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An Exposition and Evaluation of John Calvin's
Teaching on the Sacraments, with Particular
Reference to the Sacrament of the Lord's
Supper in its Liturgical Context.

(Being a thesis presented for examination for the degree
of Bachelor of Divinity at Rhodes University, Grahamstown,
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PREFACE

Misinterpretations of John Calvin's theology are legion. It is to be hoped that this thesis does not add to their number. The basis for that hope lies in the fact that the task of writing on the subject has of course compelled the writer to do his utmost to comprehend what Calvin had to say concerning the Sacraments, both in the Institutions and in the Scriptural Commentaries. It is not to be thought that in so saying he is intimating that this labour has been dull and arduous; on the contrary, it has been a source of constant stimulation and interest, lightened, where the course was difficult, by the occasional rewarding flash of humour which appears when Calvin vents his irony on absurdities of doctrines which he is concerned to expose. The point is, however, that an uncomfortably large number of commentators presume to pass judgment on Calvin's thought without the least care to examine what they criticise, this forming a small part of the reason behind the selection of the subject treated in the following pages, for the writer was concerned at the misrepresentation of one for whose thought he had a profound respect (a respect that has been heightened in the course of his task). Calvin is best understood on the Continent, not so well understood, perhaps, in Britain (even among those who place him among their theological forefathers) and least understood in South Africa. If this thesis contributes to better understanding the author will be content: it has certainly done so in his own case.

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The attempt has been made to refract Calvin's thought on the Sacrament, using certain key-concepts as prisms, and from the results thus obtained to draw certain conclusions which, it is hoped, will not be unprofitable to the life of the Holy Catholic Church. It is thus to be regarded as an essay in historical theology, rather than a whole-hearted attempt to reconstruct Calvin's exposition of the Sacrament in the light of what has been revealed to us in the intervening years. As far as possible, Calvin has been allowed to speak for himself, this accounting for the possibly disproportionate number of quotations which appear in the body of the thesis. In many cases - as was perhaps to be expected - it was impossible to improve on either his thought or his expression of it, so that some quotations may appear overlong. However it was thought better, on the whole, to stud the thesis with nuggets than to 'salt' it with a sprinkling of gold-dust.

A word is perhaps desirable concerning the inclusion of a brief (and thus inadequate) consideration of Calvin's liturgy. There are those who regard forms of service as "mere husks" or "mere scaffolding", incidentals to the "real job" of the Church. There are others who regard scaffolding as necessary to keep the building pointed and true, who regard husks as essential to protect the kernel: but the analogies do not go far enough - there are those who see liturgy as a living expression of the Church's faith, as a deeply serious attempt to obey the command to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, as a significant event in which each part should harmonise

with the others and with the object of the whole - to render worthy praise to God. In this second group the author would wish to place himself as a disciple, and it is for this reason - to see how Calvin's massive theology determines or affects the form and content of what he regarded as fitting worship - that the consideration has been introduced.

A final word: one of the happy consequences of the task here undertaken has been not only the introduction to the grandeur of the thought of John Calvin, but more intimate acquaintance, through their writings, with leading theologians, particularly of this century. Individual mention of names would be invidious - their names appear under quotations from their works. My debt to their thought and exposition cannot be measured.

It remains to utter a most grateful word of thanks to my Professor and Tutor, the Rev. Dr. Horton Davies, whose constant encouragement, friendly criticism, penetrating advice and great patience has been of inestimable value, and that not only in the writing of this thesis. Perhaps the best means of showing my gratitude is - if he will forgive the impertinence - to dedicate it to him.

NOTE ON QUOTATIONS:

Since several editions of both the Commentaries and the Institutes have appeared, it has been thought best to avoid the irritating custom of referring to either of these by the page number and instead to refer (in the case of the Institutes) to book, chapter, and paragraph numbers, and (in the case of the Commentaries) to the relevant Scriptural book, with chapter and verse. Thus e.g.

Inst. 4. 14, 20 refers to Book 4, chapter 14, paragraph 20, of the Institutes

Comm. 1 Cor. 11:24 refers to Calvin's exposition on this verse in his Commentary on 1 Corinthians.

Other citations are made in the usual manner.

The translation of the Institutes used throughout is that made by Henry Beveridge, as reprinted and published (by James Clarke and Co.) in 1949, while the Commentaries are those published in series by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

SUMMARY.

Introduction.

While the ultimate source of Calvin's theology is the Scriptures, he claims the support of the Fathers and particularly of Augustine. Augustine's definition of a Sacrament is the same as his own, he affirms. Consideration of Augustine's Sacramental theology reveals the importance attached to the Word of God which must be added to the element to make it a Sacrament, not because the Word is heard merely, but because it is believed, this process revealing to the communicant the res of the Sacrament. Christ is present in the Supper and gives it its life-bestowing property in the Church by means of His Spirit.

Aquinas is considered as the classical expositor of transubstantiation. Much in his Sacramental theology wins our support e.g. the Institution only by God in Christ, the necessity of faith. St. Thomas is primarily concerned to preserve the most literal possible meaning of the words "This is my body" and constantly appeals to this in support of his doctrine. The familiar sundering of "substance" and "accidents" is due mainly to this concern.

Luther's revolt against Romanism was of mixed extent due to his innate conservatism. This is notable in his thought on the Sacrament which he approaches as a repentant troubled sinner seeking grace. The ground of the assurance of grace therein is not in our own faith but in a literal interpretation of the words "This is my body" which to him means that the body and blood of Christ are there as well as the bread and

wine, and which involves the ubiquity of the glorified body of Christ. Unbelievers partake as a result of the body and blood though not of the grace conveyed. The argument by which the presence of Christ is established appears to result in a vicious circle.

Zwingli's humanist background helps to account for the rather meagre view of the Sacrament, which to him was a memorial meal, though the Marburg Colloquy brings him to admit a spiritual presence of Christ, while this is yet dependent on the faith of the recipient.

ONE (a) The Definition of a Sacrament.

Calvin's more mystical cast of mind influences his teaching and brings him to conclusions different from Zwingli's. He cannot think of the Sacraments as signs only, but holds that through them something must happen, a hint of this appearing in his now classical definitions. Similar trends may be seen in Aquinas, the Westminster Confession and the Thirth-Nine Articles. Sacraments must have a spiritual reference, a promise of God of which the Sacrament is a seal, and are - most important - a means of grace whereby God conveys something of Himself to us.

ONE (b) The Definition of a "Gospel Sacrament"

Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two Sacraments Calvin will allow to have been instituted by God to confirm His promises. This is practically implicit in the three conditions of a Sacrament outlined in the last section.

Calvin gives qualified approval to Ordination and Confirmation, though he will not rank these as in the full sense Sacraments. Man's presumption in instituting additional Sacraments is an insult to the Holy Spirit.

ONE (c) The institution by Jesus Christ.

Since our salvation is of Christ, and Sacraments are assurances of salvation, they must be intimately related to Him. The ancient Sacraments, like ours, had the purpose of leading men to Christ, but since He had not yet been born, they gave an imperfect and incomplete representation of Him. With the inauguration of a New Covenant, new Sacraments had to be instituted, to picture Him to the life and to draw their whole effect from Him, who acts as God's agent in their institution. This institution it is that guards against distortion introduced by men. The insistence on dominical institution is of a piece with the general centrality of Christ in Calvin's system.

ONE (d) The prevent^{ient}~~ive~~ grace of God.

That everything is of God is a terminus a quo for Calvin. The grace of God alone is responsible for our salvation and sanctification, the Sacraments playing an essential part in this progress. The central thing in the Sacraments is not so much our faith as that in them God acts.

ONE (e) The relation of the Sacraments to the Covenant.

Part of Calvin's definition of a Sacrament involves the

antecedent promise of God, a consideration deeply embedded in the two-sided Covenant-relationship which itself rests on God's initiative. The Sacraments of the Hebrews were intended as seals of God's covenant with them. With the inauguration of the New Covenant, new Sacraments must replace the old as signs and seals of the Covenant of grace. The Sacraments are not only a seal of the Covenant but a renewing of it: as in the old Covenant man is bound to respond in obedience. Yet the Covenant is of no avail except God give the power for man to maintain it, and this is supplied in Communion.

ONE (f) The relation of the Sacraments to Creation-Incarnation and to Redemption-Incarnation and

In the created order the lower may often be taken as revelatory or symbolic of the higher. To this principle of the sacramental universe Calvin gives support that is qualified by the condition that parts of creation so used must be stamped with the word of God, this lending itself to the view that creation itself needs to be redeemed before it can point or lead to God. Relation of the Sacraments to Incarnation leaves the way open for multiplication: relation to the Redemption gives room for one of initiation and one of sanctification. Yet this separation must not be falsely pushed too far, for Incarnation and Atonement, the Person of Christ and His Work, belong together and must be thus considered.

ONE (g) The relation of the Sacraments to the Atonement.

One great difference between Roman and Reformed systems concerns the application of salvation and the relative emphasis on faith and Sacraments. Calvin cannot and will not allow that participation in the Sacraments is a sine qua non for salvation, for that would imply that Christ's Atonement was incomplete. Faith is the only attitude which can appropriate salvation, and Sacraments are appointed as assurances of faith.

ONE (h) The necessity of the Word.

Calvin attached great importance to the Word - without it there would be no Sacrament. Apparently for him "the Word" sums up the message of the Gospel as set forth in Scripture and sharply focussed in the Words of Institution. That Christ is the Word of God is recognised and affirmed, as is also the fact that apart from Christ the Sacraments would be nothing, but the relation Sacrament = element plus Word, and, in this context, Word = Jesus Christ, is not explicitly made. Prior place is given to the Word, for the Sacraments confirm to us what has been spoken and believed. This involves the addressing of the Word to the congregation and not to the elements. Word and Sacrament form complementary parts of the total revelation and encounter with God.

ONE (i) The work of the Holy Spirit

The spirit it is who uses both Word and Sacraments in the Church to produce and confirm faith. It is His operation, not any striving of our own, nor any virtue inherent in the

Sacraments themselves, that avails for this result. Over and above all is the Spirit to whom alone it belongs to begin and sustain faith.

ONE (j) The necessity of faith.

A Sacrament received without faith is destruction to the Church, and faith is a gift of God, the only instrument for appropriating His blessings. A Sacrament received without faith is only a sign and no more. Calvin's idea of faith is on the whole more intellectual in emphasis than that of e.g. Luther, but he by no means neglects to see it as an attitude of both mind and heart. Every part of the Sacrament must have reference to faith, which is directed, not towards the Sacraments, but towards God the giver.

ONE (k) The duty of the believer.

The only proper attitude towards God in the Sacraments, as everywhere else, is faith. He who comes without faith does not partake of the body and blood of Christ though that is not affected by his lack, and is still offered. At times Calvin has to consign such an one to further damnation, as eating and drinking judgment to himself. Lack of faith here is closely related to that lack of charity which destroys the unity of the Church. To avoid the fate in store for the faithless and truly to partake of the Lord's body and blood, careful self-examination of motives is a necessity in approaching the Lord's Table: the communicant must bring repentance and love.. Necessity for this self-examination leads to the exclusion of children from the Table

until such time as they show due understanding of the mysteries of the Faith and have as a result been solemnly admitted to full fellowship in the Church.

TWO (a) Commemoration and Thanksgiving.

Commemoration, though by no means central to Calvin's thought on the Sacrament, is given due place. The Sacrament is a perpetual reminder of the sacrifice of Christ, and is properly conjoined with thanksgiving, praise, and public confession of faith. There is a hint that such thanksgiving has its part to play in the consecration of the elements for their holy use.

TWO (b) Communion with God in Christ and with the whole Church

Communion is the focal point of the Sacrament for Calvin. With the symbols of bread and wine is given the reality of what these signify. This is only possible if there is a "real presence" of Christ. While stoutly affirming this presence, Calvin stubbornly refuses to explain it by means of transubstantiation or consubstantiation and reveals the inconsistencies in both on the basis of the rigidly orthodox doctrine of Christ's exalted body which may not be "dragged down" from heaven. He cuts the Gordian knot which remains by affirming that the powerful agency of the Holy Spirit so unites things separated by space that we are in truth made partakers of the body and blood of Christ. Further than this Calvin will not go, content to leave the mystery a mystery.

True to his stress on the corporate nature of the Church, Calvin states explicitly that the Supper is a corporate act

which loses its character if celebrated in private. This is closely related to that faith which is brought to the Holy Table and which must issue in love of the brethren. The communion of saints is however limited to include only those in the fellowship of the Church Militant, in which the Sacrament is a striking reminder, evidence and affirmation of our unity.

TWO (c) Sacrifice.

The term "sacrifice" is of limited application in the Supper, for the latter cannot be a repetition of Christ's sacrifice without detracting from the unique character of His work. What is set forth is a memorial of that sacrifice, which stirs up the communicants to a corresponding sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving and obedience: this, though important, is a secondary aspect of the Sacrament.

TWO (d) Eschatology

Although Calvin in no wise anticipates the prevailing eschatological emphasis, he does regard participation in the Supper as a feeding unto eternal life, and a foretaste of eternity.

TWO (e) The purpose of the Sacrament.

For the life of the Christian to attain its full richness, participation in the Sacrament is essential. In it Christ Himself comes to us with all His power and benefits, including the knowledge of sins effaced by His sacrifice. Our faith is confirmed by the Sacrament, for God again impresses us with

the costliness of the price that was paid. It is a bond of unity, a testimony of our faith, and a renewing of the Covenant.

THREE The Liturgy of the Supper.

A note of what Calvin considered as essentials in the Liturgy is followed by setting out his exposition of these in various orders of service either used or approved by him. Then is set out the text of the prayers he employed, while these in turn are followed by notes on the text and on the orders, the attempt being made to draw out their significance in view of his theology. Such notes include the place given to the minister, and a consideration of Calvin's insistence on weekly celebration. A prevailing emphasis is Calvin's declared intention to recover the best in primitive practice.

CONCLUSION

The attempt is made to discover a basis for the objectivity of the "real presence" of Christ in the Supper, as qualitatively different from that experienced in non-sacramental worship. The suggested basis is that in the Sacrament there are not only words but deeds. It is in addition difficult to distinguish, on the grounds of biblical theology, between partaking of the body and blood of the Lord in the Sacrament, and participation in the mystic life of the Church which is His resurrection Body. Temple's suggestion that "body" must be taken to convey the sense of the vehicle or effective symbol of personality is adopted as being in harmony with such a train of thought.

Calvin's objectivity in respect of faith as the gift of God is to be welcomed, though at times it appears as if it reduces human response to a minimum. Both this emphasis and that of wholehearted personal surrender need to be held, though it may be in a tension that is more intellectual than existential.

Calvin provides good ground for excluding all but Baptism and the Lord's Supper as true Sacraments by insisting that Sacraments must be a seal of the antecedent promise of God. These two Sacraments are the clearest possible expression of the heart of the Gospel, while the others, though useful, are peripheral. A note is appended on Calvin's approbation of some ceremony by which repentant sinners may be restored to fellowship and favour in the Church and the relevance of this approval shown for the life of the contemporary Reformed Church.

Reflection on Calvin's liturgical expressions of the Sacrament reveals a disturbing lack of balance between didactic and emotional elements, particularly in regard to the omission of any provision for the expression of holy joy and joyful thanksgiving. This is, in all probability, a result of his surprising neglect of the Resurrection, both in his theology and in his services. There is also insufficient provision for such acts of worship as would make the service a truly corporate act, since one voice is inclined to dominate.

That so little appears in either the theology or liturgy

of the eagerly forward-looking emphasis characteristic of eschatology, is surprising in view of the fact that Calvin was serving a Church under persecution.

Calvin's neglect of the Church Triumphant in considering the "communion of saints" is probably due to his dislike of the prevailing Roman practice of intercession for the dead and invocation of saints.

INTRODUCTION

It needs but a glance at the index of Patristic quotations appearing in the Institutes¹ to gain some impression of Calvin's indebtedness to the Fathers, an impression that is more than confirmed on a reading of the Institutes and thoughtful consideration of its contents². Indeed, while he was never weary of proclaiming that his teaching rested on the sole basis of Scripture, the writings of the Fathers, in which he was thoroughly conversant, gave shape and direction to his theology. Of none of the Fathers is this more true than of Augustine, for whose systematic mind Calvin had great respect, and with whose thought his own showed such affinity. This influence of Augustine is patent throughout the Institutes: it is no less evident at the very beginning of our author's treatment of the Sacraments, where, in setting out to give a concise and accurate definition of a Sacrament, he claims that his definitions

... differ not from that of Augustine, which defines a sacrament to be a visible sign of a sacred (divine) thing or a visible form of an invisible grace... 3

At the same time, Calvin does not simply rest on Augustine's authority, but rather quotes him as supporting his own interpretation of the Scriptural doctrine. Both theologians find

1. Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. H. Beveridge, pub. Jas. Clarke 1949 pp xxi-xxiv. Approximately 450 Patristic quotations are listed here, while many incidental references which appear in the body of the Institutes are not listed.
2. cf. A.M. Hunter, The Teaching of Calvin, Jas Clarke, 2nd. edit. 1950, chapter 3.
3. Inst. 4. 14,1 cf Augustine: de Cat Rud. xxvi 50.

kinship in their deep and profound respect for the Word of God in its action upon man and upon creation - an action that issues in sanctification. As for the Sacraments, the central place occupied by the Word is illustrated by Augustine's statement that

... the word is added to the element and a sacrament is constituted, being itself, as it were, a visible word ...

4

Apart from the Word, that is, the elements remain unchanged, uncharged with any spiritual dynamic. For, to Augustine, two things are to be perceived in the Sacraments: the sacramentum, or outward part, and the res, or inward part⁵, the "real thing", the essential matter of the Sacrament itself, which could only be discerned in the Sacrament after the divine Word had been added to it, and that not because the Word had been spoken merely, but because it had been believed.

In the Sacrament of the Holy Supper, the bread becomes the Body of Christ because it has been sanctified by the Word of God, the consecration being denoted by the words, consecratio, benedictio, and sanctificare, a consecration which has the effect of making the elements a "sacrament of commemoration" of Christ's sacrifice⁶. But, again, the sacramentum and the res must be carefully distinguished one from the other, for while it is the feeding of the whole man⁷ that is intended at the Supper, without the res

4. In Joann. lxxx 3

5. cf. Tract in Joann xxvi 15

6. cFaust xx 21

7. of Book of Common Prayer: "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ... preserve thy body and soul ..."

of the Sacrament, which is only partaken of and which only feeds by faith⁸, the action becomes a purely physical chewing and swallowing, void of spiritual significance.

It is not that which is seen that feeds, but
that which is believed

9

and this faith comes to be, and is established by the operation of the Word. In all this, Augustine is in line both with the Hebrew conception, which saw the spoken word, whether of men or of God, nor merely as a sound issuing from the mouth to express a meaning, but as a living thing, a projection of a spiritual power inherent in the person of the one who utters it¹⁰, and also with the Johannine conception of the Word of God addressing, penetrating, changing, sanctifying all God's creation¹¹. Further to this Johannine conception of the Word as bearing life within Himself¹², Augustine sees the Eucharist as conveying the gift of life, life which springs from participation in the spiritual process of eating and drinking our Lord's Body and Blood, by which process we come "to dwell in Christ and to have Christ dwelling in us"¹³. The power and life released by partaking of the bread and wine result from the presence of Christ, which Augustine conceives as a spiritual presence by virtue of the spiritual essence of Christ's

8. *ibid*: "... feed on him in thy heart by faith".

9. *Serm cxii* 5, cf *De Civ.Dei* *xxi* 25.

10. cf the story of Jacob's stolen blessing in *Gen* 27 - a blessing which Isaac longs to revoke but cannot. cf also *Is* 55:11, 40:26, *Pes* 29:5, 33:6, *Heb* 11:3, *Gen* 1.

11. *Jn* 1:1-18

12. *Jn* 1:4

13. cf "The participation of that table..." *De Civ.Dei* *xvii* 20.

humanity receiving a new symbolical Body, and this spiritual essence also becomes the spiritual essence of the Church, which is sometimes spoken of as the Body of Christ and as the res sacramenti.¹⁴ This latter exposition would almost certainly appear to be that adopted by Calvin when he speaks of Christ being truly present in the Supper through the Holy Spirit, who, as part of His office, here awakes and nourishes that faith in the heart of the believer which enables him, having been made a member of the Body of Christ, to partake of the body and blood of our Lord, signified in the bread and wine of the Sacrament.

But, it is hoped, sufficient has now been said of Augustine's theology of the Sacrament to indicate the close relationship between his thought and that of Calvin. We must turn to an interpretation of the Eucharist against which Calvin argued long and fiercely, viz. transubstantiation, later made regulative and authoritative by the decree of the Council of Trent:

... through consecration of the bread and wine, there comes about a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood 15

and fully expressed in the third part of the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas. There is much in Aquinas's general treatment of the Sacraments that deserves the description of devout and pene-

14. see Serm cccxvii in Joann xxvi 15, Ep clixv (ad Bonifacium) 50
 15. Quoted in Bettenson ; Documents of the Christian Church (Oxford p 368.
 Addition to note 8 (see previous page): the unfortunate custom having arisen of omitting these words at the delivery, the way is left open for a too objective view of the Sacrament.

trating exposition, and to which few could object. There is, for example, a gracious sense of the goodness of God in providing the Sacraments as buttresses to our faith and as means of grace for the nourishment of the souls of men. A Sacrament is ordained by God to signify our sanctification which, to Aquinas involves (i) the cause of our sanctification, which is Christ's Passion, (ii) the form of our sanctification, which is grace, (iii) the ultimate end of our sanctification, which is eternal life¹⁶; it may not be fanciful to extend these, by analogy, to involve the three aspects of the Holy Supper, viz. commemoration, communion, and eschatology. Of equal, if not prior, importance in the Sacraments is the worship of God¹⁷, from whom alone the power of the sanctification of man comes. There is thus considered the parallel movement of God to man and of man to God.

Particular signs of a special kind are necessary to show forth the grace and love of God, signs which, by virtue of the words added to them (he quotes Augustine's saying concerning the word transforming the element into a Sacrament)¹⁸ become more effective in conveying grace than either the words or the elements themselves. He would probably have agreed with the description of a Sacrament as an "acted parable". Care is thus needed in the selection of signs to be used in the Sacraments, and the only criterion for this

16. Summa Theologica, Part III, Q 60, cf. also Q 60, 6
 17. op. cit. Q 60, 5
 18. op. cit. Q 60, 4



Selection is institution by God, from whom alone is the power of the Sacrament¹⁹.

Although human institutions are observed as part of the Sacrament, these are not essential. Rather are they things which are added as being thought fitting for the solemnity of the act:

But those things that are essential to the sacrament are instituted by Christ Himself, who is both God and man. 20

Christ indeed, as the Incarnate Word, is the cause of that sanctification which the Sacraments bring²¹, both as God and as man. As the Word Incarnate was united to "sensible flesh" so the word is joined to the sensible sign²². Although the Roman view of the Sacraments has been charged with being tinged with magic, as if the Sacraments were efficacious merely by virtue of the words spoken over them, St. Thomas is aware that the word in the Sacraments must not only be spoken but believed²³, though it is not certain what importance he attached to the faith of the receiver, since he seems to mention it merely in passing.

It is as well to remember this aspect of faith as the treatment of the doctrine of transubstantiation, where many part company with St. Thomas, is considered, for at the beginning of his exposition he is careful to point out explicitly that

19. op. cit. q 64, 2
 20. op. cit. q 64, 2.
 21. op. cit. q 62, 5
 22. op. cit. q 60, 6
 23. op. cit. q 60, 7 cf. q 62, 5

The presence of Christ's true body and blood in this sacrament cannot be detected by sense, nor understanding, but by faith alone, which rests upon Divine authority. 24

It is however pertinent to point out that Aquinas seems to explain what he means by "Divine authority" in this connection by equating faith, as so often with the Scholastics, with the intellectual acceptance of certain dogmatic statements which reason would reject.²⁵

St. Thomas rules out the view that the body and blood are in the Sacrament as in a sign, as heretical, since it is in contradiction to Christ's words: the Sacrament contains

Christ Himself crucified, not merely in signification or in figure, but also in very truth 26

The whole of his eucharistic doctrine rests upon the most literal interpretation of the words "This is my body"; this interpretation is the axiom on which his system is built up, and any view that would dilute this interpretation must, by some means or other, be rejected. It is to this courageous, if stubborn, clinging to what he believed to be the very words of our Lord that the whole of the "angelic Doctor's" ingenuity and subtlety in expounding the doctrine of transubstantiation is to be attributed.

Aquinas partly "anticipates" Calvin's objection that tran-

24. op. cit. q 75, 1
25. It should, however, be noted that, as his "Office of Corpus Christi" reveals, St. Thomas is by no means lacking in the devotion which has faith as its source and food.
26. Sum. Theol. q 75, 1

substantiation drags Christ from heaven by saying that

Christ's body does not begin to be present in this sacrament by local motion ... because it would follow that it would cease to be in heaven 27

It is, on the contrary, present sacramentally which he "explains" by saying that it is

... here after a fashion proper to this sacrament. 28

while it becomes difficult to see a point of divergence between his teaching and Calvin's when he says that

... the body and blood of Christ is in this sacrament (not) merely according to mystical signification, but spiritually, that is, invisibly, and by the power of the spirit. 29

However, company is parted when Aquinas finds himself forced to go further and declare that

Christ's body cannot begin to be anew in this sacrament except by the change of the substance of the bread into itself. But what is changed into another thing, no longer remains after such change. Hence the conclusion is that, saving the truth of this sacrament, the substance of the bread cannot remain after the consecration. 30

Here again, an appeal that is almost vehement is made to the words of our Lord, in support of what appear at first sight to be absurdities. Aquinas cannot leave the heart of the mystery well alone; he must ever probe to search out the inmost recesses of the hidden things of God (not that Calvin can be excused from this fault, the almost inevitable result of a strictly logical mind involved in controversy). In reading his treatment of Eucharistic doctrine it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Aquinas is himself baffled by the mystery of the communion, by what takes place at

27. op. cit. q 75, 2
28. op. cit. q 75, 1
29. op. cit. q 75, 1
30. op' cit. q 75, 2 (my Italics)

the moment of consecration.

While St. Thomas admits that

it is evident to sense that all the accidents
of bread and wine remain after the consecration
... by Divine Providence.

31

yet he firmly maintains that the substance of bread and wine has
vanished, to be replaced instantaneously³² by the substance of
the body and blood of Christ. It has often been pointed out that
the technical doctrine of transubstantiation rests heavily on the
Aristotelian philosophy as taught by the schoolmen, according to
which a physical object consists of "accidents", i.e. the properties
perceptible by the senses, and "substance" in which the accidents
inhere and which gives to the object its essential nature. Aquinas,
summing up Catholic eucharistic theology, in effect distinguishes
the substance and the accidents, the latter remaining, the former
being nullified and replaced. But Aristotle declared that an
accident cannot exist without substance, and St. Thomas confirms this
nullum enim accidens invenitur sine substantia³³. It is not possible
to admit that once a substance has vanished, its accidents will not
also vanish with it, since their substance is lost³⁴. Difficulty
arises from the use of the solely philosophical sense of the term
"substance", an approach which leads into a cul-de-sac, instead of,
with Calvin and others, seeing the participation in the body and
blood of Christ as an encounter at the most intense level of
personality.

31. op, cit. Q 75, 5

32. op, cit. Q 75, 7

33. This section owes much to Cadler;
La Doctrine Calviniste de la
Sainte Ene P. 25

34. Idem.

LUTHER:

In their revolt against the mediaeval ecclesiastical and doctrinal system, the Reformers were united in rejecting certain parts of mediaeval theory and practice concerning the Holy Supper. Foremost of these were (i) the doctrine of transubstantiation, (ii) the idea of any priestly miracle³⁵, (iii) the adoration of the Host, (iv) the propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass, (v) the withholding of the cup from the laity.³⁶ On the positive side there is unity of affirmation that (i) the Holy Supper is of dominical institution (but cf. the Society of Friends), (ii) it is the central and culminating act of worship,³⁷ (iii) it is a means of grace, (iv) there is a real presence of Christ. The main point of divergence in the teachings of the three "schools" of Reformed doctrine lies in the varying conceptions of the manner of the presence of Christ in the Sacrament. It will, therefore, be this point of divergence which will claim most attention in the treatment of both Luther's and Zwingli's emphases, for it is here that Calvin's exposition stands in clear-cut contrast to that of his two contemporaries.

When upheaval, revolt, and rebellion take place in a man's life, it is inevitable that his whole outlook thereafter will be coloured by the nature of the change he has undergone. Luther was no exception to this general rule, and the influence of his violent

35. Note the protest that it is God who through the priest works the miracle.

36. cf. Battenson op. cit. p. 373.

37. Although, in this respect, practice has shown a lamentable lapse from the implications of theory, in that celebration of the Sacrament has been confined to rare intervals, so much so indeed that there appears to be grave danger of the meaning of the Sacrament being obscured.

break from Rome is evident in his radically changed approach to the doctrine of the Sacrament. The rite had doubtless made a profound impression on his fervent, yet innately conservative mind, and he came to treat of it from the point of view of the disturbed and distressed conscience earnestly desiring grace. It is possible that Luther had a vivid assurance of receiving that grace through the awe-inspiring mystery of the Holy Supper, for at first he was content merely to remove what appeared to him to be superfluous miracles, while insisting most emphatically on the necessity of the Word in the Sacrament:

In the Sacrament everything lies in the words that Christ says, which we should verily set with gold and precious jewels.

38

For although he is everywhere and in all creatures... yet he does not wish me to seek him apart from the word ... He is everywhere but he does not desire that you should seek him everywhere but only where the Word is. ... Of course Christ is truly present in the prison and the martyr's death. ... He is truly present there with the Word, yet not in the same sense as in the Sacrament, because he has attached his body and blood to the Word, and in bread and wine is truly to be received.

39

The channels of self-disclosure which God has ordained are all summed up in the Word, which is not to be equated with the Scripture nor with the Sacraments, yet it operates through them, with them, and not apart from them. It is evident that Luther is anxious to retain both Word and Sacrament as instruments by which God draws men to Himself.

38. Serm Von dem Neuen Testament Erlangen edit. xxvii 139f.

39. quoted without source in Bainton "Here I Stand" Hodder and Stoughton 1951, p 224.

To attempt to systematise Luther's theology is a bewildering task and to such a statement no other meaning must be attached than that his gifts lay outside the field of consistent dogmatics. This is true particularly of his teaching on the Holy Supper, but an attempt may be made to trace the working of his mind by setting out his doctrine in the following steps:

1. There is in the Sacrament the assurance of grace and forgiveness: the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sins.
2. The ground of this assurance must be objective rather than subjective, otherwise we are at the mercy of our feelings and states of mind.
3. Such objective ground is found in the words of Institution (as interpreted by Luther) which make a promise which is to be taken literally.
4. Luther's interpretation of the Words of Institution asserts consubstantiation, or co-existence: Christ is there as well as the bread and wine.
5. This co-existence involves a sacramental unity which exists by virtue of the words of Institution, being spoken.
6. This co-existence is possible because Christ's resurrection body is in space, but does not fill it nor is circumscribed by it; it can therefore occupy the same space as the bread and wine without change or displacement of the latter.
7. If it be objected that Christ is at the right hand of God and therefore cannot be in the Sacrament, we must remember that "God's right hand" is not local, but everywhere.

8. The same conclusion is reached from the starting-point of Christology: the attributes of the divine nature are transferred to the human; therefore (inter alia) the body of Christ is everywhere.
9. This proves too much some would object: If the body of Christ is everywhere, why specifically in the Sacrament?
10. In answer to this we are to remember that there is a specific sacramental presence of Christ in accordance with the Dominical promise.

If the above is a fair analysis of Luther's treatment, then it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the argument has come full circle and has told us nothing new. The solution is evidently imperfect, as must be the case when an attempt is made to connect the theory of the ubiquity of Christ's body with a real presence in the Sacrament. Luther unfortunately insisted on both. So much did he insist on the latter that he held that even unbelievers who participated partook of the body and blood, though, through their unbelief, they had no part in the grace of which the body and blood were the vehicles.

To sum up: the characteristic and distinctive points of Luther's teaching were these: (i) that the Supper's main purpose is the strengthening of believers through the assurance of the forgiving grace of God and communion with the risen Lord, (ii) that the necessary objective guarantee of this assurance, and the means of this communion is the real presence of Christ in (with) and under

the bread and wine, (iii) that this real presence is assured by postulating the ubiquity of Christ's body and made available by the words of institution, (iv) that this real presence involves participation by the unbelieving in the body and blood of Christ, though only believers have part in the grace of the Sacrament.

Zwingli:

It is hardly fair to expose the inadequacy of Zwingli's doctrine without remembering that he came to the Reformation as a humanist scholar intent on reducing the doctrine of the Supper (inter alia) to the simplest possible form consonant with the New Testament. In his outlook he was more rationalistic, more subjective and analytical than mystical: his idea of God is characterised by an extreme transcendentalism difficult to reconcile with the necessary complement of immanence. Then too, probably as a result of democratic Swiss background, he emphasised the social aspect of the Faith, and the relation of the Sacraments to the community. His exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Supper crossed swords with that of the Mass with its thought of the repetition of the sacrifice of the Cross. Over against this Zwingli set the Supper as a memorial or remembrance of the sacrifice that had been offered once and for all.

In this Zwingli is not opposed to any thought of present participation, but only to that of repetition. The emphasis is however on the commemorative aspect: for Zwingli, as has been said, the bread and wine signify that which is absent, while for Calvin they exhibit that which is present.

Zwingli resisted any identification of the bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ by pointing out that "This - my body", is a more accurate translation than the words "This is my body", in which former phrase it is quite legitimate to supply "signifies" rather than "is". As far as the discourse in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John is concerned, the words he selected for emphasis are those in v 63 "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail", the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and life", while of Paul's teaching he extracted "the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6). To him faith was the organ of the appropriation of the life of Christ, faith including mystical union with Christ, the life of Christ in us, and ours in Him. Since the life of faith has its fluctuations, God continually renews and increases our faith, to which end Christ gives Himself for food. Thus the Holy Supper has two aspects: it is a memorial of the death of Christ, and it is also an act of renewed union with Christ.

Although deadlock was the eventual outcome of the Marburg Colloquoy, during it Zwingli could not but crystallise his doctrine and acknowledge that Christ is spiritually present in the Supper. At the same time he asserted that to take "This is my body" too literally was without philosophical basis, for, he said, flesh and spirit are incompatible.

Zwingli's completed doctrine may be thus summarised: (i) the Holy Supper is not a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, but a commemoration of that sacrifice, (ii) the bread and wine are signs

or symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Christ, (iii) the reference of the Supper is to Christ crucified rather than to Christ glorified, (iv) in the Supper, Christ is truly our food, and through Him our spiritual life is nourished, but He is appropriated through faith alone, (v) the Supper, as a true communion of the body and blood of Christ, is specially significant for the life of the Church, being the sign and pledge of united allegiance to Christ and membership in Him.

Part ONE (a) The Definition of a Sacrament:

It has been said above that Zwingli was intent on expounding the doctrine of the Supper in its simplest possible form consonant with the New Testament teaching. It is to be wondered at that Calvin's exposition of the doctrine should have caused many of the Swiss to regard him at first as a pure Lutheran whose purpose it was to undermine the teaching of Zwingli, for Calvin's aim might well be set out in precisely the same words. For him:

the simpler the view taken of the Sacrament consistent with the significance attributed to it by Christ and His apostles, the greater would be its potency, the more would it be a real means of grace 1

Possibly, however, the difference that finally emerged between the doctrine of these two expositors may be traced to the more mystical cast of Calvin's mind and soul, for he was above all intensely concerned to preserve the religious value which must, if the teaching is to be true to the New Testament, be inherent in the doctrine of the Sacrament. By and large his mind appears to have been of a similar logical, humanist mould to Zwingli's; there was in him that quality (which he has bequeathed to many of his spiritual descendants) that cannot tolerate untidy loose ends in thinking. He is intent on crystallised and clear-cut doctrine. Yet, for all that, evidence is not lacking that on the deeper levels of his thought it was his

1 A.M. Hunter "The Teaching of Calvin" Jas Clarke, 1950, p. 167.

34

heart that controlled his head (even while both were held in obedience to the revelation of God). While it must be said that Zwingli was largely insensitive to the numinous element in worship, it is ever Calvin's purpose to retain the essential mystery and awe that must characterise man's view of his meeting with God. Once this is borne in mind, it will perhaps no longer occasion surprise that his teaching should thus differ from that of Zwingli, for although the two Reformers begin with the same explicit intent, the motives that urge them on differ, and bring them to significantly different conclusions.

To Zwingli, the Sacraments, and particularly the Eucharist, were to be understood in a figurative manner:

In Eucharistia res est, ex fide gratis agere domino pro beneficiis, quae nos per filium suum redimendo praestitit; panis et vine sacrorum symbolorum divinis verbis sanctificatorum suntio ejus rei sacramentum est; gratiarum ergo actio non est vel peccatorum remissio vel panis et vinum Christi corpus naturale, sed es tantummodo significat atque in rem praesentem velut adducit representando et contemplationi fidei offerendo. 2

Nos nunquam negavimus, corpus Ch. sacramentaliter ac in mysterio esse in coena, tum propter fidei contemplationem tum propter symboli, ut diximus, totam actionem, 3

While, on the other hand, the trend of Calvin's exposition may be gauged from the emphatic declaration of the Scots Confession of 1560, largely the result of the influence of his pupil John Knox:

2. Epist. ad princip. German. (Opp 11 p 545), quoted in Winer "Confessions of Christendom", T & T Clark, 1873, p. 269f

3. op cit. p 546 quoted ibid. p 270

Itsque manifestissimae vanitatis eos damnamus, qui
affirmant sacramenta nihil aliud esse praeterquam
nuda signa 4

Calvin is, indeed, greatly concerned to maintain that a
Sacrament is never an empty symbol, but that with it there
is given the reality of what it signifies. It is never, that
is, a mere sign. This contention is, however, implicit rather
than explicit in the now well-known definition of a Sacrament
with which Calvin begins his exposition of the meaning,
purpose and value of the Sacraments in the Institutiones:

... an external sign, by which the Lord seals on
our consciences his promises of goodwill towards us,
in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and
we in turn testify our piety towards him, both
before himself and before angels as well as men. 5

nor is it explicit in the briefer definition which immediately
follows this:

... a testimony of the divine favour towards us,
confirmed by an external sign, with a corresponding
attestation of our faith towards him. 6

From these definitions (which Calvin claims as being essentially
the same as those given by Augustine - viz. that a sacrament is
a visible sign of a sacred thing, or a visible form of an
invisible grace) it is not immediately possible to foresee //
Calvin's own peculiar emphasis on the sacraments as a true
means of grace in and through which not only is something
shown, but, in addition something is conveyed, though even
here the words "seals on our consciences his promises" and
"a corresponding attestation of our faith" give us more than
a hint of the direction in which he intends to move as he

4. Confessio Scoticae 1560 Art. 21. Church of Scotland
Committee on Publications, 1937, p 84.
5. Inst. 4. 14, 1 6. Inst 4. 14, 1

proceeds in his exposition, for it is not easy to imagine either of these processes occurring if the sacraments are simply signs which exhibit without conveying.

These definitions formed the major influence in the shaping of the article on the Sacraments in the Westminster Confession:

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits; and to confirm our interest in Him: ... 7

where also full weight must be given to the words "represent Christ" (the ambiguity of which word, given to it mainly by recent theological discussions, was probably not in the minds of the Divines) and to the phrase "to confirm our interest in Him", neither of which, again, could very well take place unless God acts in conveying something through the Sacrament. This, implicit in the definition above given, is made explicit by the additional clause in the same chapter of the Confession:

There is in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.

from which it would appear that the Westminster Divines were as careful to maintain that the Sacraments were more than bare signs as were their spiritual brethren who drew up the Scots Confession of 1560.

7. The Confession of Faith of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, Ch 27

It is, strangely enough, to St. Thomas Aquinas that we must turn for the most adequate brief definition of a Sacrament:

A sacrament is defined as being the sign of a holy thing so far as it makes men holy. 8

and Calvin would probably have agreed that this included the fundamental considerations in the Sacraments, though with the significant reservations that for the "sign of a holy thing" to be a Sacrament, there must be the antecedent divine promise and also the restrictive stipulation that it must be of explicit dominical institution in order to exclude the multitude of "sacramentals" which might otherwise be included under such a definition. But it is (unexpectedly perhaps to some) to the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England that we must turn for a concise and fully adequate definition of the position which Calvin held with regard to the Sacraments:

Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effective signs of grace, and God's goodwill towards us, by the which he doth invisibly work in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him. 9

(though even here perhaps Calvin would not have agreed to the implication that the Sacraments are the cause of our faith). Here the Sacraments are "not only badges" but "effectual signs of grace" by means of which "God doth work invisibly in us".

8. Summa Theologica 3 q 69:2

9. Art. 25.

and this is precisely what Calvin was at pains to maintain.

What was lacking in his strict definition of a Sacrament Calvin supplies explicitly in his exposition both in the Institutions and in the relevant Scriptural Commentaries. From affirmations made therein, we learn that for Calvin a Sacrament included and involved the following:

1. A spiritual reference:

... sacraments are the signs of sacred and spiritual things. 10

When the thing ... was sacred and secret, he (the old interpreter) used the term sacramentum. ... Hence ... the term was applied to those signs which gave an august representation of things spiritual and sublime. 11

... the sacraments receive names from their similarity to the things which they designate ... 12

while, particularly in regard to the Holy Supper:

... the sacred mystery of the Supper consists of two things - the corporeal signs, which, presented to the eye, represent invisible things in a manner adapted to our weak capacity, and the spiritual truth, which is at once figured and exhibited by the signs. 13

2. A promise, made by God Himself, of which the Sacrament is a sign, seal and confirmation:

... the right consideration of signs does not lie merely in the outward ceremonies, but depends chiefly on the promise and the spiritual mysteries, to typify which the ceremonies themselves are appointed. 14

10. Inst. 4. 14, 13
11. Inst. 4. 14, 2
12. Inst. 4. 17, 28
13. Inst. 4. 17, 11
14. Inst. 4. 16, 2

...if they (the sacraments) are covenants they contain promises by which consciences may be roused up to an assurance of salvation. Hence it follows that they are not merely outward signs of profession before men, but are inwardly too, helps to faith. It is well known that sacraments receive that name (i.e. testaments) from being testimonies to us of the divine will, to confirm and seal it in our minds. 15

.. in a sacrament the thing required is not only that it be a work of God, but that it be an external ceremony appointed by God to confirm a promise. 16

...the sacrament being added as a kind of appendix, with the view of confirming and sealing the promise, and giving a better attestation... 17

...the sacraments ... whose only office is ... to be pledges of his promises 18

3. It is - most important - a means of grace whereby God conveys something of Himself to us: (while Zwingli called the elements signs which represent what is absent, Calvin called them signs which exhibit what is present. Zwingli held that the sacraments are "signs and seals of the fact that Christ died for us, that He is ours and we are His, that we are partakers of His benefits." Calvin would accept all that, but he would add that we are partakers also of Himself)

... a sacrament consists of a visible sign, with which is connected the thing signified, which is the reality of it. It must be well known, on the other hand, that the name of the thing signified is transferred to the sign; ... 19

15. Comm 1 Cor 11:25
16. Inst. 4.19,34
17. Inst. 4. 14, 3
18. Inst. 4. 14,12
19. Commentary on Harmony of the Synoptics Mt 26:26

For, although the sign differs essentially from the thing signified, the latter being spiritual and heavenly, the former corporeal and visible - yet, as it not only figures the thing which it is employed to represent as a naked and empty badge, but also truly exhibits it ... 20

... the sacred mystery of the Supper consists of two things - the corporeal signs, which, presented to the eye, represent invisible things in a manner adapted to our weak capacity, and the spiritual truth, which is at once figured and exhibited by the signs 21

... we duly infer from the exhibition of the symbol that the thing itself is exhibited. 22

... the signs are bread and wine which represent the invisible food which we receive from the body and blood of Christ ... 23

20. Inst 4. 17, 21
21. Inst. 4. 17, 11
22. Inst 4. 17, 10
23. Inst, 4. 17, 1

Part ONE (b) The Definition of "Gospel Sacrament".

Throughout the fourteenth chapter of Book Four of the Institutes, Calvin nowhere explicitly states that there are but two Sacraments deserving of that name. It is, rather, taken for granted that there are only the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, while the five commonly called sacraments do not here receive even the dignity of a mention. After Baptism and the Lord's Supper have been interpreted, expounded and guarded against distortions in chapters fifteen to eighteen, Calvin turns in chapter nineteen to a discounting of the pseudo-sacraments as he considers them, Confirmation, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders and Marriage: In regard to the first of these, while deprecating chrism and the notion that only a bishop is equal to the performing of the ordinance, he acknowledges that the ceremony of admission to the standing of a communicant member, able to understand the faith and profess it "before bishop and people" "justly required to be grave and holy", to be marked by suitable "reverence and dignity" ¹ and inferred that the custom of laying on of hands at the ceremony was used to ensure this. He will not and does not allow that this raises it to the level of a sacrament however.

Concerning ordination also, Calvin makes this concession:

For the laying on of hands, by which the ministers of the Church are initiated into their office, though I have no objection to its being called a sacrament, I do not number among ordinary sacraments. ²

1. Ins. 4. 19, 4
 2. inst 4. 14, 20

Apart from this modified appreciation, his tone in dealing with the pseudo-sacraments is particularly sharp.

As he is at pains to point out, Calvin is not exposing the falsity of claims for the pseudo-sacraments "for love of wrangling"³ (which characteristic he has been said, unjustly, to possess): he is, rather, "induced, by weighty causes" to set out to maintain the specific and unique character of the "only two Sacraments ordained by our Lord in the Gospel".⁴

The "weighty causes" he explains thus:

... the power of instituting a sacrament belongs to God alone, since a sacrament ought, by the sure promise of God, to raise up and confirm the conscience of believers, which could never receive this assurance from men. 5.

and, as is his almost invariable custom, brings forward the witness of the Fathers, especially of Augustine, to support his reading of the Scriptures. Those who press for the inclusion of the pseudo-sacraments, he maintains,

are not only unsupported by the word of God, but also by the consent of the early Church. 6

The position which Calvin takes up in this respect is practically determined for him by his conception and definition of a Sacrament, which we have attempted to outline above. There, already, appears a hint of the limitations which will restrict the proper use of the word to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, a hint which receives its elaboration in his insistence that God is the only one who can institute a sacrament and ordain its use and repetition. His general

3. Inst. 4. 19, 7

4. Westminster Confession ch 27

5. Inst. 4. 19, 2.

6. Inst. 4. 19, 3

6. INST. 4.19.3

view of the Sacrament is thus qualified, in such a way as to leave Baptism and the Lord's Supper standing quite alone, like two solitary mountain peaks, the rock out of which they are formed being Christ Himself, and their shape determined by the word of God.

Perhaps, though, more than a hint of this exalting of Baptism and the Lord's Supper is contained in the three conditions which, we have found, makes a sacrament to be a sacrament. If a ceremony or rite, to be a Sacrament, must involve a spiritual reference, must point to, sign and seal a promise made by God Himself, and must be a means of grace whereby God conveys Himself to us, it may well be asked if any acts of the Church properly fulfil these conditions apart from the two Sacraments of the Gospel.

In sum, Calvin's rejection of the ^{ps} pseudo-sacraments springs from the following convictions:

1. The testimony of the Scriptures and of the Fathers does not favour more than two rites being recognized as Sacraments.
2. The pseudo-sacraments have no precedent word of God by which a promise connected with man's salvation is confirmed, signed or sealed by their agency.
3. There is no command of God instituting them and enjoining their perpetual use

they must prove God to be the author of their confirmation, if they would have it to be regarded as a sacrament. 7

2. Inst. 4. 19, 12

... their unction is no sacrament, as it is neither a ceremony appointed by God, nor has any promise. 8

If we find neither command nor promise, what else can we do than protest against it? 9

- 4. By the pride of men adding the pseudo-sacraments, insult is offered to the Holy Spirit, who is in this manner deemed to be accessible to ceremonies of man's invention. 10

8. Inst. 4. 19, 20
 9. Inst. 4. 19, 1
 10. Inst. 4. 19, 20

Part ONE (c) The Institution by Christ.

Calvin succeeded in making it clear that in a Sacrament there is God's assurance and confirmation of a promise made to man by His, the Sacrament being appointed for that very purpose. In Baptism we are assured that:

... our sins are so deleted, covered and effaced, that they will never come into his sight, never be mentioned, never imputed. 1

while, in the Lord's Supper, we are made the receivers of a pledge to assure us of his continued liberality. 2 Both of these promises so stamped and sealed relate to the salvation, the redemption of man, for, apart from the working of grace in the elect, fallen man, so far from being assured of his sins being "deleted, covered and effaced", so far from being assured of God's "continued liberality" is on the contrary in such a state of corruption that he can only be "obnoxious" to God and, whether or not he is aware of it, is under sentence of eternal damnation. From this state and sentence the elect - in all ages - were brought into the favour of God by the work of the only Mediator, Jesus Christ.³ Salvation, that is, is of Christ the Lord, and, since the Sacraments are a pledge and assurance of that promise of salvation, they are only thus effective if they are intimately and indissolubly related to Him.⁴ Calvin is concise:

1. Inst. 4. 15,1
2. Inst. 4. 17,1
3. of Inst 2. 6,1
4. of A.M. Hunter "The Teaching of Calvin" Jas Clarke, 1950, P.169.

Christ is the matter, or ... the substance of all the sacraments, since in him they have their whole solidity and out of him promise nothing. 5

This does not obtain only under the new dispensation, in the age of grace, for amongst the ancient people of God:

Circumcision was enjoined on Abraham and his posterity, and to it were afterwards added purifications and sacrifices, and other rites of the Mosaic Law. These were the sacraments of the Jews even until the advent of Christ 6.

and:

the ancient sacraments had the same end in view as our own - viz. to direct and almost lead us by the hand to Christ, or rather were like images to represent and hold him forth to our knowledge. 7

... the reality of the things signified was exhibited in connection with the ancient sacraments. As, therefore, they were emblems of Christ, it follows, that Christ was connected with them, not locally, nor by a natural and substantial union, but sacramentally. On this principle the Apostle says that the rock was Christ ... 8

But though the sacraments of the Hebrews "had the same end in view, they could not help being but imperfect measures for that end, for Christ was not yet incarnate and the most that they could do was to point forward to an expected Christ, while the Sacraments of the Gospel show Him as having come and as being ever present.

... as painters do not in the first draught bring out a likeness in vivid colours and expressively, but in the first instance draw rude and obscure lines with charcoal, so the representation of Christ under the law was unpolished, and was, as it were, a first sketch, but in our sacraments it is seen drawn out to the life. 9

5. Inst. 4, 14, 16
6. Inst. 4, 14, 20
7. Inst. 4, 14, 26

8. Comm 1 Cor 10:4
9. Comm Col 2:17

With the advent of Christ all things were made new. Not only man but also the created order of the Universe was shown and given the only, true, and final, way of reconciliation to God. Thus it is eminently fitting that with the longed-for relationship with God now established in very truth, new sacraments should be instituted by Him who had actualised the new relationship.

...Christ, at this time, abolished the figures of the Law, and instituted a new Sacrament. 10

This new Sacrament, together with that of Baptism, gives and figures all that is necessary in the new life. It is a life that begins with the preaching of the gospel, which, applied by the Holy Spirit, induces the crucifixion of the old man, and the resurrection to life:

The sinner receives forgiveness by the ministry of the Church; in other words, not without the preaching of the gospel. And of what nature is this preaching? That we are washed from our sins by the blood of Christ. And what is the sign and evidence of that washing if it be not baptism? 11

It is a life that begins thus, in the symbol of purification and washing, of burial and resurrection; it is a life that continues and grows by constant contact and communion with Christ: this is figured, and the essential communion given, in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper:

... he has given another sacrament to his Church by the hand of his only-begotten Son - viz. a spiritual feast, at which Christ testifies that he himself is living bread (John 6:51), on whom our souls feed for a true and blessed immortality. 12

10. Coms Gospels Mt. 26:26
11. Inst. 4. 15,4

12. Inst. 4. 17,1

Thus the Sacraments obtain their efficacy from Christ, and are Sacraments because of Him. He is their matter; apart from Him they promise nothing. It goes almost without saying that they must be directly instituted by Him. Only on this fact, indeed, can true exposition of the meaning of the Sacraments be solidly grounded.¹³ Conversely what is not instituted by Christ cannot be dignified with the name Sacrament.

Besides these two, no other has been instituted by God, and no other ought to be recognised by the assembly of the faithful. 14

(It should be noted that in the great majority of references to the institution of the Sacraments, Calvin mentions to God to be the author, rather than Christ. However the meaning, for the present purpose, is the same, since Christ is the only representative of God on earth, the only Mediator between God and man.) The institution must be explicit, direct, and without doubt:

... when we require, in a sacrament, these two things, that it be a ceremony appointed by God, and have a promise from God, we at the same time demand that that ceremony be delivered to us, and that that promise have reference to us. 15

On this basis neither circumcision (since it was delivered to the Jews) nor, e.g., unction (since it sprang from a ceremony delivered only to those possessed of the gift of healing) can be accounted sacraments.

Calvin appeals to the experience of history to prove his contention that this institution by Christ is the only safeguard which will protect the Sacraments against innovations, additions and distortions invented by men. In so doing he

13. Inst. 4. 17, 20
14. Inst. 4. 18, 19

15. Inst. 4. 18, 20

points to the example of the Apostle Paul:

I received from the Lord: In these words he intimates, that there is no authority that is of any avail in the Church, but that of the Lord alone. "I have not delivered to you an invention of my own: I had not, when I came to you, contrived a new kind of Supper, according to my own humour, but have Christ as my authority, from whom I have received what I delivered unto you, in the way of handing it over." Return, then, to the original source. Thus, bidding adieu to human laws, the authority of Christ will be maintained in its stability. 16

All this is a good example of the central place which Calvin could not help giving to Jesus Christ in the whole system of his thought. The Word, the Church, the Sacraments - all begin and end in Christ who is the alpha and omega of creation.

16. Come. 1 Cor. 11:23

PART ONE (d) The prevenient grace of God

It is, perhaps, unfortunate that mention of the name "Calvin", or the term "Calvinist" usually brings an immediate reaction against what has come to be regarded as the distinctive mark of Calvin's thought viz. the doctrine of double predestination. It is not always realised that this, though the distinctive, is not the focal point of his theology. That place is more accurately accorded to Calvin's dominating conviction of the absolute sovereignty of God, for the expression of which no terms can be too strong. Much misunderstanding of the puzzling doctrine of predestination would possibly disappear, and Calvin seen in a new light, if this were realised, for (omitting the darker aside of the doctrine - reprobation - which leads us beyond the scope of our present purpose) when this conviction of Calvin's is borne in mind, his exposition of election to salvation is, in him, seen as an intensely passionate desire to maintain that every good thing we possess, and particularly our salvation, comes from the inestimable gift of the grace of God. As far as the particular doctrine of predestination is concerned, while many profess themselves unable to understand the mystery of reprobation, the

...thing to be astonished at, to Calvin's mind, lay not in reprobation, but in election. In view of all the circumstances, it is a matter for amazed adoration that God should have saved any at all. 1

And, though it may seem incongruous to cite Charles Wesley as witness in this context, it is the same thought of "amazed adoration" that he expresses when he writes:

In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more. 2

The doctrine of election, then, may be taken as a precise pointing of Calvin's dominating insistence on God's priority in all of life. All is of grace; without it we would not live nor possess eternal life, the life that comes through faith. Here too the objective character of true Calvinism is plainly seen, for faith itself is

... a work of God, by which he shows that we are his people and appoints his Son to be the protector of our salvation. 3

while on the classic text "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"

(Eph 2:8), Calvin comments:

First, he asserts, that the salvation of the Ephesians was entirely the work, the gracious work of God. But then they had obtained this grace by faith. On one side, we must look at God; and, on the other, at man. God declares, that he owes us nothing; so that salvation is not a reward or recompense, but unmixed grace. ... in what way do men receive that salvation which is offered to them by the hand of God? The answer is, by faith; and hence he concludes that nothing connected with it is our own. If, on the part of God, it is grace alone, and if we bring nothing but faith, which strips us of all condemnation, it follows that salvation does not come from us. ... Faith, then, brings a man empty to God that he may be filled with the blessings of Christ. And so he adds, not of yourselves; that, claiming nothing for themselves, they may acknowledge God alone as the author of their salvation. 4



Our salvation, then, is not of our designing, but of the infinite love of God shewn in grace. But salvation is not something that is done once, and then completed once for all

2. The Methodist Hymn Book, 1933 edition, No.371

3. Comm. Jn. 6:38

4. Comm. Eph. 2:8

time; it is, rather, a continuing process. Here too, the grace of God operates in our wills, transforming, assisting, working, urging to good works. This too is all of God:

... everything good in the will is entirely the result of grace. 5

... to show our utter destitution, he argues, that we merit nothing, because we are created in Jesus Christ unto good works, which God hath prepared; again intimating by these words, that all the fruits of good works are originally and immediately from God. 6

Thus, both in the beginning and in the continuing of the life "in Christ", it is God who is the initiator and sustainer, as He is also the sustenance.

In this "scheme", the Sacraments have their essential place. For the conveying of that grace which operates to begin this new life, the Sacrament of Baptism is ordained and instituted by God Himself; for the supplying of that grace which is necessary for the continuation of the new life, He has ordained and instituted the Lord's Supper:

... the Lord offers us his mercy, and a pledge of his grace, both in his sacred word and in the sacraments ... 7

In the Sacraments themselves it is brought home to us again, that God is the source and spring of all good:

... sacraments, which God appointed in order that believers, who are void and in want of all good, might bring nothing of their own, but simply beg God does the whole, and we only receive. 8

God has instituted them because He

5. Inst. 2. 3,6
6. Inst. 2. 3,6
7. Inst. 4. 14, 7
8. Inst. 4. 14,26

... uses the means and instruments which he sees to be expedient, in order that all things may be subservient to his glory, he being the Lord and disposer of all.

9

Here again is the emphasis on the priority of God who "prevents us in all our doings", which Calvin is never tired of expounding. "God is love"¹⁰, and it is ever the prerogative of love to give to the utmost: "God so loved the world that he gave."¹¹ In the Sacrament, the emphasis (in Calvin at least) is never so much on what we do or bring, as on what God has done and continues to do. The Sacrament is a gift and sacrifice that God makes: it is the occasion of God in Christ offering, giving Himself anew to us.

So insistent is Calvin on this prevenient grace of God who "does the whole and we only receive", that it might be thought that he would tend to a wholly opus operatum view of the Sacraments, particularly when we read:

... what I have said is not to be understood as if the power and truth of the sacrament depended on the condition or pleasure of him who receives it.

12

though Calvin is here concerned primarily to maintain, as he says, that "it is one thing to offer, and another to receive"¹³, and possible misunderstanding is corrected by the stipulation that

As for what is given to us by the sacraments, it is not by their own virtue. For it is God alone who operates them ...

14

while in addition he states elsewhere¹⁵ that only the vessel of faith will receive the grace that is bestowed in the Sacrament.

9. Inst. 4. 14,12

12. Inst. 4.14,16

15. See Part One(j)

10. 1 Jn 4:8,16

13. Inst. 4. 14,16

11. Jn 3:16

14. Consensus Tigurinus, part xii, quoted

But faith in itself is impossible without the grace of God, and the circle comes full round to rest in its starting-point - God, who is all and in all.

Though the words that follow appear in the course of Calvin's exposition of the doctrine of Baptism, but little adjustment would be necessary to make them applicable also to that of the Lord's Supper:

... inasmuch as it is appointed to elevate, nourish and confirm our faith, we are to receive it as from the hand of its author, being firmly persuaded that it is himself who washes and purifies us, and effaces the remembrance of our faults; that is himself who makes us the partakers of his death, destroys the kingdom of Satan, subdues the power of concupiscence, nay, makes us one with himself, that being clothed with him, we may be accounted the children of God.

16

God does the whole: we only receive.

Part ONE (e) The relation of Sacraments to the Covenant.

In treating of Calvin's definition of a Sacrament it was seen that one of the essential factors was that there should be an antecedent promise, made by God Himself, of which the Sacrament is a sign, seal, and confirmation. Mention of the promise of God brings to mind the covenant-relationship which existed between God and His people in Old Testament times, a relationship which has ever been fruitful ground for the expositor in drawing out the significance of God's love for man.¹ It is apposite to our purpose to note that the meaning of the Hebrew word chesed (which is probably best translated as "covenant-love") as used in the Old Testament moves towards "grace" when it is used of God, for it is the grace of God, as was noted in the preceding section, which gives us the sacraments and endues them with power; it is, also, the unmerited love of God which moves Him to enter into covenant-relationship with men.

God's unconditioned love for Israel, His people, is the basis and only cause of the existence of the covenant between them, while chesed is the means of its continuance. It was realised by the prophets that the covenant could be maintained only by that persistent, determined, steadfast love of God, which transcends every other love by its nature and depth. Grace and covenant-love are therefore firmly linked in Hebrew thought, and in the New Testament both ideas are merged in the one Greek word charis. Here Calvin is surely correct when he

1. For what follows, see H. H. Snith: "Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament", Epworth, 1944, Chap. 5.

emphasises that God chose Israel, chose the New Israel in Jesus Christ, not because of any necessity laid upon Him from outside Himself; it was all of His own free, unfettered, and sovereign will, the realisation of which emphasis is essential to the understanding of both Old and New Testaments.

Calvin used these conceptions effectively in his exposition of the meaning of the Sacraments. It has already been pointed out that to him Sacraments are not to be thought of as being used only by the New Israel, for the Hebrews used signs and symbols to remind themselves that they were the people of God, bound to Him by His love, receiving their life from Him, engaged to obey His Law. These signs (e.g. circumcision, the sacrifices, the Passover meal) were Sacraments inasmuch as they confirmed and sealed a promise made to Israel by God in the form of a covenant: in this respect there is no difference between the Sacraments of the Old Testament and those of the Gospel. Of the former Calvin can say:

... they had a mark engraven on them by the word of God, to be proofs and seals of his covenant. 2

though this is applicable to both classes of Sacrament, for

... the Lord calls his promises covenants, and sacraments signs of the covenant. 3

Apart from the covenant which He has made with us, there would have been no means of finding our way to God our Father, without whom there is no life, for nothing that we could do would have brought sinful humanity into contact with Him. Only His sovereign grace could have effected the establishing of this essential relationship. Of all this the Sacraments are

2. Inst. 4. 14, 18

3. Inst. 4. 14, 6

a sign and seal, but now that the New Covenant between God and man has been inaugurated by Jesus Christ, new Sacraments must replace the old, for when Gospel replaces Law, when the Word of God becomes Incarnate "for us men and for our salvation,"⁴ when He "seals our pardon with His blood", the old covenant falls away and the old Sacraments are inadequate to express the glory and majesty of the New Covenant. Now there must be introduced "signs and seals of the covenant of grace"⁵, signs and seals which are charged with more meaning than were the old Sacraments: not only is the Sacrament a sign and seal of the covenant, but the covenant is also included in it, so that there is, so to speak, a renewal of the covenant, and an application of it to the individual (within the fellowship of the Church) whenever the Sacraments are celebrated:

... as a covenant is entered into among men with solemn rites, so it is in the same manner that the Lord deals with us. Nor is it without strict propriety that this term is employed; for in consequence of the connection between the word and the sign, the covenant of the Lord is really included in the sacraments, and the term covenant has a reference or relation to us. This will be of no small import for understanding the nature of the sacraments; for if they are covenants, then they contain promises by which consciences may be roused up to an assurance of salvation.

6

... from the word covenant or testament, we infer that a promise is included in the Holy Supper. This refutes the error of those who maintain that faith is not aided, nourished, supported, or increased by the sacraments; for there is always a mutual relation between the covenant of God and the faith of men. By the epithet New he intended to show that the ancient figures now cease, and give way to a firm and everlasting covenant. There is an indirect contrast, therefore, between this mystery and the shadows of the law; from which it is evident how much better our condition is than that of our fathers, since, in consequence

4. The Creed "commonly called the Nicene". 6.Comm.1 Cor11:25.
5. Westminster Confession Ch.27.

of the sacrifice which was completed on the cross,
we possess the truth in perfection. 7

"In consequence of the sacrifice which was completed on the cross" - there is, truly, the crux of the matter, for that sacrifice, which Christ foreshadowed when He gave His body to be "broken for you", gathers up and abolishes all the sacrifices of the Old Testament. This sacrificial offering, completed on the Cross, is made, as is constantly emphasised in the New Testament, not by man, but by God in the person of His Son; it is, on the other hand, made by One who by the reality of His humanity is in perfect sympathy with sinful men and can offer Himself on their behalf. By this sacrifice, purification from sin is accomplished, eternal redemption is obtained, the conscience is cleansed from "dead works" and a "new and living way" has been opened to the heart of God: or, in other words, the New Covenant has been established. All this is figured and given in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper:

What is offered as to the cup, is applicable also to the bread; and thus, by this form of expression, he intimates what he had before stated more briefly - that the bread is the body. For it is so to us, that it may be a testament in his body, that is, a covenant, which has been once confirmed by the offering up of his body, and is now confirmed by eating, when believers feast upon that sacrifice....
... For the blood was poured out to reconcile us to God, and now we drink of it in a spiritual sense, that we may be partakers of reconciliation. Hence, in the Supper, we have both a covenant, and a confirming pledge of the covenant. 8

Hence he terms the cup the covenant in his blood. For the covenant which he once sanctioned by his blood he in a manner renews, or rather continues, in so far as regards the confirmation of our faith, as often as he stretches forth his sacred blood as drink to us. 9

A covenant is a two-sided relationship into which both
7. Comm. Mk. 14:24. 8. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:25 9. Inst. 4.17,1

God and man enter. It is characterized by gracious giving on the part of God, and grateful response and obedience on the part of men. Calvin does not miss this latter aspect, though it is well-nigh overshadowed by his emphasis on God's astounding gift. Of the response of man he observes:

... Chrysostom somewhere shrewdly gives them the name of pactions, by which God enters into covenant with us, and we become bound to holiness and purity of life, because a mutual stipulation is here interposed between God and us. For as God there promises to cover and efface any guilt and penalty which we may have incurred by transgressing, and reconciling us to himself in his only-begotten Son, so we, in our turn, oblige ourselves by this profession to the study of piety and righteousness. 10.

In all this there is a hint that an exposition on the basis of the covenant-relationship only will not be adequate to indicate the full power and value of the Sacraments, unless we add that by thus entering into covenant with us, God gives us of Himself:

... it is proper to attend to the force of what is meant by a testament in the body and blood of Christ. The covenant, ratified by the sacrifice of death, would not avail us without the addition of that secret communion by which we are made one with Christ. 11

There is thus more to a Sacrament than appears in the confirming of the covenant-relationship. The sacraments are more than merely "signs and seals of the covenant of grace", as the Westminster Divines themselves realised.

10. Inst. 4. 14,19

11. Inst. 4.17,20.

Part ONE (f) The relation of the Sacraments to Creation-
Incarnation and Creation-Redemption *

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament sheweth his handiwork. 1

This, to Calvin, is but one illustration of the profound truth that God in His Fatherly goodness has not left mankind to stumble in darkness without a knowledge of Himself, but has in many ways revealed something of His nature to them. There is a principle running through the whole of the created order of the universe whereby the created is symbolic of, or revelatory of, the Uncreate. This is sometimes known as the principle of the sacramental universe. To it Calvin gives his support, though (as appears later) that support is qualified:

... God ... has been pleased, in order that none might be excluded from the means of obtaining felicity, ... so to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe, and daily places himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him. ... on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse. 2

Reference to the treatment of Calvin's definition of a Sacrament will indicate that a broad interpretation can be given to the condition that:

... sacraments are signs of sacred and spiritual things. 3
to include all the material means which God has used in His communion with men, and, indeed, Calvin does not hesitate to include the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, and the rainbow after the flood as Sacraments to those for whom they were

1. Ps. 19:1
2. Inst. 1. 5,1
3. Inst. 4. 14,13.

intended, while even to-day the rainbow is a witness to us of the covenant made with Noah.

On such a view, all nature is, in some sense a revelation of God and what are called specifically the Sacraments are only specific forms of the method which God uses in His intercourse with men to communicate certain truths or to impart or intensify certain spiritual impressions or feelings. On this view, again, the supreme Sacrament is Christ Himself, who is the Word become flesh that all might see His glory. The Sacraments are thus linked with Creation, and, though profound truth is to be seen in this linkage, there are certain implications which, if insisted upon, cannot help leading (from the Reformed view at least) to grave misunderstandings.

As Calvin shrewdly points out:

... it is one thing to perceive that God our Maker supports us by his power, rules us by his providence, fosters us by his goodness, and visits us with all kinds of blessings, and another thing to embrace the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ. 4

The knowledge of God, that is, which comes to us by way of Creation and the sacramental universe is not sufficient to lead us to Christ. Then, if the whole universe is sacramental, why, in the Lord's Supper should bread and wine be singled out? Again, the term "sacrament" may be loosely applied to anything which impresses the individual as conveying spiritual meaning with outstanding clarity. Finally (and this is probably related to the previous one) a foundation is laid for the tendency, so characteristic of Rome, to multiply the number of the Sacraments. All these, of course, do violence to the

4. Inst. 1. 2,1.

unique character of Baptism and the Lord's Supper on which Calvin so strongly insisted, and his position is safe-guarded by his stress on, first, the intimate relation of the Sacraments with the word of God, and, secondly, on the necessary condition that a Sacrament must be instituted by Christ. Indeed in the same paragraph in which he points to the rainbow and the tree of life as Sacraments he maintains that this was because:

... they had a mark engraven on them by the word of God, to be proofs and seals of his covenant.
 ... when they were inscribed with the word of God a new form was given to them: and they began to be what they previously were not.

5

"They began to be what they previously were not". Otherwise they could not have been used as Sacraments, for so far from being a true channel of God's grace the Creation itself waits to be redeemed. It must be so redeemed: of itself it is not a sacramental expression of God's grace. The insistence that a Sacrament must be instituted by Christ answers the question as to how a piece of the world can come to be used as a sacramental sign at all. By this fact it is permitted, that is, to be the outward sign of redemption, for "salvation is of Christ the Lord". On the view previously outlined (viz. the idea of the sacramental universe) the divine institution hardly does more than confirm the obvious suitability of the elements to express a higher level of being, while on the view that Creation itself requires redemption the elements would lack all significance without the divine institution. On the former view the elements are significant

because of their position in nature; on the latter view because of their position in history. Usually the former view is more closely associated with the Incarnation, the latter with the Death of Christ.

On the view which relates the Sacraments to the Death of Christ rather than to the Incarnation it would seem that there is, logically, room for only two Sacraments, viz: a Sacrament of initiation corresponding to our justification and regeneration; and a Sacrament of gradual sanctification, of growth in grace and constant dependence. In other words allowance is made for no more than the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper which are the only two worthy of the significant title "Sacraments of the Gospel".

But it may well be asked whether there is here not an unnecessary and undesirable division between, or atomisation of the event that was the earthly life of Christ. It would appear that there is an awkward sundering of the meaning of the Death of Christ from that of His Incarnation, the former only being emphasised as the cause of our salvation while the latter is relegated to what is almost an appendage - a necessary appendage, but an appendage nevertheless. The dogma proclaimed by the Nicene Creed however, would seem to bear the interpretation that it is the total event from Incarnation to Second Advent which is the cause of our salvation:

... Who for us men and for our salvation
came down from heaven
And was incarnate ...
And wad made man
And was crufified ...
He suffered ...
And ... He rose again ...

And ascended ...
And sitteth on the right hand of God ...
And he shall come ...

The same interpretation can be borne by Calvin's words:

As Christ would not have been the bread of life to us if he had not been born, if he had not died and risen again; so he could not now be the bread of life, were not the efficacy and fruit of his nativity, death and resurrection, eternal.

6

The Person of Christ and His Work cannot be understood separately. Incarnation and Atonement are indissoluble, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is at once a peerless illustration of the sacramental principle, firmly related to the Incarnation by which Christ became the bread of life, and a matchless means of communion with Him who died that we might live.

Part ONE (g) The Relation of the Sacraments to the Atonement

One of the main differences between the Roman and Reformed interpretations of the Christian Faith lies in the means of the application of the salvation accomplished by Christ to believers. Rome insists that the Sacraments are essential (in some form or other) to salvation, that the converted are those who, by Baptism, are incorporated into the Church of Rome, and who by the use of the Sacraments (especially Penance and the Eucharist) consolidate and maintain that incorporation. The Reformers, on the other hand, firmly maintain the necessity of faith as the true response of those to whom God has revealed Himself in Christ. The difference is largely one of emphasis, for it is difficult to imagine Rome proclaiming that the Sacraments are altogether independent of faith, while the Reformers give a much more prominent place to Church and Sacraments than is commonly realised; yet even though they acknowledge the high import of the Sacraments, they will not bind God solely to their agency. Thus Calvin:

... what is a sacrament received without faith, but most certain destruction to the Church? ... it is an error to suppose that anything more is conferred by the sacraments than is offered by the word of God and obtained by true faith. From this another thing follows - viz. that assurance of salvation does not depend on participation in the sacraments, as if justification consisted in it. 1

God, in other words, is not limited to working through the Sacraments.

Consequently it is not to be thought (as seems to be the tendency in the Roman system) that the Atonement is incomplete without participation in the Sacraments. Our salvation which

1. Inst. 4. 14, 14.

... is treasured up in Christ alone, we know to be communicated, not less by the preaching of the Gospel than by the seal of the sacrament, and may be completely enjoyed without this seal. 2

On the contrary, fellowship in the Church and participation in the Sacraments is something which follows the reception of the gift of faith.³ The Sacraments themselves, were, indeed, given to confirm and seal this faith in God the Redeemer:

... the sacrament being added as a kind of appendix, with the view of confirming and sealing the promise, and giving a better attestation, or rather, in a manner, confirming it. In this way God provides first for our ignorance and sluggishness, and, secondly, for our infirmity; and yet, properly speaking, it does not so much confirm his word as establish us in the faith of it. 4

A Sacrament is, in other words, a vivid assurance that "now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ".⁵ That is their chief purpose, but it is a purpose that becomes meaningless without the reconciliation of man to God effected by the Atonement made by Jesus Christ in His life, death, and resurrection. The Sacraments remind us of this Atonement:

... it (the Lord's Supper) has been appointed ... that Christ may put us in mind of the benefit of his death... 6

apply its benefits to us:

By the effect (of the Lord's Supper), I understand redemption, justification, sanctification, eternal life, and all other benefits which Christ bestows upon us. 7

2. Inst. 4. 14, 14

3. cf. Inst. 4. 17, 5

4. Inst. 4. 14, 3

5. Eph. 2:13 (RSV)

6. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:26

7. Inst. 4. 17, 11.

and indicate what our response to it must be:

... in regard to us, they are marks of profession
by which we openly swear by the name of God,
binding ourselves to be faithful to him.

8

Part ONE (b) The Necessity of the Word.

According to Calvin, if the Sacraments are to be efficacious, two essential and indispensable factors must cooperate, viz. the Holy Spirit and the Word. Examples of his insistence on the latter are legion, and the following, selected from many possible citations, will indicate the importance he attached to it:

The word of God must precede to make a sacrament to be a sacrament. 1

Have they (the Romans) forgotten what they quote from Augustine, that if the word be withdrawn from the water, there will be nothing but water, but that it is owing to the word that it is a sacrament? 2

... there cannot be a right administration of the Supper without the word. Any utility which we derive from the Supper requires the word. 3

It is not altogether certain exactly what Calvin means by "the word" in this context. The phrase "the word of God" inevitably calls to mind the Holy Scripture, and it is true enough that for Calvin the Sacramental rite is incomplete without the reading and exposition of the Scripture:

Whether we are to be confirmed in faith, or aroused to duty, there is need of preaching. Nothing therefore can be more preposterous than to convert the Supper into a dumb action. 4

It might be maintained that Calvin has in mind the Words of Institution and again it must be admitted that these always appear in Calvin's rites and in those of the Reformed Churches which followed his lead. The Words of Institution do, after all, contain the command and promise of our Lord, and are the justification for all that is done and intended in the

1. Inst. 4.19,2. 3. Inst. 4. 17,39
2. Inst. 4. 19,31 4. Inst. 4. 17,39.

Sacrament. But is it the Scripture itself, the exposition, or the Words of Institution that Calvin intends when he affirms that a Sacrament consists of the word and the external sign? It appears that it is unjust to attempt to separate these, and more akin to Calvin's thought to say that by "the word" he understands primarily the word of the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation and containing in itself the declaration and promise of redemption, and as sharply focussed by the Words of Institution which in themselves sum up the Gospel story:

By the word we ought to understand not one, which, muttered without meaning and without faith, by its sound merely, as by a magical incantation, has the effect of consecrating the element, but one which, preached, makes us understand what the visible sign means. 5

This treatment of the relation of word to Sacraments is, however, not complete without including consideration of the dominant position which Calvin gives to Christ in the Sacraments as well as elsewhere:

Christ is the matter or ... the substance of all the sacraments, since in him they have their whole solidity, and out of him promise nothing. 6

The intimate relationship between Him who

was from the beginning the living Word of the Father, the fount and origin of life 7

and the Sacraments has already been indicated. But in spite of this, and in spite of the statement that

5. Inst. 4. 14, 4

6. Inst. 4. 14, 16

7. Inst. 4. 17, 8

8. Inst. 4. 17, 8

he declares, not only that he is life, inasmuch as he is the eternal word of God who came down from heaven, but, by coming down, gave vigour to the flesh which he assumed, that a communication of life to us might thence emanate 8

: in spite of this it seems fanciful to assert that when Calvin affirms that "... a sacrament consists of the word and the external sign", he is here equating "word" with "Jesus Christ the Word of God". Although Christ instituted the Sacraments and is indispensable to them, nowhere does Calvin make this identification.

It may be well to consider here the relative importance of Word and Sacraments, for though it is a mistake to imagine that Calvin emphasised the preaching of the Word to the exclusion of the Sacraments, there can be little doubt that for him prior place was given to the former, as appears from the following:

Nothing is more absurd than to extol the sacraments above the word, whose appendages and seals they are. 9

... sacraments bring with them the clearest promises, and, when compared with the word, have this peculiarity, that they represent promises to the life, as if painted in a picture. 10

With this in mind we can infer that Calvin would probably have agreed with Forsyth's description of the Sacraments as enacted parables¹¹ in which the word of truth takes dynamic and concrete shape. In this dramatic sense, Incarnation and Atonement are "re-enacted" or "re-presented" in the Lord's Supper. But both Word and Sacraments have the same purpose

8. Inst. 4.17,8
9. Tracts 2,227, quoted Henderson: "Church and Ministry" H & S, p 38
10. Inst. 4. 14,5. 11. cf. The Church and the Sacraments, Independent Press.3rd edit. 1947n.22A.

and the same effect, though using different means:

... it is an error to suppose that anything more is conferred by the sacraments than is offered by the word of God. 12

Nevertheless it is beyond question that in practice Calvin insisted on the inseparability of word and Sacraments. Neither was complete without the other. While we have seen the reason for his teaching that the Sacraments are of no avail without the Word, it is less immediately obvious, on strictly logical grounds, why the word should always be accompanied by the Sacraments, especially in view of the last quotation. Calvin, as so often, takes his stand on the example and command of Scripture, which he applies by saying that

... we ought always to provide that no meeting of the Church is held without the word, prayer, the dispensation of the Supper, and alms. 13

Characteristically he concludes that this example and command is but one of many instances of the Fatherly goodness of God, and gives Him thanks and praise for His accommodation of Himself to His creatures, for were the communication of God to His people to be confined to the Word only, they would be deprived of a vivid confirmation, appropriate to our material environment and nature, of His promises of goodwill towards us, and because of the weakness of this nature we would remain in doubt of these but for the ministry of the Sacraments. It is possible also that a communication confined to the Word might result in an approach which would tend towards the rationalistic and sterile, whereas in the Sacraments we are recalled to

12. Inst. 4. 14,14

13. Inst. 4. 17,44.

something done, rather than something merely proposed. The Word is brought to life by the Sacraments and thus can testify that in the meeting of man with his God it is not that something is said merely: something happens. Here the Sacraments witness with an eloquence that words cannot possess.

With all this in mind it is perhaps easier to understand why "the word" which must be added to the sign for it to become a Sacrament, is a word that is addressed to those who are assembled at the Sacrament. In such statements as that "the word is one which, preached, makes us understand what the visible sign means", and that the Sacrament "does not so much confirm his word as establish us in the faith of it", the emphasis is clearly on the effect produced by the word on the congregation:

... bread is a sacrament to none but those to
whom the word is addressed 14

The Words of Institution particularly refer not to the elements but to the hearers:

Christ does not address the bread and tell it to become his body, but bids his disciples eat, and promises them the communion of his body and blood. ... we are to regard these words as a living sermon, which is to edify the hearers, penetrate their minds, being impressed and seated in their hearts, and exerting its efficacy in the fulfilment of that which it promises. 15

Not only then must the word be heard and understood. For the Sacrament to have its effect, the word must also be believed.

In this respect, Calvin quotes Augustine with approval:

14. Inst. 4. 17,15

15. Inst. 4. 17,39

Let the word be added to the element and it will become a sacrament. For whence can there be so much virtue in water as to touch the body and cleanse the heart, unless by the agency of the word, and this not because it is said but because it is believed? For even in the word the transient sound is one thing, the permanent power another. 16

The proper operation of the Word is in this, as in every other context, to produce, to evoke faith in the hearts of those who hear, for there is an inseparable relation between faith and the Word. And a Sacrament without faith is "most certain destruction to the Church". When Calvin says that

... the chief and almost the whole energy of the sacrament consists in the words, it is broken for you: it is shed for you. 17

it seems reasonable to infer that the faith so necessary in the Sacrament is that which appropriates to itself the offer of salvation, summed up in these words of our Lord.

... it was upon these verbs that Jesus Himself laid all the emphasis, that here it was intended not only that by these elements the crucifixion should evidently be set before our eyes, but that the stress should be laid upon the taking and eating and drinking, that is, in communicating in the body and blood of Christ. 18

Beneath this whole emphasis runs the strong current of the Hebraic conception of the Word. To the Hebrew (and therefore to the Biblical) mind, a word was far more than a sound issuing from the mouth which, once issued, faded into silence and was no more. A word did more than express a meaning, for it was what we might call an expression or projection of

16. quoted Inst. 4. 14,4
17. Inst. 4. 17,3
18. T.F. Torrance "Eschatology and the Eucharist" in "Inter-
communion" S.C.M., 1952, p.333.

personality, carrying with it the power of that personality, for good or evil. With this in mind the essential place given to Word and Sacraments is seen as a safeguarding of a channel by which God not only communicates His will to us (this, it must be admitted, appears to be over-emphasised in Calvin) but also reveals Himself to man and Himself comes to him. In the Word, that is, there is both Revelation and Encounter. Revelation cannot be Revelation unless there is also Encounter, and the fact at the core of the Sacrament is surely the Encounter of person with God, and Encounter which cannot take place without communication of personality. Here the inseparability of Word and Sacrament is more easily understandable:

In both alike (Word and Sacrament) the Gospel is proclaimed. The one is complementary to the other. Christ is presented to the faithful in the ministry of the Word, and the presence of Christ in power and action is mediated to them in the Sacrament. The Gospel of Christ is not only in word, but in power, and as a word and power are inseparable, so also are Word and Sacrament. The ministration and reception of the Scriptural and preached Word and of the Sacraments are parallel, and cannot properly be separated, since through both media Christ is made present to the believer, and imparts to him His life. 19

Etymologically too the

... question has been raised ... whether there is any justification for the distinction between "Word" and "Sacrament" in the light of the words and the meaning of Scripture. The conception of sacramentum which was used originally to translate the biblical term mysterion, has developed a definite and much narrower meaning in theological tradition during the course of many centuries.

19. Lampe in "Ways of Worship" S.C.M. p. 200.

Logos and mysterion in the New Testament connote the whole revelation as well as the witness of the Church. Each proclamation and each action of the Church witnesses to the logos and for this very reason it is also oikonomia tou mysteriou. With this knowledge it becomes impossible to separate Word and Sacrament from each other, and to play off one against the other. 20

20. Stahl in "Ways of Worship" p.211
Note that the last three quotations come in turn from Reformed (Presbyterian), Anglican, and Lutheran theologians.

Part ONE (1) The Work of the Holy Spirit

Calvin describes and delimits the true Church of God by saying that in it is to be found the right preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments:

Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence. 1

(while to these 'marks' he was accustomed to add the exercise of a vigilant discipline). It should be remembered that these 'marks' of the Church are really but a test of its purity, since the Church is first and foremost the people of God. From these stipulations it is evident that the ministry both of Word and Sacraments is essential to the Church, and that the omission of either leads to a truncated and inadequate life. It is the Word and Sacraments that are, in a sense, constitutive of the Church, for through them and in them God speaks to and comes to His people to make them His. But underlying Word and Sacraments, using them, undergirding them, is the operation of the Holy Spirit. Salvation itself, the process by which we become the children of God as the result of His gift of Christ, is only truly made ours by the Holy Spirit making it the property of each member of the people of God.:

... the very nature of the case teaches us to
... inquire into the secret efficacy of the Spirit,
to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and
all his blessings 2

If it were not for the Holy Spirit, we would be without the hope of obtaining this salvation, for this is only made ours by His working, not by any striving of our own,

1. Inst. 4. 1,9

2. Inst. 3. 1,1

... if the shedding of his sacred blood is not to be in vain, our souls must be washed in it by the secret cleansing of the Holy Spirit 3

He indeed is the "bond by which Christ effectually binds us to Himself".⁴

The chief aim of the Spirit's activity, the purpose which gives direction to all His work, is the production of faith.

... as faith is his principal work, all those passages which express his power and operations are, in a great measure, referred to it, as it is only by faith that he brings us to the light of the Gospel ... 5

... faith itself is produced only by the Spirit. 6

Without His working in our hearts we would fail to see, understand or appropriate the promises of God, we would turn a deaf ear to the word of God, the Sacraments would remain for us bare and naked, signifying nothing, conveying nothing. With that faith which is the gift of God in Christ through His Holy Spirit, we can use the word of God as a mirror in which God Himself is seen.⁷ With that same faith the Sacraments become a ladder set up to heaven by which we are permitted to mount to the courts of the Eternal King.

The sacraments duly perform their office only when accompanied by the Spirit, the Internal Master whose energy alone penetrates the heart, stirs up the affections, and procures access for the sacraments into our souls. If he is wanting, the sacraments can avail us no more than the sun shining on the eyeballs of the blind, or sounds uttered in the ears of the deaf. 8

True to his emphasis that the Triune God "does all and we only receive", Calvin continues

3. Inst. 3. 1,1 6. Inst. 3. 1,4
4. Inst. 3. 1,2 7. cf. Inst. 3. 2,6
5. Inst. 3. 1,4 8. Inst. 4. 14,9

Wherefore in distributing between the Spirit
and the sacraments, I ascribe the whole energy
to him and leave only a ministry to them. 9

pointing out yet again that the Sacraments are only means used
by the Holy Spirit to confirm faith and bring Christ to us:

... this ministry, without the agency of the Spirit,
is empty and frivolous, but when he acts within,
and exerts his power, it is replete with energy. 10

Calvin makes good use of metaphors which illustrate the point
he makes here. Faith is confirmed through the sacraments in
the same way as light is seen by the eye and the voice heard
by the ear. The Spirit gives the power both to see and hear.
The Word of God is as a seed watered and nourished by the
Spirit to produce the fruit of faith. In summary form, it is
the Spirit and He alone who "takes of the things of God and
makes them ours", who uses both Word and Sacraments to begin,
nourish, and confirm the life of faith.

This emphasis of Calvin's springs from his earnest safe-
guarding of the dignity and majesty of God whose prerogatives
must never be attributed to any part of His creation. Though
Calvin has a high view of Church and Sacraments, and even
higher of the Word, he is fearful lest any of these should be
exalted above the God who brought them into being and establish-
ed them.

If we ascribe either in increase or confirmation
of faith to creatures, injustice is done to the
Spirit of God, who alone ought to be regarded
as its author. 11

9. Inst. 4. 14,9
10. Inst. 4. 14,9
11. Inst. 4. 14,10

We must not suppose that there is some latent virtue inherent in the Sacraments by which they, in themselves, confer the gifts of the Spirit upon us.

12

He maintains that in this he finds the support of Augustine, who warns against the danger which looms

... when by not raising our minds beyond the visible sign, we attribute to it blessings which are conferred upon us by Christ alone, and that by means of the Holy Spirit.

13

Thus, again, the objectivity of the rite is preserved, for whenever the idea of "by faith" appears in connection with the Sacrament, it must always be interpreted as "by the Holy Spirit who gives faith".

This emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit is part of his general conception of the interior testimony of the Spirit. To Calvin belongs the distinction of framing this particular doctrine in its clearest form. Conviction of truth, whether in respect of sin, the Scriptures, the promises of God, or the Sacraments, does not spring from the weighty pronouncements of Councils, nor the testimony of godly men, nor the testimony of the truth itself - the production of all conviction and faith is the proper work of the Holy Spirit. Nor is it valid to claim that this can only lead to individualism, for it is in the Church that the Spirit has chosen largely to work, and it is Himself who makes men to be of one mind in a house: the Spirit in the Church is He who makes the Body to be a Body, who is the bond of unity, who brings believers to a common mind.

12. Inst. 4. 14,17

13. Inst. 4. 14,16

What has been treated in this section as to the work of the Holy Spirit deals only with one aspect, and that the aspect broadly involved in both Sacraments, viz. the confirming of faith. The other aspect of His work is that specifically involved in the Lord's Supper, which is the means whereby believers are made to communicate in the body and blood of Christ. This will fall to be considered in the section dealing with "Communion" (Part TWO b.)

Part ONE (j) The Necessity of Faith.

A characteristic of Calvin's thought which has already been made apparent is his objectivity, his emphasis that "God does the whole, we only receive". This might be seen as a rather extreme reaction against the subjective tone of Zwingle's exposition in which the presence of Christ in the Holy Supper is a spiritual presence brought ^{and} ~~is~~ the dependent on the faith of the believing communicant and not by the elements, which were but signs representing a body which was corporeally absent: there is no sacramental presence other than what there is in any act of faith. But this leaning of Calvin's towards the objective is balanced by a further reaction against the extreme objectivity of transubstantiation. Hence Calvin steers what at times to be an intricate course between the Scylla of Zurich and the Charybdis of Rome. On the one hand he avoided that dominant emphasis on faith which strips the Sacraments of any peculiar efficacy as a means of grace; on the other hand he avoided that view which logically leads to a placing of faith and confidence in the Sacraments more than in the God who gave them and who gives grace through them (a view which Calvin abhorred as idolatry). In avoiding these extremes he comes to rest in paradox which can at times be painful. In summary form it may be put thus: God has instituted the Sacraments for our benefit: to appropriate the benefits brought with the Sacrament receptiveness and responsiveness on man's part are necessary: such an attitude is the result of the operation of the Spirit and is itself the gift of God.

Calvin is quite clear on the necessity for faith in the Sacrament: a Sacrament received without faith is "most certain destruction to the Church"¹. The necessity for faith lies in the fact that it is the only instrument for appropriating the gifts of God, while the possession of faith is the only means of standing unscathed in the presence of the living and holy God. A Sacrament received with faith is not only a sign, but a sign with which is connected the reality of the thing signified. A Sacrament received without faith is only a sign:

... from this sacrament (Baptism) as from all others, we gain nothing, unless in so far as we receive in faith. 2

... in order that you may have not a sign devoid of truth, but the thing with the sign, the word which is included in it must be apprehended by faith. 3

Calvin uses an illuminating illustration:

They (the sacraments) confer nothing and avail nothing, if not received in faith, just as wine and oil and any other liquor, however large the quantity which you pour out, will run away and perish unless there be an open vessel to receive it. 4

an illustration which he obviously has in mind later in his exposition:

I deny that men carry away more from the sacrament than they collect in the vessel of faith. 5

It might be expressed thus: grace is made available in the Sacraments; it is made availing to the participant by the exercise of faith.

1. Inst. 4. 14,14
 2. Inst. 4. 15,15
 3. Inst. 4. 14,15
 4. Inst. 4. 14,17
 5. Inst. 4. 17,33

What is faith? To this question Calvin returns a variety of answers which on the whole bear a more intellectual emphasis than that whole-hearted trust and surrender which is so characteristic a note of Svangelic^{at}-Protestantism, which, following Luther's lead, makes faith an affair mainly of the heart and at times almost crucifies reason. At the same time Calvin must be acquitted of the arid and sterile intellectualism so often attributed to him. In some places, indeed, he almost seems to equate faith with doctrine, giving what may be undue emphasis to an aspect which is certainly present in the New Testament. To paraphrase his words: The word must be added to the element and it will be a sacrament and that not because it is heard but because it is believed. Sacraments without true doctrine are null and void of any significance or value.⁶ This meaning shades off into another in which "faith" appears to bear the same import as "understanding". The word which is added to the element must be

... one which, preached, makes us understand what the visible sign means. 7

Then, the idea of intellectual acceptance of certain propositions also appears, wherein faith would seem to be a function of the mind only:

I admit that faith is the proper and entire work of the Holy Spirit, enlightened by whom we recognise God and the treasures of his grace, and without whose illumination our mind is so blind that it can see nothing, so stupid that it has no relish for spiritual things. 8

6. cf. Inst. 4. 14,4

7. Inst. 4. 14,4

8. Inst. 4. 14,8

For we do not eat Christ duly and savingly unless as crucified, while with lively apprehension we perceive the significance of his death. 9

and this contention is supported in a passage from another context:

We shall now have a full definition of faith if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favour towards us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds and sealed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit. 10.

An essential element in faith, if mere "feeling" and sentimentality are to be excluded, is that of obedience, obedience to the will of God, an obedience which is only acceptable if it is thus closely linked to faith. A hint of this appears in Calvin:

... faith is truth in performing promises ... 11
(a hint which gains added significance from the mutual relationship involved in the Covenant)

... the promises of the presence of Christ ... were ... given ... that believers, while, with religious observance, they follow the command of Christ in celebrating the Supper, might enjoy the true participation of it. ... obedience is better than sacrifice and God commands us to listen to his voice rather than to offer sacrifice. 12

But this is not the whole story: Calvin is wise enough to know that intellectual acceptance even of the promises of God are not sufficient. Although, in an earlier section of the Institutes, he gives what he states to be a "full definition of faith", the definition he gives there is patent of this "intellectualistic" interpretation, and, as if he realises

9. Inst. 4. 17,4
10. Inst. 3. 2,7
11. Inst. 4. 14,13
12. Inst. 4. 18, 8 & 9

he asserts shortly afterwards:

... without the illumination of the Spirit the word has no effect; and hence also it is obvious that faith is something higher than human understanding. Nor were it sufficient for the mind to be illuminated by the Spirit of God unless the heart also were strengthened and supported by his power. Here the schoolmen go completely astray, dwelling entirely in their consideration of faith, on the bare simple assent of the understanding, and altogether overlooking confidence and security of heart. 13

At the conclusion of this section Calvin comments on

... that firm and stable constancy of heart which is the chief part of faith. 14

That is so in the case of the faith by which salvation is given to us; in regard to the Sacraments, "every part of which ought to have reference to faith"¹⁵, and in which "it is no more possible to receive Christ without faith, than it is for seed to germinate in the fire"¹⁶, the concept of faith as intellectual acceptance, an affair of the mind only, is also inadequate:

I leave no room for the cavil, that when I say Christ is conceived by faith, I mean that he is only conceived by the intellect and imagination. He is offered by the promises, not that we may stop short at the sight or mere knowledge of him, but that we may enjoy true communion with him. And, indeed, I see not how any one can expect to have redemption and righteousness in the cross of Christ, and life in his death, without trusting first of all, to true communion with Christ himself. 17

Faith is truly more than a matter of intellect, for man is an organic unit, not an uneasy mixture of "body" and "soul", "spirit" and "mind", and hence must be considered as a whole, while faith is considered as an attitude of the whole man.

13. Inst. 3. 2, 33
14. Inst. 3. 2, 33
15. Inst. 4. 17, 32
16. Inst. 4. 17, 33
17. Inst. 4. 17, 11

The Christian life is not situated in the intelligence, nor, for that matter, in the "soul": it is a total life, in the entire being. For this aspect also, Calvin provides:

For there are some who define the eating of the flesh of Christ, and the drinking of his blood to be, in one word, nothing more than believing in Christ himself. But Christ seems to me to have intended something more express and more sublime in that noble discourse in which he recommends the eating of his flesh - viz. that we are quickened by the true partaking of him, which he designates by the terms eating and drinking, lest any one should suppose that the life which we obtain from him is obtained by simple knowledge. For as it is not the sight but the eating of the bread which gives nourishment to the body, so the soul must partake of Christ truly and thoroughly, that by his energy it may grow up into spiritual life. 18

Here, be it remembered, "spiritual life" is not one department of life, but rather that "life in the Spirit" which is the total life lived in a new atmosphere. It is a new life, given its orientation by the signpost of faith, faith which is an attitude of mind, heart and body - that is, of the whole man. It is the very life of Christ transferred to us, and the Sacrament reminds us unceasingly that we are not pure intelligence, simply because it touches our senses:

... the sacred symbols of the Supper ... are received not by the imagination or intellect merely, but are enjoyed in reality as the food of eternal life. 19

In all this, it becomes clear that (particularly in regard to the Lord's Supper) it is inadequate to equate believing with eating. Not only so; Calvin states explicitly that eating is rather the fruit and consequence of faith:

18. Inst. 4. 17,5 (my italics)

19. Inst. 4. 17,19

Those who infer from this passage that to eat Christ is faith and nothing else, reason inconclusively. I readily acknowledge, that there is no other way in which we eat Christ than by believing; but the eating is the effect and fruit of faith, rather than faith itself. For faith does not look at Christ only as at a distance, but embraces him, that he may become ours and dwell in us. 20

Apposite to the argument that by faith we live the new life in the Spirit, a life in which our nourishment is the bread of life, is an illuminating comment by Torrance:

Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, but his dwelling in our hearts is an ontological relation, not identical with faith though through faith. So we may say that in the Eucharist believing and actual communion through the bread and wine are not one and the same thing. There can be no doubt that as yet we walk by faith and not by sight, nevertheless the significance of eucharistic communion lies in the fact that by the act of the eternal Spirit the believing Church is given to step over the eschatological boundary and to partake of the divine nature. 21

It remains only to indicate once again Calvin's characteristic emphasis of pointing to the Father as the giver and disposer of all things so that faith is properly directed only towards Him, not to the Sacraments:

... as it is our duty in regard to the other creatures which the divine liberality and kindness has destined for our use, and by whose instrumentality he bestows the gifts of his goodness upon us, to put no confidence in them, nor to admire and extol them as the causes of our mercies; so neither ought our confidence to be fixed on the sacraments, nor ought the glory of God to be transferred to them, but passing beyond them all, our faith and confidence should rise to him who is the author of the sacraments and of all things. 22

20. Comm. Jn. 6:35

21. "Intercommunion", S.C.M., 1952, pp. 335 ff.

22. Inst. 4. 14, 12.

Part ONE (k) The Duty of the Believer.

It has already been noted that, for Calvin, a sacrament received without faith is "most certain destruction to the Church". This assertion may be taken as a particular instance of his general exposition that the only proper attitude towards God on the part of man is faith, apart from which man is not only unacceptable to God, but is "obnoxious" to Him.:

... everything which man thinks, designs and performs before he is reconciled to God by faith, is cursed, and not only of no avail for justification, but merits certain damnation, And why do we talk of this as if it were doubtful, when it has already been proved by the testimony of an apostle that "without faith it is impossible to please God"? (Heb. 11:6) 1

No thought, word or action of those who are not of the elect, in other words, is of any value in God's sight, since it has been sowed and reared in another soil than that of faith, which, in the last resort, involves the setting up for worship of some other God than the Father of Jesus Christ, and God cannot, will not, tolerate such idolatry.

Concerning the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, he who comes without faith is in a precarious situation. It is perhaps not inaccurate to say that Calvin himself does not quite know what to do with him. Of one thing only is he certain: that such an one does not partake of the body and blood of Christ. At times Calvin is content to say that in such a case the "communicant" gains no benefit from his participation and goes away no better than when he came, for, although the body and blood of the Lord have been offered to him in the Sacrament, yet his lack of faith has prevented him from appropriating to

Himself the grace that is there held forth.

Now in what way could the man who is altogether destitute of a living faith and repentance, having nothing of the Spirit of Christ, receive Christ himself? Nay more, as he is considerably under the influence of Satan and sin, how will he be capable of receiving Christ? While therefore I acknowledge that there are some who receive Christ truly in the Supper, and yet at the same time unworthily, as is the case with many weak persons, yet I do not admit that those who bring with them a mere historical faith, without a lively feeling of repentance and faith, receive anything but the sign. 2

Nevertheless, true to his objective emphasis, he goes on to say

... Christ's body is presented to the wicked no less than to the good, and this is enough so far as concerns the efficacy of the sacrament and the faithfulness of God. For God does not there represent, in a delusive manner, to the wicked, the body of his Son, but presents it in reality; nor is the bread a bare sign to them, but a faithful pledge. As to their rejection of it, that does not impair or alter anything as to the nature of the sacrament. 3

This, of course is but a strengthening of his affirmation that

... what I have said is not to be understood as if the power and truth of the sacrament depended on the condition or pleasure of him who receives it 4

Elsewhere, however, Calvin, as if struck with the enormity of the indifference thus shown, assigns a far harder fate to those who take without faith, and does so on grounds which appear to be logically irrefutable.

Therefore they are justly held guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, which, with sacrilegious impiety they so vilely pollute. By this unworthy eating they bring judgment on themselves.

2. Comm. 1 Cor 11:27 - note the interesting inadequacy of a "mere historical faith".

3. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:27

4. Inst. 4. 14,16

For while they have no faith in Christ, yet, by receiving the sacrament, they profess to place their salvation in him, and abjure all other confidence. Wherefore they themselves are their own accusers; they bear witness against themselves; they seal their own condemnation. 5

This effect, for Calvin, is closely related to that attitude of mind which destroys the unity of the Church by its lack of love and its alienation from the brethren. In this is seen yet again his stress on the importance of the Church and the central place which he sees it to hold in the purposes of God, in that he regards the sowing of dissension in the Church by such persons as of the utmost gravity, second only to the insult that is offered to Christ by their unworthy "participation" in the Sacrament. What other result, apart from serious hurt, can there be of such action?

... just as corporeal food, when received into a stomach subject to morbid humours, becomes itself vitiated and corrupted, and rather hurts than nourishes, so this spiritual food also, if given to a soul polluted with malice and wickedness, plunges it into greater ruin, not indeed by any defect in the food, but because to the "defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure" ... 6

Whichever of these two emphases is taken as more characteristic of Calvin however, the efficacy of the rite must be denied in the case of the non-elect: at the least it conveys no grace to them. Only in the elect was that faith possible without which the Sacraments could be no more than empty signs. It might be inferred from this that the greatest care was necessary in considering whether or not to partake of the Lord's Supper, and that if scrupulous self-examination revealed paucity

5. Inst. 4. 17, 40

6. Inst. 4. 17, 40

of faith, or lack of charity, it would be better to refrain, rather than to expose oneself to the danger resulting from unworthy participation. Here of course appears the paradox that those who are in every sense worthy to approach the Holy Table stand in no need of the benefits it confers, while those who most require the grace to be found there are not in themselves worthy to partake. Calvin puts it like this, and in so doing implicitly corrects the extreme logic of the paradox:

... this sacred feast is medicine to the sick, comfort to the sinner, and bounty to the poor; while to the healthy, the righteous and the rich, if any such could be found it would be of no value.

7

That preparation and self-examination is necessary and profitable prior to the approach to the Table, Calvin would not deny, in the light of the Scriptural injunction, which he elaborates and interprets thus:

But let a man examine himself: ... "If those that eat unworthily are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, then let no man approach who is not properly and duly prepared. Let every one, therefore, take heed to himself, that he may not fall into this sacrilege through idleness or carelessness".

8

But he will not allow that the Roman practice of self-examination and confession - which he denounces as "torture" - is the examination that is required here. If you would come duly prepared, Calvin affirms, then bring faith and repentance, and

Under repentance I include love; for the man who has learned to renounce himself, that he may give himself up wholly to Christ and his service,

7. Inst. 4. 17, 42
8. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:28.

will also, without doubt, carefully maintain that unity which Christ has enjoined.

(Here again appears the characteristic note of the importance of the unity of the Church). He continues, in words that reveal his profound sympathy and charity:

At the same time, it is not a perfect faith or repentance that is required, as some, by urging beyond due bounds, a perfection that can nowhere be found, would shut out for ever from the Supper every individual of mankind. If, however, thou aspirat after the righteousness of God with the earnest desire of thy mind, and humbled under a view of thy misery, dost wholly lean upon Christ's grace, and rest upon it, know that thou art a worthy guest to approach that table - worthy I mean in this respect, that the Lord does not exclude thee, though in another point of view there is something in thee that is not as it ought to be. For faith, when it is but begun, makes those worthy who were unworthy. 9

(It is beyond our proper scope to reconcile at length the principles outlined above with the rigid discipline, involving excommunication for a greater or lesser period, which was laid down in Geneva. Suffice it here to point out that the Genevan population was turbulent and mixed, in the process of leaving Romanism, won for the Reformation over their heads and accustomed to communicate by routine.)

The stress he laid on due self-examination and preparation and on the peril encountered by those who did not "discern the body and blood of Christ" led Calvin to exclude children from partaking of the Supper until such time as they were of age to fulfil these requirements:

... with respect to young children, the ordinance of Christ forbids them to partake of the Lord's Supper; because they are not yet able to know or to celebrate the remembrance of the death of Christ.

10

... the Supper is intended for those of riper years, who, having passed the tender period of infancy, are fit to bear solid food. ... he does not admit all to partake of the Supper, but confines it to those who are fit to discern the body and blood of the Lord, to examine their own consciences, to show forth the Lord's death, and understand its power.

11

Due instruction in the "mysteries of the faith"¹² must precede admission to the Table, and until children are able to understand and appreciate such they are (and here Calvin appeals to the practice of the early Church) to be classed among the catechumens, and in due time are to make a confession of their faith, when with fitting solemnity and dignity they are to be received into the privileges of full membership of the Church¹³. While he is reluctant to admit the ceremony of Confirmation as a Sacrament, Calvin makes no objection to it as an ordinance of the Church, and sets out his positive teaching as follows (again appealing to the practice of the early Church to support his teaching)

I wish we could retain the custom, which ... existed in the early Church before this abortive mask of a sacrament appeared. It would not be such a confirmation as they pretend, one which cannot even be named without injury to baptism, but catechising by which those in boyhood, or immediately beyond it, would give an account of their faith in the face of the Church. And the best method of catechising would be, if a form were drawn up for this purpose, containing, and briefly explaining, the substance of almost all the heads of our religion, in which the whole body of the faithful ought to concur without controverey. A boy of ten years of age would present himself to the Church, to make a profession

11. Inst. 4. 16,30
12. Inst. 4. 19,4
13. cf. Inst. 4. 19,4

of faith, would be questioned on each head, and give answers to each. If he was ignorant of any point, or did not well understand it, he would be taught. Thus, while the whole Church looked ^{and} ~~on~~ the witnessed, he would profess the one true sincere faith, with which the whole body of the faithful, with one accord, worship God.

14

The only comment that can profitably be offered on this is that which Calvin himself makes immediately afterward, and which needs no more than an emphatic underlining: the advice is almost uncannily apposite:

Were this discipline in force in the present day, it would undoubtedly whet the sluggishness of certain parents, who carelessly neglect the instruction of their children, as if it did not at all belong to them, but who could not then omit it without public disgrace; there would be greater agreement in faith among the Christian people, and not so much ignorance and rudeness; some persons would not be so readily carried away by new and strange dogmas; in fine, it would furnish all with a methodical arrangement of Christian doctrine.

15

14. Inst. 4. 19, 13

15. Inst. 4. 19, 13

Part TWO (a) Commemoration and Thanksgiving.

In the Introduction it was stated that the Reformers were united in regarding the Lord's Supper as a means of grace and in teaching a real presence of Christ in the celebration. Lest too optimistic conclusions be drawn from this statement, it should be noted that at the present day there appears to be considerable confusion in the minds of their spiritual descendents, for the prevailing view evidently sees the Sacrament as nothing more than a memorial meal, while it must also be admitted that amongst those who have pondered the matter, dissatisfaction with this inadequate view arises. For these latter it is surely a strength to realise that "memorialism" pure and simple is implicitly declared as inadequate by the standards of Churches inheriting the Reformed tradition. Not only so but in Calvin himself, whose thought still holds great sway in the Reformed Churches.

One is astonished to see so little mentioned of the phrase "in memory of me" which, to the degree that the mysticism of primitive Calvinism was lost in the Reformed Church of later centuries, takes greater importance and reduces communion to a vague memorial. 1

Calvin, it is true, pays due attention to the aspect of remembrance in the Supper, but it is accurate to say that this aspect is far from the centre of his doctrine.

In treating of the Supper as a memorial meal, Calvin emphasises that the rite is celebrated as a remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ, to keep us in mind of His death, the

1. Cadier op. cit. p. 53. cf. Higgins "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament," S.C.M., 1952, p.89.

culmination of a life of sacrifice and service; it is a memorial appointed to assist in keeping the price that was paid over before us:

Do this in remembrance of me: Hence the Supper is a memorial appointed as a help to our weakness; for, if we were sufficiently mindful of the death of Christ, this help would be unnecessary 2

Christ himself, when he seals our assurance of pardon in the Supper, does not bid his disciples stop short at that act, but send them to the sacrifice of his death; intimating, that the Supper is the memento, or, as is commonly expressed, the memorial from which they may learn that the expiatory victim by which God was to be appeased was to be offered only once. 3

Here again, Calvin calls the Fathers to witness to the truth of his assertions:

They indeed use the term sacrifice, but they at the same time, explain that they mean nothing more than the commemoration of that one true sacrifice which Christ, our only sacrifice ... performed on the Cross. 4

... you will find in his (Augustine's) writings, passim, that the only reason for which the Lord's Supper is called a sacrifice is, because it is a commemoration, an image, a testimonial of that singular, true and only sacrifice by which Christ expiated our guilt. 5

The result of such a commemoration is inevitably thanksgiving and praise, conjoined with public confession of our faith. Remembrance, that is, leads to thanksgiving "not only with our lips but in our lives":

But since the Lord not only reminds us of this great gift of his goodness... but passes it, as it were, from hand to hand, and urges us to recognise it, he, at the same time, admonishes us not to be ungrateful for the kindness thus bestowed, but rather to proclaim it with such

2. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:24
3. Inst. 4. 18,6.

4. Inst. 4. 18,10
5. Inst. 4. 18,10.

praise as is meet, and celebrate it with thanksgiving. Accordingly, when he delivers the institution of the sacrament to his apostles, he taught them to do it in remembrance of him, which Paul interprets "to show forth his death" (1 Cor. 11:26) and this is, that all should publicly and with one mouth confess that all our confidence in life and salvation is placed in our Lord's death, that we ourselves may glorify him by our confession, and by our example incite others to give him glory. Hence again, we see what the aim of the sacrament is - namely, to keep us in remembrance of Christ's death. 6

The same emphasis appears in Calvin's exposition of the passage in 1 Corinthians:

For as often as ye shall eat: Paul now adds what kind of remembrance ought to be cherished - that is, with thanksgiving: not that the remembrance consists wholly in confession with the mouth; for the chief thing is, that the efficacy of Christ's death be sealed in our consciences; but this knowledge should stir us up to a confession in respect of praise, so as to declare before men what we feel inwardly before God. The Supper then is (so to speak) a kind of memorial, which must always remain in the Church, until the last coming of Christ; and it has been appointed for this purpose, that Christ may put us in mind of the benefits of his death, and that we may recognise it before men. Hence it has the name of the Eucharist. If, therefore, you would celebrate the Supper aright, you must bear in mind that a profession of your faith is required from you. 7

Even with the aspect of thankful remembrance in his mind however, Calvin cannot exclude the dominant interest of communion with the Christ:

As to the inference ... that Christ is not present in the Supper, because a memorial applies to something that is absent; ... Christ is absent from it in the same sense in which the Supper is a commemoration. For Christ is not visibly present, and is not beheld with our eyes, as the symbols are which excite our remembrance by representing him. In short, in order, that he may be present with us, he does

not change his place, but communicates to us from heaven the virtue of his flesh, as though it were present. 8

Thus Calvin implicitly recognizes the paucity of the purely memorial view and hints at the profounder meaning of communion which is involved in the Sacrament. A memorial to one who is still alive, still our life, still present with us and acting in us, is altogether inadequate. Then too, while the remembrance and thanksgiving are intimately related to the sacrifice of the Cross, the thanksgiving has reference not only to our redemption once accomplished there, but also to the continued presence and continued grace of God in the power of which we are enabled to work out our own salvation:

... Christ gives thanks to the Father for his mercy towards the human race, and the inestimable benefit of redemption; and he invites us, by his example, to raise up our minds as often as we approach the sacred table, to an acknowledgement of the boundless love of God towards us, and to have our minds kindled up to true gratitude. 9

And again:

... this thanksgiving is connected with a spiritual mystery. While it is true that believers are commanded to give thanks to God, because he supports them in this fading life, Christ did not merely refer to ordinary eating, but directs his view to the holy action, in order to thank God for the eternal salvation of the human race. For if the food which descends into the belly ought to persuade and arouse us to praise the Fatherly kindness of God, how much more powerfully does it excite, and even inflame, us to this act of piety when he feeds our souls spiritually? 10

8. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:24 (This is a puzzling, and rather unguarded
 9. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:24 utterance of Calvin's At face value the
 10. Comm. Mt. 26:26 statement "Christ is absent.." would destroy most of his own doctrine).

It might almost be gathered from what Calvin says that the thanksgiving has no small part to play in the consecration of the elements, by which the bread and wine are "set apart from all common uses to this holy use and mystery"¹¹:

After having given thanks: Christ has oftener than once instructed us by his example that, whenever we take food, we ought to begin with prayer. For those things which God has appointed for our use, being evidences of his infinity goodness and Fatherly love towards us, call on us to offer praises to him; and thanksgiving, as Paul informs us, is a kind of solemn sanctification, by means of which the use of them begins to be pure to us (1 Tim. 4:4-5). 12

11. Church of Scotland Book of Common Order, 1940, p. 118
 12. Comm. Jn. 6:11

Part TWO (b): Communion with God in Christ and with the whole Church

That in the Holy Supper there is a communion of the believer with Christ is central to Calvin's thought on the Sacrament. On no other aspect, except perhaps on that of the benefits conferred by the Supper - which is inseparable from communion with Christ - does ~~not~~^{he} spend so much careful thought and time. It will bear repeating that for him the Supper is not a mere memorial feast, but a genuine spiritual banquet. In it, our minds are not to stop short at the outward elements of bread and wine, but are to penetrate to the spiritual mystery therein figured. At the very beginning of his exposition of the doctrine of the Supper, Calvin asserts what he will later elaborate at length. The Supper is

... a spiritual feast, at which Christ testifies that he is living bread, on which our souls feed .. 1

The symbols are bread and wine, but with the sign is given the reality of what is signified:

... the signs are bread and wine which represent the invisible food which we receive from the body and blood of Christ ... he performs the office of a provident parent, in continually supplying the food by which he may sustain and preserve us in the life to which he has begotten us by his word. Moreover Christ is the only food of our soul, and, therefore, our heavenly Father invites us to him, that, refreshed by communion with Him, we may ever and anon gather new vigour until we reach the heavenly immortality. ... souls are fed by Christ just as the corporeal life is sustained by bread and wine.

1. Inst. 4. 17,1
2. Inst. 4. 17,1

Without this aspect indeed, the Supper would be purposeless and of no more use than any merely external sign ever is - say a formal handshake. By being used for this purpose the elements become charged with a new significance:

... the design of the mystical blessing in the Supper is, that the wine may be no longer a common beverage, but set apart for the spiritual nourishment of the soul, while it is an emblem of the blood of Christ. 3

Communion is only possible if, in the Supper, there is a "real presence" of Christ, and, for the Supper to be of any value as a Sacrament, that presence of Christ must be in some way different from the presence of Christ apart from the Supper. This Calvin attempts to illustrate by saying:

... sacraments ... when compared with the word, have this peculiarity, that they represent promises to the life, as if painted in a picture. 4

As has already been seen, Calvin is at pains to point out that to extol the Sacraments above the Word is absurd, since the only office of the Sacraments is to seal the Word, but with this proviso in mind it appears as if he can find no language too exalted to describe the Lord's Supper as a particular means of grace in which we partake of Christ, in which He communicates His life to us.

As bread nourishes, sustains and protects our bodily life, so the body of Christ is the only food to invigorate and keep alive the soul. When we behold the wine set forth as a symbol of his blood, we must think that such use as wine serves to the body, the same is spiritually bestowed by the blood of Christ; and the use is to foster, strengthen and exhilarate. 5

3. Comm. 1 Cor. 10:16

4. Inst. 4. 14, 5

5. Inst. 4. 17, 3.

Calvin never tires of exp^onding the value of this aspect of the Supper. Again and again such phrases as "spiritual food", "the sacred communion of flesh and blood", "union with Christ", "Christ's body the food of our souls", sound on the pages of his searching chapter on the Lord's Supper. All this is for our sakes, to make perfect the redemption figured and sealed in Baptism, to assist in our growth in grace. All this is what is implied in the promise of God, who, through Jesus Christ, Himself instituted this holy repeat. A concise summary of what Calvin is always saying is to be found in the words:

... it is not an empty or unmeaning sign which is held out to us, but those who receive the promise by faith are actually made partakers of his flesh and blood. For in vain would the Lord command his people to eat bread, declaring that it is his body, if the effect were not truly added to the figure. Nor must it be supposed, that we dispute the point, whether it is in reality, or only by signification that Christ presents himself to be enjoyed by us in the Lord's Supper; for, though we perceive nothing in it but bread, yet he does not disappoint or mock us, when he undertakes to nourish us by his flesh. The true eating of the flesh of Christ, therefore, is not only pointed out by the sign, but is likewise exhibited in reality. 6

At the same time, care must be exercised when speaking of the Lord's Supper as a "spiritual feast", for Calvin would qualify this phrase considerably by saying:

I am not satisfied with the view of those who, while acknowledging that we have some kind of communion with Christ, only make us partakers of the Spirit, omitting all mention of flesh and blood. As if it were said to no purpose at all, that his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed; that we have no life unless

6. Comm. Mt. 26:26.

we eat that flesh and drink that blood; and so forth.

7

God, in other words, is true to His promises, in carrying out, by means of the Lord's Supper, what He had declared He would do.

... unless we would charge God with deceit, we will never presume to say that he holds forth an empty symbol. Therefore, if by the breaking of the bread the Lord truly represents the partaking of his body, there ought to be no doubt whatever that he truly exhibits and performs it.

8

and in this case, faith is represented as a sure confidence in the trustworthiness of God. Calvin goes on to say:

The rule which the pious ought always to observe is, whenever they see the symbols instituted by the Lord, to think and feel surely persuaded that the truth of the thing signified is also present. For why does the Lord put the symbol of his body into your hands, but just to assure you that you truly partake of him?

9

After all of which, one can only admit that

it were therefore extreme infatuation not to acknowledge the communion of believers with the body and blood of the Lord.

10

It remains to inquire how this occurs. Roman Catholics and Lutherans each in their own sphere and in their own way held to the doctrine of a real presence of Christ in the Sacrament, the former by transubstantiation, the latter by consubstantiation. But Calvin will have nothing to do with either of these "explanations" of the real presence. Of the former, Calvin says, with horror in his voice:

7. Inst. 4. 17, 7 in the light of this statement of Calvin's, it would appear that Gregory Dix's assertions on p. 533 of "The Shape of the Liturgy" need reconsideration.

8. Inst. 4. 17, 10.

9. Inst. 4. 17, 10

10. Inst. 4. 17, 9

11. Inst. 4. 17, 10

... we are not to dream of such a presence of Christ in the sacrament as the artificers of the Romish court have imagined, as if the body of Christ, locally present, were to be taken into the hand, and chewed by the teeth, and swallowed by the throat.

11

But, as is his custom, Calvin does not merely pillory what he considers a grave misinterpretation and held it up to ridicule; he proceeds to undermine it with relentless logic.¹²

The Romans, in proclaiming transubstantiation, maintained that after consecration the bread, as such, or in technical terms, the "substance" of bread, no longer remains. Such is the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas:

... saving the truth of this sacrament, the substance of the bread cannot remain after the consecration

13

Nothing, that is, remains of the bread, except the "accidents", colour, taste, smell, etc.. To this Calvin opposes the "plain words of scripture" and also "the very nature of the Sacrament". All that is left of the sign, in transubstantiation, is a "false and delusive appearance of bread", so that the logical implication for him is that the thing signified, the spiritual reality which should correspond with the visible sign, is a figment of the imagination. The bread must be real to represent Christ's real body. Further, the Lord's Supper is set forth so that Christ's body and blood may be our real nourishment, so that the bread and wine must also remain bread and wine, for the substance it is that nourishes, not the accidents.

11. Inst. 4. 17, 12

12. For the following argument see the Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:24

13. Summa Theologica Part III q 75, 2

On refuting this theory however, Calvin spent far less time and energy than on refuting that of consubstantiation, this being due largely to the exigencies of controversy with the Lutherans and also, possibly, to the fact that the error in consubstantiation was more subtle and not so easily disposed of. The basis of his rejection of consubstantiation is the unbending orthodoxy of his Christology, particularly in regard to the doctrine of the ascended and exalted Christ, which is characterised as a doctrine of transcendence. Not only in the Holy Supper but throughout his exposition of the Faith this note constantly recurs, though it is in the doctrine of Holy Communion that it finds a focus so sharp that Calvin is constrained to say

The presence of Christ in the Supper we must hold to be such as neither affixes him to the element of bread, nor encloses him in bread, nor circumscribes him in any way (this would obviously detract from his celestial glory); and it must, moreover, be such as neither divests him of his just dimensions, nor dissevers him by differences of place, nor assigns to him a body of boundless dimensions diffused through heaven and earth.

14

As might be inferred, Calvin gives the Ascension central importance in this scheme¹⁵. By it the Resurrected One was raised to the nearness of God, restored to the dignity of a Son, which He had temporarily abandoned in His Incarnation. By it, God had again invested Him with the glory which He had in His presence before the creation of the world. Most important - when He was exalted to the right hand of God, asserts Calvin, Christ retained and took with Him a body of

14. Inst. 4. 17, 19

15. For the argument which follows, see Cadier, op. cit. chap V, and Calvin's Comm Acts 1:11

flesh and blood. Christ has conveyed into heaven His human nature; He is now in heaven with the limitations of a human person in His body to which He has given immortality. Here again is another argument against transubstantiation

For when it is said that Christ has been raised to the heavens, it is clear that distance between places is definitely intended 16

so that His body and blood cannot, by their nature, be in two places at once - in heaven and on the altar. As for those who are constrained to hold, by the doctrine of consubstantiation, that the body of Christ is everywhere, Calvin retorts

As for those who say that the body of Christ is infinite, we must reject it without difficulty, for it is nothing more than a stupid lie. 17

for how can a body, one of whose properties it is to occupy a certain limited space, be everywhere? (Here too Calvin cites Augustine as a defender of orthodoxy : "It is not at all according to his corporeal form that Christ is present throughout. His divinity must not be established at the expense of the truth even of his body ... as God he is everywhere, as man he is in heaven."¹⁸.)

Calvin rebuts consubstantiation in more detail by laying down conditions which to him appear inevitable when we are to think of the heavenly session of Christ, and of His presence in the Supper at the same time:

First, Let there be nothing derogatory to the heavenly glory of Christ. This happens whenever he is brought under the corruptible elements of this world, or is affixed to any earthly creature. Secondly,

16. Comm. Acts. 1:11

17. Comm. Acts. 1:11

18. quoted Cadier op.cit. p 40 (Ep. to Dardanus no.187)

Let no property be ascribed to his body inconsistent with his human nature. This is done when it is either said to be infinite, or made to occupy a variety of places at the same time. 19

(In the last sentence quoted, both Roman and Lutheran doctrines are exposed). While admitting the absurdity against which the doctrine of ubiquity contends, Calvin will not allow that this permits whole-hearted acceptance of the implications of the doctrine:

... nothing meaner or earthly is to be conceived of as to Christ, inasmuch as Paul bids us look upward to heaven, that we may seek him. Now those that reason with subtlety that Christ is not shut up or hid in some corner of heaven, with the view of proving that his body is everywhere, and fills heaven and earth, say indeed something that is true, but not the whole; for as it were rash and foolish to mount up beyond the heavens, and assign to Christ a station or seat, or place of walking, in this or that region, so it is a foolish and destructive madness to draw him down from heaven by any carnal consideration so as to seek him upon earth. Up, then, with our hearts, that they may be with the Lord. 20

While this matter can be clinched, for the present purpose, as for Calvin, by saying:

The body with which Christ rose is declared, not by Aristotle, but by the Holy Spirit, to be finite, and to be contained in heaven until the last day. 21

in which he implicitly calls Scripture to witness to the truth of his doctrine. Nor is his motive in all this argument simply one of metaphysical and logical necessity, but rather one that is at bottom fundamentally religious, spiritual, and above all Christian, for, in the Institutes of 1541 he affirms:

19. Inst. 4. 17, 19
 20. Comm. Phil. 3:20
 21. Inst. 4. 17, 26

As Jesus Christ has donned and taken our true flesh when he was born of the virgin, as he suffered in our true flesh when he made satisfaction for us, so in rising again he has received and taken this same flesh, and at his ascension carried it to heaven. For here is our hope, that we shall rise again, and go to heaven, because Jesus Christ is risen and ascended. But how weak and fragile would be this hope if our very flesh had not truly risen in Jesus Christ and entered into the kingdom of heaven, and it is the perpetual truth about a body that it should be contained in one place, that it should have its measurements, that it should have visible form.

22

Having come thus far however, Calvin appears to be in a dilemma. He has steadfastly affirmed that the body of Christ is in heaven he has likewise insisted, with no less firmness, that in the Supper believers partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. He has rejected the two proposed solutions of transubstantiation and consubstantiation as being unworthy of the celestial glory of Christ. How then, is this communion in the body and blood of the Lord accomplished? What is the mode by which the body and blood with all their benefits are communicated to us? A concise sentence of Calvin's puts forward his solution to the dilemma:

That sacred communion of flesh and blood by which Christ transfuses his life into us, just as if it penetrated our bones and marrow, he testifies and seals in the Supper, and that not by presenting a vain or empty sign, but by there exerting an efficacy of the Spirit by which he fulfils what he promises.

23

Here is to be seen yet again Calvin's desire to maintain that "God does the whole, we only receive", for the whole energy and efficacy of the Sacrament is to be referred to the

22. Inst. (Edit. Pannier), t. iv, p.26, quoted Cadier, op.cit. pp. 41f
 23. Inst. 4. 17,10

Holy Spirit, who uses Word and elements and joins them in a mystic whole by means of which He communicates Christ, with all His benefits, to us:

..as to his communicating himself to us, that is effected through the secret virtue of his Holy Spirit, which can not merely bring together, but join in one, things that are separated by distance of place, and far remote.

But in order that we may be capable of this participation, we must rise heavenward. Hence, therefore, faith must be our resource, when all the bodily senses have failed. ... It seems incredible, that we should be nourished by Christ's flesh, which is at so great a distance from us. Let us bear in mind that it is a secret and wonderful work of the Holy Spirit, which it were criminal to measure by the standard of our understanding.

24

Christ's body is not to be sought on earth, but in heaven, while the eating which we perform gives life because the Holy Spirit pours into us the life that dwells in the flesh of Christ, which is spiritual nourishment²⁵. Eating is here a consequence of faith, without which the flesh of Christ does not become ours.

... what our mind does not comprehend let faith conceive - viz. that the Spirit truly unites things separated by space.

26

Therefore the presence of the heavenly Christ is accorded to whoever receives the signs of bread and wine by the action of the Holy Spirit. It is a "spiritual" presence, which we (whose thinking is coloured by the too sharp dichotomy between "spiritual" and "material") must remember, does not,

24. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:24

25. cf. Comm. Mt. 26:26

26. Inst. 4. 17,10

in the language of the sixteenth century, mean "psychological" or "immaterial" but rather "that which comes from the action of the Holy Spirit".

Several times Calvin remarks that this operation of the Spirit is beyond our understanding: such phrases as "which it were criminal to measure by the standard of our understanding", "what our mind does not comprehend let faith conceive" are frequent in this context. Two passages in which he states this explicitly will serve to indicate the mystical cast of his mind: the Sacrament is

... a mystery which I feel, and therefore freely confess that I am unable to comprehend with my mind, so far am I from wishing anyone to measure its sublimity by my feeble capacity. ... though the mind is more powerful in thought than the tongue in expression, it too is overcome and overwhelmed by the magnitude of the subject. All then that remains is to break forth in admiration of the mystery. 27

and again, the mode of communicating is

... too high a mystery either for my mind to comprehend or my words to express; and to speak more plainly, I rather feel than understand it. The truth of God, therefore, in which I can safely rest, I here embrace without controversy. He declares that his flesh is the meat, his blood the drink of my soul; I give my soul to him to be fed with such food. In his sacred Supper he bids me take, eat, and drink his body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine. I have no doubt that he will truly give and I receive. Only, I reject the absurdities which appear to be unworthy of the heavenly majesty of Christ, and are inconsistent with the reality of his human nature. 28

In essential humility this champion of orthodoxy makes his claim, a claim which we can well support.

27. Inst. 4. 17,7

28. Inst. 4. 17,32

COMMUNION WITH THE WHOLE CHURCH AND WITH FELLOW-PARTAKERS

Cadier, in his evaluation of Calvin's doctrine²⁹, makes the comment "Of the communion of the faithful among themselves, of the Supper as a sign of mutual love, he has little to say". This contrasts rather strangely with his comment on the fifth article of the Consensus Tigurinus, part of which reads:

For he does not pour out his life upon us, except he be our chief from whom all the body receives growth and vigour to distribute it to each limb, the body being united and joined to its chief by strong joints.

while Cadier's comment reads

Union is not individual, but is accomplished in the Church which is his body. There is no individual mysticism. Communion with Christ is communion with all the other members of the body: faith is linked with participation in the life of the community. 30

While it may not be out of place to call as witness the Report of the Faith and Order Commission on Intercommunion:

... traditional Calvinistic theology has laid immense stress upon the corporate nature of the Sacrament and upon the visible Church. 31

But it is Calvin himself who would probably be the first to challenge the judgment of Cadier (the nature of which of course rests on the interpretation of "little"). He goes so far as to say

... when there is not a table in common prepared for all the pious - where they are not invited to the breaking of bread in common, and where, in fine, believers do not mutually participate, it is to no purpose that the name of the Lord's Supper is laid claim to. 32

It is true that there Calvin is fulminating against the practice of private masses³³, but his words, without distor-

29. Cadier, op. cit. p.83

30. Cadier op.cit. pp.18ff.

31. "Intercommunion", S.C.M. 1952p.26

32. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:24

33. cf. also Inst. 4.18.8

tion, bear the interpretation that the communion is either a common communion or no communion at all. Similarly the words

... when an individual eats of it by himself, the promise in that case goes for nothing 34

need not necessarily be restricted to the case of private masses, for it is easy for a participant to shut himself off from his fellows in a crowded Church, and "make his own communion": to him also the above would apply.

That such a stress should find treatment is perhaps only to be expected from the high place which Calvin gives to the Church as the body of Christ, and what he sees of the high purpose for which God has formed that Church. But it is from the account of the Institution that Calvin draws support for the stress on the corporate nature of the rite (though indeed the Institution provides the source for all his thought.) Here

... it strikes us that Christ instituted a supper, which the disciples partake in company with each other. Hence it follows, that it is a diabolical invention, that a man, separating himself from the rest of the company, eats his supper apart. For what two things could be more inconsistent, that the bread should be distributed among them all, and that a single individual should swallow it alone? 35

For what did the Lord enjoin? Was it not to take and divide amongst themselves? 36

The purpose of Christ was, then, that this Sacrament should be celebrated in fellowship, and without this the nature of the rite is destroyed. Indeed

34. Comm. 1 Cor. 11:24

35. Comm. Mt. 26:26

36. Inst. 4. 18, 8.

... in all sacred observances, there is a profession of fellowship.

37

Calvin recognises, again, that faith must issue in love of the brethren

... it is impossible for the love of God to reign without producing brotherly kindness among men

38

and, since it is faith that responds to the love of God in the Sacrament, it is difficult to conceive of it acting in vacuo, without reference to the fellowship of the Church.

There does, however, seem to be room for the charge that Calvin has but little sense of the "Communion of Saints" in the Sacrament as this applies to fellowship with the Church Triumphant, for his emphasis lies rather on the communion of believers in the here and now, through their communion with Christ, in the fellowship of redemption, in the household of faith.

... believers are united together by Christ's blood, so as to become one body. ... we all become one body, because we are together partakers of the same bread. But whence ... comes that communion between us, but from this, that we are united to Christ in such a way, that we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones. For we must first of all be incorporated (so to speak) into Christ that we may be united to each other. Therefore we may conclude, that koinonia, the communion of the blood, is that communion which we have with the blood of Christ, when he ingrafts all of us together into his body, that he may live in us, and we in him.

39

Not only from the nature of the rite itself, but also from the way in which it is celebrated, we declare our unity in Him:

37. Comm. 1 Cor. 10:20
38. Comm. Mt. 22:39
39. Comm. 1 Cor. 10:16

... it was the custom of the ancient Church to break one loaf, and distribute to every one his own morsel, in order that there might be presented more clearly to the view of all believers their union to the one body of Christ.

40

And again in a passage which is strangely reminiscent of the Didache (unknown to Calvin)

... the Lord intended it to be a kind of exhortation, than which no other could urge or animate us more strongly, both to purity and holiness of life, and also to charity, peace and concord. For the Lord there communicates his body, so that he may become altogether one with us, and we with him. Moreover since he has only one body of which he makes us all to be partakers, we must necessarily, by the participation, all become one body. This unity is represented by the bread which is exhibited in the Sacrament. As it is composed of many grains, so mingled together, that one cannot be distinguished from the other; so ought our minds to be so cordially united as not to allow of any dissension or division. This I prefer giving in the words of Paul "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread". (1 Cor. 10:15f.)

41

For Calvin also, the Lord's Supper is the Sacrament of unity in which by our participating, we are drawn together into Christ the Lord.

It is perhaps true to say that Calvin does not take much space in emphasising the Supper as a sign of mutual love, largely because such was not his task, since the matter was not then an issue of controversy. However he cannot be said to neglect this aspect, and sums up his view in a passage, the profundity and warm depth of whose religious insight cannot be questioned:

40. Comm. 1 Cor. 10:16

41. Inst. 4. 17, 38

We shall have profited admirably in the sacrament, if the thought shall have been impressed and engraven on our minds, that none of our brethren is hurt, despised, rejected, injured, or in any way offended, without our, at the same time, hurting, despising, and injuring Christ; that we cannot have dissension with our brethren without at the same time dissenting from Christ; that we cannot love Christ without loving our brethren; that the same care we take of our body we ought to take of that of our brethren, who are members of our body; that as no part of our body suffers pain without extending to the other parts, so every evil which our brother suffers ought to excite our compassion. Therefore Augustine not inappropriately often terms this sacrament the bond of charity. What stronger stimulation could be employed to excite mutual charity, than when Christ, presenting himself to us, not only invites us by his example to give and devote ourselves mutually to each other, but, inasmuch as he makes himself common to all, also makes us all to be one in him.

42.

Part TWO (c) Sacrifice

Calvin had a horror of the term "sacrifice" being casually applied to the Lord's Supper, for that was to him the source of the errors promulgated in the Roman Mass. To him the idea that the Mass was a sacrifice and oblation for obtaining the remission of sins was nothing less than an invention of Satan¹, by which the true nature of the Sacrament is altogether obscured. Perhaps the centre of his objection is to be found in his charge that by transforming the Sacrament into a sacrifice, the Christ is robbed of His honour, of His prerogative of an eternal priesthood.

... the right and honour of the priesthood has ceased among mortal men, because Christ, who is immortal, is the one perpetual priest. 2

while at the same time it overlays the Cross of Christ, the sacrifice offered thereon being overthrown and declared insufficient the moment an altar is erected³. In the Lord's Supper, Calvin maintains, we were given

... a table at which we may feast, not an altar on which a victim may be offered; he has not consecrated priests to sacrifice, but ministers to distribute a sacred feast. 4

That Christ's redeeming work was done and completed on Calvary is implied in the exultant cry of the dying God

It is finished: that is, that everything necessary to regain the favour of the Father, to procure forgiveness of sins, righteousness and salvation, that all this was perfected and consummated by his one oblation, and that hence nothing was wanting. No place was left for another sacrifice. 5

1. cf. Inst. 4. 18,1
 2. Inst. 4. 18,2
 3. cf. Inst. 4. 18,3
 4. Inst. 4. 18,12
 5. Inst. 4. 18,13

It is this insistence on the once-for-all, unique character of Christ's sacrifice that leads Calvin to charge the Mass with distortion:

We deny that they are priests in this sense - namely that by such oblations they intercede with God for the people, that by propitiating God they make expiation for sins. Christ is the only Pontiff and Priest of the New Testament: to him they closed and terminated. 6

In order to make plain in what the uniqueness of Christ's sacrifice consists, Calvin⁷ quotes the words of Augustine who in a keen analysis shows that four considerations are involved in any sacrifice, considerations which may, for the sake of clarity, be put in the form of questions:

1. What is offered in the sacrifice? 2. To whom is it offered? 3. By whom is it offered? 4. For whom is it offered? In the sacrifice of Calvary the first three all have the direct answer - Christ, while the fourth has the same answer if be remembered that Christ made Himself one with those for whom He offered. It is this identity which sets His sacrifice apart from any other and makes it quite clear that any eucharistic sacrifice is only the anamnesis of proclamation of that lonely sacrifice, not involving any identity between our own sacrifice and His

... we deny not that in the Supper the sacrifice of Christ is so vividly exhibited as almost to set the spectacle of the cross before our eyes... 8

Nevertheless it is quite certain that this unique sacrifice, and the memory and proclamation of it, evokes from us a corresponding offering of thanksgiving and praise,

6. Inst. 4. 18,14

7. Inst. 4. 18,10

8. Inst. 4. 18,11.

in which we turn our proclamation of Christ's death to God, and not only plead the merits of Christ's sacrifice but offer Him all that we have and all that we are. With such a view Calvin is in hearty agreement.

Under the ... kind of sacrifice which we have called eucharistic, are included all the offices of charity, by which, while we embrace our brethren, we honour the Lord in his members; in fine, all our prayers, praises, thanksgiving, and every act of worship which we perform to God. All these depend on the greater sacrifice with which we dedicate ourselves, soul and body, to be a holy temple to the Lord. 9

Calvin is at the same time careful to make the stipulation that such a sacrifice

... has nothing to do with appeasing God, with obtaining remission of sins, with procuring justification, but is wholly employed in magnifying and extolling God, since it cannot be grateful and acceptable to God unless at the hand of those who, having received forgiveness of sins have already been reconciled and freed from guilt. 10

He is also concerned to maintain that this self-dedication of the worshippers to God in praise, thanksgiving and service is, though essential, nevertheless a secondary aspect:

... we approve not, that that which is a secondary thing in the sacraments is ... made the first ... The first thing is that they may contribute to our faith in God; the secondary, that they may attest our confession before men 11

This self-dedication and confession before men is, indeed, not only related to the two-sided nature of the covenant,

9. Inst. 4. 18,16
10. Inst. 4. 18,16
11. Inst. 4. 14,13

but is included by Calvin in the definition of a Sacrament
itself:

... an external sign, by which ... we in our
turn testify our piety towards him, both before
himself, and before angels as well as men. 12

Part TWO (d) Eschatology

Cadier, in his evaluation of Calvin's doctrine¹, states categorically that "The eschatological character, which has rightly been brought out by recent exegetes is never mentioned". It is unfortunate that the statement has been so framed, for as it stands it involves reading a more exclusive meaning into the words "eschatological character", than appears to be justified. It is true to say that of the sense in which Torrance speaks of it:

Through the Eucharist, the Church becomes, so to speak, the great arch that spans history, supported by only two pillars, the Cross which stands on this side of time, and the coming of Christ in power which stands at the end of history. 2.

- of this sense Calvin says nothing: it does not cross his mind.

On the other hand, it deserves consideration in this context, that for Calvin the Sacrament of Baptism was the rite of initiation into new life in which we are accounted children of God, in which our conversation becomes no longer of earth but of heaven. It would be idle to demand that Calvin, anticipating the contemporary concern with eschatology, should conform to the terminology of those who expound the import of this emphasis, and to look as a result for specific quotations in which he affirms that in Baptism the believer enters the eschatological Kingdom and so on. Yet surely the use of such language as

1. Cadier op. cit. p.83
2. Intercommunion p. 319

... baptism ... shows us our mortification in Christ and new life in him 3

... Christ by baptism has made us partekers of his death, ingrafting us into it 4

indicates that Calvin had at lease an idea of what "recent exegetes" have been trying to say. Similarly although he never speaks of the Lord's Supper as an "eschatological meal", he would agree that "The joy of knowing the presence of Christ at the Eucharist was a foretaste of the final reunion in the Kingdom of God"⁵ It may not be fanciful to read these words in some such sense:

Until he come: As we always need a help of this kind, so long as we are in this world, Paul intimates that this commemoration has been given us in charge, until Christ come to judgment. For as he is not present with us in a visible form, it is necessary for us to have some symbol of his presence. 6

There is, also, that important emphasis in his teaching which sees the Supper as a feeding unto eternal life:

When he called himself the bread of life, he did not take that appellation from the sacrament, as some perversely interpret; but such as he was given to us by the Father, such he exhibited himself when becoming partaker of our human mortality, he made us partekers of his divine immortality; when offering himself in sacrifice, he took our curse upon himself, that he might cover us with his blessing, when by his death he devoured and swallowed up death, when in his resurrection he raised our corruptible flesh, which he had put on, to glory and incorruption. 7

and this is further emphasized in the words:

That Christ is the bread of life by which believers are nourished unto eternal life, no man is so utterly devoid of religion as not to acknowledge. 8

It is, in fact, this eternal life, into which believers enter

3. Inst. 4. 15,5. 4. Inst. 4. 15,5. 5. Higgins: "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament" p.89. 6. Comm. 1 Cor.11:26. 7. Inst. 4. 17,4. 8. Inst. 4. 17,5

by Baptism, and during which they are nourished by the Holy Supper, that corresponds to the "life in the New Age"

... we can confidently assure ourselves, that eternal life, of which he himself is the heir, is ours, and that the kingdom of heaven, into which he has entered, can no more be taken from us than from him.

9

Eternal life, that is, is a present possession of the believer, a life that is lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual life that is maintained by spiritual food.

It will be seen, therefore that Cadler's statement, which opens this section needs qualification before it can be accepted as accurate. For Calvin the Supper is, indeed, a foretaste of eternity.

Part TWO (e) The Purpose of the Sacrament.

While, as has been noted, Calvin did not regard participation in the Sacraments as indispensable for salvation, since the Atonement is, in all essentials, complete without them, yet he held that not to do so, except with good cause, when they were available, was a neglect of and insult to the goodness of God, which could not but result in a decided impoverishment of the Christian life. Not that the Sacraments imparted a different grace from that received by faith through the Word, but that they served the purpose of providing an assurance not otherwise to be gained. To say that salvation was unattainable without the Sacraments, would, to Calvin, have been equivalent to putting us again under a similar bondage to that of the Law, for the grace of God is not so restrained now as it was then.¹ For the life of the Christian to attain its intended richness however, participation in the Sacraments was essential. The use of the term "the Christian's spiritual life" is to be avoided here, for the connotation now given to it is different from that given by Calvin. His use was closer to the New Testament in that the whole of the Christian's life was a "spiritual life" in that it is lived "in the Spirit", whereas modern usage has tended to put asunder what God has joined together by applying the term "spiritual life" to one department of the Christian's life, with the unhappy, if unconscious, result, that it is tacitly taken to be the only department of life with which God has direct contact or concern. Calvin himself

1. cf. Inst. 4. 15, 20

uses the term², but very rarely: far more often one sees the terms "the life to which he has begotten us by his word", "eternal life", or, more simply and perhaps more eloquently "life".

This eternal life, then, this spiritual life, to which we have been begotten by the Word of God, is one in which the Sacraments have a central part to play. While we have entered on our inheritance, we are yet hampered at every step by the call of the old life, and it is in gracious recognition of this that God has given the Sacraments to us, that, by things of this world, we may journey to the things of heaven and partake of them.3

... our merciful Lord ... accommodates himself to our capacity, that, seeing how from our animal nature we are always creeping on the ground, and clinging to the flesh, having no thought of what is spiritual, and not even forming an idea of it, he declines not by means of these earthly elements to lead us to himself. 3

The prevailing note in Calvin's view of the purpose of the Sacrament springs from his teaching that in it Christ communicates Himself to us, and with Him brings all the power and strength that is His. References to this are so abundant that no more can be done than to give a selection to indicate this aspect. The Sacrament confirms the promises of God:

... a kind of seal, not to give efficacy to the promise, as if in itself invalid, but merely to confirm it to us 4

It gives us life by the working in it of the Holy Spirit

...we eat his flesh when, by means of it we receive life. ... our souls feed on Christ's own flesh in precisely the same manner as bread

2. e.g. Inst. 4.17,3.
3. Inst. 4. 14,3

4. Inst. 4. 15,22

imparts vigour to our bodies. The flesh of Christ therefore, is spiritual nourishment because it gives life to us. Now it gives life because the Holy Spirit pours into us the life which dwells in it. 5

The reason for this life-giving property of the flesh of Christ which becomes bread to us, is that by it salvation was procured for us.⁵

This life has, as one of its properties, the glad knowledge that sins are effaced by the sacrifice of Christ which was for the world:

Which is shed for many: By the word, many, he means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race; for he contrasts many with one: as if he had said, that he will not be the redeemer of one man only, but will die in order to deliver many from the condemnation of the curse. It must ... be observed however, that by the words, for you ... Christ directly addresses the disciples and exhorts every believer to apply to his own advantage the shedding of blood. Therefore when we approach to the Lord's table, let us not only remember in general that the world has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but let every one consider for himself that his own sins have been expiated.

(a passage which may be difficult to reconcile with Calvin's doctrine of predestination). By giving life, by proclaiming the forgiveness of sins, the Sacrament confirms our faith:

.. sacraments are truly termed evidences of the divine grace, and, as it were, seals of the goodwill which he entertains towards us. They, by sealing it to us, sustain, nourish, confirm and increase our faith. 8

That, indeed is a major factor behind our Lord's institution of them.

... our Lord has instituted them for the express purpose of helping to establish and increase our faith. 9

5. Comm. Mt. 26:26 7. Comm. Mk. 14:24 9. Inst. 4. 14,9
6. cf. Comm. Lk 22:19.8. Inst. 4. 14,7

These effects follow from the fact of the Sacrament as a real means of grace, from the fact that in it Christ is present in power to strengthen our living union with Him. It gives not only the assurance of the benefit won by Christ, but Christ Himself. The Sacrament had one great purpose:

... to direct and almost lead us by the hand
to Christ ... 10

From this also springs the fact, that, while the Supper cannot safely be called a re-enactment of the sacrifice on Calvary, yet it does dramatically represent the Passion of our Lord in the symbolic actions of broken bread and poured out wine:

... in the Supper the sacrifice of Christ is
so vividly exhibited as almost to set the
spectacle of the cross before our eyes ... 11

This with an eloquence that is denied to words, and with a force that carries meaning to the simplest mind.

The Sacrament is, as we have noted, a powerful proclamation of our unity in Christ, since there we perceive that the life of all is hid in Christ, that from Him and from Him alone comes the life which sustains and invigorates us all.¹² It is a means whereby we exercise not only faith but love, love which is directed towards God and therefore cannot help being directed towards the brethren.

The Sacrament is, finally, a testimony of our faith. By partaking we proclaim to all who have ears to hear and eyes to see that we worship a God of holy love whose nature it is to forgive, whose desire it is that no man should die, whose

10. Inst. 4. 14, 20
11. Inst. 4. 18, 11

12. cf. Inst. 4. 17, 38

grace is such that He spared not to give to the utmost for the salvation of men:

... sacraments are ceremonies, by which God is pleased to train his people, first, to excite, cherish and strengthen faith within; and secondly, to testify our religion to men. 13

In fine, the purpose of the sacrament is summed up in the words "This is my body, broken for you". Any exposition of its benefits must rest upon this promise. "For you" - for those who realise their weakness and would be strong with the strength of Christ.

... this sacred feast is medicine to the sick, comfort to the sinner, and bounty to the poor, while to the healthy, the righteous and the rich, if any such could be found, it would be of no value. 14

A word must be added concerning the testifying of our piety towards God, which Calvin includes in his definition of a Sacrament. Since the covenant is included in the Sacrament, each partaking will thus be a renewal of the bond between the believer and God. As such, it is an encounter that leads to sanctification and to a continual reminder of the duty of the believer towards his fellows.

13. Inst 4. 14.19
14. Inst. 4. 17,42.

Part THREE:

Enough has now been said (it is hoped) to indicate that for Calvin the emphasis in worship was to be laid on both Word and Sacrament: if either of these was omitted, the service of worship was inadequate and truncated. As he himself says

We ought always to provide that no meeting of the Church is held without the word, prayer, the dispensation of the Supper, and alms. 1

From this we may gather that the bare essentials of any service could for him be reduced to the Word (which must be taken to include both the reading and exposition of the Scriptures), prayer, the offertory, and the celebration of the Sacrament. Without these, God coming to man in Word and Sacrament, man's response in the prayers and offerings, worship cannot indeed be said to exist.

The Institutes also contain² what may be regarded as an extended rubric for a service of worship. It is set out on the following page in such a form that the constituent elements may be clearly visible.

1. Inst. 4. 17,44
2. Inst. 4. 17,43

The commencement should be with
PUBLIC PRAYER;

129

next a
SERMON

should be delivered:
then the minister

HAVING PLACED BREAD AND WINE ON THE TABLE

should read

THE INSTITUTION OF THE SUPPER

He should next

EXPLAIN THE PROMISES WHICH ARE THEREIN GIVEN

and at the same time

KEEP BACK FROM COMMUNION

all those who are debarred by the prohibition of the Lord.
He should afterwards

PRAY THAT THE LORD with the kindness with which he has bestowed
WOULD ALSO FORM this sacred food upon us
AND INSTRUCT US TO RECEIVE IT WITH FAITH AND GRATITUDE

and as we are of ourselves unworthy would

MAKE US WORTHY OF THE FEAST BY HIS MERCY

Here either a

PSALM

should be sung or

SOMETHING READ

while the

FAITHFUL, IN ORDER, COMMUNICATE AT THE SACRED FEAST,
THE MINISTER BREAKING THE BREAD AND GIVING IT TO THE PEOPLE

The Supper being ended

AN EXHORTATION should be given
TO SINCERE FAITH AND CONFESSION OF FAITH, TO CHARITY, AND LIVES
BECOMING CHRISTIANS.

Lastly

THANKS

should be offered, and the

PRAISES OF GOD

should be sung.

This being done the Church should be

DISMISSED IN PEACE.

(One noteworthy omission here, in the light of what has already been said, is that of the offertory, though it may have been intended to include this in the offering of thanks towards the end of the service.)

The present purpose will now possibly be best served by setting out the following:

1. The preface to the Strasbourg Liturgy, first published in 1549 and based on the already existing rites which Calvin found there.
2. The outline of the Strasbourg Liturgy.
3. The outline of the Genevan Liturgy, first published in 1542, after Calvin's return to that city.
4. The outline of the Liturgy of "John Knox's Genevan Service Book", first published in 1556 with Calvin's "imprimatur".
5. The text of the prayers as they appear in Huycke's translation of Calvin's Genevan rite of 1542.

While these will be followed in turn by notes of explanation and comment.

1. The preface to the Strasbourg Liturgy:³

"We begin with confession of our sins, adding verses from the Law and the Gospel, ... and after we are assured that, as Jesus Christ has righteousness and life in Himself, and that, as He lives for the sake of the Father, we are justified in Him and live in the new life through the same Jesus Christ, ... we continue with psalms, hymns of praise, the reading of the Gospel, the confession of our faith and the holy oblations and offerings...

3. Quoted in "An Outline of Christian Worship", W.D. Maxwell, Oxford, 1952, p 116.

And ... quickened and stirred by the reading and preaching of the Gospel and the confession of our faith ... it follows that we must pray for the salvation of all men, for the life of Christ should be greatly enkindled within us. Now the life of Christ consists in this, namely, to seek and to save that which is lost; fittingly, then, we pray for all men. And, because we receive Jesus Christ truly in this Sacrament, ... we worship Him in spirit and in truth; and receive the Eucharist with great reverence, concluding the whole mystery with praise and thanksgiving. This, therefore, is the whole order and reason for its administration in this manner; and it agrees also with the administration in the ancient Church of the Apostles, martyrs and holy Fathers".

From the above, the order would be as follows:

Confession of sins

Scriptural words of pardon

Psalms and hymns of praise

Reading of the Gospel (including preaching - the sermon)

The Apostles' Creed

Offertory

Prayer of Intercession

Reception of the Elements.

Praise and Thanksgiving.

2. The outline of the Strasbourg Liturgy: ⁴

Scripture sentences: Our help is in the name of the Lord, etc.

Ps. 124:8

Confession of sins

Scriptural words of Pardon

Absolution

Metrical Decalogue sung with Kyrie Eleison after each Law

Collect for Illumination

4. As analysed in Maxwell, op. cit. p 114

Lection

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Sermon

Collection of Alms

Intercessions

Lord's Prayer in long paraphrase LITURGY OF THE UPPER ROOM

Preparation of elements, while

Apostles' Creed sung

Consecration Prayer

Lord's Prayer

Words of Institution

Exhortation

Fraction

Delivery

Communion while Psalm sung

Post-communion collect

Nunc dimittis in metre

Aaronic blessing

3. The outline of the Genevan Liturgy:⁵

Scripture Sentences : Our help is in the name of the Lord etc.

Ps. 124:8

Prayer for Pardon

Metrical Psalm

Collect for Illumination

Lection

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Sermon

Collection of Alms

Intercessions

Lord's Prayer in long paraphrase LITURGY OF THE UPPER ROOM

Preparation of elements, while

Apostles' Creed sung

Words of Institution

Exhortation

Consecration Prayer

Fraction

Delivery

Communion, while Psalm or other Scriptures read

Post-communion collect

Aaronic blessing.

4. The outline of the Liturgy of "John Knox's Genevan Service Book"⁶

Confession of sins

Prayer for Pardon

Psalm in metre

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture Lection

5. As analysed in Maxwell, op. cit. p. 144

6. As analysed in Maxwell, op. cit. p. 123 and in "John Knox's Genevan Service Book", Oliver and Boyd, 1931, pp. 18 & 51.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Sermon

Collection of Alms

Thanksgiving and intercessions

LITURGY OF THE UPPER ROOM

Lord's Prayer

Apostles' Creed

Offertory: preparation of elements while a psalm in metre is sung

Words of Institution

Exhortation

Prayer of Consecration: Adoration
Thanksgiving for Creation and Redemption
Anamnesis
Doxology

Fraction

Minister's Communion

Delivery

People's Communion while celebrant reads "the whole historie of the Passion"

Post-communion Thanksgiving

Psalm 103 in metre

Aaronic blessing (or Apostolic)

5. The text of the prayers of the Genevan rite:

a) The prayer of Confession⁷:

Lord God, everlasting and almighty Father, we confess and acknowledge unfeignedly before thy blessed majesty, that we are miserable sinners conceived and born in unrighteousness and filth of sin, being naturally inclined to do wickedly, being also unapt and unable to do any thing that is good, and that by the self same sin planted in us by nature, we transgress without all measure (never ceasing from the same) thy most holy and blessed commandments: wherein we procure unto ourselves by thy righteous judgment, confusion and destruction. Yet most merciful Father and Lord, forasmuch as we are displeas'd, in that we have offended thy goodness: and seeing we condemn both ourselves and our wickedness, being truly repentant for the same, most instantly desiring that thou of thy bountiful goodness wilt help us in this misery: vouchsafe now most merciful God and loving Father to have pity

⁷ "John Knox's Genevan Service Book" pp. 96f. I have ventured to make a partial translation into modern English to avoid unnecessary

on us for thy only son's sake, for the merits (I say) of our Lord Jesus Christ: not alone in putting away our faults and transgressions, but also in giving unto us the gifts of they holy spirit, increasing the same from time to time, to the end that we continually, even from the bottom of our hearts, acknowledge our own unrighteousness: may conceive such displeasure towards sin, as may bring forth an unfeigned repentance, whereby we may both mortify our sinful inordinate affections, and also of an upright conscience shew forth the fruits of righteousness, which fruits (notwithstanding they be polluted and imperfect through our naughty nature) yet thou dost accept as perfect, for Jesus Christ's sake, which liveth & c ..

b.) The "Great Prayer" of Intercession etc.: 8

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, since thou has first promised to fulfil our requests which we shall make unto thee in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, thy well-beloved Son: secondly, forasmuch as the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles doth teach us to make our common prayer in his name, promising that he will be among us, and that he will make intercession for us unto thee; for the obtaining of all such things as we shall Godly agree upon, here in earth: and thirdly seeing thou has given us commandment to pray, especially for such as thou has appointed rulers and governors over us, and also for things needful to thy congregation, and for all sorts of men: we conceiving a heartiness, through thy holy word, leaning assuredly unto thy most undoubted promise, in so much as we are here gathered together before thy face in the

8. *ibid.* pp 194 ff.

name of thy only son, our Lord Jesus: we therefore (I say) make our earnest supplication unto thee, our most merciful God and bountiful Father, that for Jesus Christ's sake, our saviour and only mediator, it may please thee of thy infinite mercy freely to pardon our offences, and in such sort to draw and lift up our hearts and affections towards thee, that our requests may both proceed of a fervent mind, and also be agreeable unto thy most blessed will and pleasure, which is only to be accepted.

We beseech thee therefore, our heavenly Father, as touching all princes and rulers of the congregation, unto whom thou hast committed the administration of thy justice, and namely, as touching the governors of this city, that it would please thee to grant them thy holy spirit (the which only by right is called the principal spirit) and so to increase the same from time to time in them, that they with a pure faith, acknowledging Jesus Christ thy only son our Lord, to be King of all Kings, and governor of all governors, even according as thou has given all power unto him both in heaven and in earth, may bend themselves with their whole endeavour, to serve him, and to advance his kingdom and glory in their dominions, ruling their subjects, which by thy creatures, and the sheep of thy pasture, even after thy good pleasure: whereby we being maintained in peace and tranquillity, both here and everywhere, may serve thee in all holiness and virtue, so that we being quit and void from all fear of enemies, may render duly unto thee, lauds and praises during the term of our life. We beseech thee also (most dear Father and Saviour) for all pastors and curates of thy flock, unto whom thou hast committed the charge of men's souls and the

ministry of thy holy gospel, that it will please thee likewise so to guide them with thy holy spirit, that they may be found perfect, faithful, and praiseworthy ministers of thy glory, directing always their whole studies unto this end, that the poor sheep which be gone astray out of Christ's flock, may be sought out and brought again unto the Lord Jesus, who is the chief shepherd, and head of all bishops, whereby they may from day to day grow and increase in him unto all righteousness and holiness. And on the other part, that it may please thee to deliver all thy congregations from the danger of ravening wolves, and from hirelings, who search their own ambition and profit, and not only the setting forth of thy glory, and the safeguarding of thy flock.

Moreover we make our prayers unto thee (most merciful and loving Father) for all men in general, that as thy will is that all the world acknowledge thee to be their saviour through the redemption made by thy only son Jesus Christ: even so that such as have been hitherto holden captive in darkness and ignorance for lack of the knowledge of thy gospel through the preaching thereof, and the clear light of thy holy spirit, be brought into the right way of health everlasting, which is, to know that thou art only very God, and that he whom thou hast sent is our saviour Christ. Likewise that they whom thou hast already endued with thy grace, whose hearts thou hast enlightened with the right knowledge of thy word, may continually increase in godliness, and be plentifully enriched with spiritual benefits: so that we may altogether in one accord, both with heart and mouth, render due honour and service unto Christ, who is our only master, king,

and lawmaker.

In like manner (O Lord of all true comfort) we commit unto thee in our prayers all such persons as thou hast visited and chastened with pestilence, war, or famine, and all other persons afflicted with poverty, imprisonment, sickness, or banishment, or any like bodily adversity, or hast otherwise troubled or afflicted in spirit: that it will please thee to make them perceive thy tender Fatherly affections towards them: that is, that these Crosses be nothing else but Fatherly chastenings to bring them to amendment, whereby they may unfeignedly and with all their hearts turn unto thee, whereby they cleaving unto thee and guided by thy hand, may receive full comfort and so be clean delivered from all manner of evil.

Finally (O God most dear Father) we beseech thee to grant us also, us (I say) which be here gathered together in the name of thy son Jesus, to hear thy word preached (and to celebrate his holy Supper), that we may acknowledge truly and uprightly without hypocrisy and dissimulation, in how miserable a state of perdition we are in by nature, and how worthily we procure unto ourselves everlasting damnation, heaping up from time to time thy gracious punishments towards us, through our wicked and sinful life: whereby, seeing there remaineth no spark of goodness in our natures, and that there is nothing in us as touching our first creation and that which we receive of our parents, meet to enjoy the heritage of God's kingdom, we may yield and render up ourselves with all our hearts (having a substantial

and constant faith) unto thy dearly beloved son Jesus our Lord, our only saviour, and redeemer: to the end that he dwelling in us may mortify our old man (that is to say) our sinful affections, and that we may be regenerated to a more godly life: whereby thy holy name (as it is worthy of all honour) may be advanced and magnified throughout the world and in all places: so that while thou hast the tuition and governance over us, we may learn daily more and more to humble and submit ourselves unto thy majesty: in such sort that thou mayest be counted Lord and king over all the world, guiding thy people with the sceptre of thy word, by the virtue of thy holy spirit, to the confusion of all thine enemies through the might of thy truth and righteousness, so that by this means all power and stateliness withstanding thy glory, may be continually thrown down and abolished, until such time as the full and perfect face of thy kingdom shall appear, ^{when} ~~that~~ thou shalt show thyself in judgment: whereby also we with the rest of thy creatures, may render unto thee perfect and due obedience, even as thy holy angels do apply themselves only to the performing of thy commandments: so that thy only will may be accomplished and fulfilled without all repinings, and that every man may bend himself to serve and please thee, the contentation of their own wills, and their proper desires or affections being utterly set apart. Grant us also (good Lord) that we thus walking in the love and dread of thy holy name, may be fed and sustained through thy goodness, that we may receive at thy hands all things expedient and necessary for us: whereby we may use thy gifts peaceably and quietly, to this end that when we see that thou hast regard

and care/of us: we may the more effectively acknowledge thee to be our Father, looking for all good gifts at thy hand: and by this means we withdrawing and pulling back all our vain confidence from creatures, may seek thee and cleave only unto thee, putting our whole trust in thy most bountiful mercy, and for so much as whiles we continue here in this transitory life, we are so miserable, so frail, and so much inclined unto sin, that we fall continually and swerve from the right way of thy commandments. We beseech thee pardon our innumerable offences by which we are worthily in danger of thy judgment and condemnation, and forgive us so freely that death and sin, under whom we be by nature holden in miserable captivity, may hereafter have no title nor right unto us: and that it may please thee not to lay unto our charge, that evil and naughty root or fountain of sin, which doth evermore remain in us; in like manner as we forget the wrongs or damages which other men do unto us, and as we in the stead of seeking vengeance, procure or purchase the wealth of our enemies. Finally, let it be thy good pleasure to aid us, to hold up and sustain our weakness, that hereafter the readiness to sin which abideth in us, do not cause us to fall: and that whereas we ourselves be so frail that we are not able to stand upright one minute of an hour: and whereas on the other part again, we are so belaid and assaulted evermore with such a multitude of dangerous enemies, that the devil, the world, sin, and our own concupiscence, do never leave off to wage battle against us, let it stand with thy good pleasure to strengthen us with thy holy spirit, and to do upon us the sure armour of thy~~s~~ grace,

that thereby we may be able to withstand mightily all manner temptations, and to endure manfully in this spiritual conflict against sin, until such time as we shall win the field, that we may once triumphantly rejoice in thy kingdom, with our captain and governor our Lord Jesus Christ.

What day they celebrate the supper of the Lord, they use also to say this that followeth.

And according as our Lord Jesus thought it not sufficient only to offer up once his blessed body and blood on the cross to acquit us of all our sins: but doth vouchsafe also spiritually, to deal and distribute the same unto us, for a sustenance to nourish us unto everlasting life: Even so may it please thee to endue us with thy special grace, that with most upright singleness of heart, and earnest ferventness of affections we may most thankfully receive at his hand so high a benefit, and so worthy (that is to say) that we may with a constant and assured faith, receive both his body and blood, yea, verily Christ himself wholly, even as he, being both very God and man, is most worthily named to be the holy bread of heaven, to quicken and refresh our souls: to the end that we may from henceforth cease to live in ourselves, and after the course or inclination of our own most corrupt and defiled nature: and that we may live in him, whiles we have him also living ~~also~~ in us, to conduct and guide us unto the holy, most blessed and everlasting life. Grant us also that in receiving the same, we become in very deed partakers of the new and everlasting testament (that is to say) of the covenant of grace and mercy, being most certain and assured, that thy

good pleasure is to be our everlasting merciful Father, whiles thou layest not to our charge our manifold offences, and providest for us, as for thy dealy beloved children and heirs, all things needful as well for the body as for the soul: so that we may without ceasing render lauds and thanks unto thee, evermore extolling, and magnifying thy holy name both by word and deed. And finally give us grace so to celebrate this day the holy remembrance of thy blessed and dearly beloved son, yea in such sort to use and practise ourselves therein, and so to show forth and declare the worthy benefits of his previous death: that we receiving thereby further strength and more ample increase and faith and all good things, may with the lustier Courage, and the more confidence praise thee our Father, rejoicing and glorifying only in thy name.

c.) The Exhortation:⁹

We have heard (my brethren) in what sort our Lord did celebrate his Supper amongst his Disciples: whereby we are also instructed, that strangers, that is to say, such as be not of the faithful congregation, ought not by any means to be admitted thereunto. Wherefore following the selfsame rule and order: In the virtue and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ: I excommunicate and bar out all idolaters, blasphemers, despisers of God, heretics and all sorts of people that bring in sects, that teach new doctrine to break the unity of Christ's congregation: all perjured persons, all such as be disobedient to their father and mother and other their superiors or masters, all seditious persons, privy

9. *ibid* pp 130 ff

workers of dissension, quarrel pickers or fighters, scolders, slanderers, adulterers, whoremongers, thieves, drunkards, gluttons, and finally all such as lead a dissolute life to the slander or evil example of other, signifying unto them, that it is the part of all such to absent themselves from this table, and to conceive this reverent fear, not to pollute or defile with their presence, these most holy and precious victuals seeking everlasting salvation only in the merits and passion of Jesus Christ, and whether having refused and forgotten all make and debate, he hath now a full purpose and earnest desire to live in brotherly amity and concord with his neighbours ... and albeit we feel in ourselves much frailty, and wretchedness, as that we have not our faith so perfect and constant as we ought, being many times ready to distrust God's goodness through our corrupt nature: And also that we are not so thoroughly given to serve God neither have so fervent a zeal to set forth his glory as our duty requireth, feeling still such rebellion in ourselves, that we have need daily to fight against the lusts of our flesh: yet nevertheless seeing that our Lord hath dealt thus mercifully with us that he hath printed his gospel in our hearts, so that we are preserved from falling into desperation and misbelief, and seeing also he hath endued us with a lust and desire to renounce and withstand our own affections with a longing for his righteousness and the keeping of his commandments: we may be now right well assured that these defaults and manifold imperfections in us shall be no hindrance at all against us, to cause him not to accept us, or account us as worthy to come to his spiritual table. For the end of our coming hither is not to make

protestation that we are upright or just in ourselves: but contrariwise we come to seek our life and perfection in Jesus Christ: acknowledging in the meantime that we of ourselves be most miserably the prisoners of death: Let us consider then that this sacrament is a singular medicine for all poor sick creatures a means of comfort to weak souls, and that the Lord requireth no other worthiness on our part, but that we unfeignedly acknowledge our naughtiness and imperfection: ... And to the end that we may do this let us lift up our hearts and minds into heaven, where Christ abideth in the glory of his Father, and from whence (our sure hope is) he will come to show himself our redeemer. And let us not suffer our imagination of these earthly and corruptible things (which we see present to our eye and feel with our hands) to seek Christ bodily present in them, as if he were enclosed in the bread and wine, or as if they were transmuted and changed into his substance. For the only way to dispose our souls to receive nourishment, relief, and quickening of his substance: is to lift up our minds by means of a right faith, above all things worldly, and sensible, and thereby to enter into heaven, that we may find and receive Christ where he dwelleth, undoubtedly very God and very man, in the incomprehensible glory of his Father ...

d.) The post-communion thanksgiving:¹⁰

We praise and thank thee (our most merciful Father) for that thou has vouchsafed to grant unto us miserable sinners so excellent

10. *ibid.* p. 141

a benefit as to rescue us into the fellowship and company of thy dear son Jesus Christ our Lord: first delivering him to a most cruel death for our sakes. Secondly, giving him unto us as a necessary food and nourishment unto everlasting life. Grant to us (we beseech thee) yet moreover this one request, that thou do never suffer us to become so unkind, as to forget so worthy benefits, but rather so imprint them and fasten them in our hearts, that we may grow and increase daily more and more in such a right faith as doth carefully travail, and is continually occupied in all manner of good works, and that in so doing, we may lead forth and direct our whole life to the advancement of thy glory, and edifying of our neighbours, through the merit of Jesus Christ thy son, who in the unity of the holy spirit liveth one God with thee evermore. Amen

4.) The Consecration Prayer in "John Knox's Genevan Service Book."¹¹

O Father of mercy and God of all consolation, seeing all creatures do acknowledge and confess thee, as governor and lord, it becometh us the workmanship of thine own hands, at all times to reverence and magnify thy godly majesty, first that thou has created us to thine own Image and similitude: but chiefly that thou has delivered us, from that everlasting death and damnation into the which Satan drew mankind by the means of sin: from the bondage thereof (neither man nor angel was able to make us free) but thou (O Lord) rich in mercy and infinite in goodness, hast provided our redemption to stand in thy only and well-beloved son: whom of very love thou didst give to be made man, like unto us in all things (sin excepted) that in his body he might

11. *ibid.*, pp 124 ff.

receive the punishment of our transgression, by his death to make satisfaction to thy Justice, and by his resurrection to destroy him that was the author of death, and so to produce and bring again life to the world, from which the whole offspring of Adam most justly was exiled.

O Lord we acknowledge that no creature is able to comprehend the length and breadth, the depth and height, of that thy most excellent love which moved thee to show mercy, where death had gotten victory: but to receive us into thy grace, when we could do nothing but rebel against thy justice.

O Lord the blind dulness of our corrupt nature will not suffer us sufficiently to weigh these thy most ample benefits; yet nevertheless at the commandment of Jesus Christ our Lord, we present ourselves to this his table (which he hath left to be used in remembrance of his death until his coming again) to declare and witness before the world, that by him alone we have received liberty and life: that by him alone we have entrance to the throne of thy grace: that by him alone we are possessed of our spiritual kingdom, to eat and drink at his table: with whom we have our conversation presently in heaven, and by whom our bodies shall be raised up again from the dust, and shall be placed with him in that endless joy, which thou (O Father of mercy) has prepared for thine elect, before the foundation of the world was laid.

And these most inestimable benefits, we acknowledge and confess to have received of thy free mercy and grace, by thy only beloved son Jesus Christ, for the which therefore we thy

congregation moved by thy holy spirit render thee all thanks, praise and glory for ever and ever.

NOTES:

1. The Strasbourg and Genevan Liturgies:

The Strasbourg rite is probably the better indication of Calvin's mind, since the Genevan rite was a diluted form of that of Strasbourg, made so to conform to the extreme opinions (probably a legacy from Farel) held among the magistracy there. Significant alterations have been made, the nature of which will appear in some of the following notes. The text of the prayers has been taken from Huycke's translation of the Genevan order (and compared with the Latin text in Kidd's "Documents of the Continental Reformation") since this was the most easily available form at the time of writing. It should be noted that it was Calvin's declared intention to restore the primitive form of worship in form and content. The practical result of this was that his Strasbourg rite was deliberately modelled on those he had found already in operation there, for the worship at Strasbourg appeared to him to conform to the model of the Ancient Church. That this was his desire is evident in the title affixed to his Strasbourg service Book: "The Form of Prayers and Manner of Ministering the Sacraments according to the Use of the Ancient Church". It is therefore blinking the facts to intimate that the rite which became the standard for the Reformed Churches had its origin only in Calvin's mind. Maxwell (John Knox's Genevan Service Book, pp 17 ff) also shows, by tracing the genealogy of the Strasbourg rite that in

essentials it was a true Eucharist and in the beginning based directly on the Roman Eucharist. Sucer:

2. The Confession of Sins and the Prayer for Pardon:

The Absolution, contained in the Strasbourg order, was omitted from the Genevan rite, Calvin acceding very reluctantly: "There is none of us, but must acknowledge it to be very useful, that after the General Confession, some striking promise of Scripture should follow, whereby sinners might be raised to the hope of pardon and reconciliation"¹². A prayer for pardon was substituted in the Genevan rite¹³.

3. The Metrical Psalm:

The Reformers at Geneva wished to avoid intricacies and flourishes such as could only be rendered by a trained choir, and insisted that instead the Psalm should be sung in music which the simple could know and love and sing. By such means they were successful in restoring song in the Church to the People.

4. The Collect for Illumination:

This prayer for the assistance or illumination of the Holy Spirit before the Reading and Sermon is common to all Calvin's editions and forms a practical expression of his well-known doctrine that it is the Spirit who is the true interpreter and authoriser of Scripture. In every case and all editions it is left to the discretion of the minister to frame a prayer suitable

12. Quoted in "John Knox's Genevan Service Book" p. 98
13. According to p. 114 of "An Outline of Christian Worship" but of John Knox's Genevan Service Book p.98 where Maxwell inconsistently states that this was not done.

for the occasion and theme. This prayer stands in the place of the Collect which comes before the Lections in the Mass, following the Gloria in Excelsis. But instead of the Collect, this prayer becomes one for illumination, thereby returning to very primitive practice, though this may not have been the conscious motive apart from a mere following of the dictates of logic (which after all was at the foundation of primitive practice itself).

5. The Scripture Lections and Sermon.

Where and when Calvin speaks of a Sermon only in his order Scripture Readings are implicitly included and vice versa. In his service is "the reading and exposition of the Gospel", the term "Gospel" here referring to the writings of the four Evangelists. The Gospels were taken chapter by chapter, and were read and explained consecutively. As much was read as could conveniently be explained, this evidently being understood to mean one chapter at least, and since the services were about two hours in length, this would easily be possible. The Gospels are to be preferred because they deal with the most central matter, the work and words of our Lord. The consecutive method is chosen because it is the only method by which the whole of the Gospels are covered so that nothing is withheld from the people. There seems to be no evidence that the Christian Year was of much influence in determining the subjects to be treated each Sunday (and of course the Lections to correspond) and it is debatable whether Calvin's method of treating the Gospels in course, or the Christian Year gives a better rounded

and more adequate picture of the fulness of the Gospel. On inspection it appears that there is little that is intended to be covered by following the Christian Year that would not also be treated by Calvin's method. The central concern in both is to deliver the proclamation of the fulness of the Gospel from the idiosyncrasies of the individual minister who, left to himself, would revolve about his own favourite topics, and provide an assurance that such a habit will not lead to the omission of important facets of the Faith. Some system is necessary if this end is to be achieved, and there seems little to choose between Calvin's and that of the Christian Year to which, indeed, Calvin's can, with but slight modification, be adapted.

In the afternoon of the Sunday, and at other services the remainder of the Biblical books are studied and read. Explanation of the Scripture came after the reading and did not intrude upon it vers by versae. The Gospels were retained as the central books for exposition at the Morning Service since they were "the Crown of all Scripture". It is worth noting that the prayer for illumination comes not before the Sermon but before the Reading: illumination may well be expected from both.

6. The Offertory:

In all the Reformed Liturgies there is no mention of an offertory per se. From the beginning at Strasbourg, the offertory (sacrificial) prayers were considered an undesirable part of the Catholic ritual and were accordingly suppressed,

but though rarely expressly mentioned, the offering seems to have remained.

Calvin's practice in Strasbourg was to collect the alms before the Great Prayer, thus retaining the collection of the offering in the old Catholic position and it is very probable that this also represents the Genevan practice. Apparently after the sermon any announcements were made, banns published, baptisms performed, and marriages celebrated, after which the offering was collected by the deacons, and meantime the Great Prayer would be begun

7. The Great Prayer:

A summary of this may be set out as follows:

Grounds of approach: The promise to fulfill requests
We are taught by His word to make intercession
The Commandment to pray
Met in His Name, and purified by His grace, we offer up our supplication

Intercession for rulers that they serve God and the people, that true religion may be thereby advanced
For pastors and curates, that they may be faithful to their charge
For the congregations that they may be kept in safety
For all men that they may come to acknowledge Jesus Christ
For the faithful that they may be established in the faith
For all in adversity that they may recognise it as coming from a Fatherly hand.
For this congregation here present that they may admit their own unprofitableness and turn to Christ the only source of good

Paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer

Prayer for grace to receive the Sacrament worthily

A reading of the Great Prayer at the estimated normal rate takes approximately seventeen minutes, revealing a disturbing lack of sympathy with the powers of mental concentration of a normal congregation especially as there is a good deal of

repetition mostly dealing with the abject unworthiness of the worshippers, again indicating a lack of insight into the psychology of worship. The long and tiresome paraphrase of the Lord's prayer is an addition by Calvin to the original Strasbourg rite (which addition of course found its way to Geneva when he returned) and has little to commend it.

The additional paragraph included when the Sacrament is celebrated contains a hint of an Epiclesis - the invoking of the Holy Spirit to bless worshippers, elements and action that the communion may be a true feeding on Christ's body and blood - though this is only evident on careful inspection in the section beginning "Even so may it please thee to endue us with thy special grace ...". This omission of an explicit Epiclesis is at first sight startling and puzzling in view of Calvin's constant stress on the Holy Spirit as the agent who makes us to be partakers of the body and blood of the Lord, and the problem is but partially solved when it is remembered that for Calvin any consecration is directed, not at the elements, since Christ does not address these and tell them to become His body and blood, but to the communicants, since it is the Holy Spirit working in their hearts, that makes the command of Christ effective when He says "Take, eat, this is my body". *

(It is as well to note here that Maxwell: "John Knox's Genevan Service Book," p. 136: states explicitly that "He(Calvin) did not have a separate prayer of Consecration, but,

* (Anáklκασις)

following German practice at Strasbourg merely added a paragraph to his Great Prayer when Communion was celebrated". The truth of this statement is borne out by inspection of the Latin text in Kidd's "Documents of the Continental Reformation pp. 618 ff., but it contrasts strangely with the analysis of the Strasbourg rite and of the Genevan rite as printed on pp 114 ff of Maxwell's "Outline of Christian Worship" where a Consecration Prayer is set down as appearing in both orders, and in the analysis of the Strasbourg rite given on p. 51 of "John Knox's Genevan Service Book". It seems clear that Calvin did not have a separate Consecration Prayer, possibly for the reason suggested in the preceding paragraph, and it seems that the analyses quoted would need revision.

The Great Prayer incidentally reveals a predominating Calvinist emphasis - that on the sovereign, holy God, in whose sight men are less than dust, an emphasis indeed, that too easily tends towards a lack of Christian balance.

B. The Preparation of the Elements:

The practice at Strasbourg from the beginning of the Reformation was to bring the Bread and Wine to the Holy Table (in all likelihood from a side altar) immediately following the singing of the Creed after the Sermon. In this, they simply prepared the elements at the same point in the service as had been done in the Mass. Calvin carried on the same custom, save that he made his preparation while the people sang the Creed. In Calvin's case it was the celebrant himself who made the preparation, though it is probable that he was

assisted by another minister also, the same who assisted him in the giving of the cup. For some unknown reason Calvin placed the Creed at the end of the Great Prayer, instead of as a response of faith to the challenge of the sermon as in the German Strasbourg rites and the Roman rite of 1570. It is true that there is support for the position of the Creed after the Great Prayer in some of the primitive liturgies, though it would be difficult to maintain that this was Calvin's motive for the change.

9. The Words of Institution:

These appear in Calvin's extended rubric in the Institutes and in both the Strasbourg and Genevan orders. The Words of Institution had no significance for consecration in the Roman sense (where they were held to effect the miracle of transubstantiation) but they may have had some significance in the Augustinian sense of the Word being required to be joined to the symbol to make a valid sacrament. Compare also the remarks above on the Epiclesis and the section on "The Necessity of the Word". The chief importance of the Words of Institution undoubtedly came to be as a warrant - a use which is quite Catholic.

10 The Exhortation:

Note the following:

- a. The exclusion of those "not of the faithful congregation", presumably that they may not eat and drink condemnation to themselves and thereby also pollute the Sacrament.
- b. The Christocentrism: Christ is the only Mediator: "seeking

- everlasting salvation only in the merits ...".
- c. The Sacrament as a bond of unity: "desire to live in brotherly amity and concord with his neighbours ...".
 - d. God does the whole, we only receive: the prevailing emphasis that of our own there is nothing good that we can do, that life is all of God.
 - e. Assurance of salvation comes before the reception of the Sacrament which is a more perfect assurance: "we may be now right well assured ...".
 - f. That we might bring nothing of our own, but simply beg: "no other worthiness ... but that we unfeignedly acknowledge our naughtiness and imperfection".
 - g. Christ reigns in heavenly glory, true God and true man: compare the last paragraph containing a definite hint of the *Bursum Corde*.
 - h. Consubstantiation is excluded: "as if he were enclosed in the bread and wine ...".
 - i. Transubstantiation likewise: "as if they were transmuted and changed into his substance".
 - j. All is of faith: "By means of a right faith ...".
 - 11. The Consecration Prayer:

Although (as has been noted) Calvin does not himself include a specific Prayer of Consecration, that appearing in John Knox's Service Book indicates that he had no objection to it as such, and probably approved of its use (as intimated in the general title of John Knox's Book). The Prayer in John Knox's Book is not derived from any known source and

appears therefore to be wholly the work of the compilers themselves. The form of the Prayer is truly Eucharistic, following the order of the primitive liturgies:

Adoration and Thanksgiving for Creation and Redemption: commemoration of the Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, and the Last Supper, concluding with an Ascription of Praise. Here too an Epiclesis is lacking.

12. The Fraction:

None of Calvin's rubrics mention definitely a fraction (but compare the extended rubric in Inst. 4. 17, 43) but Huycke's translation does so, and there can be little doubt that such was Calvin's practice, for it was so rooted in custom that it was not though necessary to mention it.

13. The delivery and Communion:

Calvin retained the primitive and Catholic custom, the minister communicating before the people. After the Consecration the minister invited the people to come to the Holy Table with due Christian reverence and order; he first receives the bread and wine, gives to the deacon and then to the congregation, saying: Take, Eat, the Body of Christ. And the deacon presents the Cup, saying: This is the cup of the New Testament in the blood of Jesus, which was shed for you. The congregation meanwhile sings a Psalm, for to have silence during the act of Communion is a custom unknown to the old Catholic and Reformed rites and is entirely a modern innovation, the helpfulness of which is at least debatable.

14. The Blessing:

The Blessing from Numbers is derived from the German use at Strasbourg and ultimately from Luther, and is the only form of Blessing given in Calvin. This is rather puzzling in view of Calvin's strong Trinitarian emphasis. The Apostolic Blessing appears only as an alternative in John Knox's Order.

15. The place of the minister and deacon:

As appears from the following quotation, only ordained ministers could celebrate the Sacrament. Since there is otherwise little mention of this point, we may conclude that it was not a matter of controversy:

It is ... pertinent to observe that it is improper for private individuals to take upon themselves the administration of baptism; for it as well as the dispensation of the Supper, is part of the ministerial office. For Christ did not give command to any men or women whatever to baptise, but to those whom he had appointed apostles. And when, in the administration of the Supper, he ordered his disciples to do what they had seen him do (he having done the part of a legitimate dispenser), he doubtless meant that in this they should imitate his example. 14

Concerning the office of the deacon in the Sacrament, Maxwell has as follows:

... 'Diacon' in Calvin ... does not refer to the deacons in the Reformed Church sense as those who had the charge and care of the poor, but to an assisting minister, i.e. in the old Catholic sense¹⁵

This does not, however, seem to take cognisance of the statement made by Calvin when he speaks of the office of deacons in his general treatment of the forms of ministry in the true Church:

14. Inst. 4. 15, 20

15. John Knox's Genevan Service Book p. 133

Archdeacons began to be appointed (i.e. in addition to deacons) when the extent of the revenues demanded a new and more exact method of administration, To them belonged the amount of revenues, possessions, and furniture, and the charge of the daily offerings. . . . The reading of the word to the people, and exhortation to prayer, was assigned to them, and they were permitted, moreover, to give the cup in the sacred Supper; but this was done for the purpose of honouring their office, that they might perform it with greater reverence, when they were reminded by such symbols that what they discharged was not some profane stewardship, but a spiritual function dedicated to God. 16

16. The Completion of the Communion:

For Calvin the Sacrament was not complete before the actual act of communion, before the command "Take, eat" had been fulfilled and obeyed. This indeed was one of his reasons for opposing the Mass as a spectacle, for the promise was attached to the command to partake:

They consecrate the host, as they call it, and carry it about in solemn show, and formally exhibit it to be admired, revered, and invoked, I ask by what virtue they think it duly consecrated? They will quote the words "This is my body". I, on the contrary, will object, that it was at the same time said, "take, eat". Nor will I count that other passage as nothing; for I hold that since the promise is annexed to the command, the former is so included under the latter, that it cannot possibly be separated from it. 17

17. The Inessentials:

That Calvin was not concerned to lay down a new law for the correct order for the celebration of the Sacrament, appears from the fact that he regarded as "of no consequence",
 18
 the following details:

16. Inst. 4. 4,5
 17. Inst. 4. 17,37
 18. Inst. 4. 17,43.

Whether communicants are to take into their hands and divide among themselves, or each is to eat what is given to him; whether they are to return the cup to the deacon, or hand it to their neighbour; whether the bread be leavened, or unleavened. It appears also from the above that we cannot expect Calvin to have anticipated the recovery of the value of symbols (of which he would probably have been highly suspicious) and symbolic acts, where e.g. the sharing out of one piece of bread while each communicant breaks off his portion (as indeed was done by Zwingli) symbolises the essential unity of the Church, and each member's part in that Church, as does also the drinking from one common cup.

18. The frequency of celebration:

Calvin desired all his life a weekly celebration of the Supper; to restore this weekly celebration was one of the reforms he had striven to achieve. For, while in the mediaeval Roman Church Mass was celebrated daily, in actual practice it was only the 'religious' who communicated. The people themselves rarely communicated more than once a year, on Easter Sunday, or at the most twice, on Christmas Day as well. This infrequent celebration Calvin abhorred: "Most certainly the custom which prescribes communion once a year is an invention of the devil, by what instrumentality soever it may have been introduced". (Inst. 4. 17,46) Evidence of his attempts to restore primitive and New Testament practice is not lacking. It appears first in the first edition of the Institutiones in 1536, before he came to Geneva; and that he

desired to put that theory into practice is plain enough in the *Ordonnances Ecclesiastiques* submitted to the Magistracy by the Genevan ministers in January 1537, who, though willing for the sake of peace and harmony to consent to a monthly communion would have so arranged it that though the celebration in each church in the city was but monthly, in one or other of the churches there would be a celebration each Sunday. This point was one of those on which Calvin quarrelled with the Magistracy, suffering banishment as a result. In spite of never being able to achieve his goal of weekly communion, to the end of his life Calvin desired it, for he is equally explicit in the last edition of the *Institutiones* (see quotation above). On this, as on many other matters, however, he was forced to compromise.

After his banishment he became minister of the French Church in Strasbourg and was there granted special permission by the magistrates to celebrate communion monthly. He was grateful for this privilege and had no thought of remonstrance in a foreign city. When he returned to Geneva in 1541 still further compromise was forced upon him. He did attempt to secure weekly celebrations to be hopeless, but even this was disallowed. As late as 1561 Calvin still regretted that quarterly communion was the rule at Geneva, but declared that he thought it preferable at least to give way to the weakness of the people, rather than struggle obstinately on. Nevertheless he took the opportunity of expressing his strong disapprobation of the Genevan custom, and hoped that those

who came after him might be able to correct it. Thus he writes in a letter to the magistrates of Berne: "There is another matter, though not a new one which I would call to your attention, namely, that we celebrate the Lord's Supper four times a year, and you three times. Please God, gentlemen that both you and we may be able to establish a more frequent usage. For it is evident from St. Luke in the Book of Acts that communion was much more frequently celebrated in the primitive Church; and that continued for a long time in the ancient Church, until this abomination of the Mass was set up by Satan, who so caused it that the people received communion only once or twice a year. Wherefore we must acknowledge that it is a defect in us that we do not follow the example of the Apostles" (Maxwell 'Outline' p 118, quoting Bretschneider: Corpus Reformatum vol xliii p 838) And again (in 1561): "I have taken care to record publicly that our custom is defective so that those who come after me may be able to correct it the more freely and easily (idem. quoting op. cit. vol xxxviii, 1, p 213) It is surely ironical to note that it was civil interference which in each case prevented Calvin from restoring and maintaining primitive practice.

Calvin's view of infrequent communion is set out in a typical passage as follows:

They say that Zephyrinus was the author of the decree, though it is not possible to believe that it was the same as we now have it. It may be, that as times then were, he did not, by his ordinance, consult ill for the Church. For there cannot be a doubt that at that time the sacred Supper was dispensed to the faithful at every meeting; nor can it be doubted that a great number of them communicated. But as

it scarcely ever happens that all could communicate at the same time, and it was necessary that those who were mingled with the profane and idolaters, should testify their faith by some external symbol, this holy man, with a view to order and government, had appointed that day, that on it the whole of Christendom might give a confession of their faith by partaking of the Lord's Supper. The ordinance of Zephyrius, which was otherwise good, posterity perverted, when they made a fixed law of one communion in the year. The consequence is, that almost all, when they have communicated, as if they were discharged as to all the rest of the year, sleep on secure. It ought to have been far otherwise. Each week, at least, the table of the Lord ought to have been spread for the company of the Christians, and the promises declared on which we might then spiritually feed. No one, indeed, ought to be forced, but all ought to be exhorted and stimulated; the torpor of the sluggish also, ought to be rebuked, that all, like persons famishing, should come to the feast. It was not without cause, therefore, I complained, at the outset, that this practice had been introduced by the wile of the devil; a practice which, in prescribing one day in the year, makes the whole year one of sloth. We see, indeed, that this perverse abuse had already crept in in the time of Chrysostom; but we, also, at the same time, see how much it displeased him. For he complains in bitter terms ... that there is so great an inequality in this matter, that they did not approach often, at other times of the year, even when prepared, but only at Easter, though unprepared. Then he exclaims "O custom! O presumption! In vain, then, is the daily oblation made: in vain do we stand at the altar. There is none who partakes along with us." So far is he from approving the practice by interposing his authority to it

19.

Calvin's failure in this respect had unfortunate consequences, for the weekly service, comprising both the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Upper Room, cannot be regarded as the Genevan norm, no matter what may have been striven for, since the practice at Geneva - and hence the norm - remained

19. Inst. 4. 17, 46.

as a quarterly celebration. The ideal norm was weekly, the actual norm was quarterly - to the long-lasting impoverishment of the worship of the Reformed Church.

Another important result was that on those days when the Communion was not celebrated, the service took that form variously known as the "Missa Sicca", "Missa Catechumenorum", or "Ante-Communion", simply proceeding as far as the end of the Great Prayer and concluding thereafter with the Blessing.

CONCLUSION

What has thus far been attempted is to give a concise and systematic outline of the approach of a great mind to the mystery of the Lord's Supper. It is tempting indeed to relinquish the task there in the hope that Calvin has been allowed to speak for himself, for he is, in the last resort, his ~~own~~^{own} best interpreter. However, having climbed the peaks that Calvin has reared, and having been constantly impressed with the grandeur of his structure, it would be ingratitude to his memory not to survey the scene from the summit, and, it may be, scan country which Calvin himself would fain have traversed, bearing in mind always that he has been the instructor and guide of our footsteps thus far, so that, trained by his careful thought, we may hesitantly take some few steps of our own accord. Calvin himself would have been the first to urge us not to rest content with his exposition if we believed that we could see further and deeper truth breaking from the Word of God. So then the venture may be made to outline the positive nature of Calvin's accomplishment, to see wherein he was fettered by being a child of his times, and to see how far we, using the tools he has forged, may improve on his own structure, even if the magnitude of the task and our own inexperience make us falter.

The Doctrine of the Real Presence:

Calvin's mystic mind could not rest content with the teaching of Zwingli which tended only too easily to make the

presence of Christ in the Supper a spiritual presence brought by the faith of the believing communicant - a view which still holds sway in certain schools of thought. Calvin's opposition to this is (with Luther) based on the objection that this is ultimately to bring our assurance to rest in the strength of our own faith, and both Reformers realised that such a foundation was laid in quicksand. The view is for Calvin, in a word, too subjective, and too much at variance with his stress on the Triune God as the source of all blessing and assurance. To it also he opposed the Biblical emphasis on participation in the body and blood of Christ, rejecting falsely and excessively "spiritual" interpretations.¹

Having disposed of this view, he is still left with the puzzle as to how Christ's ascended body, taken with Him into heaven, is at the same time really offered in the Sacrament. Consubstantiation and transubstantiation are rebutted, but the problem still remains, if anything sharpened by Calvin's uncompromising refusal to "drag Christ down from heaven". It appears in his exposition that he is deeply concerned to preserve the orthodoxy of the doctrine expressed in the Creed as "He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty" but having guarded against what he sees to be dangerous interpretations of the doctrine of the Real Presence, he has, strictly speaking, little to add to the solution of the problem. He even discourages inquiry as to the place of the heavenly session of Christ², calling such

¹ Temple's now justly famous statement that "Christianity is the most materialistic of the world's great religions", and also C.S. Lewis' penetrating comment: "There is not good trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely

questions curious and superfluous, and is content to rest his assurance on the faithfulness of Christ in carrying out His promise that He will truly give and we truly receive, His body and blood in the Sacrament. The working of this incredible operation, viz. the uniting of things so separated by space, Calvin characteristically attributes to the power of the Holy Spirit, but, having done so, offers no elaboration of the way in which this is accomplished. In the Sacrament he finds mystery, mystery unexplained, felt and experienced rather than understood, defines and guards that mystery and leaves it as such. It must be admitted that in doing so he gives a more scriptural and satisfactorily spiritual basis to the doctrine than he found it to possess; nevertheless it is at least debatable whether his solution can satisfy the enquiring mind. His own line of argument has led him into an intolerable impasse with unanswerable questions which he himself inevitably raises.

The attempt must be made, it seems, to trace a different path by which the fact of the presence of Christ may be maintained, avoiding at the same time those pitfalls against which Calvin warned, and preserving his valuable objective and positive emphasis.

Spiritual Creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not. He invented eating He likes matter. He invented it" (Here Christianity, Etes, 1952, p. 51)
 2. cf. Inst. 4. 17, 26.

It is clear that a simple quantitative difference between the presence of Christ as given in the Sacrament and as given in any other service of worship is inadequate to express what is meant when we speak of communion in the body and blood of Christ. If the difference were quantitative alone, it would be difficult to find a valid reason for celebrating the Supper (apart from obedience to the dominical command - cf. the practice of the Quakers, who give a wholly spiritual interpretation to the command).

Though we cannot say that the presence of Christ is dependent upon the faith of the communicant, yet it is true that the presence of Christ and faith are most intimately related. They, as it were, go hand in hand: where the Christ is, there is faith; where faith is, there also is the Christ. (One might adapt the old saying to read "ubi Christus ibi fides") The Presence of Christ cannot be identified with faith, but their close relation nevertheless must be taken into account in the exposition of any Christian doctrine, which, it must be remembered, is description of the circumstances and results of an encounter that is personal, encounter with God in Christ. It is faith (the gift of God) which makes us to be members of the Church which is His Body, to be participants in the life of that Body, a Body entered by way of Baptism. It is through this act of Baptism that men step into new life in the atmosphere of the Spirit, new life as members of His Resurrection Body. The believer's being "in Christ" is not a purely personal faith relationship: it is a relationship

that is corporal, in close union not only with Christ but with other members of His Body. It is a relationship that is characterised and contained in the ever-renewed sacrifice of crucifixion and resurrection, the constant pattern of the life in Christ. It is by the Sacraments indeed that the believer enters and remains, not in a society only, but in the Body of Christ. The resurrection Body of Christ is not an individual, but the Christian Community³. True discernment of the Lord's Body implies recognising the Church for what it is, the Body of Christ, in which the living Lord is present⁴.

Yet this is but a partial solution and has not reached the heart of the problem. The Lord is present in His Body. But why especially in the Sacrament? It is through the preaching of the Word with power that men are begotten to new life in Christ. Is that not all that is essential? It is the Holy Spirit who makes us members of Christ's Body, but why should He operate specially in the Sacrament?

One of the clues to the solution is probably to be found in the light of the story of the resurrection appearance on the road to Emmaus. There, though the disciples heard the Scriptures concerning Christ expounded by the Risen and Living Lord Himself, and though their hearts burned within as they listened, it was not until the simple act of the breaking of bread that their eyes were opened and they

3. See pp 49-55 of "The Body" S.C.M. (1953) by J.A.T. Robinson, whose most illuminating exegesis suggested the thought of the present passage.

4. cf Higgins "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament" pp 72ff S.C.M. P(1952)

knew him for what He was. It would appear from this that the whole act of revelation, the knowledge of God through Christ crucified and risen, is not completed until the Sacrament is celebrated after the reading and expounding of the Word. And this is surely because there is in the Sacrament not only speech but action, not only the Word of God, but God who acts, mighty to save. There the bread is broken⁵, there the wine is out-poured, there, in deeds, not words simply, God acts. There is a wealth of difference between speech and action. There is a wealth of difference between the effectiveness of Word and Sacrament. Believers in their being in the Body of Christ do not know Christ in His fulness until the Sacrament is celebrated and they have partaken. Communion is necessary to attain the full richness of the life in Christ⁶. This exposition appears to be in harmony with the objectivity of Calvin's emphasis and with that larger objectivity which insists that Jesus Christ not only taught about God, not only revealed God to them, but also that He did accomplish the salvation of men by His life⁷ on earth, that His life was not merely prophetic, to call men to be reconciled to God, but also priestly, to effect that reconciliation in Himself.

We may gratefully accept Calvin's strong reminder that whatever happens, and however it happens, at the Lord's Supper,

5. There would seem to be good theological ground in the preceding for the custom of delivering, in the rite, one piece of bread, from which each communicant breaks off his own portion.

6. This appears to do justice both to Biblical theology and to Calvin, who gave the Sacraments such high place, yet could not, being true to Scripture, say that participation was an absolute necessity to salvation.

7. By the term "life" here I include the whole event from Incarnation to Second Advent.

all is to be attributed to the working of the Holy Spirit. For not only was it the Spirit who found in Christ the first man completely responsive to His leading: it is the Spirit who makes us all to be one Body with Christ, to share His life.

One point may still remain to be clarified: in what sense are the elements of bread and wine to be regarded as the body and blood of Christ? I can do no better than answer in the words of Dr. Temple:

"My body" is that part of the physical world which acts directly in response to my will, and is thus the vehicle and medium whereby I effect my purposes. In precisely this sense the Church is the Body of Christ; in precisely this sense (I suggest) the Eucharistic bread is the Body of Christ. the identity which justifies the use of one name is an identity of relation to the Spirit of Christ and to His disciples. As through the physical organism which was His Body Christ spoke the words of eternal life, so through the Church which is His Body He speaks them still. As through the physical organism which was His Body He revealed in agony and death that utter obedience of Humanity in His Person to the Father, which is the atoning sacrifice, so through the broken Bread He shows it still and enables us to become participants therein

8

And again:

The Eucharistic Bread is His Body for the purpose for which it is consecrated, which is Communion, in exactly the same sense as that in which a physico-chemical organism was once His Body; it is the vehicle - the effective symbol - of His Personality.

9

The Objectivity of Calvin's Emphasis:

The value of this objectivity in respect of faith (faith in general, as well as faith that operates in the Sacrament) would be difficult to challenge. The emphasis is indeed all

8. "Christus Veritas", Macmillan, 1st editn. 1924 p. 252
9. op. cit. p 253

169
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of a piece with Calvin's general leaning towards the objective, as most sharply exemplified in the doctrine of predestination, and in both cases raises puzzling questions. Faith is a necessity in the Sacrament. Faith is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit. Both these statements, which Calvin makes without compromise, are Biblical in content. With both of them we cannot but agree. But an uncomfortable feeling persists that these statements, as Calvin elaborates them, tend to make the believer an automaton to be worked on or not, as it pleases God, tend to make him a cog in the machine with no will of his own to accept or reject faith. There is but little of the whole-hearted response of self-giving in reply to the amazing love of God which is such a note of triumph in the New Testament, a note which Luther's trumpet rejoiced to sound. If it be asked how this note can be sounded without jarring the crystal clarity and consistency of Calvin's carefully constructed system, a question is posed which is not easy of solution, for logic is compelled to confess the completeness of his thought as it stands. It is possible that there is here yet another aspect of the Faith which by logic appears to be in paradoxical tension, but which in experience is scarcely felt as paradox. The devout communicant offers himself in faith at the Sacrament to receive the body and blood of Christ, yet reflection reveals this faith as issuing from the Giver of very good and perfect gift. It is again "I, yet not I, but Christ in me".

The Pseudo-Sacraments.

Calvin's rejection of what he regards as pseud-sacraments is based on two considerations, first, that they have not been directly instituted by Christ, secondly, that there is consequently no explicit promise attached to them as ceremonies by which they could be raised to the level of Sacraments.

The first consideration can, at the least, be argued, in that, particularly in Roman Catholicism, it is held as de fide that our Lord instituted all the seven Sacraments. The affirmation is generally made that our Lord instituted all of them directly, not indirectly through guiding ecclesiastical developments. This latter affirmation is not indeed to be accepted as in the strictest definition de fide, but as so certain that contrary opinion is inadmissible. Here, it must be admitted, Calvin appears at times to waver slightly, for (as we have seen) he goes so far as to admit that he has no objection to the term "sacrament" being applied to the laying on of hands by which ministers are initiated into their office, though he does not number this among the ordinary sacraments. In regard to Confirmation also he concedes that at least the form of the ordinance, as a fitting ceremony of admission to full membership of the Church, is most useful and profitable.

The second consideration, however, would seem to provide surer ground for excluding all but the Lord's Supper and Baptism from the dignity and rank of Sacraments, and this

indeed is in harmony with what was noted above concerning what Sacraments most clearly exhibit and portray the Gospel. It is Baptism that testifies to our justification: it is the Lord's Supper that testifies to our need for continued sanctification, and that because of the promises attached to them. The other rites may, it is true, be admitted as "sacramentals" (without attempting to define that term) to indicate their limited application and inferior rank to the twin peaks of the two Sacraments of the Gospel.

This is perhaps the most convenient place to consider the place of Absolution and Penance in Calvin's system. The rite of restoring penitent sinners who had made reparation, by the formal laying on of hands to signify their reconciliation to the Church, to assure the penitent of God's pardon, to admonish the Church to lay aside the remembrance of the offence and kindly receive him back into favour - all this Calvin earnestly approves as a holy and salutary ordinance which he would like to see restored. His approbation has not been sufficiently emphasized. It was, to say the least, not without due consideration of all the issues involved that the tradition of our Lord's delivery to the Apostles of the power to remit or retain sins was held in remembrance in the early Church. It is, after all, part of the Church's proclamation to affirm that sins are forgiven those who are truly penitent. That there are many who are unconscious of the gravity of sin, that there are on the other hand many who are in doubt

as to the assurance of their pardon, gives weight to the grave charge that the Reformed Church has, thus far, failed in her divinely appointed task. That task is directed primarily to her members, many of whom find their life in the Spirit handicapped by the crippling indecision of doubt, the while the Church zealously guards the treasure of forgiveness committed to her, and possesses but an inadequate channel whereby that priceless gift might flow out to the salvation of souls sick unto death. It is strange indeed that the Reformed Church has relapsed into such a situation, thereby strikingly differentiated from the four great communions, Roman, orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran; thereby neglectful of the heritage rediscovered at the Reformation, thereby - worst of all - untrue to the Gospel. There is a priestly office committed to the Church, not indeed to offer sacrifice, but, in pleading the one true eternal sacrifice, to continue the mediating work of Christ, reconciling man to God. Penance and Absolution in their widest sense as a decisive proclamation of the Gospel form a part of the ministry of the whole Church, to which she is bound to give effect in every age: she cannot in honesty affirm as a corporate act "I believe ... in the forgiveness of sins", without that belief expressing itself in the life of the Church as active love for the sinner. Calvin taught his contemporaries to look for the assurance of the forgiveness of sins in the Supper. His was in this instance a good example.

Elements of the Liturgy.

A criticism which can justly be levelled at Calvin's liturgical expression of the Lord's Supper is the psychological lack of balance between the didactic and aesthetic elements.

Maxwell indeed quotes Doumergue as saying:

Shall it be said that ... the true Calvinian cultus was by nature cold and impoverished? Those who were present at the services have told us that often they could not keep back the tears of their emotion and joy. 10

but although this paragraph is cited in three of Dr. Maxwell's books, it is not once supported by evidence, either from Doumergue himself nor by any other that Dr. Maxwell is able to find. One is forced to appraise this judgment from the form and content of the prayers available to us, and such appraisal makes the judgment very difficult to believe. The prevailing emphasis in the Genevan Liturgy is didactic and largely unsuited to the expression of holy joy. Due and worthy reverence and awe in the presence of the Holy majesty of God appear throughout, but there is no note of triumph or of joyful thanksgiving. This lack can probably be attributed to the surprising neglect, in Calvin's theology of the Sacrament and in his liturgy, of the Resurrection, so characteristic a note of the moving and dramatic Eastern liturgies, and of the warm Luthern order. What is a most essential factor on the communion of the Church with God in Christ is thus overlooked with disastrous consequences. It is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile this lack with the consistence and comprehensiveness of Calvin's mind.

Concerning the excessively didactic emphasis of Calvin's liturgy, it is not too much to say that there is much in the prayers that would do better in the Sermon, a regrettable "oblique preaching" at the congregation during an act in which the minister should fix his own, and the people's attention, on God the Holy, the Forgiving, the Giver. There is room for the suspicion that the Prayer of Thanksgiving e.g. is not so much a framing of the thanks of the people as an exhortation to thanksgiving. Such an approach may, it is true, have been necessary at the time, but that does not excuse it from the charge of being unbalanced and inadequate. Insofar as the didactic emphasis springs from a desire to make public worship the handmaid of the Gospel it is to be commended and this principle applied; but insofar as it fails to comprehend the fulness of that Gospel, including the richness of the total response of the whole man to God, it is to be warned against. It is of little avail to fall from the sacerdotalism of Rome into the worse sacerdotalism of Geneva, false as this latter is to the best principles of the Reformation, especially that of the priesthood of all believers, one logical implication of which is surely to make public worship a truly corporate act, rather than to subject it to the tyranny of one voice.

The Eschatological Note.

A word must be recorded concerning the lack of an eagerly forward-looking eschatology in either Calvin's exposition or liturgical expression of the Sacrament. The attempt has been

made to show that insofar as he sees the Supper as a feeding unto eternal life he cannot be said to neglect an aspect of it which is properly termed eschatological, but it is true to say that he is almost wholly indifferent to that more precisely eschatological frame of mind which in the Sacrament stretches out trembling hands for the foretaste of eternity there offered, and to which the words "Till He come" strike responsive chords in the soul that looks for the imminent fulfilment of the promise they contain. There is at once in the Sacrament a commemoration of the past ("Christ has come"), a realisation of present communion ("Christ is here"), and an expectation of His Second Advent with all that that implies ("Till He come" - "Even so, maranatha"). This neglect on Calvin's part is the more surprising when it is remembered that the eschatological hope has always waxed brightest when prophetic eyes have brooded over dark and gloomy days and beyond the carnage and woe of strife and persecution, have seen the glory of the bright morning star bearing hope in its rising. It is to be seen in the Book of the Revelation; it is to be seen in the proclamation of the twentieth century. Calvin, it will be recalled, was writing for a Church battling for its life in the teeth of persecution, ministering in a city that harboured exiles who thanked God that they had escaped with their lives¹⁰, and this makes it all the more strange that

10. Note here the aptness of the intercession in the Great Prayer for those suffering Banishment.

in the most characteristic and climactic act of the Church's worship this expectant note should not contribute to the harmony of the whole.

The Communion of Saints.

One other note that is missed is that which is trumpeted in the great words which precede the Sanctus: "With angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we worship and adore ...". When Calvin refers to the article of the Creed concerning the "communion of saints"¹¹, it is heartening to note that it extends far and wide to embrace the whole company of the elect on earth, rather than confining itself to one congregation of believers, but the lack is sorely felt when it is realized that Calvin's understanding of that article of the Creed goes no further. It is of course possible that he tacitly avoided the expounding of it in the sense for which we are here striving, because of the Roman practice of employing the mediation and intercession of the blessed dead¹², especially where this tended to a "by-passing" of the only Mediator¹³. Although Hunter¹⁴ intimates that Calvin's conception of the invisible church (invisible only in the sense that its precise boundaries were indistinguishable to human eyes) includes all "those who in any time or place belonged to the fellowship of Christ on earth or now to the communion of saints in heaven", such an idea seems but seldom to be explicitly expressed¹⁵, and certainly does not appear in the liturgy, to the latter's impoverishment.

11. Inst. 4. 1,3

15. but cf. Inst. 4.1,2

12. cf. Kirsch "The Doctrine of the Communion of Saints in the Ancient Church", Sands, 1910, pp.254ff.

13. cf. Inst. 3.20,21-27. 14. The Teaching of Calvin p.156

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