

Calvin and The Doctrine of Authority¹⁾

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I. Introduction

In his classical work, *The Progress of Dogma*, James Orr contended that the Christian Church, in each great epoch of its history, has been forced to come to grips with one particular doctrine of crucial significance both for that day and for the subsequent history of the Church.²⁾

What great doctrinal issue does the modern Church face? The doctrinal problem which, above all others, demands resolution in the modern Church is that of the authority of Holy Scripture. All other issue of belief today pale before this issue, and indeed root in it; for example, ecumenical discussions, if they are doctrinal in nature, eventually and inevitably reach the question of religious authority—what is the final determinant of doctrinal truth, and how fully can the Bible be relied upon to establish truth in theological dialog?³⁾

It will be meaningful for us to refresh our memories as to how solid the historic doctrine of Scripture was, let us study some eminent testimonies of John Calvin.

“The biggest problem facing anyone who attempts a paper on Calvin’s view of Scripture is simply *embarras de richesse*. Far more material presents itself than can be properly treated in the space available. Calvin held that a particular understanding of the relations

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1) The title is taken from R. A. Finlayson, *The Story of Theology* (London: Tyndale Press, 19692), p. 48.

2) James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 19014), passim. quoted in John Warwick Montgomery, “Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Wheaton: Wheaton College, 1965), VIII, 2, p. 45.

3) *Ibid.* During the summer of 1964, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* polled the membership of the Evangelical Theological Society. Its members were asked to designate the major areas conflict in the theological arena. Two thirds of those who responded to the poll (2/3 of 112 respondees) said that biblical authority is the main theological theme now under review in conservative circles in America. Harold Lindsell, “A Historical Looks At Inerrancy,” *BETS* (1965), VIII, 1, p. 3; Clark H. Pinnock, “Baptist and Biblical Authority,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Wheaton: Wheaton College, 1974), XVII, 4, p. 193.

between Church, bible and Holy Script was essential to the maintaining of undistorted Christinanity, and he laboured too focus and flesh out that understanding all through his working life. To systematize, expound and apply the teaching of Scripture was, as he saw it, his supreme task, the fruits of which now fill 59 large volumes of the *Corpus Reformatorum*.⁴⁾ Having first written his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as a layman's poket-book six chapters,⁵⁾ he laboured from the second (1539) to the sixth (1559) edition to perfect it as a student's introduction to Bible study and in particular to his own commentaries;⁶⁾ and the index pages of the latest translation list almost 7,000 biblical references scattered through the 1,500 pages and 80 chapters of the fullgrown work.⁷⁾ Thorough his commentaries, which covered most of the Bible,⁸⁾ he became the father of modern critical and theological exegesis—a field in which, four centuries after, he is still, right up with the leaders.⁹⁾ On his death-bed in 1564 he told his fellow-pastors what he had sought to do, and, as he believed, had done:¹⁰⁾

As for my doctrine, I had taught faithfully, and God has given me grace to write, which I have done faithfully as I could; and I have not corrupted noe signle passage of Scripture nor twisted it so far as

- 4) *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. N. W. Baum, E. Cunitz, E.Reuss, P. Lopstein and A. Erichson (Brunswick and Berlin: C.A. Schweiske, 1863~1900). This standard edition of Calvin's writings comprises Vols. 29~87 of the *Corpus Reformatorum* (cited as CR). Even these volumes do not exhaust the material available, and twelve further volumes under the title *Supplementa Calviniana*, ed. E. Mulhaupt and others, are currently in process of publication (Neukirchen: Heukirchener Verlag). James I. Packer, "Calvin's View of Scripture," *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974, John Warwick Montgomery, ed.), pp.95 and 112 n. 1.
- 5) Published in 1536; its length 520pp. is about the New Testament from the beinning of Matthew to the end of Ephesians (Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed J.T. McNeill, trans., F.L. Battles (2 Vols. London and Philadelphia 1960), p. xxxiv) *Ibid.*
- 6) In the preface to the edition of 1539 and all later editions, Calvin wrote: "My intention in this work was so to prepare and train aspirants after sacred theology in reading the Divine Word that they might have an easy access to it and then go on in it without stumbling. For I think I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts and arranged it systematically (*ordine*) that if anyone grasps aright, he will have no difficulty in determining both what he ought especially to seek in Scripiure, and to what end (*scopum*) he should refer everything contained in...it And if I shall hereafter publish any commentaries on Scripture, I shall always condense them and keep them short, for I shall have no need to undertake lengthy discussions on doctrines, and digress into *loci communes*. By this method the godly reader will be spared great trouble and boredom provided he approaches the commentaries forearmed with a knowledge of the present work as a necessary weapon." (Translation based on T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (London:SCM, 1971), p. 53, a more accurate rendering than is found else where.) Parker, *op. cit.*, chs. 2 and 3, points up Calvins importance as the first commentator of the modern type; whereas Bucer and Melancthon had writtentaries revolving partly or wholly round doctrinal themes (*loci communes*) Calvin put all the doctrinal material into the *Institutes* and then wrote running commentaries on the flow of thought in the text. *Idem.*
- 7) *Institutes* (ed. J.T. McNeill), II, 1553-92.
- 8) Calvin wrote commentaries on every New Testament book exept II & III Jn. and Rev. (Which he once professed not to understand), and on the Pentateuch, Joshua, Psalms and Isaiah. Translations of these, plus his printed lecture- sermons on the otherprophets, fill forty-five volumes of the Calvin Translation Society edition (reprinted by Eerd-mans in 1948). The stylistic level of the commentaries is very similar to that of the lecture-sermons. *Idem.*
- 9) Calvin's New Testament Commentaries are currently being retranslated, under the editorship of D.W. and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd and St. Andrew's Press, 1959 to date). *Idem.*
- 10) CR 9, 893b. *Idem.*
- 11) Text in *Documents of the Continental Reformation*, ed. B.J. Kidd (Oxford: University Press) (pp. 589ff. *Idem.*

I know; and when I studied, I have put all that under my feet, and have always aimed at being simple. I have written nothing out of hatred against anyone, but have always set before me what I thought was for glory of God.

Thus Calvin saw his calling; and in the course of his thirty year quest for faithful simplicity in handling the Word of God, he produced more material expressing or reflecting his view of Scripture than has ever been brought together in print.¹¹

II. Calvin and His Major Work

John Calvin was born on the tenth of July, 1509, at Noyon, in Picardy. His boyhood was spent under the shadow of the "long, straight-backed" cathedral which dominates his native town. His mother, a woman of notable devoutness, omitted no effort to imbue her son with her own spirit. His father, a successful advocate and shrewd man of affairs, holding both ecclesiastical and civil offices, stood in close relations with the cathedral chapter, and seems to have been impressed with the advantages of a clerical life. At all events, he early devoted his promising son to it. According to the bad custom of the times, a benefice in the cathedral was assigned to the young Calvin at an early age, and to it was afterwards added a neighbouring curacy; thus funds were provided for his support. His education was conducted in companionship with the youthful scions of the local noble house of Montmor, and began, therefore, with the training proper to a gentleman. As changing circumstances dictated changes of plan, he was educated, first as a churchman, then as a lawyer, and through all and most abundantly of all as a man of letters. He was an eager student, rapidly and solidly mastering the subjects to which he turned his attention, and earning such admiration from his companions as to be esteemed by them rather a teacher than a fellowpupil. His youth was as blameless as it was strenuous. It is doubtless legendary, that the censoriousness of his bearing earned for him from his associates the nickname of "The Accusative Case." But serious-minded he undoubtedly was, dominated by a scrupulous piety and schooled in a strict morality which brooked with difficult immorality in his associates; an open-minded, affectionate young man, of irreproachable life frank manners; somewhat sensitive, perhaps, but easy to be entreated, and attracting not merely the confidence but the lasting affection of all with whom he came into contact.

At the age of twenty-two this high-minded young is found established at Paris as a humanist scholar, with his ambition set upon literary fame. His debut was made by the publication of an excellent commentary on Seneca's treatise "On Clemency" (April, 1532), in which a remarkable command of the whole mass of classical literature, a fine intelli-

12) Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1956, ed. Samuel G. Craig), pp. 3~4.

gence, and a serious interest in the higher moralities are conspicuous. A great career as a humanist seemed opening before him, when suddenly he was "converted," and his whole life revolutionized. He had always been not only of an elevated ethical temper, but of a deeply religious spirit; but now the religious motive took complete possession of him and directed all his activities. "Renouncing all other studies," says Beza, "he devoted himself to God." He did not, indeed, cease to be a "man of letters," any more than he ceased to be a man. But all his talents and acquisitions were henceforth dedicated purely to the service of God and His Gospel.¹²⁾

Paul Wernle remarks, "If you would know the man [Calvin], how he lived with and for God and the World, read first of all in the *Institutes* the section On the Life of the Christian Man. It is the portrait of himself. And then for his religious individuality add the section On Justification and On Predestination, where will be found what is most profound, most moving in his life of faith."

Such a man was Calvin; and such was the work he did for God and His Kingdom on earth. Adolf Harnack has said that between Paul the Apostle and Luther the Reformer, Augustine was the greatest man God gave His church. We may surely add that from Luther the Reformer to our day God has given His church no greater man than John Calvin.¹³⁾

The Institutes of the Christian Religion (Institutio Christianae), published in 1536, has been regarded in wide circles as the Primer of Protestantism. Institute signifies instruction. It was written as a sort of textbook of the tenets of the Christian religion by the rising Reformation leader, appearing when its author was only twenty-seven years of age. The system of theology and polity which developed from Calvin's Scriptural interpretations became known as Calvinism, a major system in historic Protestant thought.

God is revealed—so said Calvin—in both nature and reason but supremely in the Holy Scriptures. Basic is the commitment to the total sovereignty of God (theocentrism). Since the Fall of Adam all mankind has become impotent to do the will of God and thus stands outside the orbit of the family of God. Man's salvation from this state, however, has been provided for in the holy wisdom and mercy of Deity, by a plan of redemption (ordained by Divine decree of election and reprobation) by means of Christ, God's Son, the Redeemer. The elect (without merit on their part) find it possible to do God's Will by Divine grace, living by faith in union with the Son of God. The church is not a visible organization but consists of those called to redemption (membership known only to God). The sacraments rightly administered and the Word of God rightly preached (together with proper discipline) are marks of a portion of the true visible church.

The *Institutes* is divided into four Books, treating of the knowledge of God the Creator, the knowledge of God the Redeemer, the reception of the grace in Christ, and the Holy Catholic Church.

13) *Ibid*, pp. 25~26.

University trained (Paris), fugitive for his faith in France and the Rhine cities, Calvin was persuaded to settle in Geneva (1536) where he guided the Reformation already begun in Switzerland. Banished for a period, he returned (1514) to Geneva to become one of Protestantism's major figures in his day and through his writings and forceful leadership a major interpreter of the Reformed faith in the long centuries which followed—even to our time.¹⁴⁾

III. Calvin on Scripture

Calvin does not find it necessary to insist at length upon the supreme and final authority of Scripture in the realm of doctrine and morals. Calvin however discussed with considerable care the grounds on which the authority of the Scriptures rested.

It is gratifying that the two studies which just previous decade has produced and which have brought the most painstaking research to bear on the question have reached the same conclusion that in Calvin's esteem the original Scriptures were inerrant. In the word of E. A. Dowey: "There is no hint anywhere in Calvin's writings that the original text contained any flaws at all."¹⁵⁾ "The important thing to realize is that according to Calvin the Scriptures were so given that—whether by 'literal' or 'figurative' dictation—the result was a series of documents errorless in their original form."¹⁶⁾ And Kenneth S. Kantzer has written that the evidence in support of the view that Calvin held to the "rigidly orthodox verbal type of inspiration . . . is so transparent that any endeavor to clarify his position seems almost to be a work of supererogation."¹⁷⁾ "The merest glance at Calvin's commentaries," he adds, "will demonstrate how seriously the Reformer applied his rigid doctrine of verbal inerrancy to his exegesis of Scripture" and Kantzer claims that "attempts to discover a looser view of inspiration in Calvin's teaching fall flat upon examination."¹⁸⁾ Along with the inerrancy of Scripture, Calvin asserted its equal authority and uniform consistency. What was said in Genesis was as much divine truth as what was said in Revelation.¹⁹⁾

1. The Need for Special Revelation

"Calvin's doctrine of Scripture can be understood only against a background of his doc-

14) Vergilius Ferm, ed., *Classics of Protestantism* (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1959), pp. 67–68.

15) Edward A. Dowey Jr.: *The knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York, 1952), p. 100 quoted in John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. C., 1960), p. 11.

16) *Ibid.*, pp. 101f.

17) Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures," *Inspiration and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957, John F. Walvoord, ed.), p. 137.

18) *Ibid.*, pp. 142f.

19) A. Mitchell Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin* (London: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1950), p. 78.

trine of natural revelation.”²⁰⁾ To quote the title of *Institutes* I. vi, “Scripture is indeed as guide and teacher for anyone who would come to God the Creator.”

Calvin brings this thought into focus by the use of three favourite figures: the maze, the spectacles and the school master. Man, by nature, says Calvin, is stuck in a labyrinth of which he does not know the plan, and from which he cannot find his way out unaided. His sinful wrong-mindedness always takes him up blind alleys of idolatry, where he wanders lost. “Scarcely a single person has ever been found who did not fashion for himself an idol or phantom in God’s place.”²¹⁾ But God in love reaches down to us in our lostness and gives us the guidance of the Scriptures, which are like a thread leading us out of the maze of ignorance and misconception into knowledge of the one true God. “Thread” is Calvin’s own metaphor;²²⁾ and his image of the spectacles makes the same point. “Just as, when you put before old or bleary-eyed and weak-sighted men even the most beautiful book, thought they may recognize that there is something written they can hardly make out two words, yet with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering into one the otherwise muddled-up knowledge of God in our minds, dispels the darkness and shows us the true God clearly.”²³⁾ “We should hold that, for true religion to shine on us, we must begin by being taught from heaven; and that no man can have the least knowledge of true and sound doctrine without having been a pupil of the Scriptures. Hence it is that when we reverently embrace what God has been pleased to testify there concerning Himself, the beginning of true understanding emerges. And not only perfect faith, complete in every way, but all right knowledge of God, is borne of obedience.”²⁴⁾ Thus the Scriptures should be seen first and foremost as a gift of grace of benighted sinners, who without them could never have known God at all; and we need to have it firmly fixed in our minds that disregard of the Scripture is as perverse and ungrateful as it is disastrous.²⁵⁾

2. The Nature of Scripture

God gave the whole Bible, and thereby constituted it all His Word for all time. Calvin’s classic statement on this deserves extended quotation:²⁶⁾

When it pleased God to raise up a more visible form of the church, He willed to have His Word set down and sealed in writing. . . He commanded also that the prophecies be committed to writing and

20) Kantzer, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

21) *Inst.* I.v. 12. Battles observes that Calvin often uses the labyrinth image “as a symbol of human frustration and confusion.”

22) *Ibid.* I. vi. 3.

23) *Ibid.* I. vi. 1.

24) *Ibid.* I. vi. 2.

25) James I. Packer, “Calvin’s View of Scripture,” *God’s Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974, ed. John Warwick Montgomery), pp. 100f.

26) *Inst.* IV. viii. 8f.; vi. 2.

be accounted part of His Word. To these at the same time histories were added, also the labour of the prophets, but composed under the Holy Spirit's dictation. I include the psalms with the prophecies. . . . That whole body [*corpus*], therefore, made up of law, prophecies, psalms and histories was the Lord's Word for the ancient people. . . .

Let this be a firm principle: No other word is to held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles. . . . [The apostles] were to expound the ancient Scripture and to show that what is taught apostles [The apostles] were to expound the ancient Scripture and to show that what is taught there has has been fulfilled in Christ. Yet they were not to do this except from the Lord, that is, with Christ's Spirit going before them and in a sense dictating their words . . . [They] were sure and genuine penmen [*certi et authentici amanuenses*] of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God: and the sole office of others is to teach what is provided and sealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Calvin's view of inspiration is nowhere spelt out in formal analysis. Nonetheless, we can focus it clearly enough by attention to four key notions which recur when he deals with the Scriptures. The first notion is *os Dei*, "the mouth of God," a biblical phrase pointing to the Creator's use of human language to address us. The second notion is *doctrina*, "Doctrine" or "teaching," which is the instruction that these verbal utterances convey. "Teaching from God's mouth," or putting it more simply and dynamically, "God speaking-teaching-preaching," is the heart of Calvin's concept of Holy Scripture. The third notion is "dictation" as a term for the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the part played by the human authors in producing the Biblical documents. The fourth notion is "condescension" as a characterization of God's method and style of verbal instruction.

(1,2,) Calvin's view of Scripture as doctrine coming from God's mouth is made explicitly by remarks in his Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles. Says the concerning 2 Tim.3:16:²⁷

He [Paul] commends the Scripture, first, on account of its authority, and, second, on account of the utility that springs from it. In order to uphold the authority of Scripture, he declares it to be divinely inspired [*divinitus inspiratam*]: for if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men should receive it with reverence Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all aly down as a settled point this—that the law and prophecies are not teaching [*doctrinam*] delivered by the will of men, but dictated [dictatam] by the Holy Ghost Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have from their hand, but, since they spoke by divine impulse, they confidently and fearlessly testified, as was actually the case, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spoke [*os Domini locutum esse*] We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God, because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing of man mixed with it [*nec quiequam humani habet admixtum*].

These statements are very emphatic, and their meaning admits of no doubt.

(3) Calvin's frequent references to the Holy Spirit "dictating" Scripture and using the

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.* I. vii. 1, 4&5.

biblical writers as His amanuenses may well sound startling and even uncouth in modern ears.²⁸⁾ However, his use of the notion turns out on inspection to be both clear and sober. Positively, as Warfield, Kantzer and others have shown,²⁹⁾ this is theological metaphor conveying the thought that what is written in Scripture bears the same relation to the mind of God which was its source as a letter written by a good secretary bears to the mind of the man from whom she took it—a relation, that is, of complete correspondence and thus of absolute authenticity. Psychologically, there are no implications whatsoever of any suppression or diminution of the free cooperative functioning of the penmen's minds as the Spirit led them. Peter and Paul express their own thoughts as well as the judgment of the Spirit; tradition, observation and memory entered into the writings of the prophets; David wrote out of his own experience and expressed what in his heart; each writer wrote in his own style, according to his own personality.³⁰⁾

(4) And in this we see God's "condescension." God in His great love designs to talk our language so that we may understand Him. More than that, He stoops to talk our language in an earthly and homespun way, sometimes "with a contemptible meanness of words" [*sub contemptibili verborum humilitate*].³¹⁾ His purpose in this is not simply to keep us humble, though that is part of it; His first aim is to help us to understand, and His simple method of speech is thus a gesture of love first and foremost. On the "earthly things" (i.e. Jesus' parable of a fresh firth) referred to in Jn. 3:12, Calvin comments: "God . . . condescends to our immaturity [*se ille nostram rudiatem demittit*] When God prattles to us [*balbutit*] in Scripture in a clumsy, homely style [*crasse et plebeio stylo*], let us know that this is done on account of the love He bears us"³²⁾ One sign of love to a child is that one accomodates to the child's language when talking to him, and this, says Calvin, is how God in His love accomodates to our childishness in spiritual things.³³⁾

3. The Authority of Scripture

We turn now from the question of the nature of Scripture to that of its authority, which to Calvin was the central point needing to be argued against both Roman Catholics and Anabaptists. The key chapters on this topic in the *Institutes* are I.vii, I. ix and Iv. viii.

28) See Kantzer (*op. cit.*, p. 140, n. 97) observe that the word "dictate" has in Calvin a broad, metaphorical use. Nature, common sense, experience and one's feelings all "dictate" courses of action. Equally, the Holy Spirit "dictates" by confirming in the heart that the teaching one has heard is from God (*Inst.* IV. vii. 5). Any strong urging or pressure to accept, do or produce something could, it seems, be described as "dictation." Perhaps when the Spirit is said to have dictated the Scriptures, the metaphor carries the thought not only of actual correspondence between the divine intention and what was actually written, but also of the Spirit's sovereignty in bringing this about.

29) Warfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 62ff; Kantzer, *op. cit.*, pp. 138ff.

30) Cor. I, 271; Catholic Epistles, p. 363; Pentateuch, IV, 203. 204; Harmony, I, xxviii, xxxix, 127, 410; Jn. I, 22; Gen. I, 58; Jer IV, 329; *Inst.* I, 99; Heb. p. xvii quoted in Kantzer, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

31) *Inst.* I. viii. 1, referring to the New Testament preaching of the Kingdom.

32) *Commentary on John, ad loc.*

33) Packer, *op. cit.*, pp. 101ff.; cf. T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testamentaries* (London: SCM, 1971), p. 58.

Their headings indicate at once the thrust of Calvin's argument, for they read as follow: "By what witness Scripture must be confirmed, namely, that of the Spirit, so that its authority may be established as certain: and that it is a wicked falsehood, that its credibility depends on the judgment of the Church" (I. vii); "Fanatics, abandoning Scripture and flying over to revelation, cast down all the principles of godliness" (I, ix); "The power of the Church with respect to articles of faith; and how in the Papacy, by unbridled license, the Church has been led to corrupt all purity of doctrine" (IV. viii).

Calvin's teaching on the character of Scripture is the Word of God. One of these topics is that of the relation of the Scripture to Christ as the Word incarnate. And this is pointedly stated as the relation of the written Word to the incarnate Word. Calvin leaves us in no doubt whatsoever that in his esteem the incarnate Son is the focal point of divine revelation. In the *Institutes* and the Commentaries the centrality of Christ is in the foreground.³⁴⁾ "The saints in former ages, therefore, had no other knowledge of God than what they obtained by beholding him in the Son as in a mirror. What I mean by this is that God never manifested Himself to men than through His Son as His unique wisdom, light, and truth. From this fountain Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others drew all the knowledge they possessed of heavenly doctrine. From the same fountain all the prophets likewise drew whatever they thought of the celestial oracles."³⁵⁾

It is perfectly true, therefore, as Wilhelm Niesel says, that Calvin "considers the word of the Bible as a dead and ineffectual thing for us if it is not divinely vivified . . . and so soon as it is separated from Him [Christ] it becomes a dead body of letters without soul. Christ the soul of the law alone can make it live."³⁶⁾ "Jesus Christ is the soul of the law, the focal point of the whole of Holy Scripture."³⁷⁾

It should be recognized, therefore, as beyond dispute that for Calvin there is no incompatibility between Christ as being Himself the incarnate Word of God, the full splendor of divine truth, the last and eternal testimony of God to us, on the one hand, and Scripture as the Word of God, invested with the oracular quality of God's mouth, on the other. And so, far from there being any necessity to tone down Calvin's estimate of the nature and effect of inspiration, as set forth in other places, the case is that, in these very contexts where the finality and centrality of Christ are most plainly and eloquently expressed, there also the same concept of inspiration is introduced in order to support the thesis that Scripture is the Word of God written.

It is *Institutes*, I. vii, as we saw, that Calvin deals specifically with the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, and the summary at the head of the chapter indicates the extent to which this subject is related to the question of the authority of Scripture. And the first

34) Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

35) *Inst.* IV. viii. 5.

36) Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (Philadelphia, 1956, trans. by Harold Knight), p. 2 quoted in Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

37) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

sentence in this chapter indicates the same. "Before I proceed any further, it is proper to introduce some observations on the authority of Scripture, not only to prepare our minds to receive it with reverence but also to remove every doubt."³⁸⁾ Reinhold Seeberg says that Calvin grounds the authority of the Scriptures partly upon their divine dictation and partly upon the testimony of the Holy Spirit,³⁹⁾ we must understand how easily this interpretation could be inferred from Calvin's own remarks. It is instructive to observe the precise connections in which the term "authority" occurs in Calvin's exposition of this topic. With reference to the Scriptures as the only extant oracles of God he says that "they obtain complete authority with believers only when they are persuaded that they proceeded from heaven." Now it is plain that here Calvin is dealing with the persuasion which he proceeds to show is derived from the internal testimony. But he is not in the least suggesting that the authority itself is derived from this source. Again we read: "It must be maintained, as I have already asserted, that the faith of this doctrine is not established until we are indubitably persuaded that God is its author. Hence the highest proof of Scripture is always taken from the character of God the speaker." That "God is its author" is that of which we are persuaded. Divine authorship is the antecedent fact and is not created by our persuasion nor by that which induces this recognition on our part. It is divine authorship, therefore, that invests Scripture with authority and it is not by the internal testimony that this authorship is effected. "For as God alone is a sufficient witness to Himself in His own word, so also the word will never gain credit in the hearts of men until it is sealed by the internal testimony of the Spirit. It is necessary, therefore, that the same Spirit who spoke by the mouth of the prophets penetrate into our hearts in order that he might persuade us that they faithfully delivered what had been divinely entrusted to them." "The Spirit," he continues, "is denominated a seal and an earnest for the confirmation of the faith of the godly, because, until he illuminates their minds, they always fluctuate amidst a multitude of doubts." "Let it remain then a fixed truth that those whom the Spirit inwardly teaches firmly acquiesce in the Scripture, and that the same is self-authenticating [*autopiston*] and that it ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and arguments but obtains the certitude which it deserves with us from the testimony of the Spirit. For although it conciliates our reverence by its own majesty, nevertheless it seriously affects us only when it is sealed on our hearts by the Spirit. Therefore being illuminated by his virtue we now believe that the Scripture is from God, not by our own judgment or that of others, but, in a way that transcends human judgment, we are

38) *Inst.* I.vii. 1.

39) Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954, trans. by Charles E. Hay), Vol. II, II, pp.395f.

40) *Inst.* I. vii. 1; cf. René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody press, 1969, trans. by Helen I. Needham), pp.120f.

41) *Inst.* I. vii. 4.

42) *Idem.* cf. James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p.207.

are indubitably convinced [*certo certius constituimus*] . . . that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men Only let it be known that that alone is true faith which the Spirit of God seals in our hearts.”

Space does not allow any more discussion of Calvin’s theological exegesis of Scripture. Suffice it to say that, as he thought of the whole process of revelation in Trinitarian terms—the Son revealing the Father and the Spirit being sent by Father and Son to inspire and authenticate and interpret the written record in order that we might come to the Father through the Son—so he found the whole Bible’s end-in-view [*scopus*] in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of the Father and Mediator of all the revelation that has ever been given;⁴⁴⁾ and he broke new ground in expounding both Testaments as a unity of historical testimony to the one Christ.⁴⁵⁾

IV. Concluding Remarks

The Word of God, rightly interpreted and rightly applied by the Spirit of God, is the absolute rule of life. “Scripture,” Calvin declares, “is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which as nothing useful and necessary to be known has been omitted, so nothing is taught but what is of importance to know.” Scripture is the final court of appeals. If religion is based on Scripture, it is approved of God. True obedience to God in matters of the Spirit requires not only complete subjection to the revealed will of God, but also demands that we must not add one whit to the law of God. “There is no true religion before God,” he concludes, “except it be formed accordindg to the rule of His Word.”⁴⁶⁾

Calvin’s loyalty to the written Scriptures knows no bounds. For him the words of the Bible are the very words of God spoken through the prophets and apostles of long ago and now bringing unerringly to the souls of men the immediate voice of the living God with all the authority of the supreme sovereign of the universe.⁴⁷⁾ The Scriptures were to Calvin the only source and norm of Christian truth.⁴⁸⁾ *SOLA SCRIPTURA!*

43) *Inst.* I. vii. 5; cf. Orr, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

44) *Inst.* Iv. viii. 5.

45) Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

46) *Inst.* II, 165; 532; Pentateuch I, 345; Acts II, 129~30; 160,242; Job 706~7; Gen. I, lii; Minor Prophets I, 450; Jer. III, 185. Again and again Calvin warns against seeking “to know more than God has revealed” (Pentateuch I, 329; III, 423; *Inst.* I, 193; II, 530~31; Letters IV, 160; Jer. V, 429; Rom. p. 219; Minor Prophets IV, 196; Jn. II, 143; Ps. II 130) quoted in Kantzer, *op. cet.*, p. 155.

47) *Ibid.*, pp. 154f.

48) *Inst.* III. 21,3; cf. J.L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), vol. I, p. 288.

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