nothing is more pleasing to God than to treat us kindly, but being perverse we do not permit him to follow the inclination of his nature. He is there-

1. Com. on Jer. 3.5, CR 37.550f
2. Com. on Jer. 6.8, CR 37.648f
fore constrained to put on as if it were a new character.

'He takes no pleasure in tormenting his poor creatures. We know it is his nature to make us feel his goodness. He sees, however, that we are not able to receive it, and so there is good reason that he change and in a manner of speaking transform himself, in order to conform himself to that which he sees suitable for us.' 2 'So you see that the true nature of God is such that he seeks nothing but to draw men to him by all manner of gentleness and to use his goodness toward them. When he punishes them, it is as you would say, against his nature. Not that it is not proper for God to punish as well as to show mercy, but that he wishes to show us that his goodness is far the greater, and, to be short, that he is not rigorous, but that his only desire is to spread out his love to us if we would permit him.' 3 When Calvin is free from the bias imposed by systematic treatment, as he is throughout the sermons and commentaries, he elaborates at length on God's extreme reluctance to punish, literally filling pages on end with preaching and teaching such as this. Only when the question of predestination arises does he modify this thought.

Nor is this simply the case with God's covenant people. God strives with men at the time of the flood; he expostulates with the Amorites for four hundred years; and in the history of Sodom and Gomorrah, a 'chief and lively image of vengeance' as significant here as the Exodus is for his love, God executes punishment only after exhausting all efforts to bring man to repentance. 'God waits patiently as he has done at all times, and does not wish to execute his rigor until he has shown that the wicked are completely incorrigible.' 4 That God does not wish to proceed to vengeance is clear in Calvin's comment on Lamentations 3.33: 'He does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men.' Calvin admits 'that this doctrine may be taken

1. Com. on Hos. 6.5, CR 42.327; Ser. on Deut. 32.20-22, CR 29.15f
2. Ser. on Job 33.18-25, CR 35.81f; Ser. on Job 5.17-18, CR 33.267f
3. Ser. on Deut. 5.6-10, CR 26.265
4. Com. on Gen. 6.3, CR 23.112f; Ser. on Deut. 7.1-4, CR 26.493f
5. Com. on II Pet. 2.1-4, CR 45.463; on Ps. 11.6, CR 31.124f; on Jude 7, CR 53.492; on Ezech. 16.50, CR 40.382f; on Gen. 13.21, CR 23.260f
6. Ser. on Deut. 7.1-4, CR 26.493f
generally. 'He does not delight in the miseries of men, for if a father desires to benefit his own children, and deals kindly with them, what ought we to think of our heavenly Father?' 'As then parents are not willingly angry with their children and do not handle them roughly, there is no doubt but that God never punishes men except when he is constrained.' 'God derives no pleasure from the miseries of men, as profane men say, who utter such blasphemies as these: that we are like balls with which God plays, and that we are exposed to many evils because God wishes to have as it were a pleasant and delectable spectacle in looking on the innumerable afflictions, and at length on the death of men.

'That such thoughts might not tempt us to unbelief, the prophet here puts a check on us, and declares that God does not afflict from his heart, that is, willingly, as though he delighted in the evils of men. It is like this: A judge, when he ascends his throne and condemns the guilty to death, does not do this from his heart, because he wishes all to be innocent and thus to have a reason for acquitting them. Yet he willingly condemns the guilty, because this is his duty. So also when God adopts severity toward men, he indeed does so willingly, because he is judge of the world, but he does not do so from the heart, because he wishes all to be innocent. Far away from him is all fierceness and cruelty, and as he regards men with paternal love, so also he would have them to be saved, if they did not as it were by force drive him to rigor.' 'Because of this he employs a particle expressive of grief (in Is. 1.24) and exclaims, Alas, as a father who wishes his son to be innocent and yet is compelled to be severe with him.'

In the vengeance of God we do not understand that God's inner character is changed. He does not will the death of a sinner. He weeps over those who are on the way to eternal punishment. This means that we must remove from the vengeance of God any notion of vindictive anger. There is no wrath in God;

1. Com. on Lam. 3.33, CR 39.584f
2. Com. on Ezek. 18.23, CR 40.445f; Com. on Matt. 23.27, CR 45.691f
rather the emotional aspect arises as we find that we cannot go our own way in sin with no resistance from him, that sin is not allowed to go unpunished. 'The word wrath (ira) in the custom of Scripture, speaking anthropopathically is put for the vengeance of God, because God in punishing has according to our opinion the appearance of one in wrath. It signifies therefore no such emotion on God, but has a reference to the perception and feeling of the sinner who is punished.'

We have based what we have said so far on God's will as it is revealed to us in his Word. From this it is Calvin's basic position that it is God's nature to love, that 'he takes no pleasure in tormenting his poor creatures,' 'that he does not cherish vengeance,' and that 'nothing is more contrary to the nature of God.' But Calvin thinks as well of a secret counsel of God which may seem in contradiction with his will revealed in his Word. We must here recognize that the strength of Calvin's concept of predestination, which from the beginning, radically and on an eternal and irrevocable basis, divides all men into two groups, elect and reprobate, has colored the concept of judgment with the result that on some occasions Calvin has difficulty in thinking of judgment as primarily a positive call to repentance, and as condemnation executed on the sinner only against the will of God. Here under the pressure of a rather rigid and static division of men into God's chosen children and strangers, Calvin also hardens his concept of God's preliminary tokens of vengeance, or of his suspension of punishment, and is not able to say that God would rather the strangers also repent. He but 'executes the judgment which has been already as it were decreed.' And if he for a time suspends judgment, it is only that he might double his wrath as man's sins mount higher.

Thinking with this rigidity, Calvin writes that by God's chastisements, 'the children of this world while they sleep on quietly and securely in their

1. Com. on Rom. 1.18, CR 49.23; on Hab. 3.2, CR 43.367f; on Is. 47.6, CR 135f
2. Ser. on Job 33.18-25, CR 35.83f, supra
3. Com. on Jer. 3.5, CR 37.55of, supra
4. Com. on Hos. 11.8f, CR 42.44f
delights are fattened up like hogs for the day of slaughter." 'This privilege that by punishments they are called back from destruction belongs to believers exclusively.'¹ 'When the reprobate are lashed by the scourges of God in this world, they begin already to suffer in some measure his judgment, and though they will not escape with impunity for having disregarded such indications of the divine wrath, yet they are not punished that they may be brought back to a better disposition, but only that by their great misery God may be experienced a judge and avenger. On the other hand sons are harassed with pricks not that they may pay God the penalty of their crimes, but that they may advance to recovery of their senses.'² 'We must observe the difference that exists between the children of God and the reprobate, for the Lord chastises both, but in different ways - the children of God that they may be purified and preserved, and the reprobate that they may be cast down headlong and destroyed.'³ 'When he takes vengeance on the reprobate, he gives loose reins to his anger, because he has no other object in view than to destroy them, for they are vessels of wrath appointed to destruction.'⁴ Rigidly and irrevocably we observe this distinction: The reprobate are punished 'for vengeance,' (ad vindictam) but the elect are punished 'for correction.' (ad emendationem)⁵ Here Calvin's thought is so rigid as to suggest that God is not interested in calling back to repentance all those upon whom he passes judgment and foreshadows fulfilment of this with punishments on earth.

These statements, however, should be taken in the larger context of his thought, and Calvin is not unaware that even here the distinction is summary and needs closer statement. He is conscious of both the more flexible and the more rigid points of view as he discusses the matter in the light of Job 5.17: 'Happy is the man whom God reproves.' This is true because when God punishes his children he summons them to repentance. 'He wishes to

1. Com. on I Cor. 11.31ff, CR 49.495. on Hos. 11.8ff, CR 42.445ff
2. II.4.33, CR 2.404f. Com. on Zech. 13.9, CR 44.357; on Mal. 12ff, CR 44.399f
3. Com. on Is. 30.28, CR 36.528. Com. on Jer. 10.24, CR 38.92
4. Com. on Is. 27.7, CR 36.453
bring us back as often as he afflicts us.' But is this generally true, for the reprobate are scourged as well? 'There yet remains one difficulty, for we see at the same time that afflictions are common to all. God chastises those to whom he wishes to show mercy, but we see also that he chastises the reprobate, and yet this turns to their greater condemnation.' Are we to say that the chastisement of the reprobate who is later fully to be afflicted with vengeance is in no way a call to repentance? Calvin is aware that this is not quite right.

Certainly these chastisements did not profit the reprobate but turned to their condemnation. But the fact that a turning is involved does mean if we do not for the moment raise the question of God's touching some with his Spirit and giving them the grace to return - that there is a way in which we can say that these chastisements were an invitation to repentance. 'Let us note how God works toward the reprobate. It is true that he exhorts all men to repentance when he chastises them.' 'It is just as if he should wake them up and say, Know your faults, and continue no longer in them. Return to me, and I am ready to show you mercy.' So Calvin has to confess, even in a context where the distinction between elect and reprobate has been rigidly drawn, that it still ought to be said that God calls even the reprobate to repentance with his scourges. 'God indeed invites us and even urges us by external means to repent, for what is the design of punishment but to lead us to repentance?' 'yet God indeed calls all men by punishment to repentance, so that even the reprobate are rendered inexcusable when they harden their hearts, and profit not under the rod. But punishment is peculiarly useful to the faithful, for God not only scourges them but also by his Spirit bends their minds to docility.' As the Word is always a blessing, so judgment is always a blessing, but it can turn to condemnation.

1. Ser. on Job 5.17-18, CR 33.295ff
2. Com. on Jer. 31.18, CR 38.670
2. Vengeance as accidental to God's purpose

We have seen how Calvin thinks of God's Word of salvation as turning through man's resistance and by accident to condemnation. Here in the matter of God's vengeance, Calvin returns to this concept. God's judgment only through accident is condemnation. There is a way in which this is not true, thinking broadly of judgment as part of God's restoration of order. But thinking specifically of judgment as damnation, then vengeance is accidental to God. If Christ was set for the ruin of many in Israel, this is not a proper end of his work, rather it happens when unbelievers turn the judgment of God, set to turn them to their salvation, set for the resurrection of many in Israel, into their own ruin. 'Let it also be taken into account that the former is accidental, while the latter is properly his office.'

To execute vengeance is accidental. Christ says, 'I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.' The word judge is to be taken for condemn, and this is obvious from its opposite, save. The latter ought to be understood as a reference to the proper and genuine office of Christ. For that unbelievers should be more severely condemned by reason of the gospel is accidental and not of its nature.'

'It was not in vain that God sent his own Son to us. He came not to destroy and therefore it follows that it is the proper office of the Son of God that all who believe may obtain salvation by him.' When he declares that he did not come to condemn the world, he thus points out the proper design of his coming. 'God is unwilling that we should be overwhelmed with everlasting destruction, because he has appointed his Son to be the salvation of the world. In other passages, when Christ says that he is come to judgment, when he is called a stone of offense, when he is said to be set for the destruction of many, this is accidental or adventitious, so to speak, for they who reject the grace offered in him deserve to find him

2. Com. on John 12.47, CR 47.303. Com. on Matt. 16.19, CR 45.475
the judge and avenger of contempt so unworthy and base.\(^1\) 'Since the gospel invites all to partake of salvation without any difference, it is rightly called the doctrine of salvation, for Christ is there offered, whose peculiar office is to save those who are lost, but those who refuse to be saved by him shall find him a judge.'\(^2\) 'We will not be overwhelmed if we take him for our father. But if we will not be children to him and if we remain incorrigible, he will lay aside the person of a father and show himself to be our judge.'\(^3\) 'Although therefore God's Word by itself is naturally greatly to be desired, yet when God answers as a judge and takes away all hope of pardon and pity then no taste of his favor can be perceived.' But if it so 'only ends in destruction, this is accidental.'\(^4\)

In a very real way the whole concept of the judging work of Christ, together with the last judgment of God in Christ, must be held as accidental and not properly within the divine purpose. A passage in the *Commentary on Joel* makes this clear. The wrath of God is brought with the coming of Christ. In part this has already come, but finally it awaits the second coming. 'The judge will come at last from heaven, not only to clothe the sun and moon in darkness but to turn life into death.' Men 'must all at last stand before the tribunal of the celestial Judge; for the day of Jehovah, great and terrible, will come.' But we have ever to note that God's proper work is salvation. In the coming of the kingdom of Christ 'an access' is offered to both Jew and Gentile, 'the doctrine of salvation is common to all,' as we learn from the Pauline witness to Joel's testimony. 'Now if anyone asks, Why by the coming of Christ was God's wrath more stirred up against men? - for this may seem to be without reason, to this I answer that it was as it were accidental. For if Christ had been received as he ought to have been, if all embraced him with due reverence, he would certainly have been the giver not only of spiritual grace but also of

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1. *Com. on John* 3.17, CR 47.66
2. *Com. on Rom.* 1.16, CR 49.20, *Ser. on Deut.* 11.26-32, CR 27.139f
3. *Ser. on Deut.* 4.23-26, CR 26.10f
4. *Com. on Ezek.* 14.4, CR 40.90f
earthly happiness. The felicity of all then would have in every respect been made complete by the coming of Christ, had not their wickedness and ingratitude kindled up anew the wrath of God; and we see what a flood of evils burst forth immediately after the preaching of the gospel. In the last day, 'the world will be full of darkness after the appearance of Christ, who is the sun of righteousness, and who has shone upon us with his salvation, but it will be as if it were through accident (per accidens) that God will exhibit himself with so much severity to the world when it is the acceptable time, when it is the day of salvation and good will.' So 'these two things are joined together: that God will be the judge of the world, who will not spare the wickedness of men, but will execute dreadful vengeance, and yet that salvation will be given to all who call on the name of the Lord.'

3. Vengeance as provoked by sin

Calvin says this again, in the language of constraint and provocation, as he says that God is provoked to vengeance. He is constrained or compelled. This is an emphasis in Calvin's thought parallel to that of sin as a hindrance to the goodness of God, and developed particularly in the Old Testament commentaries. Our sins not only shut off his grace, but they provoke him to wrath. God puts off his fatherhood and assumes the character of a judge. Scripture represents God to us in various ways. Sometimes it exhibits him as burning with indignation and having a terrible aspect, and sometimes as showing nothing but gentleness and mercy. The reason for this diversity is that we are not all capable of enjoying his goodness. Thus he is constrained (cogo) to be perverse toward the perverse and holy toward the holy. 'He shows himself to us what we permit him to be, for by our rebelliousness we drive him to severity. Men are obstinate and their wickedness constrains.

1. Com. on Joel, 2:30-32, passim, CR 42.572ff
2. Com. on Ps. 86.15, CR 31.797
him in some measure to change his disposition toward them."

Calvin has an interesting comment on Deut. 28.63: 'As the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you.' 'We see that God is as it were vexed, we see that God not only deprives us of his blessing, but he is also provoked with us, and we feel in brief, only rigor from him. But what is the cause of this? It is that we shut the door to his goodness, and in a manner of speaking will not permit him to use his natural disposition.'

'For it is certain that he will take pleasure in doing us good, but also we have to note on the other side that he must take pleasure in doing us harm. Why is this? Because he is just. It is true that if we permitted God to use his own desires toward us, he would bestow infinite blessings upon us, and we should be already in this world in a living paradise.' Yet 'also it is said that God will rejoice and be glad when he has punished the wicked, when he has maintained his majesty against them.'

'But it is nonetheless true that he says by his prophet Isaiah that he does it with regret. Alas, says he, must I revenge myself on my enemies? God cries there with an alas, as if he were in sorrow and anguish for it. It is necessary, says he, that I ease myself of my enemies.' 'He shows that it is with regret that he must strike men down with many blows, and yet he cannot do otherwise.' 'We are to note that he wishes to declare that it is on account of our incorrigible malice that he must follow the way we have spoken of here, that he should take pleasure in doing harm.'

Passages like these are found continually throughout many of Calvin's commentaries, where Calvin is not influenced by the concept of predestination. The whole concept of vengeance is cast in dynamic terms. 'God does not contend with us as if he wishes to pursue our offenses to the utmost. For if we sincerely turn to him, he will immediately return to favor with us.' '

1. Com. on Is. 27.4, CR 36.50. Com. on Ps. 2.9, CR 31.48f
2. Ser. on Deut. 28.59-64, CR 28.468f. Com. on Jer. 23.34, CR 38.450f
is by nature disposed to acts of kindness, nothing but our ingratitude and enmity hinders us from receiving that goodness which he freely offers to all. But on the other hand, he adds a sharp and heavy threatening that it is in his power to take revenge, lest they should imagine that they who despise God will escape without punishment. ¹ 'And yet, in order to show that he is unwillingly as it were constrained to inflict punishment on his people, God utters his threatening with a kind of groan. For as nothing is more agreeable to his nature than to do good, so whenever he is angry with us and treats us harshly, it is certain that our wickedness has compelled him to do so, because we do not allow his goodness to take its free course. More especially he is disposed to treat his own people with gentleness, and when he sees that there is no longer any room for his forbearance, he takes measure in sorrow for inflicting punishment.' ²

In Exodus 34.6 we meet with a remarkable description of God. He is called merciful, ready to forgive, and longsuffering. 'He is said to be abundant in mercy and truth, by which I understand that his beneficence is continually exercised, and that he is always true. He is indeed no less worthy to be praised on account of his rigor than on account of his mercy; but as it is our wilful obstinacy alone which makes him severe, compelling him, as it were, to punish us, the Scriptures in representing him as by nature merciful and ready to forgive teach us that if he is at any time rigorous and severe this is as it were accidental to him. I am speaking, it is true, roughly and with impropriety, but still these ascriptions by which the nature of God is described amount to this: that God is by nature so gracious and ready to forgive that he seems to connive at our sins, he delays the infliction of punishment, and he never proceeds to execute vengeance unless compelled by our obstinate wickedness.' ³

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1. Com. on Is. 1.19, CR 56.46f. Ser. on Deut. 4.27-31, CR 26.195f; Com. on Jer. 23.36f, CR 38.452f; on Jer. 30.14, CR 38.626f
2. Com. on Is. 1.24, CR 56.52
3. Com. on Ps. 86.15, CR 31.797
Calvin must be credited with so conceiving of the justice and judgment of God as to subordinate these under the love and grace of God. God's wrath and vengeance on sin has to be interpreted within the framework of his mercy. We have attempted to see this against the background of God's restoration of order, for this is the governing motion and the larger work of God from which springs his judgment. In this way Calvin is able to make God's judgment an act of love, for here God vindicates his order of grace. Calvin's insights into the Biblical concept of the righteousness of God should be peculiarly helpful to modern theology, because he has seen that God by his righteousness makes right or rectifies his order. Thus we must develop God's righteousness not only as punishing sin but as restoring the order of grace, thus avoiding conflict between his righteousness and his grace.

It is then both tragic and ironic that Calvin is popularly conceived as portraying a just and awful God whose wrath equals if not surpasses his love, for Calvin's real position is just the opposite. Nonetheless there is in Calvin a weakness which accounts for this misconception, for although Calvin was able to relate God's wrath to his love, he was not able to combine his thought about reprobation with his notion of judgment. Predestination does at times overshadow and harden his thought about God's condemnation and vengeance. We have had to recognize that Calvin's thought about divine wrath can degenerate, and he does portray God as creating some for damnation and as consequently visiting ruin upon them, apparently with no serious interest in their salvation. But if this is Calvin's mistake, he provides his own answers as we include Calvin's full teaching about judgment where God patiently strives with man and judges him unwillingly when all hope of repentance is vain. We must also take seriously Calvin's statement that it is accidental to God to judge in vengeance. God takes
vengeance only when constrained and provoked to do so against his own nature and desires. These themes occur constantly in his sermons and commentaries and ought to be developed - as later Reformed theology has not always done - to see Calvin's larger concept of vengeance.

Calvin's concepts of God's justice and judgment are to be contrasted with the notions which characterized later Reformed theology, particularly the theology of the covenants. Here justice and judgment were not effectively brought under God's love but stood in antithesis to it. But Calvin is able to incorporate his notion of God's wrath into that of God's love because he conceives of but one order, an order of grace. Adam's righteousness and rectitude consisted in continually acknowledging God's grace. By contrast federal theology saw an order of justice or a covenant of works as the primal order followed by an order of grace superadded later. It thought of an order where Adam had to present to God some merit of his own and to live by working his own intrinsic righteousness, standing up to the justice of God. Adam failed to fulfil the conditions of life and deserved to be punished by God's righteousness. With the second covenant, theology conceived God's grace as intervening to give man what he by his own sin had lost and in the light of God's justice did not deserve. There is created a tension between God's righteousness and his grace. This tension could only be resolved in the atonement.

Calvin does not have these problems because he does not think of man's original relationship to God in this way. It is true that there is always this popular way of opposing mercy to justice and Calvin does at times incorporate it into his thought. But he is nonetheless aware that there is fundamentally the most perfect harmony. Adam was not to live by his own righteousness of works, but his life even in integrity was to be a life where God's righteousness and rectitude were continually poured out upon him. In a confident belief in God's goodness, in trust, in a glad
and willing obedience, in love of God, and in gratitude he reflected God's grace back to him; this, as we see later, was his responsibility. And Adam's sin was that he did claim something for his own and strive to be righteous apart from God.

It is certainly true that God in his righteousness could at this point have removed man's existence, for man had broken God's order and was unworthy of life. God would have been righteous had he done this, as indeed he is righteous now as he presses upon iniquity to destroy it. But it is also true that God is equally righteous as his grace superabounds to redeem man and replace him in grace. It is vital to see here that Calvin has immediately and from the very start avoided any ultimate conflict between God's righteousness and his mercy. Because God restores and rectifies his order of grace, he must be gracious to be righteous. His righteousness, says Calvin, is the source of our salvation.

It is then important to see Calvin's concept of sin in the light of such a concept of the wrath of God. As sin is man's disordering of the divine order of grace, so God's judgment on it is the restoration of this order. God says no to man's sin; this is his judgment. But he says no in such a way as to say yes with regard to his primal order of grace. He is angry with sin because it has broken his government of law and justice - as later Reformed theology has portrayed it - but for Calvin there is even more. He is angry with sin because it has cut off his grace to man. God's judgment is then the sure sign that he still cares for man and has not forsaken him. The whole concept of divine wrath and judgment as developed in contemporary theology must be enlarged to include these more basic principles of Calvin's thought.
VI. Sin, Ethics, and the Law

If, as we have insisted throughout the thesis, Calvin's understanding of sin and responsibility has to be understood in the light of divine grace, then man's moral works in nature and under the law have to be interpreted so as to be brought under this governing concept. Man's immorality is part of his dis-ordering the divine order of grace. We must here see how this virtue found among the Jews and Gentiles is set aside by the light of Christ as being wholly sinful. While in Calvin's thought we must make full room for moral works, yet there is never any question of these being righteous, simply and basically because in nature and under law these are never done by way of gratitude and in acknowledgment for grace. The qualitative distinction is clear cut. And the characteristic teaching of later Reformed theology followed Calvin to think of these virtues in ethics and under law as wholly sinful.

Yet the ultimate reason why has been obscured because the federal theology did not begin with an order of grace, as did Calvin. Conceiving of man's duty from the start in the moral terms of a covenant of works, such moral and virtuous works were precisely what man ought to have had but had failed to provide. The moral works of man in nature and under law were sinful because they were insufficient or imperfect. Jews and Gentiles were guilty because they had not really or fully kept the moral law. In Calvin's thought, however, they are wrong not only in degree but in kind. Subordinating moral works to man's principal duty of being grateful, trusting in God's grace and acknowledging it, Calvin holds that even the perfect observance of the law done in strong self will would be as sinful as ever. Not more perfect moral works, but a new kind is what is needed. If man is virtuous in order to insure his felicity, he is trusting in himself and wrong even though he is perfectly moral, because he is depending on his works. Only that virtue done in glad response to grace is real virtue. We here enter into
Calvin's concept of sin, ethics, and the law, to clarify these distinctions.

A. Sin and ethics

Calvin's understanding of the ethical and religious activity of the Gentiles is best seen in the light of his notion of order. The concept of a reversed order which Calvin has used to describe sin is radical and not suggestive of compromise. At the same time, however, Calvin can assert that there is something left. In terms of order, Calvin says that the order is not totally obliterated, but that within the world of sin some print of the right order remains. 'The order which God has established...can never be violated by the malice of men so that it is completely effaced but there will always remain some remnant (residuum) of it.' Recasting the question into the figure of light - and it is sometimes as easy to follow this aspect of his thought in terms of light as it is in terms of order - Calvin asserts that sin has totally blinded man and yet says that within the darkness of sin there are some sparks of light which remain. 'In the perverse and degenerate nature of man sparks continue to shine.' Again in terms of the image of God, Calvin asserts that the image was obliterated, and yet thinks in terms of a relic which survives. In these apparent contradictions Calvin couches his notion of the religious and ethical actions of the natural man. And by pressing him on these points we can see how moral works are related to divine grace.

1. The shadow (umbra) of virtue

We must begin by examining the way in which Calvin does recognize virtue in the natural man. It is quite possible for fallen man to enunciate an ethical standard of good and evil. 'The Gentiles...by their deeds declared themselves to have some rule of righteousness, (nonulla iustitiae regula) for there is no people so lost to humanity that they do not keep themselves within some laws. Inasmuch therefore as all peoples voluntarily and without a monitor are inclined to make laws unto themselves, it is established beyond

1. Ser. on I Tim. 2.1-2, CR 53.150; on I Tim. 2.12-14, CR 53.211, etc.
2. II.2.12, CR 2.196, Com. on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.203, etc.
question that there are naturally engrafted in the minds of men certain conceptions of justice and rectitude, which the Greeks call ἄπολύμενος. 'They are not altogether void of the knowledge of right and equity, for otherwise they could not discern between vice and virtue, the first of which they restrain by punishment, the other of which they commend and manifest their approval by honoring it with rewards. 'The Gentiles are illuminated by a natural light of justice.' 'They testify that there is engraven on their hearts a certain discretion and judgment by which they distinguish between what is right and wrong, what is honest and dishonest.'

We are not here dealing with what is really right and wrong, with what is really righteous or just, with something that is in some way not totally corrupt, but at the same time we are dealing with a real attempt of the natural man to discriminate between good and bad. Calvin includes an ability to discern right and wrong partly among the natural or non-spiritual gifts. He means that ethics overlaps into both the spiritual and the natural divisions of life. Natural here assumes the sense of non-revealed. There is a Christian ethics and then again there is a natural ethics; both in part at least pertain to the same moral sphere of the life of man. We may then speak of two ethical orders, one formulated by the natural man, the other by the light of gospel and law. The first we call, in the language of Calvin, 'the shadow (ombra, umbra) of virtue' or 'the image (imago) of virtue,' and the other real or true virtue. The first is the law of nature as man perceives it, the second is real obedience to God.

2. The divine basis of natural ethics

This natural ethical system is the work of God. Calvin can say this in such a way that superficially it might seem as if there is no fundamental distinction between ethical virtue and Christian virtue. Calvin affirms

1. Com. on Rom. 2.14f, CR 49.37f; III.14.2, CR 2.565; Inst. of 1539 (et seqq), ch. VI, pag. 198, CR 1.775; II.2.12, CR 2.195f
2. Ser. on Eph. 1.17-18, CR 51.323f
3. II.2.15, CR 2.196f; II.2.22, CR 2.203f
4. Ser. on Gal. 5.22-26, CR 51.53; Com. on I Cor. 3.20, CR 49.360, etc.
5. III.14.2, CR 2.565, etc.
that God has established even this natural and false ethical order. If a right action is taken, it is so taken in the strength of God. The 'images of virtues...are the gifts of God.' "Whatever excellences appear in unbelievers are the gifts of God." This distinction is engraved 'by the Lord' and is 'frequently confirmed by his providential dispensations.' These virtues 'are instruments used by God for the preservation of society.' We are here involved in an aspect of the way God is able to suspend the punishment of man. God bridles man to hold his selfishness back from this anarchy and ruin to which it would otherwise lead him. 'Amid this corruption of nature there is some room for divine grace, not to purify it, but internally to restrain its operation.' Here then the grace of God breaks through the obstacle of man's sin. Though it never purifies man's actions, yet it sets up a natural ethical system which orders the society of all men and preserves the race of man 'internally' or within the sphere of man's concupiscence. This is a phase of the larger work of the 'Spirit of holiness' by which 'he animates and supports us by that general power which is displayed in mankind.' 'Natural perspicacity is a gift of God.'

Further, God bases the natural ethical order on his ultimate ethical order. It is an 'image of virtue' of the real and ultimate virtue which stands approved before God. Calvin says that 'so great is the difference between the just and unjust that it is visible even in the lifeless image of it.' The divine distinction between the just and unjust shines through as it were the veil of sin, and while never purifying the area on this side of the veil, yet stamps within the natural world an ethical order woven into sinful fabric on a relative or analogical scale. Yet this reflects absolute

1. III.14.2, CR 2.565. Com. on Phil. 3.8, CR 52.47
2. III.14.3, CR 2.565
3. Ser. on 1 Tim. 2.12-14, CR 53.210f. Ser. on Deut. 23.12-17, CR 28.109f
4. II.3.3, CR 2.211
5. II.3.4, CR 2.212f
6. III.1.2, CR 2.394
7. Ser. on 1 Cor. 3.19, CR 49.359. Com. on Mark 10.21, CR 54.540
8. III.14.2, CR 2.565
distinctions of righteousness and unrighteousness, and is to that extent 'a lifeless image,' wrought out in the natural and sinful world, of that which is really right and wrong. Real virtue casts its shadow into the world, though it does not appear itself. In that we have to do with the shadow and image of real virtue, we may say that it is of God.

3. The likeness (conformité) to righteousness

The fact that God reflects absolute right and wrong in this natural ethical system, the fact that it is created as real ethics casts its shadow means - as an image resembles a reality without being composed of that reality, or a shadow outlines an illuminated object without being light at all but only darkness - that there is a type of analogical likeness between real and false ethics and yet no identity. 'There is a likeness (conformité = likeness, or analogy) between the law of God and the order of nature which is engraven in all men.'

There is a certain formal resemblance between the two, such that externally it might be a question at times of whether some real righteousness is involved. There is 'a conduct among men which has some appearance of sanctity.' There is about it an 'external resemblance of virtue.' (externa virtutis image) It is 'counterfeit righteousness.' A specific act of the natural man may look like righteousness, it images it, and in objective behavior it may at times be identical with true righteousness. 'An act performed by them is externally and apparently good.' They 'commonly deceive mankind by their affinity and similitude to virtues.'

Nor is this simply a formal thing, for heathen poets require both a clean heart and pure hands, when they speak with a sober and well regulated mind of the worship of God.'

1. Ser. on Tim. 5.4-5, CR 53.456
2. III. 14.1, CR 2.564
4. II. 7.6, CR 2.257
6. ibid. Com. on Col. 2.23, CR 52.115
7. Com. on Gen. 4.4, CR 23.85. I.3.3, CR 2.38
offered to God except the mind be right and pure. 1

Take, for instance, the paternal duties of a father over his household and relations. Christians affirm it as a Scriptural teaching and a Christian duty: 'If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for those of his own family, he has disowned the faith.' (I Tim. 5:8) But should we not have Scripture, we would still know this from the natural ethical code. 'We need not have any written laws, we need no long sermons to show us that a father ought to govern his children and that he ought to guide them into maturity in a proper fashion. God does not need, I say, to reveal himself from heaven for this. Why so? We have this engraved on us by nature. Let someone go and ask the heathen and every one can give him this teaching, it is not necessary to go to school for it.' 2 So it is with many points. The moral teachings on adultery or marriage, 3 on honesty or parental respect 4 may be very nearly the same. Frequently 'our judgment does indeed agree with the law of God in regard to mere outward actions.' 5 Laws formulated by magistrates may agree with those required by the kingdom of God. 6

But there are further likenesses. In that this natural ethics is created out of a shadow or print of God's true morality by which he would restrain society from destroying itself, and in that there is this partial identity in objective behavior, there is a duty laid upon by God to abide by its commands and to order his life in accord with it. To this shadow of virtue in the sphere of concupiscence God holds him bound. God 'is said to love the political virtues' of the Gentiles - 'justice, uprightness, moderation, prudence, fidelity, and temperance' - 'not that they are meritorious of salvation or grace, but that they have reference to an end

1. Com. on Hag. 2.11, OR 44.11. Ser. on John 1.1-5, CR 47.75ff
2. Ser. on I Tim. 5.7-12, CR 53.468. Ser. on Deut. 21.15-17, CR 27.67ff
3. Ser. on Eph. 5.28-30, CR 51.759ff; Ser. on Deut. 5.18, CR 26.338
4. Ser. on Eph. 6.1-4, CR 51.783ff; Ser. on I Tim. 5.7-12, CR 53.468
5. Com. on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.205
6. Ser. on I Tim. 2.1-2, CR 53.137ff. II.8.1, CR 2.267
of which he approves,' 'the preservation of the human race.' 1 'In following the natural order to which each one of us ought to be inclined even if we had neither Scripture nor law, besides the fact that such honesty is laudable and worthy to be esteemed among men, we ought still to be moved the more because God accepts and approves such a service.' 2

There is credit due those who fulfill these moral obligations. Though such performance 'is of no avail to justification!' 3 and in no way purifies the corruption in man, yet it is blessed of God insofar as it is morally correct and objectively parallel to true righteousness. 'We see how he confers many blessings of the present life on those who practice virtue among men. Not that this external semblance of virtue merits the least favor from him, but he is pleased to discover his great esteem of true righteousness by not permitting that which is external and hypocritical to remain without a temporal reward.' 4 Natural ethics, as approved by God though not for merit and righteousness, is yet in some respects 'laudable.' 5 'God is sometimes said to love those whom he does not approve or justify.'

'In this sense under various points of view, God loved Aristides and Fabricius, and also hated them. For insofar as he bestowed on them outward righteousness and that for the general advantage, he loved his own work in them, but as their heart was impure, the outward semblance of righteousness was of no avail for obtaining righteousness.' 6 'It is not inconsistent that the good seed, which God has implanted in some natures, is loved by him, and yet that he rejects their persons and works on account of corruption.' 7 So it was with Titus and Trajan, or Scipio and Cato. 8

Thus Calvin makes full place for the existence of natural and moral virtue. 'In all ages there have been some persons who from the mere

1. Com. on Mark 10.21, CR 45.540
2. Ser. on I Tim. 5.4-5, CR 53.456f
3. III.14.4, CR 2.566
4. III.14.2, CR 2.565
5. ibid.
6. Com. on Mark 10.21, CR 45.540
7. III.14.2f, CR 2.564f
dictates of nature have devoted their whole lives to the pursuit of virtue. And although many errors might perhaps be discovered in their conduct, yet by their pursuit of virtue they afforded a proof that there was some degree of purity in their nature. 'These examples seem to teach us that we should not consider human nature to be corrupted since from its instinctive bias some men have not only been eminent for noble actions, but have uniformly conducted themselves in a most virtuous manner through the whole course of their lives.' It might seem as if the print of order, or the spark of light, or the relic of the image of God, which remains is really qualitatively indistinguishable from the real order, light, or image; and - even if perhaps on a very limited scale - a small but qualitative portion of the true righteousness, some real virtue, does exist in man. In this case we could no longer consistently affirm that the light has been totally put out, or the order totally reversed.

4. Total depravity and natural ethics

In all that we have said so far Calvin does not clearly differ from the concept of ethical virtue which obtained in the Reformed theology which followed him. But these natural actions remain different in kind and not just in degree, and now we see the clear qualitative distinction Calvin draws in the light of his concept of sin as man's self-willed refusal to live in dependence on the grace of God. In later Reformed theology these works were set aside because they were not sufficient or perfect enough to meet the demands of the covenant of works and divine moral law, and the emphasis was thus laid on man's transgression of or want of conformity to the law of God. But Calvin sets them aside because they were done in self-love and self-trust and not in response to the grace of God. As man depends on his works, he is not faithful to the order of dependence on grace. Calvin thus deals with the question of ethical value not only at

1. II.3.3, CR 2.211
the level of divine moral law, but also and more fundamentally in the light of God's grace. But we must trace this thought through Calvin, for his concepts require closer inspection to see just how and where he says it.

Calvin says that the difference between this apparent virtue and real virtue is **internal or in the end.** These externally correct actions are done not out of real obedience as with a willing and glad servant, but in concupiscence, for reasons of self-interest and selfishness, and so totally corrupted. But it is rather important to see what he includes under selfishness here, for this is not a crass but an enlightened form of selfishness, which the natural man never thought to be wrong. Calvin cites as examples of virtues in which selfishness may lie: 'the exercise of justice, continence, friendship, temperance, fortitude, prudence,' also 'uprightness' and 'fidelity.' Pagan virtues moreover may include honesty and chastity, obedience to parents or husband, even love and charity toward our neighbors. The vices in question are those the entire world had been deceived into thinking were virtues. The wrong lies in the fact that these acts were done for the self-satisfaction involved, to further self-respect, out of enlightened self-interest for the self or race, or in the theological terms of natural religion, for self-justification. A truly virtuous act would be done out of gratitude and in willing service to God. 'The end of what is right is always to serve God, whatever is directed to any other end can have no claim to that appellation. Therefore since they do not regard the end prescribed by divine wisdom, though an act performed by them is externally and apparently good, yet being directed to a wrong end it becomes sin.'

The natural ethical system never detects and removes concupiscence, which is man's primal sin. Here it is important to recall what concupiscence can include in its sublimated forms, as we saw in our examination of the root

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1. III.14.3, CR 2.565
2. Com. on Mark 10.21, CR 45.540
3. Ser. on I Tim. 5.7-12, CR 53.468
4. Com. on I Pet. 2.19, CR 55.248
5. Ser. on Gal. 6.9-11, CR 51.160f
defection. We do not mean crass lusts, for even natural men know these are wrong, but we mean man's self-willed desire to depend on himself and not on God. As a matter of fact natural ethics recognizes concupiscence, but sees nothing wrong with it. This whole understanding of two ethical spheres is seen clearly in Calvin's discussion of Paul's assertion: 'I knew not sin but by the law.' (Rom. 7:7) This cannot be a denial of natural ability to judge right from wrong. On the contrary, 'men are never so destitute of judgment as not to retain the distinction between external works.' But when Paul says, 'I knew not sin but by the law,' he is speaking not of this but of the knowledge of 'one kind (una species) of sin' which is radically different. Here 'Paul mounts higher than the common capacity of men is able to reach,' he passes the more acute insights of the philosophers. The difference is this: that natural ethical judgment does not perceive concupiscence to be wrong. 'That ignorance of sin to which he referred consisted in this: that he did not notice his concupiscence.' Paul was in effect no wiser than a Gentile. This fault is not known in natural ethics. 'The fault of concupiscence is more hidden and lies deeper, therefore it never comes into account so long as men judge according to their sense.' Indeed, natural man sees nothing inherently wrong in concupiscence and does not think it incompatible with righteousness. Paul 'thought that righteousness could not be hindered by concupiscence.' In human judgment, this is not counted as a vice. 

And it is generally Calvin's statement that moral works are sinful because they are done in concupiscence. 'In the universal observations of the law the censure of concupiscence wholly escapes our notice. For the natural man cannot be brought to acknowledge the disorder of his inward affections. The light of nature is smothered before it approaches the first entrance of this abyss.'

1. Com. on Rom. 7-7, CR 49.123f
2. II.2.24, CR 2.205. Inst.of 1539 (et seqq.) ch. II, pag. 33, CR 1,332
in such deep and intricate recesses as easily to elude the view of man.  

'Our judgment does indeed agree with the law of God in regard to the mere outward actions; but concupiscence, which is the source of everything evil, escapes our notice.'  

But just how did concupiscence manifest itself in Paul? He had formally and sincerely, so he thought, kept the law and was irreproachable before men. Paul was concupiscent, Calvin tells us, as 'being puffed up with confidence (confidentia) in his righteousness, he expected salvation by his works.'  

This is Calvin's analysis of the sin of Paul in several contexts.

The difficulty is that the moral order, although objectively and formally resembling the will of God, is inextricably and totally permeated with man's primal sin of attempting to depend on himself in self-love rather than depending on grace. It is quite possible to have a good moral life and have not removed concupiscence. 'For it may happen that a man may fully discharge his duty to all men with respect to external actions, and at the same time be very far from discharging it in the right way.'  

Ethics is concupiscent if it moves as all other sin away from God and his grace in the direction of self-interest, self-satisfaction, self-adulation, or self-justification. 'However praiseworthy in appearance the life of some may be, because their concupiscence does not break out in the sight of men, there is nothing pure or holy which does not proceed from the fountain of all purity.'  

Only following the eradication of self-love from the inmost recesses of the heart will apparent virtue be real virtue.

It is important to see here that even man's effort to provide works from his side and his hope thereby to gain salvation is in itself part of this concupiscence. Here Calvin has departed from the concept of federal

1. II.7.6, CR 2.257ff
2. Com. on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.205. Com. on I Thes. 4.3, CR 52.161
3. Com. on Ex. 20.17, CR 24.719
4. Ser. on Gal. 2.17-18, CR 50.436; Com. on Ps. 119.36, CR 32.230
5. Ser. on Deut. 5.21, CR 26.37ff
6. III.7.7, CR 2.511
7. III.7.4, CR 2.509
theology, for in the works covenant man was supposed to do this. In this covenant his felicity was to depend on his works, and he is guilty because he broke the moral law and did not provide such works. But in Calvin man is guilty more fundamentally because he trusted in his works and not in God. These virtues are sinful because they were done in self-trust. Aristides and the Greeks of legendary virtue, though they professed to serve God, actually trusted in themselves. 'Those men, with all the excellence of their virtues, were either filled with ambition or inflated with pride which made them trust (confido) more in themselves than in God.' 'Such persons, relying on their own strength and virtue, despised the grace of God with all the superciliousness of impiety. Making an idol of their own virtue, they disdained to lift up their eyes to him.' They were not faithful, they did not trust him, and it is 'trust (fiducia) in God which is the mother of piety.'

The essential drive that lies behind all this ethical activity, even when it has the appearance of sanctity, is one of self-trust. Here the Gentile has seized the order which God allows to remain and wields it for his own purpose. He concludes that if he can fulfil the requirements of the natural moral order this will merit salvation. 'Pagans have always wished to be acceptable to God by their own virtues.' 'The heathens fully believed that they would be rewarded by God if they lived in an honest and unblameable fashion among men.' To say 'that God owes us recompense as wages when we have served him' is 'to argue according to philosophy.' A salvation by works is uncharacteristic in some form of every heathen nation. 'If a man asks the philosophers, they will always say that God loves those who are worthy, that inasmuch as virtue pleases him he selects those who are devoted to it, and holds them for his people.'

1. Com. on Ps. 86.2, GR 31.792. II. 7.2, GR 2506
2. Ser. on Gal. 3.11-14, GR 50.498f
3. Ser. on Gal. 2.24-16, GR 50.409f
4. Ser. on Gal. 2.20-21, GR 50.453. Com. on Ps. 32.1, GR 31.314f
5. Ser. on Eph. 1.3-4, GR 51.260
nothing except their own good fortune, as they called it, for they believed that they had everything through their own virtue (virtu = strength) and industry. They thought they came to God 'of their own movement.' Such a concept as this: of man's virtue being wrong because he tried to save himself by it, was of necessity obscured as the later covenant of works suggested that man originally did have his salvation based on his works, and therefore, though he might be morally imperfect and unsuccessful, he could not be wrong in principle as he attempted to justify himself.

But in Calvin it is as natural man serves God not in gratitude, nor in belief in his goodness, nor in fidelity to depend on his strength alone, but in order to merit salvation and for fear lest in no other way he arrive at felicity, that he sins. Calvin works this out in his discussion of the opening chapters of Romans. We turn to those Gentiles (as well as Jews) who were 'saintlings,' (sanctulos) with no 'grosser vices' and who lived outwardly in 'innocence, temperance, and all virtue.' They 'dazzle the eyes of men by displays of outward sanctity, and even think themselves to be accepted before God, as though they had given him full satisfaction.' But it is precisely this which is their central sin: that they had hoped to save themselves by it, rather than to rely on the grace of God. We 'charge them with inward purity' which natural man cannot detect. But this is more than an inner insincerity; it is a concupiscent self-reliance. 'Men of this class will with astonishing security trust in themselves,' they 'are commonly transported with prosperity as though they had merited the Lord's kindness by their good deeds.' 'They think they can really gain something,' 'that God will take an account of their disguised righteousness.' But in this 'they have rejected the fatherly invitation of God. And though all the gifts of God are so many evidences of his paternal goodness, yet...the ungodly absurdly congratulate themselves on their prosperity, as

1. Ser. on Eph. 1.15-18, CR 51.312
though they were dear to him, while he kindly and bountifully supports them.

For the Lord by his kindness shows that it is he to whom we ought to turn if we desire to secure our well-being, and at the same time he strengthens our confidence in expecting mercy. If we use not God's bounty for this end, we abuse it.'

So, Calvin concludes this discussion in Romans, they too have disgraced themselves in the divine order of grace. They too have turned the gifts of God into a curse, as they applied God-given virtue toward their own self-reliance. 'This is a remarkable passage: we may from this learn... that the gifts of God which they continually enjoy shall increase their condemnation, for an account of them will be required, and then it will be found that it is justly imputed to them as extreme wickedness that they have been made worse through God's bounty, by which surely they ought to have been improved.' The Gentile saintlings are to be condemned because they have trusted in their own virtue rather than the grace of God, and have in this inverted his gifts. So even in man's perceiving God and endeavoring to worship him, even in his demand for purity and sincerity, even in his formally correct ethical practice - in all these things of his religion which bear some outward appearance of righteousness - in that he moves in them away from God to self-independence, he yet stands totally sinful. The more the philosophers thought they were approaching God, the further away they were straying. 'All the virtues of the philosophers, as they call them, that is, which men think they possess through free will, are mere smoke. Indeed, they are the illusions of the devil by which he bewitches the minds of men so that they do not approach God, but rather precipitate themselves into the lowest depth, when they seek to exalt themselves beyond measure.'

When the light shines in the darkness of sin, even though sinful man does perceive something ethically and religiously, this illumination is such

1. Com. on Rom. 2.1-5, passim, CR 49.30ff
2. Ser. on John 1.1-5, CR 47.475; Ser. on Eph. 4.17-19, CR 51.599
3. Com. on Hab. 2.4, CR 43.531; I.5.2, CR 2.50; II.2.10, CR 2.200
that it does not really light the way at all, as far as any true knowledge or real righteousness is concerned; whatever man may accomplish by it bears not the slightest trace of the substance of truth and righteousness. There is nothing of the quality of righteousness in it. But Calvin affirms that there may be a likeness between what we see and what is righteousness. Something the natural man does may look like righteousness. Calvin's Biblical figure of light and darkness to a certain extent breaks down here. Light shines in the darkness in such a way that though man has some virtue, yet it is still darkness. Man's sin 'darkens the light which still dwells in him.'

Light is in him, but the light that is in him is darkness. It is a false appearance of light. The light in him is not really light at all, if we mean by that a light that enables him to see and pursue any part of true righteousness, to respond to God in the only real way, the way of gratitude and selfless obedience. In this sense the human mind remains in total darkness. 'The whole course of human life is dark, because no man proposes for himself a proper object. I confess indeed that men naturally possess reason to distinguish between vices and virtues, but I say that it is so corrupted that it fails at every step.'

'Out of Christ there is not even a spark of true light. There may be some appearance of brightness, but it resembles lightning, which only dazzles the eyes.'

The concept of order also must be pressed. The order of grace has been wholly reversed as man attempts to depend on his own works. All is disordered. Yet nonetheless within this totally reversed order there is a print or remnant of the original order as men outwardly conform to virtues parallel to those original and true virtues. The rightness or wrongness of these is not measured by whether they are similar to Christian ethical directives. It is measured by whether they rise from dependence on grace, or from man's self-trust and sinful attempt to raise himself up apart from the Lord.

1. Com. on John 1:5, CR 47.7
2. Com. on Matt. 6:22, CR 45.207
3. Com. on John 8:12, CR 47.192
B. Sin and law

It is now necessary to enter into Calvin's thought about the relationship between sin and man's works under the law. Calvin, we have noted from the beginning, interprets sin most basically and fundamentally in the light of divine grace. The concept of sin as transgression of the law is vital in Calvin's thought and he makes wide use of it. But beyond this we have seen and now see again that sin is much more than this, it is man's rejection of God's grace as he moves in self-independence. We now examine first how sin is indeed known in the light of the law, and then secondly how sin must be further known by grace, for the law is not enough to teach us our sins. Some men attempt to live by the law and in so doing suppress its power to reveal sin. The law is dead to them. It is here that Calvin reveals most significantly that it is not enough to keep the law, for even the perfect obedience of the man who would live by the law is to be set aside because it is done in self-willed concupiscence and not in acknowledgment of divine grace and gratitude for it.

Calvin's position here has once again to be contrasted with the characteristic teaching of later Reformed theology, particularly as influenced by federal theology. In the first divine covenant of works, what was required of man was moral works done in obedience to the divine law, performed as man applied his will and ability toward righteousness. When this law is revealed again to man in the Old Testament, man comes to know his sin as his moral imperfection and his inability to keep and perform the law. Sin is seen more in the light of the law than in the light of grace. Federal theology could not interpret sin as a disordering of the divine order of grace because it did not begin with an order of grace. But Calvin can at once keep the principle: that we interpret our sins in the light of the law, making full use of it, and at the same time bring it under the larger truth: that we must further
interpret our sins in contrast to God's grace. Even in the case that men should fully and perfectly keep the law they would remain totally sinful - if they kept it in their own strength and not in dependence on God's grace. Men may sin as they break the law, but they would sin in a more fundamental way even if they kept the whole law and trusted not in grace.

1. The one covenant of grace and the pedagogy of the law

Calvin’s concepts here can only be understood when seen against the relationship between the law and the covenant. There has been and there can be but one covenant. With Adam in the garden of Eden, with Abraham in Ur, with Moses on Sinai, or with us today in Christ, God has bound himself to be gracious to man and requires of him in response an acknowledgment in gratitude and obedience. 'All those persons from the beginning of the world whom God has adopted into the society of his people have been in covenant (foederatus) bound to him by the same law and doctrine which are in force among us.'

In substance God makes no other covenant with us today than he made of old with the Jews.

'It is indeed certain that never has there been but one means by which men could come to salvation.' 'God must work it of his infinite goodness, for all other helps are frivolous and useless.' Therefore it must be that the ancient fathers were saved by the pure grace of God, just as today we hope in the same thing.' 'In sum, it must be that there is but one salvation for all the faithful who are today, and for those who have lived since the beginning of the world; it must be that God receive us with one accord, that we by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be reconciled to him.'

We can then speak of man as being 'under law' only subjectively. Only from the side of man's experience does law exist apart from grace.

The covenant of grace is, however, made 'under shadows' in the Old Testament. A difference in 'administration' centers in the law, given by God.
because the covenant of grace though present in substance is yet under shadow. It follows the gracious covenant and depends on it. It does not set aside the Abrahamic covenant but points back to it, and forward to the fulfillment of this covenant in Christ. Here Calvin uses the Biblical metaphor of a schoolmaster to indicate its pedagogic and transient function. 'The law was a schoolmaster (paedagogus) to bring them to Christ.' The Jews were conducted to Christ by the pedagogy of the law. The several pedagogic functions of the law which Calvin delineates are reduced to two at the simplest.

a. The teaching of the law for men 'under grace'

The 'principal' use or 'proper end' of the law is to show us the appropriate way of life to return to God in gratitude for his mercy. 'His beneficient work' will 'convict us of ingratitude if we do not obey his voice.' The law is 'connected with the covenant of gratuitous adoption,' as 'an excellent instrument to give them from day to day a better and more certain understanding of the divine will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the knowledge of it.' But this 'use of the law, which is the principal one and which is more nearly connected with the proper end of it, relates to the faithful in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns.' Such believers, immature in grace, are not really under law but under grace. They have the law in their hearts, or on their hearts. They comprehend the grace of God enough to know that salvation does not depend on their performance, but is already assured in the covenant of grace. They obey 'excited and animated by the direction of the Spirit,' out of 'desire to obey God,' and out of an 'inward promptitude to obedience.'

1. Ser. on Eph. 2:19-22, CR 51.423f
2. II.7.11, CR 2.261. Cf. Gal. 3.24
3. II.11.5, CR 2.333
4. Genevan Catechism, French, 1541, 33 Sunday, CR 6.79ff
5. II.7.12, CR 2.261
6. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 8
7. II.7.2, CR 2.254
8. II.7.12, CR 2.261f
9. II.7.1, CR 2.252
10. II.7.12, CR 2.262
'no longer exercises toward us the part of a rigorous exactor only to be satisfied by the performance of every injunction; but in this perfection to which it exhorts us it shows us a goal, to aim at which during the whole course of our lives would be equally conducive to our interest and consistent with our duty.'

b. The teaching of the law for men 'under law'

But there is a second use of the law for those who do not yet comprehend the meaning of grace. God promises that he will grant salvation upon condition of fulfilment of the law. 'God promises to those who shall have fulfilled the law not only the grand blessings of the present life...but also the recompense of eternal life.' This is what Calvin calls a 'legal promise,' as distinct from an 'evangelical one.' 'Such promises...proclaim that a reward is ready to be bestowed on condition that we perform what is commanded.' Here is the only place in Calvin's thought where we have anything suggestive of the covenant of works, such as later federal theology was to assert that God made with Adam. As in the covenant of works God covenanted with Adam to provide salvation on the basis of his works, so here God promises salvation to those who fulfil the law. But Calvin is here abundantly aware that God does this not because man is supposed to earn felicity in this way, but because God is striving with man's sinful nature.

God as it were condescends to the nature of man to permit him to work in a limited way to help himself as he is wont by nature to do. Men 'have always deluded themselves with vainglory and presumption that they could purchase salvation. Therefore God has to say to them, Go to, if you are such able men as you think show it. As for me, I will let you have my law, and so that you will not think youselves ill dealt with for your serving me, your salary is all ready for you if you perform it. There it is; eternal life is definitely assured to you. But now let us see a little

1. II.7.13, CR 2.262. Ser. on Gal. 2.3-5, CR 50.367
2. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 10. III.17.1, CR 2.590
3. III.17.6, CR 2.594. Ser. on Deut. 11.22-25, CR 27.133
what you can do. Busy yourselves to your work! Such promises are given to those who will not 'perform spontaneously, as if it were not a duty,' but only perform hoping for reward. 'For since the eyes of our mind are too dim to be attracted with the mere beauty of virtue, our most merciful Father has been graciously pleased to allure us to the love and worship of himself by the sweetness of his rewards. He announces therefore that he has reserved rewards for virtue, and that the person who obeys his commandment shall not labor in vain.'

But in point of fact it is impossible for man ever to fulfill the law and it is God's intent to teach us our sins and lead us to grace by it. The law becomes man's goal. As he is by nature attracted to this opportunity to rest on his own merit, he strives to earn his righteousness. He fails and sees his own iniquity and then looks again to see the covenant of grace which he had not seen before. 'When men have strained everything that is in them to do, it is certain that they will recognize their weakness which was hidden before.' The law gives commands in order that, endeavoring to perform them and being wearied through our infirmity under the law, we may learn to pray for the assistance of grace.

2. Works of the law and merit

It is highly significant to note here that this legal promise can be given only on the basis of the covenant of grace. Through a misunderstanding on this point sin is able to usurp the law. The law allows man to work in a limited way toward his own salvation. But further - and we must not obscure this point - it is an act of pure grace even for God to promise such salvation. A perfect performance of the law would be rewarded with salvation, but a perfect performance would not earn or merit salvation intrinsically but rather by the covenant. 'Works are not meritorious by in-

1. Ser. on Gal. 3.19-20, CR 50.538. Com. on Rom. 6.4, CR 49.138
2. II.6.4, CR 2.270
3. ibid., CR 2.269f
4. Ser. on Gal. 3.19-20, CR 50.538
5. II.7.8f, CR 2.259f, in part quoting Augustine. 'The Use of the Law' in Com. on Harm. of the Pent., CR 24.725f
trinsic worth, but become meritorious by covenant. (ex parte) The reward of works depends on the voluntary promise of the law. Thus man can work in this limited way within the covenant for his own salvation, but only after God in a movement of grace has established a law and declared that he might so labor. Thus 'from his side it is a wage which he gratuitously gives us.'

We make this clear because it is the primary assertion of the sinner that he can merit God's favor in his own independently gained work's righteousness. But while God allows man to attempt to perform the law, this has been preceded by God's gracious permission for him so to attempt and promise to pay should he succeed. God, apart from his promise, would owe nothing. Calvin returns again and again to the little parable of the unprofitable servants in Luke 17.7f. 'The Scripture shows us...what would be merited by the perfect performance of the law if this could anywhere be found, when it directs us: We are unprofitable servants, because we shall not have conferred any favor on God, but only have performed the duties incumbent on us.' If God were to speak in the most strict terms, we ought not to say that perfect obedience would be righteousness. 'God enters into covenant with us and brings himself so to speak under obligation to recompense our obedience.' But 'he promises to his servants a reward, which in point of justice he does not owe to them.' Righteousness and rectitude consists for man in a grateful response in obedience, any works performed to earn salvation would by this fact not be pure righteousness. Perfect obedience is righteousness, not properly but by divine promise. Calvin says that the Lord has 'honored' the observance of the law with the title of righteousness. 'He recedes from the strictness of his claims, when he proposes a reward to our obedience, which is not performed spontaneously, as if it were not a duty.' Such

1. Com. on Rom. 3.20, CR 49.56. Com. on Luke 17.7; CR 45.444f
2. Ser. on Gen. 15.6-7, CR 23.728. Com. on Ezek. 20.11, CR 40.431ff
3. III.15.3, CR 2.580ff. III.14.4, CR 2.573ff; Com. on Luke 17.7, CR 45.413ff; Com. on I Cor. 9.12, CR 49.446; on Ezek. 18.20, CR 40.443
4. Com. on Ps. 19.11, CR 31.203. Ser. on Job 4.1-6, CR 33.185f
5. III.17.7, CR 2.595. Ser. on Job 4.7-11, CR 33.186f
6. II.8.4, CR 2.565, Ser. on Deut. 6.15-19, CR 26.472f
righteousness, even if it could be found anywhere, is not proper righteousness, but more righteousness by definition, or by divine condescension, or by divine honor and free grace. 'It is owing therefore to the divine favor that they are accounted worthy both of the title and reward of righteousness.'

Were there indeed anyone found who strictly kept God's law, he could not be counted righteous, except by virtue of the promise.'

'Although we had an angelic perfection, yet that could not obligate God to us at all, if it were not that he of his own good will had given this promise in his law: He that does these things shall live by them. Then if we attempt to acquire grace from God by our own works, we must not argue as does philosophy that God owes us wages or recompense for the service that we have done him. For we are his and we cannot bind him by anything that we could do. How then is it that our works could be recompensed as though they were meritorious before God? Because he has promised so to do. It is the covenant which he has made with us, saying: He that does these things shall live by them. So then, if we could perform the law in its perfection, surely we should be righteous before God and merit salvation; not for any worthiness that should be in ourselves however, but by reason of the covenant that God has made with us. For we see that all the desert which could be alleged from the side of man depends wholly upon this promise.'

The whole point here is that man has not been created to work independently or semi-independently of God to effect his own felicity and salvation, as is suggested by the covenant of works. This - as we have seen and will see again - is his sin. He is made to move in God, to reflect him, to receive by grace all he needs and acknowledge in grateful obedience what he receives. All this talk about man's justifying his own existence in a self-willed obedience is just so much questioning after a fancied mode of existence which was never his even in his innocence and primal perfection. There can be no question

1. III.11.20, CR 2.549ff. Ser. on Gal. 3.11-14, CR 50.561
2. Com. on Hab. 2.4, CR 43.532. Ser. on Gal. 2.15-16, CR 50.415
3. Ser. on Gal. 2.14-16, CR 40.409. Ser. on Gal. 3.11-14, CR 50.495ff
of man's really or intrinsically being righteous and deserving, even if in some impossible way he had perfectly kept the law of God. 'Though we were as pure as the angels, yet we should not be able to stand but by the grace of God and insofar as he upholds us as his creatures.'

3. The life of the law and the death of the sinner

We are now in a position to see against this background of Calvin's concept of the law within the covenant of grace how sin is related to the works of the law. Calvin takes as key here the Pauline assertion: 'The strength of sin is the law.' (I Cor. 15.56) We 'speak of the law as the strength or power of sin because it executes upon us the judgment of God.' The law is the strength of sin; it sharpens sin so that we are mortally wounded by it.

There are two related but rather different ways in which the law renders us more liable to judgment. The first way sin converts the law into a curse Calvin calls 'the life of the law.' This is the way Calvin sees sin in the light of the divine law, and we must notice here that he can include in his thought the whole breadth of the concept of sin which obtained in later Reformed theology. Sin is indeed the breaking of God's law and we interpret it this way.

Here the sinner, brought to an awareness of his previously unnoticed sin, is slain by the judgment of God. 'As soon as the law begins to live in us, it inflicts a fatal wound by which we die.' This is the experience we have already outlined where man attempts to gain salvation, only to realize his sin and inability. 'The law is like a mirror' to show us our sin. 'Each of us lies stagnant in his filth and sleeps there, so that without the law we are not touched to the quick, our consciences are numbed; in short each exempts himself and gives himself license to do evil. But when the law steps forward then sin is recognized and each must bow before God despite what

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1. Ser. on Job 9.29-35, CR 33.46ff. Com. on Rom. 11.35, CR 49.231f
2. Com. on I Cor. 15.56, CR 49.56f. Com. on Rom. 8.2, CR 49.137f
3. Ser. on Gal. 3.19-20, CR 50.54f. Ser. on Deut. 30.6-10, CR 28.56f
4. Com. on Gal. 2.19, CR 50.197f. Com. on Ex. 20.17, CR 24.717f
5. ibid.
6. II.7.7, CR 2.258
he would, or else gnash his teeth at him as a rebel.' It is as if a person with a dirty face is suddenly brought face to face with a mirror. In this way we may say that the law increases sin, in that it increases the knowledge of sin and therefore lays the sinner open to the wrath of God. 'For iniquity undoubtedly increases more and more in proportion to the clearness of that sense of sin which strikes the conscience, because to transgression of the law there is then added contumacy against the law-giver.' So on account of their having the law 'the Jews were more damnable than other men,' being 'doubly guilty' when compared with Gentiles.

Calvin's thought about the revelation of sin by the law encounters the somewhat problematic fact that seen from a larger point of view and from the side of God this increased awareness of sin may be beneficial, if man is driven to repent. But seen, on the other hand, from a more narrow or temporary point of view and from the side of man, God's law has only served to render man doubly liable to judgment and therefore has been harmful. Calvin turns to employ the accidental or adventitious distinction. But here it must be developed somewhat differently. Even though Calvin holds that God's real purpose in the law is so to reduce man to grace, yet Calvin thinks of man's sense of condemnation, which is inevitably involved in this process, as a 'contrary effect of the law,' or 'an inseparable and perpetual accident.' Thus we affirm from one point of view that God purposed it; from another that it is an accidental effect - which ought to imply that it was not God's purpose. It is always 'an inseparable and perpetual accident that the law, by demonstrating to man his sin, cuts off the hope of salvation. By itself because it teaches what righteousness is, it is the way to salvation; but our depravity and corruption obstruct so that in this way it does not profit us.

1. Ser. on Gal. 3.19-20, CR 50.535f. Ser. on Gal. 2.17-18, CR 50.434f
2. II.7.7, CR 2.258. Com. on Rom. 4.5, CR 49.79; Inst. of 1536, ch. 1, pag. 4.6ff, CR 1.29ff; Com. on II Cor. 5.7, CR 50.41ff
3. Ser. on Gal. 2.17-18, CR 50.429f
4. Com. on Rom. 3.20, CR 49.57. Com. on Gen. 2.16, CR 23.45
anything. Yet this condemnation is in the divine plan. 'When God gave his law, it was not to the end that we seek our righteousness and salvation there, as though his grace did not suffice or was weak, but there is another intent quite different, namely that it bring men to know themselves to be sinners.' Calvin does not appear to deal with this problem any further.

4. The life of the sinner and the death of the law

The second way in which sin employs the law to exert its strength, to work its curse and make men more liable to punishment, is what Calvin calls 'the death of the law.' It is here that we see that the law is not enough to reveal sin, for sin is more than the failure to conform to the law. Some men, who are of the opinion that sin involves only this transgression of the law, think that if they can successfully perform all the law they will merit salvation at God's hand. But these men are sinners in an even more serious way than before because they have depended on themselves and not on God's grace. Their sin has really increased as they have in concupiscent self-reliance and self-trust depended on their own legal works. Perfect legal works of this type would still be sin. It is here obvious that Calvin sees sin as something more fundamental than the moral imperfection of man under the law, or even than man's rebellion from divine law. Calvin is able to interpret the relationship between sin and legal works in the light of God's grace. But later Reformed thought of necessity obscured this further and more basic concept of Calvin's as it suggested through the covenant of works that perfect legal observance was what was really needed.

Here man believes himself to have life in the law, he lives to the law. Such a person believes that he has done his duty and has merited salvation for his performance. 'When men believe that they have life, that is to say, when they persuade themselves that they are righteous and that God is propitious and favorable to them, it is a sign that the law is dead to them, that is,

1. ibid., Com. on Rom. 4.15, CR 49.79; on 7.11, CR 49.127; on 7.13, CR 49.127
2. Ser. on Gal. 3.21-25, CR 50.45
3. Com. on Gal. 2.19, CR 50.198
it has not the power and strength to show them what it ought. 'The law is
then dead, ... as long as we have this foolish fancy about being righteous and
obtaining paradise by our good works.' In this experience Calvin thinks of
the law becoming again the strength of sin because, although sin is not
necessarily revealed to the sinner, yet objective transgression is actually
increased. The law gives to sin 'its deadly power,' 'because it does not
merely discover our guilt but even increases it.' Sin 'is kindled up by the
law so as to rage furiously.' Often when Calvin refers to this 'increase'
of sin brought about by the law he has primary reference to its revealing
powers, which to be precise increases guilt rather than actual transgression.
But there may be an increase of actual sin. It may be that 'our lusting'
(cupiditas) - here synonymous with concupiscence - 'is instigated through the
law so that it boils over with greater fury.' 'The flesh is more sharply
stimulated to concupiscence by the law, and by this means more clearly shows
itself.' 'The restraint of the law avails so little to bridle the flesh that
it becomes rather an inducement to sin.' (peccandi incitamentum)

Exactly what does Calvin mean here? Possibly at times a spiteful
and contrary, deliberate breaking of the law just because we are forbidden
to do certain things. But this is not his main point. This boiling over
of concupiscence into new fury may be accompanied by reduced transgression
as far as outward actions are concerned. During the time that we are under
the law and it becomes for us 'an inducement to sin,' 'we have in the law
nothing but the outward letter, which indeed briddles our external actions
but does not in the least restrain the fury of our concupiscence.' How may
it be that concupiscence increases while in conformance with the law men
become morally and formally more correct? When Calvin says that concupiscence
is increased while external transgression is reduced, he is thinking of the

1. Ser. on Gal. 2.17-18, CR 50.43f. Com. on Matt. 19.16f, CR 45.536f
2. Com. on I Cor. 15.56, CR 49.564.
3. See e.g. his conscious choice in Com. on Rom. 7.8, CR 49.125f.
4. Com. on Rom. 7.6, CR 49.123.
5. ibid.
way in which men take the law, wield it to earn their own salvation, and
thus employ it to the purposes of their own self-will. Men appear to demand
salvation from God as their due. Man’s vain confidence, his desire to look
after himself, his concupiscence is nourished so that he now thinks he can
win heaven. The Jews in this external observance of the law are deluded
in hypocrisy and believe that they have purchased grace before God in
observing the law. Those then are of the law who hold by the law that they
are able to deserve from God the inheritance of heavenly life. 1

Of course there is perhaps an extent to which men may lawfully set
out to earn their salvation, and this is something of a problem for Calvin.
Does not God openly encourage it with his legal promises, even if his real
motive is other? Have we not said that this is just what God invites them
to do, and that - although it is impossible that man should ever arrive at
his goal - this is a sincere promise. But in this case, as Calvin has taken
care to note, such righteousness would be worthy not intrinsically but from
the grace of God. It would have been wrought within the covenantal law which
God freely and graciously gave Israel. At best if he thought he had completed
the law, man could only come to God humbly to ask the salvation he had been
promised and giving thanks that he had been chosen and allowed so to work for
his own felicity.

Here, however, we have gone far beyond such action as this. Man’s self-
confidence has over-inflated itself, his concupiscence and desire to help and
care for himself rather than be helped and cared for by God has boiled over,
he seizes on the law, forgets all goodness of God in condescending to him
and in favoring him with the law, and presently with unprecedented arrogance
demands salvation at the hand of God. Let us consider the law in 'the inter-
pretation with which it has been corrupted by these hypocrites who entertain
themselves with some petty trash and wish to do meritorious deeds by it,' by
'those who wish to win righteousness by it.' 'To them it seems that God is

1. Ser. on Gal. 3.7-9, CR 50.485
obligated to them when they have discharged their duty and think that they have done it all. They hear this promise: He who does these things shall live. Thereupon they strain themselves and think that they will succeed in accomplishing all that God requires and commands. And then, having taken hold of this promise which is given to them, there it is just as if it were a salary. And they never think any longer that their salvation is a free gift, but that they have deserved and earned all this which God promised to them, so that eternal life is to them a recompense for their merits. In the end 'they imagine that they are able to satisfy God and by this means win grace from him.' In effect 'men give themselves to believe that they are their own saviors.' But this is 'intolerable ingratitude.'

The rich young ruler was 'dead' to the law, he lived by it and 'vainly imagined that he was so righteous.' 'Intoxicated with foolish confidence he fearlessly boasts that he has discharged his duty properly from his childhood.' The sin of the rich young ruler, Calvin reminds us, is the same as the sin of Paul in Romans 7, which we have seen to be concupiscence. 'In the very keeping of the law,' which 'represses all concupiscence,' in his virtues that might seem outwardly meritorious, the young ruler had been concupiscent. In service both to man and God he had been motivated by a hope of self-justification to 'vainly imagine that he was so righteous' that all the while his sin had only increased. 'He dreams of merits on account of which he may receive eternal life as a reward due. Therefore in the final analysis man's works under law are seen as sin not only because they are imperfect and insufficient, but also and more fundamentally because the man who so lives to the law is not motivated by gratitude and glad and selfless love of God. He is rather motivated by his own attempt to merit God's favor. He obeys that with strong self-will he might depend on himself and not on God's grace. His works must be set aside, for he has in self-trust and self-reliance disordered the divine order of grace.

1. Ser. on Gal. 4.21-23, CR 50.637
2. Ser. on Gal. 5.22-26, CR 51.50
4. Com. on Matt. 19.16ff, on Mark 10.21, CR 45.536ff
It is Calvin's insight and message for theology that all of the moral works of men both in nature and under law have to be set aside when seen in the light of God's grace, because these are done by Jew and Gentile in such a way as to continue to disorder the divine order of grace. God reaches through the veil of sin to leave with the Gentiles a print of his true order wrought out within the sphere of concupiscence. Motivated by the central sin of mankind, his desire to be independent from God's grace and to raise himself up apart from the Lord - these Gentiles become only greater sinners with their self-willed virtue. And like the natural man the Jew only increases his sin. Although doubly guilty, as God's requirements were wholly set before him, including a demand in the final commandment to forgo all concupiscence and self-interest for a willing and thankful obedience to God, yet in effect this law has been formalized so that the central sin of mankind is the sin of the Jew as well; he hopes to help himself to righteousness. In this both Jew and Gentile have rejected God's grace by ascribing the ethical and legal virtues God bestows upon them to their own strength, thereby turning God's grace into a curse. Calvin thus basically interprets sin, ethics, and legal works, in the light of his larger concept of sin as that reality which inverts and cuts off the grace of God to us. If ethical actions are interpreted as good or bad by a moral code, and if legal actions are seen as right or wrong in the light of God's law, this must not obscure the fact that they have also and finally to be interpreted as righteousness or unrighteousness according to whether they are ordered in accordance with the divine order of grace to man and man's grateful acknowledgment of it.

And we have seen that the primary concept in Reformed thought which has tended to obscure this larger way in which Calvin interprets moral and
legal works in the light of God's order of grace is that of the covenant of works. Here, where man's duty is conceived from the beginning in terms of moral obedience provided by man with his own strength and will in order to earn and merit salvation, it is difficult if not impossible to relate these works of virtue and legal worth to God's grace. Rather the tendency is to stop short of Calvin's full concept of sin and cast the whole argument about the total sinfulness of man in nature and law into moral and legal terms. This has led to confusion and an outlook of pessimism toward the virtues of both Greek and Jews that does not do justice to the facts of reality. Theology was unable to make place for the ethical virtues of a morally depraved natural man. And man's depravity and helplessness under the law had to be seen in terms of his lack of faculty and will in such a way that it prejudiced his real guiltiness.

The point here is not that Calvin does not include these ways of thought, but that he can do it in the awareness that this thought must be subordinated to man's total depravity as his complete rejection of God's grace and his refusal to depend on God. We have taken care to note that Calvin makes room for Gentile virtues and describes their sin and culpability in failing to conform to their standards of righteousness. And in a parallel though much greater way Calvin takes as a principle the fact that we are unable to perform the law and must interpret sin as our failure to conform to God's law. But beyond all this and more fundamentally there remains the governing concept that these works must be examined not by ethical codes, or the moral law, but by the light of grace. Do they rise from man's acknowledgment in gratitude and so take their place in God's order of grace to man, or do they rise from man's self-interest and attempt to depend on himself in rejection of the grace of God? Theology must once again recover Calvin's twofold way of interpreting sin in the light of ethics and law, and then fundamentally in the light of grace.
VII. Responsibility and Life in Grace

In the preceding seven chapters we have tried to see how Calvin's concept of sin is to be interpreted in the light of his thought about a divine order of grace. We have not as yet pressed the question of responsibility, although we have noted that man's culpability lies in his rejection of the grace of God, and that in the thought of Calvin he is free to do this, despite what we have to say about divine providence. In the last part of this study, against the background of the sin of man, we now examine Calvin's concept of responsibility, of what man was supposed to do in the life of grace, and of how he is guilty for not having done this. We bring out of the concept of sin, extend, isolate, and develop the points where responsibility is at issue. It will here be our thesis again that the concept of responsibility has to be interpreted in the light of the divine order of grace. The relation between man's responsibility to God and his sin against God must be subordinated to the grace of God and worked out here. In the thought of Calvin man's duty and his obligation are to be set within this framework of the grace of God, as a duty and an obligation to acknowledge God's grace and be grateful for it. Man is responsible for responding to God's grace in such a way as faithfully to live in it and depend on it. This is the way he was to live originally and ideally, and this is the way he is to live now. And we have tried already to make it clear that man's sin is his failure to respond in this way. Man strove to raise himself up apart from God, he so dis-graced himself in God's order.

In the introductory analysis of the problems which generate such a study as this, we saw that there are two positions over against which the position of Calvin is to be set. Both of these are developments which followed Calvin and obscured his thought. The first of these is contained within the Reformed tradition in that concept of responsibility which follows from the covenant of works. Responsibility is here seen in terms of a moral duty and obligation to obey the law of God and by so doing to fulfil the terms
of the covenant, to provide works of righteousness. Man is thus at the first responsible for justifying his own right to exist. He is supposed to be rewarded or punished on the basis of his works; he is responsible in this way. He once had but has now lost both the ability and the will to do these works. Nor has the covenant of works been abrogated in this respect, for it yet expresses man's natural relation to God. The fact that man cannot now fulfil his responsibility and must be saved by a second covenant of grace does not mean that he is not still held responsible in this way. But here responsibility has not been worked out in terms of the grace of God at all, rather it is defined in terms of man's works of righteousness in the divine order of justice. Responsibility is not interpreted in the light of an order of grace but in the light of a semi-autonomous man justifying himself before divine law and in the moral order. Calvin's concept of responsibility stands radically opposed to this concept, because man's responsibility is not that of producing works to justify himself, but that of being grateful for the gift of life and felicity bestowed upon him. With Calvin it is man's central sin that he does try to depend on his own works and in so doing despises the grace of God.

The second concept of responsibility against which Calvin's teaching is to be set is that which obtains in moral philosophy. This we saw in the opening chapter to be at once rather different from that of the Reformed tradition and yet similar to it. It is here assumed that moral responsibility is always co-relative with the freedom to do or not to do a certain thing. A man is faced with a situation out of which he can make good or bad. He is to be praised as he by the choice of his free will takes one course of action and makes good. Or he is to be blamed if he by weakness of will chooses the wrong. Responsibility is defined relative to man's freedom and ability. This concept is at once different from that of the Reformed faith, in that theology did not continue to posit man's freedom and ability but asserted his bondage
to sin and his inability, and yet like it, in that both conceive of a man who by nature is or is supposed to be and originally was responsible on the basis of his deeds, the choice of his will, and the exercise of his ability. And here we note again that in moral philosophy responsibility is not defined in terms of grace but with reference to man's ability and freedom. It is this view of responsibility so prevalent in modern thought which has obscured Calvin's notion. We must set ourselves against it in this thesis, as we now attempt to show how Calvin works out a radically different concept of responsibility based on the divine order of grace.

From the outset, this is an arbitrary study in a way that the investigation of his understanding of sin is not. First, Calvin makes a constant conscious attempt to formulate a doctrine of sin; he does not in this conscious way systematize his thought about responsibility. The difference is most clearly illustrated when we recognize that the word sin occurs on virtually every page that Calvin wrote, the word responsibility does not occur in the writings of Calvin. There is no equivalent word in Latin or the French of Calvin's time. Responsible in its present usage has developed since. The idea had then to be expressed in simpler language parallel to our concept. Neither is it, of course, a word found in the Bible. Secondly, we are setting Calvin over against a position to which he did not direct himself, a position which has in the main developed after his time. Here we must then differentiate responsibility into patterns of thought familiar to him. Each of these concepts that fall short of a comprehensive notion of responsibility in the modern sense may be integrated to form an understanding of human responsibility.

The elements of responsibility which are familiar to Calvin are those of man's response to God, of man's obligation, of man's accountability, and of man's culpability. It is in this equivalent or parallel language that he develops his notion of responsibility. First, Calvin thinks of man's response to God, his answer and acknowledgment to grace. This is perhaps the way in
which it is most natural to Calvin to develop man's responsibility; man properly responds to God with his answer of trust and fidelity to depend on grace, his obedience, and his love and gratitude for this grace. 'Woe be to those who have the knowledge of the gospel and to whom God has communicated himself, unless they respond to it (...sinon qu'ils y répondent...) in true obedience and humility.'

When God blesses men, 'their life should answer accordingly.'

The second element in responsibility is obligation or duty. Calvin has many words that are synonymous with our concept of obligation. 'A bond binds and obliges (obstringo, devincio) us to God.' We have a 'solemn obligation' (obligation) to God. By pressing Calvin here we can see the nature of this obligation of man to God and compare it with ideas of obligation which obtained in the concepts following Calvin. The third element contained in responsibility is that of accountability, or answerability. 'Every man must equally give account for himself.'

'The Scripture proclaims that all our thoughts must come to account.' We are 'accountable' (contable = comptable) to God.

Here we speak too of 'discharging a duty.' We are here involved in language which is parallel to that of the covenant of works and can set Calvin more specifically against this later development, as we press him on the nature of this account man is supposed to render to God. Here as well we are using language and concepts like those of moral philosophy and can point up the differences between Calvin and the philosophical tradition. In this way we hope to make it clear that man's culpability, the last aspect of responsibility, lies not in his failure to produce works of merit so much as it does in his continual rejection of God's grace.

1. Ser. on Deut. 26.16-19, CR 23.293
2. Ser. on Deut. 4.1-2, CR 26.101
4. Ser. on Deut. 29.9-18, CR 29.513
6. Ser. on Eph. 5.11-14, CR 51.698
7. Ser. on Job 33.1-7, CR 35.4.9
8. Com. on Rom. 1.18, CR 49.22
A. The response of the sons of God

As it was necessary to expound Calvin's concept of sin in the light of the divine ordering of man's life, so we must understand responsibility against the same background. God's order, which Calvin refers to as the order of creation, consists of grace to man from the side of God and an appropriate acknowledgment to God from man. 'At first man was formed in the image and resemblance of God in order that man might admire his author in the adornments with which he had been nobly vested by God and honor him with proper acknowledgment.' It is this acknowledgment which concerns us here, for it stands opposite man's share in the covenant of works depicted in later theology, and opposite the deeds of virtue by which man is to enter into the full and good life depicted in philosophy. But we find that from the very start Calvin defines this acknowledgment not in terms of works but in terms of a number of concepts that revolve about an answer of man to God's grace and man's resulting life in this grace. In that we have already seen what is man's sin, his chief act of irresponsibility, we examine this response as it stands in antithesis to man's unbelief, infidelity, disobedience, concupiscence, and ingratitude. 'Although the duties we owe to God are innumerable, yet they may not improperly be classed under four general heads, adoration, a necessary branch of which is the spiritual obedience of the conscience; trust; invocation; and thanksgiving.' Man's primal duty is (1) to trust in God's goodness, (2) to be faithful to him, (3) to obey him, (4) to love him, (5) to be grateful to him.

1. Faith (fides) as trust

This response man was in the beginning and is now to give to God is a response of faith or trust in God's goodness. 'Confidence (fiducia = trust) proceeds from faith, (fides) as an effect from its cause,' and it is 'confidence in God which is the mother of piety.' We must develop our confidence in God's goodness, Calvin notes in the second of three parts of man's duty.

1. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 3
2. II.8.16, CR 2.77
3. Com. on Is. 12.2, CR 36.252. Ser. on Eph. 3.9-12, CR 51.472
4. Com. on Ps. 86.2, CR 51.792
'The sum of heavenly wisdom consists in this: (1) that men, having their hearts fixed on God by a true and unfeigned faith, invoke him, and (2) that for the purpose of maintaining and cherishing their confidence in him, they exercise themselves in meditating in good earnest upon his benefits, and (3) that then they yield him an unfeigned and devoted obedience. We may learn from this that the true service of God begins with faith.'

'Faith therefore is the root of true piety. It teaches us to trust in and expect every blessing from God, and it frames us to yield obedience to him, while all those who distrust him must necessarily be ever murmuring and rebelling against him.'

And on the other side we recall that only when a belief in God's goodness failed did the sin of Adam occur, that 'all evils arise from unbelief (incredulitas) and distrust.' (diffidentia)

2. Faith as fidelity

The second way we regard man's proper response, or the life for which he is responsible is that it is to be an acknowledgment in fidelity to him alone. Here we only shift emphasis from trust to fidelity, from belief to faithfulness. Believing in God's goodness with the certainty of faith as trust, we are faithful to him by turning nowhere else for our felicity.

We are to be faithful as we invoke God alone. Man's whole life is a larger life of prayer, he is faithful, he has faith as he looks to God for his every need. This fidelity to invoke him alone Calvin designates as the first part of 'the sum of heavenly wisdom,' which we just noted. The first of the three parts of man's duty is this: 'that men, having their hearts fixed on God by a true and unfeigned faith, invoke him.' Our duty is that 'we adore only one God, that we depend on him for all blessings, that we confess ourselves indebted to him, that we fly to him for all refuge, that we endeavor to dedicate our whole life to him.' Here we recall Calvin's thought about

1. Com. on Ps. 78.7, CR 31.724. The numbers are added.
2. Com. on Ps. 78.21, CR 31.729f
3. Com. on Is. 57.13, CR 37.315
4. 3rd Ser. on Job 1.2-5, CR 33.51. Ser. on Job 22.23-31, CR 34.329
5. Com. on Ps. 78.7, CR 31.724, supra.
6. Ser. on Eph. 1.15-16, CR 51.312
infidelity as the root sin. 'Infidelity was the root of the defection, just as faith alone unites us to God.' So Adam was not faithful 'to claim nothing for his own' and 'depend wholly upon the Son of God' and not seek life anywhere but in him,' rather he attempted to 'rely on his own prudence.'

Calvin sums up these two principal facets of our duty to God in the following typical statements: 'The principal thing' about the service of God is 'that we put our whole trust in him, that we acknowledge that all our blessings come from him, that we invoke him because of this trust, and that we render him the praise for all that which he bestows upon us.' 'The way to honor God aright' 'is to put our whole trust in him, to study to serve him in obeying his will, to invoke him in our necessities, seeking our salvation and all good things at his hand, and finally to acknowledge both with heart and mouth that he is the lively fountain of all goodness.' Man's duty and response to God is here clearly set forth in terms of a response to the grace of God and a life in dependence on it.

It is important to realize here that Calvin is speaking of the duty of man both fundamentally and in the abstract, that is, apart from considerations of sin and redemption. Later Reformed theology would have been able to state the duty of redeemed man in this way. But these statements are equally as applicable to Adam in his innocence. Adam's responsibility was to be faithful to God, as by contrast his sin was infidelity; his responsibility was to trust in and depend on God's grace, as his sin was his distrust. Calvin sets this forth in the definitive statement of man's response to the knowledge of God in the opening section of the Institutes. Here already the concept of a covenant of works is conspicuous by its absence. This duty of man in the beginning is not separately stated in terms of an obligation to produce works which stand before the justice of God. Nor is it defined as a duty to choose the good by his own will and be praised or blamed on this basis. But Calvin

1. Comm. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.39
3. Genevan Catechism, French, 1541, 2 Sunday, CR 6.9f
4. I.2.1f, CR 2.34ff
is beginning with man's duty both in his innocence and now in his redemption as the duty to depend on God's grace and relate his life to it.

3. Obedience (obedientia)

Man's response is to be an answer of obedience. 'Let us recognize that the principal thing which we must pursue is to conform and to devote ourselves to the obedience of faith, that is, that our life be entirely regulated by the Word of God.'

The tree in the garden was a 'test of obedience,' that Adam might not in attempting one thing or another rely upon his own prudence, but that cleaving to God alone, he might become wise only by his obedience.

'This truly is the only rule of living well and rationally: that men should exercise themselves in obeying God.' 'Our life will then be rightly ordered if we obey God and if his will is the regulator of our affections.'

'The chief good consists in the practice of righteousness, in obedience to the commands of God.'

Statements like these could be collected from the entirety of the writings of Calvin. And again we recognize in this response of obedience the counter motion of sin. 'As nothing is more acceptable to God than obedience, so nothing is more intolerable than when men, having spurned his commandments, obey Satan and their own lust.'

As disobedience is the wellspring by which all sin has entered the world, so obedience is 'the mother and guardian' or 'the origin of all virtues.'

Having begun with man's response to God as that of fidelity and trust Calvin here makes an important place for man's duty as obedience. Calvin is then able to work out the whole concept of man's responsibility as that of obeying the divine law, and it has been this concept that later Reformed theology took over. Man is responsible as he obeys God's law. But it is important to see that in Calvin this is an obedience which rises from the trust in and fidelity to depend on God's grace that we have just examined; it takes its

1. Ser. on I Tim. 1.14-15, CR 53.86
2. II.1.4, CR 2.178
3. Com. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.39
4. Com. on Gen. 2.16, CR 23.44f
5. II.1.4, CR 2.179
6. Com. on Gen. 3.11, CR 23.67
7. II.8.5, CR 2.270, Ser. on I Tim. 1.14-15, CR 53.81
place alongside these ways of thought where God's original grace to man governs. There is no sense of man's being obedient, in order to produce works sufficient to justify his own existence, as the concept of duty under the covenant of works suggests. But this obedience, as we see presently in the discussion of obligation, comes from man's gratitude to God.

4. Self denial (sui abnegatio) and love of God (Dei amor)

The fourth way we regard the response of man is that it is to be a response of love of God in denial of self. We yield up our whole affection to God. 'The whole perfection of life is often said to consist in the love of God.'¹ 'Our life will not be regulated aright till the love of God fill all our senses. Let us therefore learn that the commencement of godliness is the love of God because God disdains the forced services of men and chooses to be worshiped freely and willingly.'² Love is the chief virtue and others are nothing without it. Emphasis is here on the fact that man's affection must be one away from self and toward God. In that it is a motion away from self, it is self-denial; in that it is toward God, it is in love and adoration of God.³ This is man's acknowledgment as seen in antithesis to his concupiscence and self-love. The 'carnal mind,' by nature corrupt in 'concupiscence,' is 'so perverse that with all its affections it entertains a secret hatred against God.'⁴ But we must love God, our affection and desire must be to follow his will. 'He (Peter) sets forth the way of ceasing from sin, that renouncing the concupiscence of men, we should study to form our life according to the will of God.' Moreover Peter defines here what is the rule of right living, even when man depends on the will of God. From this it follows that nothing is right and well ordered in man's life as soon as he wanders from this rule. We ought further to notice the contrast between God's will and the concupiscence of men.⁵

It is to real love we turn when we abandon self-love and concupiscence,

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1. Com. on I John 2.9, CR 55.315
2. Com. on Matt. 22.37, CR 45.611
3. III.7.4, CR 2.508; Ser. on Eph. 6.5-9, CR 51.802
4. III.3.1, CR 2.209. III.7.2, CR 2.506
5. Com. on I Pet. 4.2, CR 55.271
when we follow God’s will. For God’s will is that we love him. The law, which
‘represses all concupiscences,’ and designs ‘to bring men to self-denial’
requires on the positive side the free and voluntary love of God.\(^1\) ‘Love...
truly is the rule of our whole life and of all our actions so that everything
that is not regulated according to it is faulty whatever attractiveness it may
otherwise possess.’\(^2\) ‘The principal service that God demands is that we love
him...as he declares in the summary of his law: Thou shalt love the Lord thy
God.’ This makes us desire to follow his will and law. ‘When we love him,
service is to that extent pleasant for us.’ ‘Instead of our concupiscences
which draw us here and there we are to have this affection which overrules,
namely, that we take more pleasure in giving ourselves to him and that we are
governed by his Holy Spirit to conform to his righteousness.’\(^3\)

That Adam could not have been bound to God by any sort of covenant of
works is here obvious as we realize that Calvin is talking about man’s primal
relationship to God when he says we must be bound by a love and willing
desire to serve him, and as we recall that man’s attempt to depend on his
own works is included by Calvin as a secret form of concupiscence. Paul was
concupiscent because ‘being puffed up with confidence in his righteousness,
he expected salvation by his works.’\(^4\) And the rich young ruler is concupiscent
because ‘he dreams of merits on account of which he may receive eternal
life as a reward due.’\(^5\) Rather Calvin has here set man’s basic duty to God
from the very start as that of a glad and loving response to his bounty.

5. Gratitude (gratitudo)

The most all embracing way we view the response of man is that it is
to be a response of gratitude. ‘At first man was formed in the image and
resemblance of God in order that man might admire his author in the adornments
with which he had been nobly vested by God and honor him with proper gratitude.’\(^6\)

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1. Com. on I John 2.5, CR 55.312. Com. on Matt. 19.20, CR 45.539f
2. Com. on Col. 3.14, CR 54.123. Com. on Ps. 18.1, CR 31.170f
3. Ser. on Gen. 22.9-14, CR 23.774f. Com. on I John 2.15ff, CR 55.318f
4. Com. on Ex. 20.17, CR 24.719
5. Com. on Matt. 19.16ff, on Mark 10.21, CR 45.536f
This is the content of the acknowledgment man was and is to make. It is finally obvious that Calvin does not see man's relation to God even in his innocence as that of producing works of righteousness by which he justified his own existence. Man has simply to be grateful to God. Here above all we see that Calvin's starting point about man's responsibility is the grace of God, and that he works out man's responsibility within this framework. This is the 'thanksgiving' in Calvin's 'four general heads' of our duty to God. We 'acknowledge that all our blessings come from him,' and 'we render him the praise for all that which he bestows upon us.' We are 'finally to acknowledge both with heart and mouths that he is the lively fountain of all goodness.' We must 'pay homage to him for all the things that we hold of his mere goodness.'

As often as God helps us in our need let us understand that he requires of us an expression of thanksgiving.'

And we recall that through his ingratitude man brought ignominy upon himself. His primal sin was and is ingratitude. 'On account of his ingratitude man has been hurled from the summit of glory to the abyss of ignominy.' Adam through his ingratitude became corrupted. Now the nature of man contains the seed of all evils; sins rise out of the ignorance of God and this ingratitude of which all men are guilty.

It is in these ways that Calvin develops the responsibility of man to God. If it has here seemed strange to talk about man's duty and responsibility to God in terms of faith, trust, fidelity, love and gratitude, rather than in terms of what he ought to have done with his freedom and power in his primal state, of virtues he ought to have provided, or of righteous choices he ought to have made, this is only an index of the way in which we must get behind these later notions of responsibility and begin at Calvin's starting point of the grace of God. But a study of any of Calvin's statements of man's response

2. Genevan Catechism, 1541, 2 Sunday, CR 6.9f
3. Ser. on Eph. 2.8-10, CR 51.376
4. II.2.1, CR 2.186
5. Ser. on Job 3.2-10, CR 33.144
6. Com. on I Cor. 6.11, CR 49.394
to God reveals these same key ideas. They are clearly integrated in the definitive statement in the Institutes\(^1\) and in the Catechism.\(^2\) The federal and philosophical ideas are alien to him.

**B. The obligation of the sons of God**

Responsibility involves a notion of obligation. We have a duty to behave as sons of God by rendering this acknowledgment we have examined, a response in confident belief, in fidelity, in obedience, in love of God, and in gratitude. We turn now to the nature of this obligation. We have seen that in all the ways Calvin thinks of man's response to God he keeps in constant focus the grace of God. Here we note how the concept of obligation is brought under the governing concept of the grace of God. Calvin begins with the concept of our obligation to our Lord and master, and we do not minimize this way of thought. From here we could develop the concept of obligation in formal and legal terms. We could say that man discharged his duty as he did certain things. Reformed theology did from here develop the concept of God as our master and maker who judged our works and who obligated us to serve him with deeds of virtue and works of merit. But Calvin brings these notions under our obligation as sons to our father. And we see in contrast to the notions of moral philosophy how the concept of obligation is extended from formal service demanded by a divine imperative to the glad and willing response of a son to a father. Man is not created into a situation where he is bound rightly to use his freedom and will in order to maintain the moral order, but he is bound to God by a glad and selfless love and desires nothing more than to do his will.

1. **Creator and creature**

There are several ways we are bound to God. To begin with, we are obligated as creatures to our creator. In the consideration of why we worship and serve him, 'we must here proceed by degrees. (deges) First, we must understand that since God has honored us by making us his creatures, we are

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\(^1\) T.2.1-2, CR 2.33ff. also T.14.22, CR 2.15ff
\(^2\) Catechism, ad loc. cit., Ser. on Eph. 3.14-19, CR 51.494
already bound to him, though there were no other reason.  

As soon as he begins to exist, he is already by right of creation so much indebted to his maker that he has nothing of his own.  

It is then our duty to give ourselves to God because he has given us life.  

'God, as he is our creator, justly sustains toward us the character of a father and of a Lord; and on this account we owe to him glory and reverence, love and fear. Moreover, we are not at liberty to follow everything to which the violence of our passions may excite us, but we ought to be attentive to his will and to practice nothing but what is pleasing to him.'  

'Righteousness and rectitude are a delight, but iniquity and abomination to him, and therefore unless we will with impious ingratitude rebel against our maker, we must necessarily spend the whole of our lives in the practice of righteousness.'  

'Whatever he requires of us...we are under a natural obligation to obey.'  

2. Master and servant

We are obligated to God as servants to our master. The figure here is changed from a creature and creator relationship to that of a servant and master, but this second idea is implicit in the first as we say that God is the Lord. God is our ruler and king. Calvin recognizes these two separately, but usually incorporates the two into one. God is our maker and Lord. This is the first consideration why we obey him. This stands preliminary to the second consideration: that he is our father. God justly sustains toward us the character of a father and of a Lord; and on this account we owe to him glory and reverence, love and fear.  

There are 'two considerations' involved in the reason we must obey him. We think of a debt of money, or the debt of a slave to his master. 'Since we with all that belongs to us are indebted to his majesty, whatever he requires of us, he most justly

1. Ser. on Job 35.8-11, CR 35.240
2. Com. on Rom. 11.35, CR 49.231f. I.2.2, CR 2.34f
3. II.8.2, CR 2.267, CR 2.276
4. ibid.
5. II.8.14, CR 2.276
demands as the payment of a debt.¹ This is the language of accountability, which we examine presently. Or, we recall the parable of the unprofitable servants. 'A bond of servitude no less rigorous binds and obliges us to serve God.'² There is a real way in which we are bound to God like this.

But we are not to think of a Christian's obligation principally in these terms. We must go beyond this. As a manner of fact, the response of obedience which issues from this type of obligation only is not acceptable to God.³ Fully to be acceptable obligation is to be pitched not on a plane of mere forced service to God - this is only to 'serve God halfway' - but for real obedience there must be obligation on a plane of glad, free, willing love to God. 'The principal service that God demands is that we love him, for servile fear when we tremble before his majesty and do unwillingly that which he commands is nothing. God will reject all this. True, sometimes he seems to accept a forced obedience, but this is not what he approves. This is done by way of (outward) example, but at the same time he rejects persons when they do not have a will sincere and free.

'The principal thing in our life is to love God, as he declares in the summary of his law: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, he says. He could have used the word fear but this would not have been enough, because as I have already said we would serve God only halfway, if we were motivated by the authority which he has over us. That would be only smoke. But when we love him, service is to that extent pleasant for us.'⁴ 'This servile fear is full of perverseness.'⁵ God has to 'recede from the strictness of his claims' to accept 'obedience which is not performed spontaneously as if it were not a duty.'⁶

3. Father and son

The second consideration in our obligation to God is found in our

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1. II.8.4, CR 2.268. Ser. on Deut. 6.4-9, CR 26.436ff
3. Com. on Ps. 1.1ff, CR 31.39; Ser. on Job 1.1, CR 33.31f
4. Ser. on Gen. 22.9-14, CR 23.774f. Ser. on Deut. 8.3-9, CR 26.609
5. Com. on Jonah 1.16, CR 43.230. Ser. on Deut. 6.4-7, CR 26.439ff; on Deut. 19.8-13, CR 27.558ff; on Eph. 6.5-9, CR 51.302
6. II.8.4, CR 2.268
relationship as sons to our father. Beyond our giving him service because of his right and authority, service must be rendered in love and gratitude. If we are to serve him all the way and not just halfway, we are bound to serve him not only by necessity, but as sons. God always goes beyond requiring obedience on the plane of the servant. 'After having shown that he has a right to command and that obedience is his just due, that he may not appear to constrain us by necessity alone, he sweetly allure us by pronouncing himself the God of the church.' It is a matter of 'the mutual relation which is contained in that promise, I will be their God and they shall be my people.'

This notion added to that God as Lord and maker is the second of our 'degrees' of obligation. 'As we see that God is never weary of showing himself liberal toward us, and that this fountain always flows in so many streams as to satisfy us in all things, we can only show continuously how we are bound and indebted to a father so good and kindhearted.'

God says, I dealt kindly with you for this very purpose: that you might be mine, for he who has been redeemed by another's kindness is no longer his own. God had redeemed that people, and redemption brought with it an obligation, (obligatio) by which the people were bound willingly to submit to God as their ruler and king.

It is of the highest significance that obligation as a servant is given in subordination to obligation as a son, and is of itself not enough. 'He says by his prophets, (Mal. 1.16) If I am your father, where is the love that you should bear me? Especially does he attribute this term love to a father. Now he puts also in its turn the word master, but above all he names a father, and not without cause. For if we know God only as our superior, it is certain that we will be motivated to serve him, but as I have already said, this will only be a servile fear. Now the principal thing is that we hold him for our father, and that we be as it were delighted to conform ourselves to his will,'

1. II.8.14, CR 2.276. Ser. on Deut. 5.4-7, CR 26.252ff
2. Ser. on Job 35.8-11, CR 35.240f. Ser. on Deut. 8.1-4, CR 26.584ff
3. Ser. on Eph. 5.18-21, CR 51.728
4. Com. on Jer. 2.20, CR 37.519
since he has been pleased to adopt us for his children. It is from this that voluntary reverence proceeds. Thus we note well that for our life to be approved of God, and for it to be well regulated, it is not only necessary that we do that which he commands, but that we desire also to do it.  

Thus there is a twofold way in which sanction is given to what God requires of us: God's sheer authority over us as our master and maker, and our love to him for his fatherly relationship to us. According to the 'preface' to his law, 'God supports the authority of his law in two ways. For first, it ought to be a powerful excitement to the worship of God when we are fully convinced that we worship the actual creator of heaven and earth,' and secondly, because it is a pleasing inducement to love him when he freely adopts us as his people.' He exhibits a promise of grace, to allure them by its charms to the pursuit of holiness. He reminds the Israelites of his favor, to convict them of ingratitude if they do not conduct themselves in a manner corresponding to his goodness.

It is important to notice that we are not only talking about the obligation of redeemed sinners, but also the primal obligation of man. This is the way Adam was bound to God. While God does threaten punishment, yet this is not his deepest basis of obligation. 'The kind commemoration of the gifts of God' was to retain in his duty this first son of God. 'To the end that Adam might the more willingly comply, God commends his own liberality.' A true child of God, Calvin notes, 'even though there were no hell, would shudder and the thought of offending him.'

4. Discharged obligation?

There can be no question here of the type of obligation where man enters into felicity as he discharges his obligation. If we think of obligation in this way we come face to face again with the fact that God has given man all

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1. Ser. on Gen. 22.3-14, CR 23.774f. Com. on Mal. 1.6f; CR 44.409f
2. Com. on Matt. 22.37, CR 45.611. Com. on Ex. 20.1ff, CR 24.209ff
4. Com. on Gen. 2.16, CR 23.4ff
5. I.2.2, CR 2.35
that he is, has, and does. So any fulfilling of our obligation which would in
turn obligate God to us is absurd. 'All the zeal that may be manifested by us
in discharging our duty does not obligate him to us by any sort of merit, for
as we are his property so he on his part can owe us nothing.' Any promise in
the law is a free one where God obligates himself to us upon the condition that
we discharge our obligation to him. But it is not God's intent that we come to
felicity this way, indeed is impossible. Even if it should happen, we would
still be saved by grace. This is obligation under law from which we have been
released.

It is true that only as man responds does he retain eternal life and the
gifts of God. We have a debt of gratitude laid on us at birth. But even if
we were innocent we could not think of these gifts as coming because man has
discharged his obligation. Rather life and felicity is given us, we have only
to acknowledge it. This is not to discharge an obligation and justify the
blessings having been given us. Far from God's grace being any sort of reward
as we discharge our duty, it only renews our obligation. 'The kindness and
liberality which God exercises toward us are so far from giving us a right to
swell with foolish confidence that we are only laid under deeper obligation to
him. Whenever we meet with the word reward, or whenever it occurs to our re-
collection, let us look upon this as the crowning act of the goodness of God to
us, that though we are completely in his debt, he condescends to enter into a
bargain with us.' And this bargain is that we discharge our duty precisely
as we confess that we cannot discharge our duty. 'We are not cognizant enough
toward God if from year to year, month to month, day to day, hour to hour, we
are not careful to acknowledge his graces and render to him the sacrifice he
requires of us, that is, that we affirm that we are wholly his, that we hold
all from him, and that it is impossible for us to discharge the hundredth part

2. ibid.; Ser. on Eph. 6.1-4, CR 51.795 and see earlier on the law.
3. III.19.2, CR 2.613f
4. Com. on Ps. 30.14f, CR 31.501. Com. on Rom. 1.18, CR 49.22
5. Ser. on Job 33.1-7, CR 35.48
of our duty.\(^1\) 'It is an inestimable goodness to us that he discharges us of all that we owe to him in return for our affirming that we are bound and obligated to him and that we cannot discharge ourselves of it.'\(^2\)

5. Obligation and gratitude

The most advanced kind of obligation in the life of a believer—a type without which obligation is fulfilled only halfway—appears as he meditates on the goodness of God. There must be an obligation characterized by willingness and freedom. Where obligation is not pleasant, where man's inclination differs from his obligation, we are not yet operating with a truly redeemed notion of responsibility. 'We know that the more favor God shows to us, the more we ought to be incited to love and fear him. God has shown himself beneficial to us, now ought this not draw us the more to him? Yes. For if we bind a mortal man to us by our well doing, he will be thought ungrateful if he does not acknowledge the good that we have done him. And how much less are we to be excused if we do not so to the living God?' 'Consider what you have from him, think of all the benefits which he has bestowed upon you to this hour. Let every man examine himself to see how much he is \underline{bound} to God that we may be the more inflamed to love him.' He has created us, redeemed us, drawn us to him, and daily blesses us. 'Seeing then that our Lord does not cease to confirm us daily in his grace, let us on our side see that we take occasion in this to serve him more earnestly.'\(^3\)

Man's truest obligation is not in terms of a life dominated by rules that command obedience that we may earn God's favor, a life of merit or reward, of censure or blame. It is not this way in the Christian faith and it was not this way in the beginning. This responsibility under sin or law can only lead to bondage and idolatry. We have been set at liberty to 'a higher principle,' restored to a right and primal relation to God as sons to a father. We must free ourselves from responsibility as a duty we have to

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1. Ser. on Eph. 5.18-21, CR 51.727. Ser. on Deut. 6.10-13, CR 26.449f
2. Ser. on Eph. 5.18-21, CR 51.732. Ser. on Deut. 32.11-15, CR 26.702f
3. Ser. on Deut. 4.44-5.3, CR 26.239. Com. on I Thes. 2.12f, CR 52.150f
Com. on Ps. 23.5, CR 31.241; on Deut. 10.14f, CR 24.221 et al.
be pleasing to God that he may be favorable to us. This is a sub-Christian plane of obligation. We live in a Christian 'liberty' which leads to 'a willing obedience to righteousness.' 

1. No other worship is pleasing to him than what is voluntary. 'God disdains the forced services of men and chooses to be worshipped freely and willingly.' 

2. Everyone who has tasted of God's goodness so orders himself as to obey God. 

3. Men are to observe a 'continual Sabbath all their life long,' where they rest from their works and efforts, put aside concupiscence and self-will, and quietly and peacefully serve God and depend on his goodness.

In his notion of obligation for the man in Christ Calvin re-asserts his concept of the responsibility of primal man. Man is placed again - this time by redemption in Christ - on a position of blessedness. He freely receives all in the grace of God. He no longer needs to obey as under sin or law in discharging a duty, in self-justification, or to earn salvation. Grace and mercy stimulate a desire for obedience. 'A godly heart is formed to the obedience of God not so much by any precepts nor by sanctions, but rather by the serious meditating upon the goodness of God toward him.' 'Men can never seriously worship God, nor be sufficiently stimulated to his reverence and obedience until they know how much they are indebted to his mercy.' 'That he might obligate us to God not with a servile fear but with a voluntary and cheerful love, Paul persuades us with the sweetness of his grace, which contains our salvation.' We are to be 'charged with ingratitude, unless having experienced such a bountiful and liberal father, we endeavor in our turn to dedicate ourselves wholly to him.' 

5. 'There is no sacrifice which he values more than when we are bound fast to him by the chain of a free and spontaneous love.' 

In Calvin's thought the whole concept of man's obligation to God must

2. Com. on Matt. 22.37, CR 45.611. Ser. on Eph. 6.5-9, CR 51.802
3. Com. on Hos. 3.2, CR 42.26f
4. Com. on Rom. 12.1, CR 49.233. Ser. on Deut. 4.1-6, CR 33.185f
6. Com. on Ps. 18.1, CR 31.170
be brought under God's grace and man's response to it.

C. The accountability of the Sons of God

Responsibility involves a notion of accountability. Man is responsible, he will be called to account by God. Each will stand or fall according to whether he is accounted righteous. We are here using a language that is common to both later Reformed theology in the idea of a covenant of works, and to moral philosophy. In these, man is called to account for his works. If he has rightly employed his abilities and chosen the good, he ought to be rewarded. If he has failed to do so, he is to be censured. Though the theologians and philosophers differed as to man's ability and freedom, yet the concept of man's basic accountability is similar. But we now see that Calvin does not discuss accountability in these terms. There is absolutely no case where man is to be rewarded for his deeds even in theory, for man is not to live by his works, but by grace. All of his goodness even in his innocence and rectitude comes immediately from God; it is not man's responsibility to render account and be rewarded for his actions, it is for man to be responsible as he acknowledges God's grace, depends on it, and is grateful for it. And where man fails and is to be censured, he is not punished so much for his lack of independently effected good works, as he is for having cut off God's grace to him and despised it. Thus Calvin brings the whole notion of accountability under the governing principle of God's grace to man and man's response to it.

1. An account of merit and ability?

We must begin with the recognition that it is not the place of man to live by his own righteousness. The sons of God are not to present an account of what they have accomplished with the gifts of God and look for felicity on the grounds of the profit, fruition, or increase of these gifts. We do not effectuate our felicity but receive it from God. This is true with man in integrity as well as with those redeemed from guilt. 'God has made man upright.' 'He was favored with rectitude by the divine goodness.'

1. II.1.10, CR 2.184.
only to receive his inheritance of eternal life as he gave it proper acknowledgment. Only in this secondary sense of being accountable for retaining it can we say that men are accountable for their eternal life. This we examine presently. But initially man is not put on his own account, he is not by fulfilling the law of God in skill, dexterity, or strength of will to provide the credit with which to effect his own felicity.

It may not be objected - as federal theology has indicated - that believers do receive free grace in this way, that when man proved himself not able to render account, God's grace superabounded to give what he had before required, but that in the beginning Adam was placed on account that he might be rewarded eternal life on the basis of his deeds. The Adamic relationship to God was not this way. 'At that time when man was exalted to the most honorable eminence, the Scripture attributes nothing to him but that he was created after the image of God, which certainly implies that his happiness consisted not in any goodness of his own, but in a participation of God.'¹ 'Let us put the case that we were in the integrity in which our father Adam was at the first. Should we then presume it was of ourselves under the illusion that God had ennobled us in this way? Now we hold everything from him.'²

'Would we have it through our own dexterity? Would we have got it by our own strength? (vertu) No! But we would have it because God had given it to us through his own free goodness.'² Adam's righteousness was as much the gift of God as ours, he did good only insofar as God continued to empower him.

'Adam had need of being gifted with that fortitude and constancy with which the elect of God are gifted whom God wills to keep safe and sound from falling.'³

'Let us recognize then that the praise is due to him that we may not defraud him of that which belongs to him. For if we should live as perfectly as angels and yet have the foolish idea that this came from our own free will and of our movement, then we would miss the principal thing. To what end serve all our good

¹. II.2.1, CR 2.186. Com. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.39
². Ser. on Job 33.1-7, CR 35.48
³. The Secret Providence of God, (E.T. by Cole) 281
works lest it be that God in them is glorified? But if we think ourselves the author of them, we see that they are corrupted in so doing, and are converted into vices, so that they are nothing more than ambition.\(^1\)

This is the notion of accountability that man assumes for himself, as he moves in sin to take care of himself, to be wise in his own strength, to judge, select, and obtain good and evil for himself and thus attend to his own needs. We think 'we can co-operate so that when it comes to the reckoning (conte = compte) the principal part will always be found in us.'\(^2\)

'Having trusted such a great excellence of his nature and having forgotten from whom it had come and by whom it subsisted, man strove to raise himself up apart from the Lord.'\(^3\) Adam's sin was that he thought he was able to do this and that with his own wisdom, free will, and virtue.\(^4\) This particular aspect of rendering account most easily conceived by us is the very type which is not at all permissible. We are prone by nature to think of our rendering such an account as by our good or bad deeds to gain for ourselves reward or censure. 'Such is the wicked ambition that belongs to our nature that when the question related to the origin of our salvation, we quickly form diabolical imaginations about our own merits.'\(^5\) But this is the type of accountability into which we fell and from which we have been released, which we served while we were under sin and law. We may in no way assume responsibility for any merit, even a meritorious proper acknowledgment and gratitude which renders efficacious the grace of God. 'Two errors must be avoided: the legitimate use of the grace first bestowed must not be said to be rewarded with subsequent degrees of grace, as though man by his own industry rendered the grace of God efficacious, nor must it be accounted a remuneration in such a sense as to cease to be esteemed the free favor of God.'\(^6\)

\(^1\) Ser. on Eph. 1.4-6, CR 51.274
\(^2\) Ser. on Eph. 1.17-18, CR 51.329f
\(^3\) Instruction in Faith, 1547, sec. 4
\(^4\) Ser. on Eph. 1.13-14, CR 51.305
\(^5\) Com. on John 3.16, CR 47.6f. Ser. on Deut. 7.11-15, CR 26.533; Ser. on Gal. 3.21-25, CR 50.546; Com. on Heb. 11.6, CR 55.149
\(^6\) II.3.11, CR 2.221
We speak of God's keeping an account of the deeds of man to bless him for them only in the loosest way, in such a way that his free grace permeates and overrides all. Though we can really bring nothing to him worthy of account, yet 'God receives the thing at our hand which is worth nothing, and puts our items of work as it were into his books of account,' but in spite of that, 'they are acceptable to him through his own goodness,' and 'we see then how gracious he does show himself to us.'

2. An account of acknowledgment

Rather Adam was given only a dependent and subordinate accountability. His duty was to acknowledge the felicity and inheritance of eternal life he had been given by returning to God his gratitude and obedience. 'At first man was formed in the image of God in order that he might admire his author in the adornments with which he had been nobly vested by God and honor him with proper gratitude.' In this he is held accountable, on the basis of this he retains or forfeits eternal life. 'He at the time when he possessed his life in safety, had it only as deposited in the Word of God, and could not otherwise retain it, than by acknowledging that it was received from him.' This is a very real accountability, but it is a very different one from being held initially responsible for coming to felicity, or for making efficacious the gifts of God.

As it is to a similar thankful acknowledgment of God's life and blessing that the sons of God are today held responsible, when he restores us to the life in grace, we examine the nature of this account more thoroughly in the general terms of man's acknowledgment to God. 'The principal sacrifice that God requires is that men acknowledge his benefits, that they pay homage to him, and that then these should excite men to do their duty.' 'For why are we fed by his goodness, why in short does he put out our eyes with the great number of benefits that he bestows upon us, unless it is to the end that we

1. Ser. on Job 35.1-7, CR 35.229. Com. on Rom. 2.6, CR 49.34; on Ps. 62.12, CR 31.592f; on Mal. 3.17, CR 44.432ff
2. Instruction in Faith, 1538, sec. 3
3. Com. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.397. Com. on John 1.4, CR 47.5
should yield some acknowledgment (recoignissance) of them to him? For, as it is said in the Psalm, we can from our side (de nostre costé) bring no profit to him, rather he requires in exchange nothing other than this act of thanksgiving, as it is said in Psalm 116: What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits which I have received from him, unless I take the cup of salvation at his hand and call upon his name? This then is what we have to bring to God: that we confess ourselves bound to him for all things. ¹

This is the 'solemn record' we have to yield to him.²

'Our gratitude in yielding to God the praise which is his due is regarded by him as a singular recompense.'³ 'For seeing that we can bring no recompense to God, at least we can pay homage to him for the things that we hold of his mere goodness, and when he sees us so humbled, he is content with such a pure and simple confession as this. But if there is such an ingratitude in us to usurp the thing that is properly his, certainly it is a just punishment for him to reject us entirely.'⁴ 'Inasmuch as we can bring God neither profit nor loss, he is content if we praise his name. For even if we should employ all our ability, what is in us with which God might be enriched or given some advantage? For he gives all things and needs nothing. It is an inestimable goodness to us that he discharges us of all that we owe to him in return for our affirming that we are bound and obligated to him and that we cannot discharge ourselves of it. Then if we come in all humility to him to confess the obligation that we have to God this and nothing more is the payment (payement) that he requires of us.'⁵

'Our Lord calls us gently to him, he wishes to win us by such kindness, and therefore if we do not deign to come to him that which we receive at his hand will cost us right dearily. It is true that God asks no payment

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¹ Ser. on Eph. 1.1-3, CR 51.252. Ser. on Deut. 32.11-15, CR 26.702²
² Ser. on Job 22.23-30, CR 34.330. Com. on Hos. 11.1f, CR 42.500²
³ Com. on Ps. 104.31, CR 32.96. Com. on Ps. 116.12f, CR 32.197²
⁴ Ser. on Eph. 2.8-10, CR 51.376
⁵ Ser. on Eph. 5.18-21, CR 51.732
(pavement) from us, for we can bring him nothing. But yet as our duty he would have us render an expression of thanksgiving to him. If we do not do this, the sacrilege must be laid to our charge that we have ravaged the blessings of God, for being in no way his children. For what right do we have to enjoy them unless it is that he is our father? 'What remains but that our Lord enter into account (entrer en compte) with us, if we on our part (de nostre part) do not desire to serve him, and if the ease and rest which he has given us is not applied to the end that we truly show that we hold him for our father, inasmuch as he treats us as his children. If, I say, we do not acknowledge this, then our ingratitude will not go unpunished.' Now according as God has extended himself toward us, so must we extend our hearts to serve him, that we may be fully devoted to his love. For by all the blessings which we receive at his hand we ought to be inflamed to come to him. We have in them a taste of his goodness to draw us to him. If then we do not make worthy the graces of God, to love him, and be as it were delighted in him, it is certain that we must render a dreadful account for it.' It is this accountability for acknowledgment and gratitude that is given to sons of God.

3. Accountability and free will

We must now ask ourselves, in the light of what we have said to be man's responsibility, how Calvin conceives of man's power and will in the beginning, to see this in contrast to the notions of moral philosophy. There is a sense in which Calvin may ascribe a free will to Adam in the beginning. Adam was free either to remain in rectitude or to sin. 'It was possible for him not to sin.' (posse non peccare) Calvin seems, at least in controversy, to grant to man in integrity a type of choice. It is possible to isolate a few passages in Calvin where his language might suggest the concept of responsibility later to be found in the covenant of works or developed in moral philosophy. Faced

1. Ser. on Deut. 6.10-13, CR 26.450f. Ser. on Tit. 1.15-16, CR 54.483
2. Ser. on Deut. 32.11-15, CR 26.702
3. 1.15.8, CR 2.14.2f
4. Com. on Matt. 4.1, CR 45.130
with a passage from Ecclesiasticus, he concedes the point that man at his creation had some choice, but maintains that he now has lost it. The writer (of Ecclesiasticus) says that man, as soon as he was created, was left in the power of his own determination (in manu consilii sui); that precepts were given to him, which if he kept, he should also be kept by them; that he had life and death, good and evil set before him; and that whatever he desired would be given him. Let it be granted that man at his creation was endowed with the faculty of choosing (facultas adipiscendae) life or death. But 'we reply that he has lost it.'¹ In the fall Adam exercised his free will to precipitate his descendants into a state where free will was lost. We are not free to live in rectitude or to sin.

But as we press the question, it is clear that Calvin does not mean that man in integrity was supposed to have independent power or free will. Adam was not to live by the exercise of his will as he chose the good and not the evil. Interestingly, Calvin is uneasy about what is taught by this passage in Ecclesiasticus. Calvin replies not only to his opponents 'but also to Ecclesiasticus himself, whoever he may be: If you design to teach man to seek within himself a power (facultas) to attain salvation, your authority is not so great in our estimation as to obtain even the smallest degree of credit in opposition to the undoubted Word of God.'² While man in integrity was given to will, he was not given an autocratic power to determine intrinsically and apart from God. He was given to will only in confrontation with and in answer to the grace of God, in such a way that in his answer he ascribed nothing to himself, but rested wholly on the objective necessity of God's presence and strength. Man could only act in response and corresponding to the grace presented to him. He himself was not to create by his own will some higher good out of the gifts with which God had endowed him. He was not put on his own account. As man can know only according and corresponding to

1. III.5.18, CR 2.245
2. ibid.
the object that is presented to him - his rational faculties have no creative power to create certain forms out of something formless - so man can will only according and corresponding to the necessity that arises out of a confrontation with the objective reality. His faculty to will does not have and is not supposed to have a power to create good. Calvin is clear here that man not only does not have a free will and choice in the sense demanded by moral philosophy but that he was not supposed to have it so. His will was always to be allied with and supported by divine grace. It was not supposed to be free and autonomous but to be determined by God's grace. And likewise man's power and ability was always to be that of God's grace within him, he was not supposed to have power, virtue, or ability of his own. Where moral philosophy defined responsibility with reference to man's freedom and ability, Calvin relates it to the grace of God.

Calvin teaches in fact that it was when Adam first attempted to exercise free will like this to choose for himself some good, to determine some good, to create good by his own choice, that he fell. The 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' is 'free will' (voluntatis arbitrium = choice of the will) and when Adam reached for it, he sinned. Calvin teaches that independence of this sort to be able to do good is what man desires in sin. 'The devil has never ceased since the beginning of the world to inflate men with some foolish opinion about their own wisdom and about their virtue. (vertu = 'strength)

'For he cast down the human race by this cunning and now he yet endeavors to make us believe that we are able to do this and that. Paul then had to strip men of this false and cursed idea about their free will (franc-arbitre) and about their own virtue, and show them that they are bound to the Holy Spirit for all.' Calvin teaches that independence of this sort to be able to do good is what man desires in sin. Calvin teaches that independence of this sort to be able to do good is what man desires in sin. 'The devil has never ceased since the beginning of the world to inflate men with some foolish opinion about their own wisdom and about their virtue. (vertu = 'strength)
works, 'if we think ourselves the author of them, we see that they are corrupted in so doing, and are converted into vices, so that they are nothing more than ambition.'

He who attributes some free will to himself and who presumes that he has some means and faculty (faculté) to do good of himself certainly wishes to step into the place of God and show himself to be creator.

Calvin follows here the Augustinian distinction between arbitrium (will or choice) and voluntas (will). Man has a faculty of willing, (voluntas) but it is only when this will is turned by the grace (gratia) of God toward the good that man makes a choice (arbitrium) of the good. This is the case with man in his integrity, with fallen man, or with redeemed man. But this happens in the thought of Calvin (who differs here slightly from Augustine) in such a way that the responsibility for this choice (arbitrium) rests entirely upon grace and not upon man's will (voluntas). We do not ascribe even to man in integrity, or to redeemed man, much less to fallen man, a free choice or will (liberum arbitrium). Nor, as we have seen, it was when Adam in his integrity did ascribe to himself this free will (liberum arbitrium = franc-arbitre) that he fell. Man does not 'turn himself hither or thither at the free choice of his own will.' (liberum voluntatis suae arbitrium)

If we forsake the grace (gratia) of God - which we do as soon as we ascribe the smallest credit to man himself - the choice (arbitrium) of the will (voluntas) brings death. The will turns on itself and becomes concupiscent, or self-willed. Thus man is not responsible as he is free and able, as moral philosophy would have it, but he is responsible only as he responds to grace, as he is enabled and has his actions determined by it.

'If a man should live devoutly, and if he were a mirror of holiness and of all virtue, it might be said, He has done this and that. And in fact we are not as tree trunks, and so we do do good. But we must recognize that

1. Ser. on Eph. 1.4-6, CR 51.274; II.2.10, CR 2.194
2. Ser. on Eph. 2.8-10, CR 51.380f
3. Ser. on Eph. 2.8-10, CR 51.380f
4. II.2.6, CR 2.190; II.2.9, CR 2.192; II.3.5, CR 2.215f; II.5.15, CR 2.243
5. I.16.4, CR 2.147
6. II.2.9, CR 2.193; II.1.8, CR 2.183; II.15.6ff, CR 2.142ff
this comes from somewhere else and not of ourselves. This is the gist of the case. Then when it is asked, Can men do good? Yes, but not of themselves and not their own movement or of their own nature, but only inasmuch as they are led to it by the Spirit of God. If someone asks, Can men do evil? They are wholly addicted to it, it is their common path. So men do evil of themselves, the root of it resides in them, and the guilt for it as well is rightly imputed to them. 'Whoever has done evil will always abide in his condemnation, but let us well consider that God works in us when we do good, and the praise for it ought rightly to be attributed to him.' 'There is nothing in us and on our side (de nostre costé) when we serve God.'

Men may be responsible for their evil, as they indeed are when they resist the grace of God, but on the other hand they may not be responsible for their good, for neither in the beginning in a state of integrity, nor as a sinner, nor now as redeemed has man been given the faculty to do any sort of good. We may not maintain 'that men by the exercise of their own will, are free to choose either good or evil. When God charges men with obstinacy, we must not on that account believe that he describes the nature or extent of their ability.' Yet we do ascribe to him doing evil when he thwarts or inverts the grace of God. 'It is therefore true that it is a special gift of God when a man aims at what is good, but it is equally true that it is their own wickedness that hinders the reprobate from applying their mind to it, and consequently that the whole blame of their obstinacy rests with themselves.' God would give to all men - including the reprobate - that special gift of God by which a man aims at what is good, but their own wickedness hinders the reprobate from applying it. 'For since God is by nature disposed to acts of kindness, nothing but our ingratitude and enmity hinders us from receiving that goodness which he freely offers to all.'

1. Ser. on Eph. 6.10-12, CR 51.815
3. Com. on Is. 1.19, CR 36.46f
We may now integrate these notions of man's response, of his obligation and of his accountability, drew from this Calvin's understanding of man's responsibility, and restate it in modern language, bearing in mind the positions which are to be contrasted with Calvin. We must take into full recognition the fact that man is put into a father and son relationship. 'While we are his creatures, yet we are his children as well.' This means immediately that man is not independently responsible, but is given responsibility only within this sonship. Both sides of this fact are important. To begin with, we recognize that God has taken upon himself a certain responsibility for man, it is his will and intent to be a father to man. In his own freedom and with great grace God chose to create man, to place him in an earthly paradise, to give him the hope and inheritance of eternal life, to promise and guarantee ever to care for man by sustaining him and providing for his needs. Man was rich before his birth.

And even after man in irresponsibility forfeited his riches God did not forsake this responsibility toward man. He might have, but rather he chose to extend his obligation, his grace has superabounded and assumed the new responsibility to provide for man's redemption and restoration to grace. Thus from the very start right through the whole of the history of mankind God has proved himself more than responsible, he has been a father to man in ways unprecedented in earthly fatherhood. And now man is called once again in a way not essentially different from, though far greater than that of the first creation to let God be a father to him. Man remains positioned in creation so that he is supposed to find life as he receives it from the hand of another, as a free gift from one who is his lord, his master, but above all his father. We have thus from the very start put responsibility in the framework of divine grace, which stands opposite the starting points of moral

1. Ser. on Deut. 4.1-2, CR 26.101f
philosophy and of federal theology. While God's role in these other concepts of responsibility is primarily that of creator, Lord, master, and judge, with Calvin he is first our father.

On the other side is the fact that man is to be a son. 'Just as it has pleased him to give himself to us, so we on our side should be wholly his and render him the duty which children owe to their father.' This implies the essential relationship of dependence which is given to man and written into his order of existence. It defines him as one who does not stand alone, but as one who leans upon, who draws strength and security from another. Man is not given existence as a free agent by a lord who then leaves him on his own, but he is given existence in sonship. This means that he is given a limited responsibility worked out within this larger relationship of dependence upon another's being responsible for him. He is not ultimately responsible for taking care of himself, but only dependently responsible for properly living as a child of God. Nor does he some day grow up to become of age so that he no longer needs a father and can look out for himself. By contrast moral philosophy thinks in terms of a man who is independent, a free agent determining good for himself and depending on his choice to bring him to the good life. And federal theology thinks of a man who was at first to live by his works.

Sons, however, do have a real responsibility. There is nothing that we need do for ourselves. He is a perfect father to us. But this very care for us gives rise to something we must do. We are to acknowledge the gifts of God to us. We are to express our gratitude. Adam is given to 'retain' the life he possessed in safety by 'acknowledging that it was received from him.' Man's responsibility is to be found in this way in which he answers God by accepting his gifts to him, in this acceptance and in this appreciation he acts responsibly. 'As our duty he would have us render an expression of thanksgiving to him.' This and nothing more is the payment that he requires

1. Ser. on Deut. 1.1-3, CR 25.612
2. Com. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.29, supra
3. Ser. on Deut. 6.10-13, CR 26.450f, supra
As sons of God we are responsible to him. But we are not given a direct and immediate responsibility for ourselves. We are not to assume full responsibility for our well being. This is what man tried to do in his sin—he 'strove to raise himself up apart from the Lord,' and demonstrated himself unable to do so. Adam in his innocence was not able to be wise enough in his own right to care for himself. Nor has man since then proved himself able to work out his own happiness. Men are given an indirect and derived responsibility. They are given the privilege of accepting God's care for us by acknowledging it, or on the other hand, of rejecting God's care for us by refusing to acknowledge it. His duty, his responsibility to God is to accept the felicity he provides for us with full trust in his goodness, in fidelity to invoke him alone in his every need, in obedience to his command, in glad and willing love of God, and in gratitude for his benefits to us. In doing this man would act responsibly. Thus man is permitted to have a part in the fact of his own existence, he is in this way given a responsibility. He is made responsible in this real and dependent way so that he may be held completely accountable for the loss or retention of his life. Adam might have remained faithful to the existence God gave him and so been responsible. We today may answer God's call to accept his gospel and show ourselves such children as he has been a father to us. We are given from our side to accept his Son—though this need not mean that God does not work in his Spirit from the side of man to awaken us to our responsibility and give us the strength to answer.

Or we may be irresponsible. Adam chose to reject and forfeit God's goodness and not to let God be his father. In point of fact man has been irresponsible, he has rejected this mediate responsibility of allowing another to be responsible for him as he in infidelity, in disobedience, in unbelief, in concupiscence and love of self, and in ingratitude moved to

1. Ser. on Eph. 5.18-21, CR 51.732, supra
2. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 4
assume immediate responsibility for himself. God has been faithful, however, and once again offers to be our father. We are again given the right to be responsible or irresponsible.

Thus man is given such a responsibility that on the one hand he may be responsible for the loss of his felicity by rejecting the grace of God, but on the other hand he may not claim responsibility for having gained it. We here recall the arguments that run through so much of Calvin's writings where he asserts that men may be liable for having lost this eternal life by their deeds of sin, but they may under no circumstances lay claim to having gained it in any part by their deeds of righteousness.

This would be true even in the case of a man who retained integrity. There might seem to be undue imbalance here. It is not just that men have empirically never been observed to win happiness in this way. The truth lies deeper. We do not admit this even as a possibility, even if men were perfect and in angelic purity, this could not be the case, for men even in the beginning were not given this kind of responsibility so as to be directly and independently responsible for their own salvation. We say that he is responsible for eternal life; this means that if he sins he will be held responsible for having lost the life that was given him, but it does not mean, if he lives in rectitude or accepts the grace of God, that he is responsible for his own eternal life. It means that he may be responsible for not having lost it, if in this he lays no claim to credit due himself.

The one thing that Adam was not to do was to assert that 'his happiness consisted in some goodness of his own.' Adam was admonished that he could claim nothing for himself as if it were his own, in order that he might depend wholly on the Son of God, and might not seek life anywhere but in him.

To claim credit even for proper acknowledgment, to make even gratitude a virtue worthy of merit, to say that somehow man by his proper response renders

1. Cf. II.2.1, GR 2.186
2. Com. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.39
efficacious the grace of God, is to assume too much responsibility for the part of man. Even this ability for proper acknowledgment is not our own but is of man. Even this ability for proper acknowledgment is not our own but is of God. Such is the concept of human responsibility that lies behind Calvin's unrelenting denial of any possibility of intrinsic human merit or credit. Man has been so given existence as to live, move, and have being entirely in God. This is true of man in the very nature which he was given at the start, and from this it is true of man in the nature to which he has been restored in Christ. He not only does not and cannot, but he is not in any way supposed to amass credits on his own account by which to render himself pleasing and acceptable to God.

Thus the concept of human responsibility that is demanded by and rises out of Calvin's concept of man and his duty to God is that of a son who has an answer to give to God for his paternal care. In this relationship of acknowledging and accepting the free and gracious benefits of God is contained his responsibility. By his actions here, by his positive acceptance or negative rejection of God's felicity for him he demonstrates himself to be responsible or irresponsible — yet in such a way that if he is responsible he may not then ascribe credit or goodness to himself, for so soon as he does this in the least he has looked elsewhere for his strength, he has looked away from God and toward himself, and in doing so he has become irresponsible.

We now see how Calvin differs from the concept of responsibility in later Reformed theology or moral philosophy. To say that God places man in a state of responsibility does not mean that man will be rewarded heaven or hell on the basis of the merits of his own good or bad deeds. It does not mean that he is placed under obligation to work out his own salvation, to

1. Cf. II.2.1, CR 2.186
2. Com. on Gen. 2.9, CR 23.39
purchase felicity of God with an amassed treasure of good deeds, to be an independent, self-reliant creature - even one who might recognize God as his creator - who is responsible for himself, whose destiny depends immediately on the positive action of his own autonomous will, a will free to choose between right and wrong and to create good and evil. Responsibility is not ultimately defined with respect to man's individual and autonomous free will or free choice, where man's destiny is rested on his own initiative and self-will to do the right. It does not begin where from the very start man has an equal or nearly equal choice between alternatives, and man on the ground of his proper choice is to be held accountable and is to be punished or rewarded.

Rather to say that God places man in a position of responsibility means that man is held answerable for God's free gifts of grace. Man is given happiness, salvation, the good life. God faces us, puts us in a relation to himself in which we have an answer to give to him and this answer to God is exactly the reverse of any effort or striving to effect our own salvation. It is a real and significant answer, yet it is a passive and permissive answer which in no way may claim for itself any virtue, which does not demonstrate any goodness on the part of man for his having given it. It is not the exercise of the will, but the surrender of the will, not the free choice of the good in the face of the equally strong challenge of the evil, not our selection of what is best for us, but only the grateful acceptance and acknowledgment of life in paradise prepared for us.
VIII. Responsibility and Life in Sin

In our study of Calvin’s doctrine of sin we have seen that man rejects the dependent relationship to God for which he was created. In distrust in God’s goodness, in infidelity to call on him alone, in disobedience, in concupiscence and self-love, and in ingratitude for God’s benefits, man has turned to himself for strength and independence, he ‘strove’ to raise himself up apart from the Lord.\(^1\) He assumes responsibility for himself. Man’s culpability lies in his rejection of the grace of God. His self-will has prevented God’s grace from flowing to him. This concept of culpability and responsibility we have worked out for the most part in the two cases of man in integrity and of redeemed man, these two being similar. In the beginning and again in the gospel God confronts man to offer life and felicity if man will be thankful and acknowledge it. We like primal man are truly responsible as we are grateful to God and depend on his grace. We like primal man are culpable as we are ungrateful and seek to obtain our happiness independently.

We now concern ourselves with the third case of man who is neither in integrity nor confronted with God’s offer in the gospel, with the natural man in sin. It has not been difficult to realize man’s culpability in refusing God’s grace offered to him at the first or offered again in the gospel because it is clear (even if predestination occasionally prejudices the matter) that God does indeed offer his grace to man for his every need. But the problem becomes more difficult in the case of the natural man who lives in blindness and who has brought God over against him as judge, who — as it is put in the classical theological language — no longer has the faculty and will to know God. We must now interpret Calvin’s thought about the responsibility and culpability of natural man, and see his attempt to bring this thought under his governing concept: that responsibility and culpability must always be seen in the light of God’s grace.

\(^1\) Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 4
Calvin says that man is here culpable because he has ignored God's self-declaration in the heavens. God does not cease objectively and from his side to manifest his goodness and offer his care and strength, even to the point of continuing the gift of himself to man. But subjectively and from the side of man two things happen. Man cuts off and inverts the proper functioning of this order where he is to know God and receive his blessing. First man becomes blind to see and comprehend this order, he cuts off his knowledge of God, and secondly he takes the gifts of God that still confront him and in part break through to him and inverts them to make blessings into curses. 'We must seek and consider God in his works.' Properly done this 'generates, nourishes, and confirms in us a true and solid piety.' Yet here we sin not only by blindness, for our perversity is such that when it estimates the works of God there is nothing that it does not understand in an evil and perverse sense, so that it turns upside down all the heavenly wisdom which otherwise shines so clearly in those works.'

We see now the responsibility and culpability of man in sin against this double background. We see first the ultimate responsibility of man in his blindness, the way in which he stands in responsible ignorance, in what Calvin calls 'culpable ignorance,' when he does not render to God that proper acknowledgment he ought to have rendered. And secondly, within his reversed and darkened understanding, we establish a further way in which he is responsible, on the basis of the light of nature which breaks through to him.

Calvin's position here is not unlike the concept of natural man's culpability which continued in federal theology. Here too man was both culpably ignorant as he ignored God's light to him and responsible as he sinned against the light he did perceive. Yet here the distinction between these double ways man is held responsible was in part obscured. Federal theology saw man's sin and guilt in his failure to live up to the law of nature.

1. ibid., sec 5
2. Arg. to Com. on Gen. CR 23.7
Because it conceived of man's primal responsibility as that of producing works of the law with his own will and ability, it concerned itself chiefly with man's culpability here. Man's culpable ignorance was ignorance of this divine law and command, and his conscious sin was breaking the divine law that did break through to him. But with Calvin, these notions have to be brought under the larger notion of responsibility and grace. Man's culpable ignorance lies more in his rejection of God's offered goodness and care in nature than it does in ignorance of divine law. And man's moral failure in nature becomes with Calvin a lesser and secondary means of holding man responsible.

Later Reformed theology felt it necessary to assert here that man in nature had not the ability or freedom to know God in nature, and yet assert man's culpability. In this they formally followed Calvin. This proved objectionable to more liberal theology and philosophy, where responsibility was defined with reference to man's freedom and ability. If man were not free and able he could not be held responsible. But the argument here moved away from the concept of Calvin where man is not supposed to be independently free and able to come to God, but is bound to divine grace and enabled by it. We must work out Calvin's larger thought here again. While it is true that Calvin's speaks of man's loss of the faculty and will to come to know God in nature, federal theology took over Calvin's concept of man's ability and inclination without retaining them in subordination to divine grace. Interpreting man's ability and will in the light of a covenant of works where man was supposed to move in a semi-autonomous way, federal theology did indeed lay itself open to the criticisms of moral philosophy. By regaining Calvin's understanding of man's will and ability as dynamically related to divine grace, we can more effectively answer this objection. In two ways we view responsibility for sin: man's ultimate responsibility on the basis of what he does not perceive, and a further responsibility on the basis of what he does perceive.
A. Responsibility on the basis of what man does not perceive

It is not unreasonable in the thought of Calvin that a man should be held responsible for something that he consciously knows nothing about. A man may so completely ignore something obvious that he forms no impression of it in the slightest, and yet he may have been responsible for seeing it. Upon his default and ignorance, he may be held liable and blameworthy.

1. The continuing self-manifestation of God in nature

Responsibility here rests on the fact that the knowledge of God is immediately and obviously available to all men. As we have had occasion to see, God declares himself in nature. This is the way it was to be in the beginning and ideally. 1 Objectively and from the side of God this is the way it could be now. 2 'We certainly ought to be taught by the wonderful wisdom of God apparent in the heights and depths of the world. But we have been heedless.' 3 This representation of God in his works lacks nothing. It is, to begin with, so clear and obvious that any man with a grain of sense could not possibly miss it. 'The celestial bodies...afford a testimony of the deity too evident to escape the observation of the most ignorant people in the world.' 4 God's works are a 'mirror' of his 'paternal care' for us.

Calvin's writings are scattered with this teaching. He cannot overstate the objective clarity and obviousness of this self-declaration of God, even to the point of prejudicing what he has to say about its subjectivity. 'His majesty shines forth in his works and in his creatures everywhere; men ought in these to acknowledge him, for they clearly set forth their maker.' 5 Taking this emphasis in all seriousness, we need not think of any process needed to search God out. Calvin can speak like that, e.g. of 'the exercise of wisdom,' 6 of the mind's attaining 'a knowledge of God by its own resources,' 7 but this

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1. Com. on I Cor. 1.21, CR 49.326
2. Ser. on Gal. 4.8-11, CR 50.596. Com. on Ps. 19.1ff, CR 31.194ff
3. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 3 Ser. on Is. 53.1-4, CR 35.610
4. I.5.1, CR 2.41f. Inst. of 1539 (et seqq.) ch. I, pag. 6f, CR 1.286ff
5. Com. on Jer. 5.24, CR 37.534
6. Com. on I Cor. 1.21, CR 49.326
7. Com. on I Cor. 2.10, CR 49.341
is not to take the form of an inductive or deductive logic, but of bursting forth in acknowledgment. This representation is far too clear to need any keen intellect or contemplative mind. 'The glory of God is not written in small or obscure letters, but richly engraved in large and bright characters which all men may read, and read with the greatest ease.' The wisdom and power of God are as conspicuous in the fabric of the heavens as if God should assert them with an audible voice. Indeed not even eyes or ears are needed. Any man who can feel can find him within arm's reach. He practically ingratiates himself upon us. 'The rudest ought to perceive it.' 'God manifests himself to the simple and even to children.'

The knowledge of God which confronts us in the heavens is complete. If this knowledge were to come to perception in man, we would recognize his grace calling us to let him care for us, to trust and depend on him, to be faithful, and properly to acknowledge him in gratitude for his benefits to us. This we have seen already in the chapter on order. 'God wishes to draw us up to him by his creatures.' The whole of the perfections of God are outlined there. 'Displayed both in heaven and earth' are: 'clemency, goodness, mercy, justice, judgment, and truth.' We might learn enough there to know that God is willing to receive sinners to forgiveness, about his 'mercy, in which alone consists all our salvation,' which endures our iniquities with such a great kindliness in order to amendment. 'We must seek and consider God in his works.' 'Certainly all these should abundantly teach us all of such a God as it is necessary to know, if we in our coarseness were not blind to such a great light.'

2. The culpable ignorance (maligna ignorantia) of man

But in point of fact we have seen that this obvious and complete knowledge of God written in the heavens does not reach subjectivity in man.
What happens is that man, looking always to himself and never to God, completely fails to see in any real way that which is so obvious he could never have missed it had he turned toward God rather than himself. He ignores it. 'As his majesty shines forth in his works and in his creatures everywhere, men ought in these to acknowledge him.' But they did not. Paul 'condemns all mankind from the beginning of the world for ingratitude because they did not recognize the workman in his extraordinary work.' Notice that this is not an ingratitude which involves any conscious perception of the perfections of God outlined in heaven or earth. It is a more gross ingratitude that in the face of these perfections so eminently displayed so completely ignores them as to know nothing at all about them and to reveal unconsciously the perversity of man. They do not recognize these things but remain ignorant of them. Ignorance and ingratitude are constantly related in Calvin's thought. With men it is 'blind ingratitude, or rather voluntary carelessness that hinders them from perceiving it.' Calvin's concern to establish the obviousness of the knowledge of God written in the heavens occasionally leads to language that suggests that some conscious real knowledge of God is ungratefully rejected. The problem is complicated by the fact that men do come to an unreal knowledge of God which is not knowledge at all, for it knows not his goodness and does not tend or lead men in the right direction.

Probably the most serious passage of this sort is found in a short pivotal chapter in the Institutes. Calvin in an effort to corner his adversaries and make his case for responsibility goes too far. He attributes to heathen consciousness not the false, vain, darkened knowledge of God which he generally ascribes to the Gentiles, and on which he does in an auxiliary way base responsibility, (see later) but a knowledge of God which is real. As far as the kind of knowledge of God is concerned we are here told that 'the heathen philosophers themselves were not ignorant' of the fact that 'the end

3. Com. on I Cor 6.11, CR 49.324; on Ps. 65.10, CR 31.609, on 89.1, CR 31.816
for which all men are born and live is to know God,' and Calvin admits that when 'the knowledge of God has reached this point' it is not anymore 'uncertain and vain;' on the contrary we can only conclude that it is a genuine knowledge in part at least. We are informed as an example that Plato knew something about the *imago Dei*. 1

Had he consciously tried, Calvin could not have more flatly denied this than he does in the less polemical context of a sermon on I Timothy: 'The philosophers who had keen and excellent intellects never knew what the heavenly life meant. It is true that God made them speak to the world to be a witness to take away all excuse of ignorance from it and they did pronounce some good sentences - that men have not been created to live only here for a little while, for we see that each one of us only whilsts away the time on earth. But what? This was not a certain knowledge, they did not understand that men were created to the image of God, that by this they are immortal, and that God has provided for them an inheritance in heaven. Never could all the wise men in the world have alleged this doctrine.' 2 Nor is this an isolated statement. Generally throughout his writings Calvin denies that any real knowledge of God - which must include some awareness of his paternal goodness and benevolence - is ever acquired. 3 The difficulty might have been avoided, with all credit still due to Plato, had Calvin more carefully recognized here, as he does elsewhere, 4 that some awareness that men ought to serve God and image him need not for all the apparent similarities cease to be a wholly inverted and perverted knowledge, and on this account uncertain and vain - if it is motivated and employed by man in his sin in an endeavor to win salvation from God in his own strength, if it thus reverses and inverts the order of complete dependence on God's goodness.

Men then stand in ignorance of all true knowledge of God, they learn nothing

1. 1.3.3, CR 2:38. The passage is nearly the same in Inst. of 1539, CR 1:285f.
2. Ser. on I Tim. 6.15-16, CR 53:623
3. Com. on Jer. 9.3, CR 38.28; on 9.23, CR 38.51f; on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.204; on Heb. 11.6, CR 55.148; on Rom. 1.21, CR 49.24; on I Pet. 1.14, CR 55.222, etc.
4. Com. on II Pet. 1.4, CR 55.44.6f
at all to evoke the proper response and lead them to gratitude. But this is responsible ignorance. 'To enjoy everything in nature without acknowledging the author of the benefit is the basest ingratitude.' They will one day feel the force of the expression of Paul, related by Luke, that God has not left himself ἀμέτρητον (without witness, Acts 14:17) For they shall not be permitted to escape with impunity because they have been deaf and insensible to testimonies so illustrious. In truth it is the part of culpable ignorance (maligna ignorantia) never to see God who everywhere gives signs of his presence. 'They were ignorant of God only because they were voluntarily and culpably (maltiose = maliciously) blinded.' The Latin malignus in these contexts is spiteful or malicious. But it is apparently not here a conscious malice in the sense of malicious, as insensible ignorance which actively and wilfully delights in doing wrong is somewhat incongruous. Therefore: culpable ignorance. It is ignorance and ingratitude in the midst of brutish insensibility. Malice and ignorance are therefore closely connected, but the connection is of such a nature that ignorance proceeds from a sinful disposition of the mind. Calvin can also say, 'God has exhibited this world as a mirror to men that by beholding it they may acknowledge his majesty,' but 'men sin more through insolence and pride than through ignorance, for they despise God who manifests himself openly and speaks plainly.' Yet he does not so mean this as to say that men do not remain in ignorance of God and of the fact that he is solicitous for them. 'God renders his glory conspicuous everywhere so that it ought to engage and occupy the thoughts of all men. And it would do so were they not led away by their own vanity.' There are those who at first seem to be excusable for their error, as they have not been taught and never understood who the true God is, but yet there is in them the blame as well of malice.

1. Arg. to Com. on Gen. 23.7ff. Com. on Ps. 77.14, CR 31.718
2. Com. on Ps. 89.15, CR 31.816
3. Com. on Is. 27.11, CR 36.458
4. Com. on Is. 40.21, CR 37.21
(malitia) as of neglect, (negligentia) for they freely neglect or slight the true God.' Calvin works this out extensively in the passages in Acts and Romans which give him opportunity to develop it. Men make 'a pretext of ignorance;' 'they fly to this fortress: that no guilt ought to be imputed to them, but rather God was without feeling who did not even condescend to give so much as a hoot (sibilus = hiss) to call back those that he saw were perishing.' But 'God was hidden in such a way that he all the while bore witness to himself and to his deity.' 'In the order of nature there is a certain and evident manifestation of God.' Yet 'men have not recognized these attributes in God,' 'their foolish mind, being involved in darkness, could understand nothing aright, but was carried away headlong in various ways into error and delusions.' This is man's ingratitude. Men have ignored the fact that in this 'the paternal love of God still breaks through to the unworthy,' it has never occurred to them that this is 'the goodness of God.' 'God has set man upon earth...to exercise himself in praising the liberality of God, while he enjoys the riches of heaven and earth. And now is it not a more than shocking depravity not to be moved by so great a goodness of God in the manifold abundance of things?'

Men are guilty of 'culpable (maligna = malicious) and barbarous ingratitude, by which they have betrayed their impudence.' God from his side, or 'as much as in him lay,' has not left men to perish but constantly and completely invites them to come to him, to rest on his goodness, and accept the felicity he has prepared for them. This extends, we are elsewhere told, to an invitation to accept his mercy on which depends our salvation. But of all this men remain heedless. 'Surely nothing is more absurd than that men should ignore their author who are endowed with understanding principally

1. Com. on Jer. 10.7, CR 36.67
2. Com. on Acts 14.17, CR 47.327f
3. Com. on Rom. 1.21, CR 49.24f. Arg. to Com. on Rom., CR 49.13
4. Com. on Acts, ibid.; Com. on Ps. 29.9, CR 31.230; on 65.10, CR 31.609
6. Instruction in Faith, 1537, sec. 3; 1.10.2., CR 2.72, etc.
for this use. And we must especially note the goodness of God in that he so familiarly thrusts himself upon us that even the blind may grope after him. For this reason the blindness of men is more shameful and less tolerable, who in so manifest and evident a manifestation are touched with no feeling of God's presence. Wherever they cast their eyes upward or downward they must necessarily see lively and also innumerable images of divine power, wisdom, and goodness. For God has not darkly shadowed his glory in the creation of the world, but he has everywhere engraven such manifest marks that even blind men may know them by groping. From this we conclude that men are not only blind but stupid as well, when being helped by such excellent testimonies, they make no progress.

Being void of right judgment they pass over (praeterere) without understanding all such signs of God's glory as appear manifestly both in heaven and earth. They are inexcusable when they are blind in such clear light, as he (Paul) says in the first chapter to the Romans. Therefore though men's senses fail them in seeking out God, yet they have no pretext to cover their guilt, because though he offers himself to be handled and groped, they continue all the same in bewilderment.

'Now it is certain that although we are poor blind men, although because of Adam's sin we are deprived of judgment, of reason, and intelligence, yet there is malice in us still so that we desire only to ignore that which our Lord would have us to know. Therefore when men make a cloak of their ignorance, they will always be convicted in that they have not wished to know that which might have been plainly known to them, if they had applied themselves to this study. And this is why St. Jude, speaking in his epistle of these profane persons who spit God, who are heavy and dull and completely ignorant, says: They do not know the things which they ought to know because they do not wish to know them. Then it is a cursed pretext whenever men do not profit from God's works.

1. Com. on Acts 17.27, CR 48.415f. Com. on John 1.10, CR 47.9f; Com. on Ps. 19.1ff, CR 31.194ff
apply them contrary to his intention.\(^1\)

3. The ability (facultas) and inclination (voluntas) of man

Basing the ultimate responsibility of man on his ignoring of the clear self-declaration of God in nature is complicated by a distinction between the **ability** and the **inclination** or **will** of man. If we hold man culpable for a lack of inclination to see God, must we not be prepared to say that he has the ability, and so, if he had as well the inclination he could come to know God? Here Calvin apparently disturbs the reasonableness of his thought by his assertion that fallen man does not have the ability to see God in nature. Federal theology followed Calvin here, and it has been this to which liberal theology and philosophy have objected. How do we hold man responsible for that which he did not have the ability to do? It will be our assertion here that later Reformed theology conceived of this ability in such a static way as to be open to this criticism. And there are tendencies in Calvin's thought that point this way also. But when we interpret this ability in terms of Calvin's larger thought about man's responsibility as that of a **response** to grace in dependence and acknowledgement many of these problems disappear.

a. The distinction between ability and inclination.

We begin with the fact that Calvin does recognize this distinction and can think in these terms. He notes that 'we are deficient in natural ability, (naturali facultate deficiemur) which prevents us from attaining the pure and clear knowledge of God' in the heavens.\(^2\) 'For this matter we lack not merely inclination, but ability.'\(^3\) 'St. Paul says that the natural man is not able to understand the things of the Spirit. He does not say that men are so froward that they will not understand, but he says that they cannot understand at all; the faculty (facultas) and the power (vertu) is not in us.

Why? Because of the corruption which has come to us through the sin of Adam.\(^4\)

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1. Ser. on Deut. 32.23-27, CR 29.38
2. I.5.15, CR 2.52. II.2.10, CR 2.202
3. Com. on I Cor. 1.21, CR 49.326 ... nec voluntas tantum, sed facultas etiam ad earn rem nos deficiat.
4. Ser. on Deut. 29.1-4, CR 28.489. Com. on I Cor. 2.14, CR 49.314
When Calvin argues in these terms he would make it perfectly clear that man cannot make his way to God, and that even if he were given the inclination and desire, he could not "by all the acuteness and sagacity of his own mind penetrate into the kingdom of God."¹ "All his sagacity, as far as respects the knowledge of God, is mere blindness." Man has not "the faculty (facultas) of spiritual understanding."² Calvin labors to refute the contention of his adversaries that man can with his own strength and ability and despite the blindness and handicap of sin come to some knowledge of God. For this Calvin asserts that men are both unwilling and unable. There is perhaps here too a way in which — as far as man in nature is concerned — something of a concept of responsibility similar to that in federal theology or in moral philosophy casts a shadow across Calvin's thought. Calvin suggests that there was something man was to do with his ability in order that the human intellect might attain "a knowledge of God by its own resources."³

b. The ability and inclination of man in integrity

Yet Calvin to a certain extent argues the point along the lines set up by his opponents. To their contention that men have some ability to discover God, Calvin answers that they do not. It is interesting that these passages do indeed occur where Calvin is trying to establish himself over against an opposite position. Now it might be gathered from this that whereas men do not have this ability, they are supposed to, they would have it had it not been removed in the fall. While men do not have the perspicacity to seek God out, ideally or at the beginning they did have this talent. But it is a mistake to press the conclusion that man was created to come to God using some ability of his own. This is correct only in part.

Calvin can talk this way on occasion and is here guilty of lapsing into a more static view of the nature of man. As he argues with those who contend for man's freedom, he is inclined to yield where possible and speak of an

1. Com. on John 1.9, CR 47.6f
2. II.2.19, CR 2.201
3. Com. on I Cor. 2.10, CR 49.341
ability of man in integrity. 'Adam had that ability in his first creation.' He was 'endued with rectitude of nature and with the faculty of willing and acting uprightly' before the fall. This is now lost, 'we have need' of Adam's uprightness and of his faculty of both willing and acting uprightly.' On these terms alone Calvin, as was federal theology, could be justifiably criticized for prejudicing man's real culpability. Man ought not to be held responsible for something he was unable to do.

But we do not abandon in such contexts Calvin's thought about the relationship of correspondence between Adam and God where every talent and ability that Adam had is wholly and dynamically given him from God. Here Calvin provides answers to his own problems. Adam was created to the knowledge of God in such a way that everything necessary came to him as the grace of God. We have seen this already. He was to live in felicity as he depended wholly on God for his every need. 'His happiness consisted not in any goodness of his own, but in a participation of God.' This is primarily true of the knowledge of God. The one thing he cannot do is claim some ability or talent for himself. 'Adam was admonished that he could claim nothing for himself as if it were his own, in order that he might depend wholly on the Son of God, and might not seek life anywhere but in him.' 'If we should live as perfectly as angels and yet have the foolish idea that this came from our own free will and of our own movement, then we would miss the principal thing.' '

He who attributes some free will to himself and who presumes that he has some means and faculty (faculté) to do good of himself certainly wishes to step into the place of God and show himself to be creator.' It is our sin that we think we have some 'free will' or 'virtue' or 'power' (vertu) of our own. Man has no ability independently of God.

It is clear in this that Adam knew God only as God gave himself to be

1. Com. on Ezek. 11:19f, CR 40.247
2. II.2.1, CR 2.18f
3. Com. on Gen. 2:9, CR 23.39. II.2.1, CR 2.18f
4. Ser. on Eph. 1:4-6, CR 51.274. The Secret Providence of God, 281
5. Ser. on Eph. 2:8-10, CR 51.300f
6. Ser. on Eph. 1:13-14, CR 51.305
known. Adam's part was that of a co-participant, but not as one who rendered efficacious God's communication by bringing to fruition his talents. Rather he acknowledged and answered God. He had only to receive God's gift of himself, together with all his benefits. And in this process, though man's acknowledgment is necessary for communication, man can in no way claim some credit, ability, or goodness for his own. No part of the efficacy of God's self-communication is to be ascribed to his ability. 'Let us put the case that we were in the integrity in which our father Adam was at the first. Should we then presume it was of ourselves under the illusion that God had ennobled us in this way? Now we hold everything from him.' 'Would we have got it through our own dexterity? Would we have got it by our own strength? (vertu) No! But we would have it because God had given it to us through his own free goodness.' Then man does not speak of some ability of his own by which he makes his way to God and obeys him. Man does not on his own and in some creditable way seek out God and know him.

c. The inter-relationship of ability and inclination

It is then false permanently to separate the ability and inclination of man, for there is an inseparable relationship between them. We are here directing our remarks to the theological and philosophical objection that man cannot be held responsible unless some ability is postulated for him. To make his point perfectly clear Calvin does make a distinction. He denies man's present ability and suggests he had it at creation. On the other hand when we press Calvin in the way man ideally is supposed to know God, he describes the ability which man is to have not as some strength of his own with which he is to seek out God, but as the ability to respond to the self-communication of God, to receive God's gift of himself to man. It is then not an ability to discover him, but an ability to acknowledge him. Seen in this way what we mean by inclination or will and what we mean by ability to see God in his works are not so much separate talents as facets of the same thing.

1. Ser. on Job 33.1-7, CR 35.48
Ideally man is able rightly to will only as he is confronted by and receives the grace of God. When man rejects the grace of God he continues to will, but his will turns on itself and he becomes unable because he has rejected the grace of God which would have enabled him. As man will not he disables himself. As he is self-willed, he deprives himself of the ability God would otherwise give him, For God does not reveal himself to self-will.

If man is to claim absolutely nothing for his ability to know God, if he knows God only as God fulfils the requirements of communication, if the communication depends in no way on his own strength, on his successful or deserving use of God-given gifts, then ability is very much the same thing as inclination. Here all the ability man needs is an inclination to receive and any inclination he has to respond is immediately sufficient ability as grace is communicated to him. Ability and inclination are not separated, as might seem the case when Calvin distinguishes between the two, but they form a dual entity where man is enabled as man is inclined to accept God’s gift of himself.

A useful parallel here is that of the ability and inclination of man in the gospel. When man is confronted by the preaching of the gospel and does not respond, is it a lack of inclination or of ability? It is both. And the two cannot be separated. Ability is inclination and inclination is ability. Now it is quite proper to argue not only that man has not the inclination to respond, but that he has not the ability. In this way we can make a distinction between ability and inclination, and the distinction is a valuable one. It ought to be made very clear that man does not and cannot accept the gospel on his own strength. He is not able to do this. But on the other hand we should not suppose that whereas man does not have this ability, yet he should have, that he ought to have some ability of his own with which to receive the gospel and make it efficacious. We might loosely say this. But we would not mean that man is to claim for himself any
ability if he does respond, for this ability is given by the Spirit. And this ability is not separable from inclination, for God stands ready by his Spirit to enable those who are inclined to him. Man is enabled as man is inclined. He may not claim this ability as his own.

God's Word in nature is as his Word in the gospel. God here speaks as with an 'audible voice.' When Calvin says that natural man is unable of himself to come to the knowledge of God in nature, this does not mean that he is supposed to be able to come on his own strength - any more than when Calvin says that the man to whom the gospel is preached is unable to respond to it, this means that he is supposed to be able to come on his own strength. It is the elusive thing about Calvin's thought that he seems to leave a place for something that man is to supply. But where there is proper response, man becomes aware that God has even supplied him with the ability and the will for the response, in such a way that he can claim nothing for his own. We are then faced with the antinomy we have before encountered in the matter of responsibility. If man does properly respond, he knows it is all the strength and grace of God, yet nonetheless when man does not respond, he must not say that God has failed him, for God stands ever ready to bestow grace to those who will receive it.

In regard to the Gentile who lives in sin we must say that not only is he now unable to come to God on his own strength, but that the only ability which he in an Adamic state would have had is an inclination to respond, and that this very will could not even then stand alone, but was constantly and dynamically supported by divine grace. In terms of his present responsibility this means that all he needs is the willingness to see and acknowledge God in his works. But such is his inclination to sin and self-sufficiency that he never looks. The natural man is guilty because he has resisted the efforts of God to impart grace to him by ignoring God's
self-declaration in the heavens - as a man who audibly hears the Word in the gospel and yet resists it is guilty.

This finds emphasis in Calvin as he says that men ignore what is so very obvious that they are completely inexcusable. God's gift of himself is so complete and clear that no independent mental ability is needed to see it. The most ignorant, blind, or deaf in the world could not miss it if they were inclined to turn to him. God is so close, he so permeates all, he so fully and obviously gives himself that men have only to admit him to know him. We have tried to emphasize this in the opening part of this chapter. 'Children' and 'the simple' ought to see him.1 The heavens have a common language to teach all men without distinction, nor is there anything but their own carelessness (socordia) to hinder even those who are most foreign to each other and who live in the most distant parts of the world from profiting as it were at the mouth of the same teacher.2 Men cannot plead lack of ears, eyes, or rational faculties, but their culpability lies in a perversity which does not will to know God. 'Though the Lord is not destitute of a testimony concerning himself, while with various and most abundant benignity he sweetly allures mankind to a knowledge of him, yet they persist in following their own ways, their pernicious and fatal errors.'3 It is a question of man's being unable to let God come to him because of his perverse sin which makes him unwilling to turn to God and persistent in seeking him by his own strength. The works of God 'are so visibly before all that it is impossible that men could overlook them were it not that their minds are perverted by their own wickedness.4

It is our primal sin, a self-will to seek out God on our own strength rather than allowing him to come to us, that disables us so that we cannot receive him in nature. Calvin has an interesting passage on this point in

1. Com. on Jer. 10.7, CR 38.67f
2. Com. on Ps. 19.3, CR 31.196
3. I.5.14, CR 2.52
4. Com. on Ps. 108.43, CR 32.145
his Sermons on Ephesians. God declares himself to us in his works, but we are dazzled by them, we are not able to understand, we fall into an abyss.

'Someone will ask here, however, How then can we confess God to be righteous, wise, and almighty, if we are so dazzled by his works? For you say that it is the wisdom of men to inquire after the works of God and to apply all their diligence to them, and that this is also why he has ordered the world to be as a theatre in which we ought to contemplate his goodness, righteousness, power, and wisdom. Therefore there seems to be some contrariety here: that we are to be diligent and attentive in considering the works of God, and yet at the same time that our understanding vanishes away when we think upon them.

'But the solution to this is easy: If we should desire with sobriety to know these things which God wishes to reveal to us, and which are useful to us, we should have understanding enough; (nous avons assez d'intelligence) and we should indeed learn that he has no desire at all that we be not taught by his works to come to him and put our trust in knowing how to invoke him, to discern between good and evil, to walk according to his will. We should then in all the works of God understand all the things that are useful for our salvation, if we did not give reign to our foolish and disordered lusts, but behaved as pupils who waited for that which it pleased their master to show them. This is why it is said in the book of Job (ch. 26) that we would do well if we should see the fringes of the works of God. We would be able then to taste the wisdom and righteousness, power and goodness of God as we considered only the fringes of his works. But if we wish profoundly to sound them out, we will find this abyss we mentioned before, which is able to swallow up all our understanding.' 1 If man could confront in sobriety the self-declaration of God in his works, God would teach him in it. But his lust and presumptuousness, his self-will and ingratitude render him unable, for he will not remain to listen and receive at the master's hand what he would give to him, but he will persist in searching out and knowing

1. Ser. on Eph. 3.9-12, CR 51.459ff
for himself the works of God. If he were only to receive the movement of God to him, he has faculty enough, but when - as sin inevitably makes him do - he tries to search things out on his own, he is unable and guilty in his ability.

Calvin has thus attempted to show that from within our nature inclined to sin we do act freely and responsibly. We are responsible for what we do with our sinful nature, for we resist the grace by which God wishes to change us. We of our own will ignore God's self-communication to us and we are free in doing this. It is our self-will and nothing else that prohibits us from receiving God's gift of himself and offer of grace to us.

4. The excuse of the Gentiles

It is hazardous to mention any excuse which man may have before God, as Calvin is convinced that apart from salvation in Christ all will find just condemnation in the day of judgment. Yet there is a way in which Calvin can think of the pagan as finding some partial excuse before God. At least it is possible to sin more grievously and sustain heavier punishment than the Gentile does. Commenting on Paul's statement: 'Where there is no law there is no transgression,' Calvin writes: as the knowledge of God's justice is discovered by the law, the less excuse we have, and therefore the more grievously we offend against God. For they who despise the known will of God justly deserve to sustain a heavier punishment than those who offend through ignorance.' 'He who is not instructed by the written law, when he sins, is not guilty of so great a transgression as he who knowingly breaks and transgresses the law of God.'

'The poor pagans might have some defense and excuse (quelque defense et excuse) that they might not be held so culpable before God' as others, particularly the Jews, who beside them are 'doubly guilty.' This does not mean that they will not be condemned, but that they have some excuse

1. Com. on Rom. 4.15, CR 49.78f
2. Ser. on Gal. 2.17-18, CR 50.429
in part. 'Unbelievers will have some excuse in part (quelque excuse à demi) though not in whole, for still their sin is not so grievous or so horrible before God, because they have had no doctrine.' Calvin does not say in just what way their punishment may be mitigated, but the idea is a frequent one in his writings.

B. Responsibility on the basis of what man does perceive

We consider now a secondary way in which man is responsible. Ultimately natural man does not know his sin, his concupiscence, and his ingratitude, and does not come to a knowledge of God. He is responsible for culpable ignorance of what he does not perceive, and it is this which we have examined as his primary responsibility. In this man is held accountable for not having rendered the proper acknowledgment to God. But there is a way in which a knowledge of right and wrong and the divine sanction behind it is given to him. We do not in this come to know his primary sin or responsibility, yet he does come to a secondary type of conviction of wrong doing which Calvin considers sufficient in itself to render him inexcusable. There is a way in which apart from the light of revelation and apologetically he may come to see that he has not been responsible. We here examine responsibility not as it actually and ultimately is, but as it may be argued from the side of man and in the light which breaks through to him, a partial yet sufficient knowledge of his inexcusability which provides a secondary way he is responsible.

1. The natural man's notion of responsibility

In Calvin's understanding of sin we have seen how with the entrance of sin into the course of man's life, the whole pattern of his existence has been inverted, introducing a new notion of responsibility. The whole pattern of responsibility is inverted as it is comprehended in the mind of the unbeliever. Instead of God's assuming responsibility for man's well-being, as he did in the garden, now man in his independence assumes responsibility for

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himself. He continues to strive to raise himself up apart from the Lord. His well-being falls on his own shoulders, as he now sees it from the perspective of sin, and he sets out to redeem himself, which of course only extends the original self-sufficient notion of sin. This effort of man issues in a concept of responsibility which arises in sin and asserts that man is to rely on his own ability. God through this holds man aware of his culpability. Man in his crusade to insure his own happiness and virtue traces this perceptible order back to its origin and creates a religion. In point of fact he gets entangled in a multitude of errors. The chief and ever recurring error is that man proposes a religion which requires for man to gain some merit before God and assures him that he is able to do so. It is 'unnecessary to entertain men with some confidence or trust in their merits, for we are too much given to this by nature. We have seen that it is an error which has been common in all the world and throughout all time. It is not necessary that we go to school to persuade ourselves that we are a capable race and that by our virtue we can obligate God to us.'

This occurs as men mistake the fact of the external image of virtue done in hope of reward by God and man to be true virtue - which ought to spring from the obedient acknowledgment of grace in expression of gratitude - and erect on this foundation a religious system designed to reach behind the moral order to its creator, by which they may take care of themselves, by which they may come to felicity on their own credit and responsibility. Men 'deceive themselves with a false notion of righteousness.' Some by intense moral effort come to believe that they have fulfilled the requirements of salvation. This is to a degree substantiated by the fact that God 'confers many blessings of the present life on those who practice virtue among men' and that 'he is

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1. *Instruction in Faith*, 1537, sec. 4
2. See earlier, chapters VI and VII.
3. Ser. on Gal. 3.21-25, CR 30.546. II.1.2, CR 2.177; Arg. to Com. on Gen. CR 23.7
4. Arg. to Com. on Rom., 49.1. Com. on Rom. 1.17, CR 49.20
pleased to discover his great esteem of true righteousness by not permitting that which is external and hypocritical to remain without a reward. We have already worked out this way Calvin deals with the ethical virtues of natural man and need not repeat it here. But we must note the concept of responsibility which is inherent in ethics.

The concept of responsibility in the thought of the man who lives in sin is that he is an independent, or autonomous and semi-independent creature who has within himself the capacity and whose duty and responsibility it is to provide for himself, who is to be accounted worthy on the basis of his merits as he abides by the regulations and principles he comprehends. He says 'that God owes us wages when we have served him.' He sees heaven or hell as depending on whether he has demonstrated himself worthy or unworthy, depending on the course of life he has followed on earth, on the profit, fruition, and increase of the talents he had at birth, or on some other intrinsic goodness to be found within himself. He thinks that he can be 'justified by prerogative.' We have noted in the previous chapter the similarity between this concept and the concepts of responsibility which have obtained in moral philosophy and in the governing concept of federal theology.

It is this 'opinion with which the world has always been drunken, that is, of free will. For the pagans knew enough to say that God had indeed created them in the world, and that he was able to give them good fortune, as they termed it. But they held that each had it in his hand and in his own choosing to follow virtue, and walk so that no fault might be found in him. This is how the pagans divided things between God and themselves: the lesser matter, that is, putting us here below to crawl about like frogs, they gave to God, but they said that attaining to heaven was the ability (faculté) of men, and

1. III.14.2, CR 2.565
2. See chapter VI.
3. Ser. on Gal. 2.14-16, CR 50.409
4. Ser. on Gal. 2.11-14, CR 50.505
that it belonged to them to rule themselves with all virtue. They affirm that 'we can co-operate so that when it comes to the reckoning the principal part will always be found in us.' Sin has radically inverted man's notion of responsibility and given to it as to the rest of life the same self-orientation. He leaves grace aside, centers his confidence in himself, and thinks that he is and can be responsible for his own salvation.

2. The law of nature and the inexcusability of the Gentiles

Here God uses this sense of duty, radically wrong as it is, to take away every excuse of man. Although the natural man does not really know what his duty is, he does not know that he has only to receive God's benefits and acknowledge them in dependence on him, he ignores all this as it is written in the heavens, yet we accept his distorted concept of duty, his notion that he can and must save himself in the moral order, and use this to hold him responsible.

a. Man's sufficient knowledge (cognition suffisante)

While men do not come to a knowledge of God, yet even the inverted or shadow knowledge which they do gain leaves them inexcusable. 'We are not however, so blind that we can plead our ignorance as an excuse for our perverseness. We conceive that there is a deity, and then that whoever he may be, he ought to be worshiped, but here our reason fails, because it cannot ascertain who or what sort of being God is.' It is in fact not a real knowledge of God, 'not a certain knowledge' as it does not know his grace but fancies human merits. It is a 'confused knowledge,' or a 'vain knowledge.' Yet 'we see so far that we cannot pretend any excuse.' This is Calvin's analysis in the passage in I Cor. 1.21. Though we are 'stone-blind' as regards any real knowledge of grace that might lead us to 'break forth' in acknowledgment, yet 'we receive a slight perception of his divinity which renders us

1. Ser. on Eph. 1.17-18, CR 51.329f. II.1.2, CR 2.177
3. Ser. on I Tim. 6.15-16, CR 53.623
4. Com. on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.204; Com. on Heb. 11.6, CR 55.148
5. Com. on Rom., ibid., Com. on Hab. 1.16, CR 43.518
inexcusable. Accordingly when Paul declares here that God is not known through means of his creatures, you must understand him to mean that a pure knowledge of him is not attained. For that none may have any pretext for ignorance mankind make proficiency in the universal school of nature so far as to be affected with some perception of deity, but what God is they know not, nay more, they immediately become vain in their imaginations.¹

Calvin sometimes so states his case as to leave a problem. He follows in this passage above with a remark that seems to ascribe responsibility for ingratitude to man on the basis of what he did perceive. In this way ingratitude as man's primal sin would presuppose some perception of God's paternal goodness and solicitude. This is exactly what natural man never has the slightest idea about; men are here 'blinder than moles.' Consequently in other contexts Calvin bases responsibility for such ingratitude another way, on what man did not perceive, on what he ignored and was culpably ignorant of. Their 'ingratitude' rises from a 'brutish insensibility.'²

Here perhaps Calvin is thinking not of the real primal sin of ingratitude but of some of its lesser forms. He then does not mean to assert that men consciously perceive enough of God's goodness to evoke the proper response of gratitude — for this would be tantamount to saying they did perceive a real knowledge of God. Perhaps this responsibility for ingratitude in I Cor. 1.21 is to be referred back to the preceding discussion of what men did ignore, the fulness of his benefits and self-manifestation. Calvin does there refer to the ingratitude of men in learning nothing in the manifestation of God in the heavens.³ Or perhaps Calvin is simply inconsistent here. A similar difficulty exists in the analysis in the Institutes.⁴

At any rate it seems to be Calvin's position that men do not have a real knowledge of God, for they do not know his goodness, and yet they do

¹. Com. on I Cor. 1.21, CR 49.326
². Com. on Ps. 145.9, CR 32.4.15
³. Com. on I Cor. 1.21, ibid.
⁴. 1.5.15, CR 2.52
have a sufficient knowledge, which is an inverted knowledge, in that it leads them to depend on their own strength to worship him, to despise his grace unconsciously as they attempt to win salvation at his hand in the moral order. We have 'a sufficient knowledge (cognoissance suffisante) to convict us in the last day and prove that we merit condemnation.'¹ For men 'the distinction between good and evil is engraven on their consciences,' and serves 'for taking away every excuse of ignorance.'² There are some 'sparks' that do break through to man - not real light but darkened light. It is only called light by way of concession.³ Yet even this false appearance of light is sufficient to give a real responsibility to him.

b. Man's sense of duty to the right and sense of sin

It is this law of nature that men recognize to be divine, even though they entirely pervert it, on which we may argue the inexcusability of the natural man. They are formally correct in their supposition that such obedience ought to be rendered, though the motive of hope of reward and self-justification perverts any virtue. 'Let us remember that when our Lord gives us pricks within our hearts that we may sense what our duty and office is, that is just as if he spoke to us apart from all men and without putting any Scripture before our eyes. He who rejects such a knowledge extinguishes the Spirit of God as much as he can, and rebels against it. Let us learn therefore, when it pleases God to make us sense his will, to be obedient to him and know that it is he who urges us on.'⁴ Galvin does not mean here that man really comes to know his duty to God, to acknowledge his benefits, to depend entirely on God and conform his life to moral obedience in expression of gratitude. He notes in the context that 'it is true notwithstanding that for all this,' 'we do not cease to be poor blind men who do not know what it is to serve God.'⁵ Nevertheless God holds man responsible to this

¹ Ser. on I Tim. 5.7-12, CR 55.469. Ser. on Eph. 4.17-19, CR 51.590
² Com. on John 1.5, CR 47.6. I.3.1, CR 2.36f
³ Com. on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.206. Com. on John 9.39, CR 47.233f
⁴ Ser. on I Tim. 5.7-12, CR 55.470. Com. on Mark 10.21, CR 45.540
⁵ ibid.
observance on the basis of the law of nature they do perceive.

This does not mean that they are not responsible beyond it on the basis of what they ignore and do not perceive in the self-declaration of God in the heavens. It does mean that here as well on the basis of what is perceived men may be found culpable on their own terms. Putting aside for the moment the question of ultimate and final responsibility where man's conscience is dead in sin and concupiscence, where he is not aware of his ingratitude, we can here sufficiently convict man by his own conscience.

Because it might appear absurd that the Gentiles should perish without any previous knowledge, he (Paul) immediately subjoins that their conscience supplies in the place of a law to them, and is therefore sufficient for their just condemnation. The end of the law of nature therefore is that man may be rendered inexcusable. Nor will it be improperly defined in this manner: that it is a sentiment of the conscience sufficiently discerning between good and evil to deprive men of the pretext of ignorance, while they are convicted even by their own testimony. Such is the indulgence of man to himself that in the perpetration of evil actions he always gladly diverts his mind as much as he possibly can from all sense of sin.' (peccati sensus)

But since the sinner, though he endeavors to evade the knowledge of good and evil imprinted on his mind, is frequently brought back to it, and so is not permitted to shut his eyes, but compelled whether he will or not sometimes to open them, there is no truth in the assertion that he sins only through ignorance.'1 Guilt here is a type of ethical guilt where the Gentile is as yet wholly unaware of his primal sin, but he recognizes that he has not kept the moral law.

'It is a vain excuse if someone allege, No, now I am not a scholar, for there are things that our Lord has engraven in men so that they have been taught as it were from their mother's womb.' 'We need no Word of God to condemn them, they can allege no ignorance of religion, for nature should

1. II. 2. 22, CR 2.203f. Com. on Rom. 7.15, CR 49.129f
lead them to it. 'No, well, I was never instructed in the gospel. And were were you never taught a sufficient doctrine by nature? Did you not know how to discern between the good and the bad, as Paul puts it? Have we not a sufficient knowledge to convict us in the last day and prove that we merit condemnation?'

Where it is the case that some men consider themselves to be ethically flawless and so think they are virtuous and righteous, these men have not only ignored in their congenital blindness the clear manifestation of God in the heavens and which never finds perception in man, they have as well and in addition shut their eyes to that darkened light of nature which commonly does find perception in the consciousness of mankind. Man does 'endeavor to evade the knowledge of good and evil imprinted on his mind.' Born blind to ultimate good, man would in addition 'shut his eyes' to the light of his own conscience; we would 'bury' the remorse that God gives us. 'They suppress it as much as they can; indeed they even strive to extinguish (though they cannot) this knowledge and whatever light they have from heaven.' They have in self-deception become 'doubly blind,' sharing in the first instance the common blindness of all mankind to God's paternal goodness and beneficence which calls us to acknowledgment and gratitude, to cast themselves completely on him, and entering into in the second instance a further blindness not common to all mankind, where they do not correctly see even the moral order, the law of the Gentiles, which is generally perceived. Because of transgression, God 'entirely puts out their eyes which were formerly destitute of true light.' Paul does not speak merely of the natural blindness (naturalis caecitas) which we brought with us from the womb, but refers to a more gross blindness (magis crassa excaecatio)

1. Ser. on I Tim. 5.7-12, CR 53.469
2. II.2.22, CR 2.203. I.4.2, CR 2.39; Com. on Rom. 2.14, CR 49.37ff
3. ibid.
4. Ser. on I Tim., ibid.
5. Com. on Hab. 1.16, CR 43.515
7. ibid.
by which God punishes former transgression.\footnote{1} Operative even among the
Gentiles is that principle of sin which causes man to shut his eyes to
available truth.

Thus Calvin formulates this secondary and apologetic aspect of his
concept of responsibility. We do not learn man's real responsibility this
way. This is ignored in the heavens and comes with the gospel. But God
reaches through with man's perverted sense of duty to hold him responsible.
In this way Calvin retains two central ideas. First, sin completely blinds
man so that he never knows what sin means, and secondly, no man sins without
being or having been in some way consciously aware that he is doing wrong.
While remaining blind to his real fault, man is given within the limits of
human corruption to know right from wrong and is held culpable on this basis,
as well as on the further basis of his ignorance of ultimate values. 'Where
the knowledge of God is not there darkness, error, vanity, destitution of
light and life prevail. These things, however, do not render it impossible that
the ungodly should be conscious of doing wrong when they sin, and know that
their judge is in heaven and feel an executioner within them.'\footnote{2}

\footnote{1} Com. on Eph. 4.17, CR 51.205
\footnote{2} Com. on 1 Pet. 1.14, CR 55.222
Calvin deals with the responsibility and culpability of the man who lives in sin and by the light of nature along the same lines as theology before him and after him. Man's culpability is based on God's self-manifestation in his creatures. Man ought to have known God apart from his law and gospel in these wondrous works. Calvin's language and concepts here are often simply those of traditional theology. But it is important to see Calvin's arguments here in the light of his larger concepts of sin and responsibility, concepts which have not customarily been included in the traditional arguments, and particularly in the understanding of later Reformed theology. Calvin emphasizes that this sin of man in nature is at once an ignorance and an ingratitude. Man ignores and slight and is thus ungrateful for the blessings of God to him. He thus does not burst forth in that proper acknowledgment which is required of him. God declares himself as with an audible voice, he gives his Word in nature. But man in his ingratitude remains oblivious and heedless, because of his concern and self-willed desire to care for himself. Calvin thus includes man's sin in nature in the central sin of all mankind as ingratitude and the rejection of the grace of God. Man desires to depend on himself and his own strength in such a way that as he pursues this goal he completely ignores the offer of God to receive his blessing and grace and depend on these. As it has constantly been our thesis that sin in the thought of Calvin is most fundamentally man's breaking off of God's order of grace, so here once again in nature man constantly thwarts and inverts the grace of God to him.

The tendencies which may obscure this basic analysis of man's sin in nature grow out of that concept which sees sin primarily as moral transgression or the breaking of God's law. If it is supposed that man's primary duty to God was to obey God's law by strength and self-will, and if it is
supposed that man's sin is most fundamentally his transgression of or want of conformity unto the moral law of God, then much of the significance of Calvin's concept of man's culpability in nature will be lost. Calvin does indeed make use of man's moral transgression against the law written on his heart as a means to convict him of his sin, and we have attempted to show this. But both here and in the chapter on ethics we have further seen that Calvin subordinates this way of thought to the more fundamental concept: that man's sin is his failure to acknowledge God in gratitude, to depend on his grace, and serve him in glad and selfless love. In theology then we ought not to depict man's sinfulness in nature simply as his failure to live up in his own strength to the light that he has been given. Certainly this much is true. But beyond this we must include and even give primary emphasis to man's self-will which blinds him so that he ignores the fulness of God's self-manifestation around him.

The value of Calvin's emphasis on man's sin in nature as his ingratitude and rejection of God's grace becomes more obvious when we enter into the problems of man's responsibility and his ability in nature. Theology followed Calvin to speak of man's faculty or ability to know God in nature. But if it took over Calvin's terms, it did not take over Calvin's concept of responsibility. Federal theology rather conceived of some talent which was or was supposed to be in man by which he could search out God, learn his will and law as written in the heavens, and then obey it. The later Reformed theologians knew of course that man was not able to do this, he had lost this ability because of his sin. Yet nonetheless such was their concept of man's responsibility that they portrayed a man who was held culpable because he had not been able or willing to come to God in nature. This concept follows from that of a covenant of works of God with man where man was to provide works of merit and righteousness with which to justify himself. It is assumed that man is to reach felicity in his integrity by
employing some talent that he has been given. In thus moving away from Calvin's thought Reformed theology encountered the problem: How is man to be held responsible for something which he did not have the ability to do. When theology now asserted at once that man was supposed to be able to come to God in nature and was held culpable for his failure, and at the same time that he was unable to do this, having lost this ability in sin, it brought the criticism that such culpability was not real guilt at all.

It is the insight of Calvin in this debate that the whole question must be seen in the light of God's grace to man and man's responsibility as a response of accepting this grace and depending on it. In this discussion about man's ability, it is vital to recall Calvin's thought about man's knowing God only as God enables man to know him. We deal with what are otherwise insurmountable problems as we recognize that man is not able and is not supposed to be able to come to God in nature. Rather God was to come to him, and did come to him, until shut off by man's ingratitude. In this way we may reduce inclination and ability to the same thing, and deal with this objection of philosophy and liberal theology. Man's guilt then once again lies in his rejection of the grace of God that would have enabled him to know God in nature. We have tried to show here that even if Calvin at times hesitates about this in the matter of man's sin in nature, nevertheless his thought ought to be interpreted in this direction, bringing the question of ability under the larger and better developed notion of man's responsibility as that of being grateful for God's grace. Calvin's consistent emphasis on man's ignorance and ingratitude is here an index of the way in which he sees man's culpability in nature as that of the rejection of God's blessing, rather than as the failure to use his abilities to come to know God or to obey his moral law. In this way theology ought to deal with the question of the guilt of the man who lives in ignorance of God and of his sin.
PART III: CONCLUSION

It remains for us in conclusion to stand apart from the close study of Calvin's works and survey his concept of sin and responsibility both critically and in the light of the theological and philosophical movements which followed him and influenced Calvinist thought. We bring together and integrate the aspects of sin and responsibility we have examined in the several chapters to state the message of Calvin to present-day theology, pointing out where we today may put his thought in a more consistent form than Calvin was able to do, or noting with Calvin where there are factors which cannot be rationally adjusted or resolved.

The fact that we set ourselves the task of examining Calvin's understanding of sin and responsibility implies from the very start that there is here a problem or conflict. The subject suggests that there is real or apparent inconsistency here, that Calvin's concept of sin is so developed as to prejudice man's responsibility, or that Calvin's thought about man's freedom and ability to fulfill his responsibility is such that it prejudices his concept of sin. There arise doubts as to man's real culpability or as to the justice of God in holding man liable and punishing him in his guilt. We are now in a position to look at these problems we sketched in the introductory chapter in the light of our exposition of Calvin's thought and see both where Calvin has been rightly criticized, and where Calvin's critics may be refuted on the matter by a deeper appreciation of what Calvin taught. Here it proves of the utmost importance to free Calvin's thought from the influence of federal theology and of moral philosophy.

The subject of sin and responsibility suggests at once that responsibility be defined as culpability, that the thesis be limited to the question of what is man's sin, of how he is guilty for it, and how he is consequently
punished. It has, however, proved necessary to enter into questions of the nature of man and the nature of God in his relation to man, that is, to examine man's responsibility in the largest sense, to set forth what is man's duty, what he is responsible for. When we know wherein consisted man's responsible behavior toward God in the beginning and wherein it consists now, then we can define his sin, and consequently examine his culpability, and the justice of God in punishing man for his sin and guilt.

It must be recognized from the start that both sin and responsibility have specific theological meanings, particularly in Calvin's thought. Sin, of course, is a word and concept peculiar to theology, yet it has its parallel and counterpart in the philosophical concepts of culpability, and moral failure. Responsibility is a word and concept shared by theology and philosophy alike. Yet if we are really to understand Calvin's thought we must not confound the Christian ideas of sin and responsibility with philosophical ideas of man's responsibility and blameworthiness. Responsibility and moral failure have meanings in the ethical and philosophical sense, but responsibility and sin have meanings peculiar to the Christian faith, which are to be established independently and in distinction from all other concepts.

Sin is therefore for Calvin a concept which must be used only in a religious sense. Divine revelation must teach us our sin. For Calvin this means that the essential significance of sin is found in the relation between our knowledge of God and our knowledge of sin. We cannot speak of sin simply in the terms of moral philosophy, of ethical guilt, or of the transgression of natural and moral law, but sin must be defined in the religious sphere. But the issue here is not a simple one, for Calvin follows medieval theology before him to make use of the sense of moral guilt found in nature. This is to be incorporated into the Christian teaching in
such a way as to remain subordinated to the larger Christian concept of sin. One must be careful in reading Calvin to distinguish between his use of these ethical concepts and his basic concept of sin. He does not really seem to be guilty of confounding the two, for we have traced a clear distinction which remains between sin and ethical wrong, yet the larger distinction does often fall into the background so that we might think that Calvin's concept of sin does not differ in essence from the philosophical ideas about ethical failure before moral obligation. But when we have interpreted Calvin's concept of sin in the light of God's grace as first and most radically a rejection of this grace, then it becomes clear that this moral guilt is scarcely a prelude to what we really mean by sin.

It is moreover generally clear in Calvin that because the concept of sin comes not from philosophy but from revelation we have also to say that the clearer the eye of faith sees the light of God, the more completely the essential nature of sin is disclosed. The particular point at issue here in Calvin is whether we finally know our sins from the law or whether our knowledge of sin is to be rooted in Christology and the knowledge of grace. Here again the guiding principle is plain, but the ramifications more complex. The religious significance of sin is perceived most clearly in the light of the work of Christ. There is no shortage of passages in Calvin where this theme is developed. Yet Calvin seems at times to stumble and become confused in regard to the matter of the knowledge of sin by the law. Coupling the sense of ethical guilt in nature with the overpowering and radically greater sense of religious guilt when man stands in unrighteousness before the divine moral law, Calvin enters into moral denunciations of man that do not remain in subordination to his larger concept of sin as finally known in the light of the grace of God. But Calvin outlines here his own solution to the problem in the Biblical concept of the pedagogy of the law. The law does teach us our sins because of our hardness of heart, it brings
us through a crisis to the grace of God. Yet at the same time sin is to be made known to us by the grace of God.

It is surely a happy inconsistency in Calvin that if he is sometimes hesitant about asserting that we know our sins in a definitive way from the knowledge of grace rather than from the law, he is never inclined to develop the actual content of the doctrine of sin with reference to the Decalogue in exclusion of the grace of God. If he can neglect the importance of grace in the didactic method by which we realize our sins, yet in his systematic procedure he selects concepts each of which clearly focuses on sin in its relation to the grace of God. The correct center of reference is here insured as Calvin defines man’s original sin in the light of what was God’s grace to Adam in creation and what was to be man’s response to this grace, and therefore the concept of sin which follows from this portrayal of man’s primal state is developed in properly balanced proportions.

In the theology which followed Calvin this hesitancy to define the ultimate source of our knowledge of sin as the knowledge of grace rather than the law, and this use of the law written on man’s heart to convict of sin, without careful limitation of its legitimacy, seem to have been not only passed on but augmented to become governing concepts. In the introductory part of our study, we saw that sin came to be defined as unrighteous transgression of the moral law. This law was set forth in an original covenant of God with man which was not a covenant of grace, but of nature, law, or works. It became generally identified and confused with the Decalogue and with the law of nature. This meant that the knowledge of sin rose out of the law of God in whatever form it was known to man, and made possible the incorporation of the philosophical concept of moral failure into the doctrine of sin. It was thought possible to lead man to faith through the preliminary stage of a crisis introduced by the moral demands of nature, or the revealed law. And the doctrine of sin
came systematically to be formulated by the light of God's law.

But this is to weaken and enfeeble what the Christian really understands by sin. We have tried to show here that while there are tendencies in Calvin's thought which explain the development of the concept of sin in this direction, Calvin ought rather to be interpreted in terms of his thought about sin in relation to God's grace, for he does in point of fact develop his concept of sin this way, and not simply with reference to law. In this way the knowledge of sin is not a preliminary step toward faith, but a corollary derived from the knowledge of grace in faith.

It is also necessary for us to emphasize that as sin is known only in the light of God, so man's responsibility is truly known only when revealed by Scripture. It is not known in nature. This concept remains more implicit than explicit in Calvin, as he does not develop a concept of responsibility in systematic form or in modern terms. It becomes clear not so much at the beginning as at the end of our study that the natural man does not have the slightest idea what his duty to God really is, nor where his real culpability lies. A philosophical obligation to moral law remains so far short of man's real duty of responding to God's grace that it is actually wrought out within the sphere of sin and concupiscence.

It should, moreover, be implicitly if not explicitly obvious that man knows his responsibility to God more clearly in the light of divine grace than he does in relation to divine law. Calvin, if he were asked to state this formally, would probably stumble over this to precisely the same extent that he is confused over the knowledge of sin by grace and the knowledge of sin by the law. And in the immediate contexts of numerous passages he elaborates on how the law shows us what our duty is. But this too could be regarded as the pedagogy of the law. We have tried here to establish Calvin's real position by pressing him in his development of the
law. Here he has no doubt about the fact that man's responsibility goes beyond that of any perfect obedience to the law. Perfect obedience is not enough to discharge us of our duty, if we in this obedience yet despise the grace of God. Responsibility is therefore a concept which must be confounded neither with simple ethical obligation nor with mere perfect obedience to divine moral law. It is essentially known in its relation to the grace of God.

In determining the nature of what man is responsible for, and what is his sin, we are thus required to start with the grace of God. The concepts of sin and responsibility are therefore dependent upon our understanding of this fundamental relationship of grace between man and God. It might be thought that this is a radically reversed procedure. It might seem that man's duty is to obey God's moral law, that man sins as he breaks the law, that he is held culpable for this transgression, and that by the justice of God he is punished. The popular conception of Calvin's thought has been this way. Thus the grace of God is either omitted altogether or held in the background. Yet it is rather the case that the grace of God is the governing principle under which both sin and responsibility have to be subordinated and interpreted. We have to begin with the fact that God in his grace has ordered all things for the benefit of man. Calvin places a great deal of weight on the concept of order. He speaks of an order of creation and of the pure order of nature. While there are many ramifications of order, including the moral order, the social order, and the course of nature, we are essentially to understand an order where God is or intends to be gracious to man, and man in response acknowledges or ought to acknowledge God's benefits. In this dynamic relationship all things are ordered. Thus order is conceived as not a static relation but a continual outpouring of grace to man, and man's participation in God. From this
essential concept Calvin develops his notion of what man is responsible for - the acknowledgment of grace - and of what is his sin - his disordering the divine order of grace by his self-willed dependence not on grace, but on himself.

It is important to see this primal and ideal order in which man's relation to God is comprehended as an order of grace. Other ways of viewing this order are not to be omitted. But primary emphasis on any other principle of order obscures Calvin's thought. The theology which followed Calvin thought of a moral order, of an order of justice and righteousness. With Calvin these are included but follow from the gracious relationship of God to man. The implication of the covenant of works is that this order was not based so much on God's dynamic and continual grace to man, and man's acknowledgment, as it was based on God's righteous law and man's perfect obedience to it. Primarily works of righteousness were required to maintain all order. And philosophical emphasis falls on a formal and ethical order.

But for Calvin the inmost character of the Christian conception of God is that he is a God of grace. This, Calvin never tires of saying, is the very nature of God. God is our creator, but God is further and foremost our father. This means that God governs his universe in such a way that even when he is upholding his holiness, his majesty, and his righteousness, he does so in such a way that he is nonetheless guided by his very nature as a God of love. If sin runs counter to his holiness, his majesty, and his righteousness, it does even more run counter to his grace and love.

It is then necessary to undergird the whole understanding of sin and responsibility with the concept of a God who was, is, and continues to will to be gracious to man. This must be done even throughout man's sin. Calvin conceives of God as gracious to man in the beginning. Then when man sinned
God did not loose sight of the destiny for which he had created man, but his grace superabounded to bring man again into a relationship of grace. It is here important to see the overarching grace of God behind the whole of God’s relationship to sinful man. God is brought over against man as judge, yet this does not mean that he ceases to be father. He assumes the character of judge, as Calvin puts it, but remains in his heart our father. Even in our sin he continues to be gracious while man cuts off, thwarts, and inverts the grace of God. And finally God by his grace defeats the sin of man by sending his Son to fulfill the covenant and restore the order of creation.

But if Calvin never wearies of centering his theology in the grace of God, and thus subordinating his concepts of sin and responsibility to this grace, there is also a concept familiar to Calvin which rises again and again threatening and canceling this very nature of God, and thus prejudicing this development of man’s sin and responsibility in relationship to divine grace. It is seriously to be doubted whether for Calvin God’s providence and predestination are firmly rooted in the grace of God to us in Christ. It would seem to be the logical conclusion of Calvin’s governing concept of the grace of God that God wills and labors for the salvation of all men. If he does not lose sight of the end for which he created man, then he must wish for all to be united to him in grace and to acknowledge his benefits in gratitude and love.

But on occasion Calvin is not able to say this, for such is his concept of reprobation that he sometimes may assert that God has created some that they might perish. This prejudices at once the sincerity of the grace of God toward all men, and qualifies in turn the seriousness with which we can accept Calvin’s concepts of sin and responsibility developed in the light of this grace. There is no problem here with the concept of providence as manifested in God’s election of a chosen people and of the members of his
church. Here God only expresses and implements his will for grace. But
the problem for Calvin is in asserting at once that God's will is the
will for salvation and yet that all are not saved. In the government of
an omnipotent God some are reprobated by his decree. God brings them to
a destiny set for them before their creation.

Calvin's attempt to adjust and resolve this problem of the love and
power of God proves for him a major problem. He is forced to say that
there appears to be a double will in God, reflected in God's will which
in this matter seems different from his secret counsel. God wills the
salvation of all men but has not decreed this from all eternity. Calvin
seems to be further guilty of first making this distinction and then trying to erase it and reducing to a single will this apparent double will in God. In all this is reflected his confusion and his weakness in refusing to follow out the implications of centering his theology on the grace of God.

For modern theology it will be wise to accept Calvin's thought only
sofar as it recognizes that the love and providence of God cannot be
adjusted or rationally resolved, that the limitations of our ability
prevent a rational solution. This seems to be Calvin's intention. We
recognize that God wills the salvation of all, bestows his grace upon
them, and yet we recognize that all are not saved. This means primarily
a rejection of the idea of reprobation and of double predestination. We
either suspend judgment at this point, or else so include eternal death
in the counsel of God as to make it clear that this is part of his pro-
vidence and yet not his will, decree, or intention. Perhaps here Calvin's
concept of a secret counsel could be modified by the removal of the
elements of will and decree usually associated with it. God while yet willing the salvation of all counsels that those who reject him shall perish. And this counsel must be not only temporal but from all time.
God formulated his counsel from before the foundation of the world.

Having thus abandoned Calvin's teaching about reprobation, theology may as well abandon Calvin's twofold distinction of the will of God. There may be some usefulness in the concept where it recognizes our rational limitations, yet we may well find even in Calvin himself concepts better suited to resolve the conflict. If God's will does wear to us the appearance of variety, this must not be incorporated into theology as a systematic presupposition, but must simply be recognized as the limit of our investigation. Developing the concept will simply qualify our fundamental principle that God is a God of grace.

Thus we say that for Calvin God is a God of grace and that this fact must govern our thought about man's sin and his responsibility, while yet recognizing that Calvin's thought about double predestination does represent an important qualification of this truth. It may best be seen, however, that we have not mis-read Calvin's main position as we consider further and significant concepts Calvin employs to solve the same problem. The theologians who have followed Calvin in the Reformed tradition have not always given place to the way in which Calvin thinks of an accidental or adventitious outcome of God's grace toward man. Man is never damned by the intent of God, but only as sin by accident turns God's grace in nature, law, or gospel, to our condemnation. In this way we are able to maintain that God moves graciously toward man and is not responsible for his sin. The part of God in sin is hidden, but the part of man is open and manifest. God gives to all men grace sufficient to bring them to felicity, but they as far as they can confound and disturb his providence. By simply putting side by side with Calvin's concept of the immutable providence of God his frequent teaching that men do dynamically resist and cut off his grace, we can proceed to develop his thought about sin and responsibility in the light of God's grace.
In the main body of this thesis we have had to deal first and more completely with Calvin's concept of sin and then to bring out of this Calvin's concept of responsibility. The concept of sin finds explicit statement in Calvin, but the later concept of responsibility occurs in Calvin only in parallel and equivalent language and not in any formal statement. Nor has it been possible simply to understand by responsibility what is included under culpability, for the issues become clouded unless we keep always in mind what man is actually and ideally responsible for, what - in Calvin's language - is his duty, his obligation, his response to God, and his accountability. Now, standing apart from Calvin, we can reverse this procedure and assess first what is man's responsibility, and secondly what is his sin. In this way also his culpability becomes more obvious. This procedure is found only loosely in Calvin, in that the doctrine of man precedes the doctrine of sin. Yet it ought to be followed more explicitly in contemporary discussions of sin and responsibility. A development of the nature of sin ought to follow a clear statement of what man was responsible for in the beginning and is now held accountable for. Calvin does not lead us astray here, for he is aware that exegetically the definition of sin must be understood in the light of man's duty to God at the first. He selects concepts to describe the nature of sin which are based on God's grace to man at creation, and he opens his *Institutes* with a discussion of what is man's response to God. Yet neither does he lead us far enough in defining this as a conscious procedure. The confusion of later generations on this point, and the introduction of the covenant of works are perhaps an index of the way Calvin failed to make explicit systematically what is man's responsibility, and from this point to define his concept of sin.

It thus becomes important to recognize that man's real responsibility lies in an answer to the grace of God. Man does not so much have a
responsibility, as he is put into a responsible relation to God. He is co-responsible to God's grace. We act as we are acted upon. Duty and responsibility must be subordinated to this governing principle. He is bound by the strong cord of a free and voluntary love. He is held accountable for rendering an expression of thanksgiving. This, says Calvin, is the payment God requires of man. It is strange and even difficult at the first to regain this concept of responsibility, for we are accustomed to thinking of responsibility in terms of man's free choice, of his obligation to duty and to law. Responsibility is set within terms of reference of actual or ideal freedom, and ability for self-expression.

We think of discharging a responsibility when duty is done, of accounts rendered, or deeds of virtue and merits accomplished. But these are the terms of moral philosophy, which has supposed that responsibility was to be referred to freedom and ability for self-determination. Or they are the terms of a theology which supposed that man in paradise was to justify himself by his works, to discharge his duty by his works of righteousness. This strangeness with which Calvin's concept of responsibility strikes us is indicative of the way our thought is now permeated with ideas alien to him and the way we must at the very start begin with his reference point of the grace of God.

Here the significance of such words as acknowledgment, gratitude, or rendering homage to him for his grace cannot be over-estimated. They may not impress Calvin's readers at first glance, for they are not the formal or traditional terms of theology, yet it is by subordinating all man's duties to this single task of acknowledging God's grace and depending on it that we find the true center of focus for Calvin's notion of responsibility. Calvin brings this out in various ways, but five of these concepts are peculiarly useful in defining man's responsibility in that they stand in antithesis to man's sin. We focus on the grace of God as we say...
first that man is to be faithful to God, to live in fidelity as he believes in God's goodness to him. But this emphasis gives immediate rise to a second aspect of faith. Man is to trust in and invoke God's help as he depends on grace for his every need. This is wrought out, in the third place, as man responds not in formal, legal, or moralistic obedience, but in glad and willing obedience to divine law, which requires the life of out-going and selfless love. From a fourth viewpoint, we consider this response as man's love to God, when he denies himself, abandoning all self-love and concupiscient self-will. Perhaps most clearly of all the reference point of grace for responsibility shines forth when Calvin says that man is simply responsible for gratitude for God's blessing.

Man's responsibility is then worked out in the larger terms of another's being responsible for him. He is responsible not in his exercise of freedom or independence, or ability and will power, but in his dependence on grace, in his being bound to grace for all his faculty and will. He is not and is not supposed to be free and able, but lives responsibly as he confesses he is not able to stand alone, that he can do nothing of himself. He is responsible as he allows God to be responsible for him, and as he is perfectly grateful by trying in the strength of God to acknowledge God's benefits to him, expressing his gratitude and employing his talents in obedience and service. This was man's responsibility in the beginning and it is his responsibility now. God discharges us of all that we owe him precisely as we confess that we cannot discharge ourselves of the hundredth part of our duty. God is our father and we are his children. He cares for us. In this way Calvin sets forth a profoundly Christian concept of responsibility.

Throughout the development of such a concept of responsibility we have constantly to contrast it with the two similar concepts of responsibility explicit in moral philosophy and inherent in federal theology. On the one hand, moral philosophy conceives of a man who is responsible as he is free
and able to determine for himself some good choice of action or deed of virtue. He creates good, he makes good. He is judged on the basis of his deeds done by his own will and power, he has in this way an account to render. But this is to reverse the thought of Calvin. Responsible behavior takes place not in freedom or independence, but in dependence, not in man's use of independent ability, but in his allowing God to enable him and his depending for all abilities on him. On the other hand, the federal theology which followed Calvin conceived of a covenant of works which negated this responsible relation of man to God in grace. At the first man was not responsible as he depended on grace and was grateful for it, but he was responsible for works of righteousness, for moral deeds with which to justify himself. He lived by works, not by grace. Thus the concept of responsibility is obscured. Federal theology could not then define man's responsibility in terms of grace, but saw the covenant of works as remaining always to express man's natural relation to God and the inherent principles of justice in the universe. Man was accountable on the basis of his deeds.

Of course there are ways in which Calvin includes many of these ways of thought, and rightly so. We are accountable on the basis of our deeds in the negative sense that men who break God's law are punished while they continue in sin. We have a responsibility to choose the right and we are answerable for our choice. We can accept many statements in common with these other notions of responsibility, but only when we have clearly seen how our ultimate terms of reference differ. All these similar assertions are to be held in subordination to the governing concept of man as corespondent to the grace of God. To fail to do this means to develop in the name of Christianity a concept of responsibility which rises not from faith, but from the sin of man as he in ego-centricity defines responsibility in terms of what he himself for his part has to do in independence of God.
The natural man's notion that he can and ought to be responsible for himself comes to permeate our thought.

Calvin seems to have come closest to a concept of responsibility compatible with federal theology or with moral philosophy in a few passages dealing with the culpability of man in nature. Here he takes over the terms of his opponents to assert that at the first Adam had the faculty and ability to know God and obey him, but that in his sin he lost these. Now men cannot come to God in nature because they have not the faculty or will. Where this argument stands alone Calvin may be criticized as obscuring his case and lapsing into a more static conception of a man who is responsible as he makes proper use of some independent talent. From these terms of reference alone Calvin may be criticized for maintaining that man is to be held liable in sin for something he has not the ability and power to do. Perhaps Calvin did not see here the full implications of his larger concept of responsibility.

But it has been our attempt in this thesis to show that this thought of Calvin ought to be interpreted in subordination to the concept of man's essential response as an answer to the grace of God, not as the active employment of talents and independent ability of his own in searching out God, but as the passive acceptance of God's self-declaration and offer of grace. Ability is to be integrated with will. Man is enabled by God's grace as he is inclined to respond in gratitude. In this way we have seen that Calvin's critics may be answered. Where it was formerly objected that man ought not to be held responsible and culpable for something he did not have the ability and freedom to do, it may be replied that culpability lies not in man's misuse of freedom or ability, or his lack of these talents, but primarily in his failure to receive and depend on that divine grace which might have enabled him.

Having thus set forth how Calvin's concept of responsibility is to be
developed in the light of modern problems, we can see why we have insisted from the start that sin is only to be interpreted in the light of God's grace and what man's primal responsibility was. The nature of man's sin is that he rejects this grace of God. He falls from grace. He dis-graces himself. He breaks the divine order of grace. He does this because he attempts to depend on himself, to be independent, and not to depend on the grace of God. He hopes to care for himself, to help himself to righteousness. Calvin chooses to develop this in several ways, each of which points back to the severance of this primal relationship of grace. Five of these ways are of primary importance. Man's sin is infidelity. He in infidelity despised the grace of God. Man's sin is unbelief. But by this unbelief Calvin does not mean man's refusal intellectually to accept certain facts about God. The relation between faith and sin is one of trust and confidence in God. That it be so interpreted is guaranteed by Calvin's first insistence on man's infidelity. He does not so believe in the grace of God as to trust in it for his every need. Man's sin is his disobedience. This refers first to his rebellion against divine law, but further to his failure to obey the divine law of love. Man did not respond in glad and selfless willing obedience. Man's sin is concupiscence. Man sinned as he in self will tried to help himself to righteousness and felicity. Concupiscence manifests itself in gross forms, but most secretly in man's desire for independence from grace, as he attempts to justify himself. Man's search after God is only a sublimated form of his sin. This concupiscence and self-love is man's refusal to be subdued and dominated by divine love. God does not have dominion over man's will as his grace supports man's will, but man's will is selfishly turned toward himself. Man's sin is his ingratitude. He did not acknowledge God's benefits as he ought to have done. He despises God's grace.

It will be noted that in this discussion of the essential nature of sin
the emphasis does not fall on moral failure or simple transgression of the law. Upon approaching Calvin's doctrine of sin it might be supposed that sin at its root is to be set opposite the law of God. There is, we have recognized, a tendency in Calvin to do this, particularly in the matter of the way we come to know our sins. But in his discussions of the nature and essence of sin, any definition of sin in terms of moral law or simple transgression is conspicuously absent. This is even more remarkable when we consider the legalistic and moralistic concepts in the medieval theology which preceded Calvin. Each of the viewpoints from which Calvin examines man's primal sin not only points beyond this simpler way of thought, but is developed by Calvin so as clearly to include man's rejection of God's grace. This does not mean to say that in Calvin sin is not a transgression or want of conformity unto the law of God, for this is an important concept to him. But it must be seen that sin is very much more than this and that to understand Calvin's concept of sin, particularly in relation to man's responsibility, this concept of sin as a rejection and inversion of God's grace is fundamental.

It has moreover been our thesis that Calvin's deeper thought was obscured by the Reformed theology which followed Calvin, and by the position of moral philosophy. The covenant of works both set forth man's duty in terms of moral obedience and defined his sin in these simpler terms. And while moral philosophy did not speak of sin, it yet thought of man's blameworthiness as essentially his failure to conform to moral law. Calvin's position must be regained by theology as it goes beyond the concept of sin inherent in these ways of thought.

Calvin recognizes that we must forgo a wholly rational explanation for the origin and transmission of sin in human life when he asserts that it is by the ordination of God that all men are made sinners in Adam. If this concept has its offensive implications, and if it in some sense pre-
judges both God's will toward sin and the seriousness of our sin, it is nonetheless a frank recognition that every rational answer to the problem only raises new questions, and that we cannot understand in human terms the rightness of a decision of God to make all men sinners in Adam. Calvin's assertion that here we acquiesce in God's judgment and cut short all speculative philosophies or rational objections directs our attention not to God's part in our sinful will and nature, but to the way we sin from within our sinful nature. It is here Calvin's intention to define the concept of original sin as a spiritual and volitional corruption of the will. When Calvin chooses the concept of a divine ordination by which sin is transmitted, and fails to employ the traditional concepts of man's inherited sinfulness, he is rejecting the purely physical and at the risk of mis-interpretation placing in the spiritual realm the solidarity of man in sin. In this way he makes sin both inevitable and voluntary. But if sin is to be defined in Adam's posterity as an inherent defect or inability, this obscures the essential character of sin as a rejection of the grace of God. When the theology which followed Calvin again took over and developed the concept of an inherited sinfulness it did in this way prejudice man's culpability. But with Calvin our rejection of divine grace is volitional because it springs from our will, and not from any inherited deformity or natural and genetic considerations. Yet it is inevitable because all are born into a situation where their will is perverse and moves toward the inversion of the essential destiny given by God to man.

Theology must retain Calvin's thought here to the extent that it leaves with God's manifold wisdom the solidarity, universality, and totality of man in sin and recognizes that this problem is of a spiritual and not a physical or natural nature. It is moreover necessary to recognize that we cannot put into logical form the whole way in which we come to have perverse wills at birth. We have to recognize a mysterious and irrational element here.
Galvin's concept has this value. Nonetheless Galvin's concept of a divine ordination needs to be adjusted to remove from it elements of God's will and decree usually associated with it. It was not for a moment Galvin's intent to prejudice the seriousness of man's sin, his responsibility, or God's unqualified opposition to sin. We have seen that Galvin begins immediately to limit the implications of this concept of God's ordination which makes us sinners and to work out the way man is responsible and guilty from within the sinful nature which is his. At the same time we may question whether the concept of an ordination of God is to be retained in its present form. Does it not suggest, despite all efforts to the contrary, that God somehow wills for man to sin, or plays a part in sin which lessens his unqualified opposition to it? Despite Galvin's endeavors to show that man is responsible from within his sinful nature, this ordination of God suggests that man is not really so responsible as before, because after all it is a part of God's order that all men sin.

Theology must then improve Galvin's efforts at once to bring the origin and transmission of sin into the spiritual realm, to recognize the elements of mystery and irrationality, and yet to avoid all suggestion that God's will or desire is included in this propagation of sin, or that man's responsibility is in any way alleviated by the relationship between God and the transmission of sin. Galvin's thought must be developed with a concept which incorporates the solidarity of man in sin and yet does not have overtones to prejudice man's real responsibility or God's grace and holiness. It will be wiser to implement Galvin's intention by suspending judgment to leave with the mystery of God the bottomless abyss of man's universal sinfulness.

We can, however, retain Galvin's notion of how man is responsible from within his sin. If sin is inevitable in natural man, it is not to be understood as a natural defect, but must be conceived as the voluntary and
free act of an individual. Sin has therefore to be located in the perverse will of mankind. It is nonetheless dominant in his intellectual faculties, in his body, or soul, for the whole man is totally corrupted. But it is not so much a case of man's imperfection, of his failure to progress through his talents or lack of talents to become the highest possible human, it is not a case of his legal unrighteousness and moral failure, but it is fundamentally his unwillingness to align his will with the grace of God constantly offered to him.

From this point we proceed to summarize the culpability of man in his sin. We may first of all recognize that there are two areas of investigation in Calvin which will here prove only frustrating and fruitless. It is Calvin's caveat that when man searches in these directions for an explanation or excuse for his sin he is only being presumptuous and curious in a way forbidden to us by Scripture. The first of these is the divine providence of God, particularly God's predestination concerning our sins. It has been already our criticism that Calvin at times develops this so as needlessly to offend and antagonize, and that his concepts of God's decreeing the sin of man, and of his creating some destined for ruin ought to be abandoned. But nonetheless we may follow Calvin's advice to direct our attention to the revealed Word of God which is to be our guide. When we sin we know that we have broken his will. We consider the manifest and evident cause. We understand that our sin by accident turns God's grace to a curse, we shut off and thwart his blessings to us.

The second way in which we are not to elaborate our culpability is with reference to the ordination of God by which all men become sinners. We have just criticized Calvin here for using a concept that suggests that a will or desire of God shuts up man in sin, and which tends to qualify our responsibility and the seriousness with which God opposes sin. We have indicated that this concept needs to be worked out in more adequate language. None-
theless: we may follow Calvin's warning that we are not to relieve our culpability by directing our attention to the way we come to receive sinful wills, but are to emphasize the way we act freely and responsibly from within our sinful natures.

We have then to assert that, as far as we are permitted to see in the matter of our culpability, we are both free and able to reject the grace of God. In this consists man's culpability. This does not mean that we are free and able to accept God's grace, for we have labored to show that Calvin's concept of responsibility does not postulate such freedom or ability for man. He is not and is not supposed to be free and able to do this, but is to depend even in his acceptance on the grace of God which enables him. Yet nonetheless when he rejects God's grace, he does not ascribe this to any failure of God to give him, or will to give him grace sufficient to enable his acceptance, but he ascribes it to his perverse will which thwarts this grace. Calvin's concept of culpability is built around the antinomy that man acts responsibly only as he is acted upon and is moved by the grace of God, depending upon it for the whole of his responsible behavior, and yet that man is liable and culpable when he sins, as having cut off God's grace by his perversity.

It is thus necessary for us to deny that Calvin teaches that grace is irresistible, as far as culpability is concerned. The elect of God are brought to him as God imparts what Calvin terms the grace of the Holy Spirit. They do not finally resist such grace. Yet as far as the whole larger concept of culpability is concerned men do in a real way resist the grace of God. There can be no question that men do constantly and continually cut off God's grace to them, and that their culpability is as real as, and only as real as, this rejection of God's grace. Calvin's thought about predestination may prejudice the reality and seriousness of this sin of man, yet notwithstanding in this rejection lies Calvin's concept of man's responsibility for his sin.
The topic of sin and responsibility, when brought out in the direction of sin and culpability, proves inseparable from the concept of the judgment and punishment of God. That we enter into Calvin's thought about divine wrath and judgment becomes also imperative when we set as a center of reference the single concept of the grace of God. Throughout the whole development of Calvin's understanding of sin and responsibility we have related these to God's grace. But also the relation of these to God's wrath has to be considered. Having seen what man is responsible for, what is the nature of his sin, and how he is culpable, we finally turn to God's judgment and punishment.

Because man has in sin usurped God's responsibility of graciously caring for man and assumed the responsibility of caring for himself, because in this movement man has despised the blessing of God and sought to live independently of God, God comes over against man in judgment. God is angry because he cannot be gracious to man, as he has wished to be. It is Calvin's insight that the judgment and wrath of God are to be set within this very nature of God as a God who wills to love. Calvin reminds us constantly that God's hate, his enmity, his wrath, and his vengeance, are symbolic, and that these anthropomorphic expressions really tell us something about divine love. God both hates and loves the sinner, and his wrath is connected with and depends on his love.

Though the dangers of misunderstanding are great, yet we must affirm with Calvin that God's judgment on sin rises more fundamentally from God's love and grace than it does from his holiness or punitive justice. This can never mean for one moment in Calvin that God does not judge because he is the fountain of all righteousness. On the contrary the concept of God's judging out of his holiness and righteousness is so paramount in Calvin that this might well seem the dominating and governing principle of judgment, particularly if we read Calvin only in immediate contexts, or think
only in the narrower terms of judgment as condemnation and punishment.
And sin is ever to be set opposite the righteousness of God, nonetheless so
because we first set it opposite the grace of God. Or it might be thought
that God judges equally out of his love and righteousness, that here grace
and justice are the two feet of God. In these limited ways God's judgment
might be said to rise equally as much from his justice, or even more from it.

But here we must remember that it is God's very nature to love. As
Calvin puts it, his glory shines forth more brilliantly when he loves us
than when he judges us. Thus the judgment of God follows first from his
love and secondly from his justice. The widest meaning of judgment is
that God restores his order. If the order of God were only or primarily
a moral order, then we should affirm that God judges as he restores order
out of his holiness and justice. But Calvin asserts that this order was
most basically and at the first an order of grace. It is nonetheless
an order of morality, or law, or of justice. But it is primarily an order
of grace; all things are ordered for man's benefit. Generally the whole
order of creation is that God is gracious to us and that we acknowledge
his benefits. If this is so, then when God moves in judgment he restores
his order of grace. It must be then that God judges wickedness in such a
way as not to lose sight of the end of his creation. He says no to sin
so as to say yes with regard to his will to be gracious. He hates sin,
but he hates from within his love. He judges but not from the heart, for
he is still our father. He has assumed this character of judge. All this
can only mean for Calvin that this judgment rises more fundamentally out
of God's love than it does out of his moral order of justice.

It cannot be the other way round. We bring this out because theology
has in the past too often severed God's judgment from his love and grounded
it solely or almost exclusively in his justice, holiness, and majesty.
The federal theology which came to dominate the Reformed position lost sight
of God's ordered government set forth for man at creation as an order of grace to man, and came more to regard it as an order of justice and holiness. Man lived as he was just, that is, as he by his works satisfied God's justice. As man was set at the beginning into a covenant relation to God based on righteous works, he was judged as God restored moral order by his justice. And in a somewhat parallel way moral philosophy has conceived of judgment and punishment as rising fundamentally from the fact that the universe is a moral order. Here the fact that it is the fundamental nature of the being behind the universe to love and be gracious to man has not been given adequate and ruling place in the concept of judgment.

Because of this tendency to see God's justice and righteousness as the only wellspring of his judgment, and thus to loose sight of the fact that it is God's love that judges us as he graciously restores and removes sin, Calvin develops the concept of God's righteousness as redeeming and saving his people. We must include in the punitive justice of God the fact that our salvation is grounded as well in his righteousness as it is in his grace. Calvin's insight here, which has been largely overlooked by the theologians following him, follows out of his close Biblical exegesis in the Psalms and prophets, and is designed to establish the fact that in any final analysis we cannot see God's grace or mercy opposite or parallel to his justice and righteousness, but must see them as the single expression of the very nature of God. If it was God's will to be gracious to man in the beginning, then he is now nonetheless righteous once again as he moves in redemption.

He is of course righteous as he prosecutes those who break his law and who transgress his moral order, but he is righteous as he rectifies and makes right the order of grace. There is no dualism between love and righteousness, and therefore we need not build concepts of judgment, salvation, or reconciliation on such dualism, for this popular conception runs the risk of obscuring the Christian conception of God as one who loves.
Yet as surely as Calvin sees the judgment of God to be rooted in his love, Calvin is also guilty of destroying his own position when he turns to incorporate his idea of predestination into his idea of judgment. It cannot be denied that when the notion of reprobation enters into the thought of the divine act of judgment, this act is no longer exclusively one of love. It is ultimately impossible to reconcile the idea that God judges as he restores an order of grace, and the fact that he has created some men for everlasting death, and judges as he visits his vengeance and executes his everlasting decree upon them. Calvin allows the double predestination of God to alter his concept of judgment so that he can even suggest that God in punishment of the reprobate has no desire or hope that they turn to him and receive his love. He simply executes his vengeance. Here ideas foreign to the Christian idea of God have crept in. It is scarcely fair to Calvin to see these isolated statements apart from Calvin's larger and balancing emphases, but neither is it honest to deny that primitive ideas appear which make God seem capricious, arbitrary, vindictive, retributive, and angry, in such a way as to be wholly inconsistent with his love. Rather than recognizing in God's wrath an anthropomorphic expression which tells us something about God's love, Calvin here in effect makes wrath a divine perfection opposed to his love. He loves as he elects and he hates as he reprobates.

In Christian theology today we shall have to abandon this part of Calvin's thought because retributive justice is separated from divine grace. It may well be possible and desirable to retain ideas of God's vengeance so long as we clearly assert that it is vindicative and not vindictive. The idea of retribution may have some relative use if we use it to express the elementary fact that evil must be condemned and punished. The man who breaks God's order must pay the price, he cannot and will not go unpunished.
Insofar as Calvin uses the idea of vengeance and retribution to express this fact we may follow him, but when retribution becomes a governing principle of judgment so as to separate God's judgment and justice from his love, we can no longer retain it.

But the interesting and anomalous thing in the thought of Calvin is that the very concepts which can correct and adjust this objectionable bias introduced into the idea of judgment by the concept of reprobation are to be found in Calvin's own teaching. Here Calvin actually returns from his development of God's vengeance and reprobation in static terms, and works once again from his dynamic concept of God's judgment as depending on his love. Perhaps the most valuable concept that we have had to bring out here is Calvin's constant assertion that it is the proper work of God to love, but that it is accidental for him to judge. The punitive activity of God is here clearly set forth as foreign to him, it is adventitious, it comes not from him or his intent, but from somewhere else. If Calvin is to be criticized for failing through his concept of reprobation to relate God's vengeance to his love, he must here be commended for having left no doubt about the fact that God's very nature is one of love. We are to set the sheer weight and frequency of the passages where God is portrayed as being provoked against his will to judgment beside the smaller number of passages where Calvin lapses into static ideas of judgment based on God's immutable decrees. It will then be seen that despite the infringement of his concept of judgment by ideas of predestination, Calvin's concept of God's grace must govern here too. We interpret God's judgment and punishment of man in his sin in the light of his gracious will toward man.

By bringing out the thought of Calvin in this direction, showing his concept of what man is responsible for, what is his sin, how he is held culpable, and how he is judged and punished - all in the light of the grace
of God, we have hoped in critical analysis to present Calvin's positive message for contemporary theology and evaluate the apparent and real inconsistencies in his thought. Freeing Calvin's thought from the influence of later theological and philosophical developments, we can see his relevance in the modern debate.
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